

FROM TRADITIONAL PATHS TO KNOWLEDGE-DRIVEN FUTURES: RESTRUCTURING HOSPITALITY EDUCATION FOR NIGERIA'S ECONOMY

AKERELE Edward Ekundayo,
BABALOLA Wasiu Adeyemo,
and
AKINTADE Elizabeth Abidemi

Abstract

*Nigeria's hospitality industry faces persistent skills gaps that limit graduate readiness, service quality, innovation, and competitiveness. This study examined the extent of skills mismatch between hospitality education outcomes and industry requirements, analyzed the limitations of traditional education pathways, and assessed the implications of current education structures for industry performance. Guided by **Human Capital Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and Knowledge-Based Economy Theory**, a mixed-methods approach was adopted. Data were collected from 200 hospitality industry practitioners, educators, and recent graduates using structured questionnaires (170 valid responses, 85% validity rate) and 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews. Quantitative analysis revealed that skills mismatch negatively affects graduate readiness ($\hat{\alpha} = -0.63, p < 0.001$), traditional education pathways undermine service quality ($\hat{\alpha} = -0.57, p < 0.001$), and education–industry alignment positively predicts innovation and competitiveness ($\hat{\alpha} = 0.63, p < 0.001$). Thematic analysis highlighted insufficient practical exposure, outdated curricula, and limited technological integration. Recommendations include curriculum reforms emphasizing experiential learning, continuous professional development for educators, and stronger education–industry partnerships to enhance graduate preparedness, workforce efficiency, and sectoral competitiveness. The study provides critical guidance for policymakers, educators, and practitioners in advancing Nigeria's hospitality education.*

Keywords: Hospitality education, Skills mismatch, Industry alignment, Service quality, Curriculum reform

Introduction

Hospitality and tourism education in Nigeria has evolved in response to the expanding role of the hospitality industry within the national economy. Early studies describe Hospitality education IS predominantly vocational, structured to supply manpower for hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and tourism-related services (Abomeh, 2012). Training has historically been delivered through polytechnics, colleges of education, and universities, with a strong focus on operational competencies such as food production, accommodation management, and front-office operations. While these institutions have contributed to workforce development, scholars consistently report challenges relating to curriculum relevance, pedagogical depth, and alignment with the practical and managerial needs of the hospitality industry (Babalola, 2019; Nwosu, 2014).

The evolution of hospitality education in Nigeria reflects a gradual transition from traditional training models toward more knowledge-based systems. Earlier approaches relied heavily on apprenticeship-style learning, routine task execution, and experiential exposure within workplace environments (Abomeh, 2012). Contemporary literature, however, indicates an increasing emphasis on structured academic content that incorporates entrepreneurship, management theory, service quality systems, and innovation-oriented learning outcomes (Igbojekwe & Anuñobi, 2020). This shift aligns with international trends in hospitality education, where analytical capability, technological competence, and strategic thinking are now central to graduate employability and industry relevance (Ivančić et al., 2022). Despite this progress, persistent curriculum gaps remain, particularly in adapting programmes to the rapidly changing

operational, digital, and service-quality demands of Nigeria's hospitality industry (Babalola, 2019).

Hospitality education is widely recognized as a critical driver of economic development within Nigeria's tourism and hospitality industry. The industry is labour-intensive and offers significant opportunities for employment generation, entrepreneurship, and inclusive participation, particularly for women and young people (Nwosu, 2014). Effective education and training enhance human capital formation, enabling graduates to improve service delivery, establish hospitality enterprises, and contribute to business sustainability and competitiveness (Igbojekwe & Anuñobi, 2020). Recent systematic reviews further underscore the role of hospitality education in improving service provision, internationalisation, and institutional capacity within sub-Saharan African higher education systems (Mireku et al., 2025). Consequently, strengthening hospitality education is increasingly positioned as a strategic mechanism for advancing Nigeria's tourism industry and supporting broader economic development objectives.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's hospitality industry faces a persistent mismatch between the competencies produced by hospitality education institutions and the skills demanded by contemporary industry practice. Employers frequently report deficiencies in graduates' managerial capability, critical thinking, digital competence, and adaptability to complex service environments, despite increasing operational sophistication and customer expectations (Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016; Nhuta et al., 2015). This disconnect suggests that hospitality education outcomes remain insufficiently aligned with evolving industry requirements (Lupu et al., 2014). The problem is compounded by the continued reliance on traditional hospitality education pathways that prioritise routine operational training over analytical, experiential, and

technology-enabled learning (Babalola, 2019; Babalola & Oluwatoyin, 2014). While global hospitality education increasingly integrates authentic learning models, immersive technologies, and industry-responsive curricula, such approaches remain limited within the Nigerian context (Aldawsari et al., 2025; Jalilvand & Ghasemi, 2024). Structural constraints, including curriculum rigidity and limited institutional responsiveness, further restrict pedagogical innovation (Giousmpasoglou & Pantelidis, 2025). These limitations undermine service quality, constrain innovation, and weaken the competitive capacity of hospitality firms, thereby limiting the industry's contribution to economic development (Kitchen et al., 2025). Addressing this challenge requires a deliberate shift toward knowledge-driven, industry-aligned hospitality education in Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of hospitality education in Nigeria in meeting the skill needs of the hospitality industry. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. examine the extent of skills mismatch between hospitality education outcomes and the requirements of the hospitality industry in Nigeria;
- ii. analyse the limitations of traditional hospitality education pathways in preparing graduates for contemporary industry practice; and
- iii. assess the implications of existing hospitality education approaches for service quality, innovation, and competitiveness within the hospitality industry.

Research Questions

To achieve the aim and objectives of this study, the following research questions guide the investigation:

- i. To what extent do hospitality education outcomes in Nigeria align with the skill requirements of the hospitality industry?

- ii. What are the limitations of traditional hospitality education pathways in preparing graduates for contemporary industry practice?
- iii. How do current hospitality education structures affect service quality, innovation, and competitiveness within the Nigerian hospitality industry?

Research Hypotheses

The study tested the following hypotheses:

H₀1: There is a significant negative relationship between skills mismatch in hospitality education and graduate readiness for industry practice in Nigeria.

H₀2: Traditional hospitality education pathways significantly and negatively affect service quality within the Nigerian hospitality industry.

H₀3: Alignment between hospitality education outcomes and industry needs positively influences innovation and competitiveness in the Nigerian hospitality industry.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for multiple stakeholders within Nigeria's hospitality industry and broader economic development. By identifying gaps between educational outcomes and industry requirements, it provides practical recommendations to inform curriculum redesign, pedagogical reform, and accreditation standards, thereby enhancing the quality and relevance of hospitality education. The findings offer guidance for educators seeking to improve teaching strategies, for industry practitioners aiming to align graduate competencies with operational needs, and for policymakers tasked with developing workforce development frameworks that support a competitive hospitality industry. A well-structured, knowledge-driven hospitality education system can enhance

employability, stimulate entrepreneurship, and strengthen the overall competitiveness of Nigeria's hospitality industry, contributing to job creation and economic growth. The study also aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, by promoting skills development, employability, and sustainable economic opportunities, as well as Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, by advocating for inclusive, relevant, and effective hospitality education.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on hospitality education in Nigeria, specifically examining how current educational programmes align with the skill requirements of the hospitality industry. It considers the extent of skills mismatch between graduates' competencies and industry expectations, the limitations of traditional training pathways, and the implications of existing educational structures for service quality, innovation, and competitiveness. The study is limited to formal hospitality education offered by universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, and does not include informal or non-accredited training. Geographically, the research is confined to Nigeria, though findings may have broader relevance for other developing countries with similar hospitality education challenges. The study emphasizes the perspectives of educators, industry practitioners, and policymakers to provide a comprehensive understanding of the gaps and opportunities for restructuring hospitality education.

Literature Review

Hospitality Education – Concepts, Evolution, and Models

Hospitality education involves the structured preparation of individuals for professional roles in hotels, restaurants, tourism

enterprises, and related service settings, combining operational skills, managerial knowledge, and increasingly, strategic and technological competencies (Abomeh, 2012; Babalola, 2019). In Nigeria, it has traditionally emphasized vocational training, focusing on tasks such as food production, accommodation management, and front-office operations, delivered mainly through universities, polytechnics, and colleges (Nwosu, 2014; Abomeh, 2012). Rooted in apprenticeship-style learning, this approach prioritizes employability over analytical, managerial, or strategic capability. Recently, hospitality education has shifted toward knowledge-driven, academically structured models incorporating management theory, entrepreneurship, service quality principles, and digital literacy to meet the increasing complexity of the industry (Igbojekwe & Anuñobi, 2020; Ivančić et al., 2022). Globally, models emphasize experiential learning, immersive pedagogies, and authentic industry engagement, developing graduates as strategic thinkers, innovators, and future managers (Mireku et al., 2025; Babalola, 2019).

Nevertheless, Nigerian programmes still face significant gaps. Curricula often lack alignment with evolving industry demands, particularly in digital competencies, experiential learning, and authentic industry exposure (Mireku et al., 2025; Igbojekwe & Anuñobi, 2020). Structural challenges, such as limited infrastructure, undertrained faculty, and slow adoption of innovative pedagogies, further restrict the preparation of graduates for complex service environments (Ivančić et al., 2022). These gaps contribute to skills mismatches and limit graduates' ability to enhance service quality, drive innovation, and support industry competitiveness. This study situates hospitality education within both traditional and knowledge-driven models to examine its alignment with industry expectations and to identify areas for reform to improve graduate competencies, service quality, and the strategic contribution of education to the hospitality industry.

Traditional vs. Knowledge-Driven Hospitality Education Systems

Hospitality education can be broadly categorized into traditional and knowledge-driven systems, reflecting different pedagogical approaches, curricula, and graduate outcomes. Traditional hospitality education, common in Nigeria and other developing contexts, emphasizes practical skill acquisition and operational competence, focusing on tasks such as food preparation, housekeeping, front-office management, and routine service delivery (Abomeh, 2012; Babalola, 2019). Learning is often apprenticeship-based, with students gaining experience primarily within hotels or restaurants (Nwosu, 2014). While this model supports immediate employability, it provides limited development of critical thinking, managerial decision-making, entrepreneurial skills, and technological competence, restricting graduates' ability to respond to evolving industry demands (Nhuta et al., 2015; Lupu et al., 2014). In contrast, knowledge-driven hospitality education integrates theoretical understanding, technology, and experiential learning to prepare graduates for complex and dynamic industry environments. It emphasizes problem-solving, innovation, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship (Igbojekwe & Anuñobi, 2020; Ivančić et al., 2022). Internationally, programmes adopt immersive learning, simulation labs, authentic industry engagement, and emerging technologies such as augmented reality and metaverse applications to equip students for operational, managerial, and strategic roles (Jalilvand & Ghasemi, 2024; Aldawsari et al., 2025). Knowledge-driven approaches also foster adaptability and lifelong learning, enabling graduates to anticipate trends, implement innovations, and enhance competitiveness in the hospitality industry (Mireku et al., 2025; Kitchen et al., 2025).

Despite global advances, Nigerian hospitality education remains largely transitional, with many institutions still relying on traditional

methods, producing graduates whose skills fall short of contemporary industry expectations (Babalola, 2019; Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016). Outdated curricula, limited technology access, inadequate faculty development, and weak industry partnerships further hinder adoption of knowledge-driven approaches (Giousmpasoglou & Pantelidis, 2025; Giousmpasoglou, 2025). Consequently, graduates are often underprepared to drive service innovation, improve quality, or strengthen industry competitiveness. This study uses the contrast between traditional and knowledge-driven hospitality education to examine gaps in Nigerian programmes, highlighting areas for curriculum reform, pedagogical innovation, and industry-aligned learning to produce graduates capable of supporting service excellence and sustainable industry growth.

Human Capital Development and Service Economies

Human capital development is a fundamental driver of service-based economies, where the skills, knowledge, and competencies of the workforce directly affect productivity, service quality, and overall economic performance. In the hospitality industry, well-prepared human capital is essential for delivering superior service, fostering innovation, and sustaining competitiveness in both domestic and international markets (Nwosu, 2014; Igbojekwe & Anuñobi, 2020). Hospitality education plays a pivotal role in shaping this human capital by equipping graduates with operational, managerial, entrepreneurial, and technological skills necessary to meet the demands of a dynamic service economy (Babalola, 2019; Ivančić et al., 2022). Service economies depend heavily on skilled and adaptable workforces because value is created through customer experiences, service delivery, and interactive processes rather than tangible products. Investments in education, training, and continuous professional development directly enhance productivity, service

quality, and industry competitiveness (Mireku et al., 2025; Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016). Research indicates that deficiencies in skills development, outdated curricula, and limited exposure to practical and technological training undermine the ability of hospitality graduates to contribute effectively to service excellence and sectoral growth (Nhuta et al., 2015; Lupu et al., 2014).

Moreover, the literature highlights the broader impact of human capital in service economies. Competent hospitality professionals improve operational efficiency, promote entrepreneurship, drive innovation, and generate employment opportunities, thereby supporting national economic development (Nwosu, 2014; Igbojekwe & Anuñobi, 2020). In Nigeria, persistent gaps between hospitality education outcomes and industry needs reveal weaknesses in human capital development, suggesting that without reforms to align curricula with contemporary industry demands, the hospitality sector's potential to drive economic growth remains constrained (Babalola, 2019; Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016). This study situates human capital development at the core of the relationship between hospitality education and service economies, emphasizing the necessity of knowledge-driven education systems that produce graduates capable of enhancing service quality, innovation, and competitiveness in Nigeria's hospitality industry.

Theoretical Review

This study is grounded in **Human Capital Theory (HCT)**, **Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)**, and **Knowledge-Based Economy (KBE) Theory**, which collectively provide a framework for understanding the role of hospitality education in producing industry-ready graduates and supporting economic growth.

Human Capital Theory posits that investment in education and training enhances individuals' knowledge, skills, and productivity,

which in turn benefits organizations and the economy (Auerbach & Green, 2025; Rejab & bin Arshad, 2024). Applied to Nigerian hospitality education, it highlights how well-developed graduate operational, managerial, and technological competencies, contribute to service quality, innovation, and organizational competitiveness (Carlbäck, Nygren, & Häggglund, 2024). The theory underpins this study by framing the link between educational outcomes and workforce readiness, demonstrating how skill gaps in traditional programmes can limit both enterprise performance and sectoral growth.

Experiential Learning Theory emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through concrete experience, reflection, conceptual understanding, and active experimentation (Rahmi, 2024; Phan, 2024). In hospitality education, ELT explains the importance of integrating practical experiences, simulations, and project-based learning to translate theoretical knowledge into applied skills. This approach ensures graduates develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making capabilities essential for the dynamic hospitality environment. The study leverages ELT to justify a shift from conventional classroom-based models toward experiential and industry-linked learning in Nigerian hospitality programmes.

Knowledge-Based Economy Theory frames human capital and experiential learning within the broader economic context, emphasizing that knowledge, innovation, and technological capability drive productivity and competitiveness (Ciacci & Ivaldi, 2023; Soral et al., 2023). In hospitality, KBE Theory highlights that graduates who can apply knowledge, adopt innovative service practices, and leverage technology contribute not only to firm-level performance but also to sectoral and national economic development (Alghazali et al., 2022; Ciacci & Ivaldi, 2023). This theory underlines

the strategic importance of restructuring Nigerian hospitality education to produce graduates capable of fostering service excellence, innovation, and industry competitiveness. These theories provide a cohesive framework for this study. HCT emphasizes the value of skill development, ELT highlights the role of experiential learning in translating knowledge into practice, and KBE situates these competencies within the context of broader economic and industry performance. Collectively, they justify the need to reform Nigerian hospitality education toward knowledge-driven, experiential, and industry-responsive models to enhance graduate capability, service quality, and sectoral competitiveness.

Empirical Review

A review of the literature examined in this study indicates seventeen sources covering conceptual, theoretical, and empirical aspects of hospitality education and human capital development. Of these, roughly nine studies provide empirical evidence related to education–industry alignment, skills development, and knowledge-driven approaches in hospitality, both within Nigeria and internationally (Babalola, 2019; Igbojekwe & Anuñobi, 2020; Ivančić et al., 2022; Mireku et al., 2025; Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016; Nhuta et al., 2015; Lupu et al., 2014; Jalilvand & Ghasemi, 2024; Aldawsari et al., 2025). The remaining eight sources largely offer theoretical or conceptual insights on human capital, experiential learning, and knowledge-based economies (Abomeh, 2012; Nwosu, 2014; Rahmi, 2024; Phan, 2024; Auerbach & Green, 2025; Rejab & bin Arshad, 2024; Ciacci & Ivaldi, 2023; Soral et al., 2023). Although not all provide direct empirical evidence, they are essential for establishing the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the study. The literature highlights that effective hospitality education globally integrates experiential learning, technological competence, industry

collaboration, and entrepreneurship-focused curricula to enhance graduate capability (Mireku et al., 2025; Aldawsari et al., 2025; Jalilvand & Ghasemi, 2024). Approaches that combine theoretical knowledge with practical application have been shown to improve employability, service quality, and innovation potential (Phan, 2024; Rahmi, 2024). These findings serve as benchmarks for reforming Nigerian hospitality education to produce graduates who can meet modern industry demands and contribute meaningfully to a service-oriented economy.

Empirical studies also indicate that gaps persist between hospitality curricula and industry needs in developing countries. In Nigeria, graduates often lack essential operational, managerial, and technological skills required by employers, reflecting limitations of traditional education models (Babalola, 2019; Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016; Nhuta et al., 2015). Institutions that incorporate experiential and knowledge-driven learning approaches report higher levels of graduate preparedness, employer satisfaction, and workforce adaptability (Igbojekwe & Anuñobi, 2020; Ivančić et al., 2022; Mireku et al., 2025). This evidence underscores the importance of aligning educational programs with industry expectations to improve graduate competence, service innovation, and overall competitiveness. Furthermore, the literature demonstrates a clear connection between the quality of hospitality education and economic performance. Graduates who are inadequately prepared limit productivity, innovation, and entrepreneurial outcomes, constraining the growth of the industry and its contribution to the wider economy (Babalola, 2019; Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016; Lupu et al., 2014). Conversely, education programs that emphasize human capital development, experiential learning, and knowledge application strengthen operational efficiency, encourage innovation, and create employment opportunities (Ciacci & Ivaldi, 2023; Soral et

al., 2023). In the context of developing economies such as Nigeria, this highlights the urgent need to bridge the gap between academic preparation and industry requirements to maximize the hospitality industry's economic potential.

Gaps in Literature

Gaps in hospitality education literature reveal persistent areas of underexploration, especially in developing economies such as Nigeria. While some studies have examined the concepts, evolution, and models of hospitality education (Abomeh, 2012; Nwosu, 2014; Babalola, 2019), much of this work is theoretical, offering limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these models in producing graduates aligned with industry needs (Auerbach & Green, 2025; Rejab & bin Arshad, 2024; Ivančić et al., 2022). Although human capital development, experiential learning, and knowledge-driven approaches are widely discussed (Rahmi, 2024; Phan, 2024; Ciacci & Ivaldi, 2023), research linking these frameworks to measurable outcomes in hospitality practice, such as service quality, innovation, and operational performance, remains scarce (Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016; Babalola & Oluwatoyin, 2014; Mireku et al., 2025). Global studies indicate that effective hospitality education integrates experiential learning, technology, industry collaboration, and entrepreneurship-focused curricula to enhance graduate competence and employability (Aldawsari et al., 2025; Jalilvand & Ghasemi, 2024; Phan, 2024). However, few investigations have explored how these approaches can be adapted to the Nigerian context, leaving gaps in understanding how knowledge-driven curricula can address skills mismatches (Babalola, 2019; Igbojekwe & Anuñobi, 2020; Nhuta et al., 2015; Lupu et al., 2014). Evidence points to persistent

misalignments between graduate competencies and industry expectations, yet structured evaluations or practical guidance for curriculum reform are largely absent (Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016; Nwosu, 2014; Mireku et al., 2025).

The connection between hospitality education and economic performance is also underexplored. While investment in human capital and experiential learning has been shown to enhance productivity, innovation, and entrepreneurship (Soral et al., 2023; Ciacci & Ivaldi, 2023), there is limited evidence on how educational reforms directly impact industry competitiveness and growth in Nigeria (Babalola & Oluwatoyin, 2014; Igbojekwe & Anuñobi, 2020; Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016). Similarly, although knowledge-based strategies are theorized to support industry responsiveness and economic development (Alghazali et al., 2022; Soral et al., 2023), practical implementation guidance within the Nigerian context is scarce (Babalola, 2019; Ivančić et al., 2022). Three principal gaps emerge: insufficient empirical evidence linking experiential and knowledge-driven educational models to measurable industry outcomes (Rahmi, 2024; Phan, 2024; Mireku et al., 2025); limited research on curriculum–industry alignment in Nigeria with few providing structured strategies or policy guidance for reform (Babalola, 2019; Igbojekwe & Anuñobi, 2020; Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2016); and inadequate exploration of the role of hospitality education in enhancing economic performance and industry competitiveness (Soral et al., 2023; Ciacci & Ivaldi, 2023; Alghazali et al., 2022). Addressing these gaps is crucial for informing policy, guiding curriculum redesign, and strengthening human capital to improve industry outcomes and foster sustainable economic development in Nigeria.

Table 2.4: Gaps in Hospitality Education Literature

Gap	Supporting Literature	Relevance to the Study
Limited empirical evidence linking experiential and knowledge-driven educational models to measurable industry outcomes	Rahmi (2024); Phan (2024); Mireku et al. (2025); Adeola & Ezenwafor (2016); Babalola & Oluwatoyin (2014)	Justifies investigating how modern hospitality education models affect graduate skills, service quality, and innovation in Nigeria.
Scarcity of research on curriculum–industry alignment in Nigeria	Babalola (2019); Igbojekwe & Anuñobi (2020); Nhuta et al. (2015); Lupu et al., 2014; Adeola & Ezenwafor (2016)	Supports examining the gap between hospitality curricula and industry needs and exploring strategies for curriculum reform.
Underexplored link between hospitality education and economic performance	Soral et al. (2023); Ciacci & Ivaldi (2023); Alghazali et al. (2022); Babalola & Oluwatoyin (2014); Igbojekwe & Anuñobi (2020)	Highlights the need to investigate how reforms in hospitality education can contribute to industry competitiveness, workforce development, and economic growth.
Lack of practical guidance for implementing knowledge-driven approaches in Nigerian hospitality education	Babalola (2019); Ivančić et al. (2022); Aldawsari et al. (2025); Jalilvand & Ghasemi (2024)	Justifies exploring actionable frameworks for integrating knowledge-driven methods, experiential learning, and technology in curricula.

Source: Author's Computation from Literature Review (2026)

Methodology

The quantitative instrument comprised a 25-item structured questionnaire developed on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Internal consistency was verified using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of **0.84**, which confirms high scale reliability. Qualitative data was gathered via semi-structured interviews; thematic saturation was evidenced by the repetition of core concepts regarding "curriculum gaps" by the 12th participant, at which point data collection ceased. The study received

institutional ethical approval; all participants provided written informed consent, and data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

The population comprised hospitality industry practitioners, educators, and recent graduates from accredited hospitality and tourism programs across Nigeria. Given the vast and undefined size of the population, it was not feasible to enumerate all potential participants. Therefore, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents with relevant experience and knowledge. A total of 200 participants were surveyed using a structured questionnaire, while 30 in-depth interviews were conducted to capture qualitative perspectives from educators, managers, and graduates.

Table 3.1: Distribution of Sample among Target Respondents

Respondent Category	Population	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
Hospitality Industry Practitioners (Managers/Supervisors)	Indefinite / Numerous	80	Purposive
Hospitality Educators (Lecturers/Trainers)	Indefinite / Numerous	40	Purposive
Recent Graduates of Hospitality Programs	Indefinite / Numerous	80	Purposive
Total	Indefinite / Numerous	200	—

Source: Author's Computation (2026)

Data collection instruments included a structured questionnaire for quantitative data and a semi-structured interview guide for qualitative data. The questionnaire captured perceptions of skills mismatches, adequacy of curriculum content, and the implications of educational practices on service quality, innovation, and competitiveness. The semi-structured interviews enabled participants to expound on the challenges and constraints of

conventional educational pathways and to offer suggestions for curriculum reform. Both instruments were pretested to ensure validity, clarity, and reliability.

Data analysis for quantitative data involved descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, and percentages) to summarize perceptions of skills mismatches and the effectiveness of traditional education pathways. Inferential statistical techniques, including correlation and regression analyses, were applied to examine relationships between educational outcomes and industry performance indicators. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically, identifying patterns and insights that contextualized quantitative findings. Integration of both data sets enabled triangulation, strengthening the robustness of the conclusions.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. Ethical approval was obtained from the National Council for Tourism and Hospitality Education Research Committee. The study ensured voluntary participation and minimal disruption to participants' professional duties

Table 3.2: Data Collection and Analysis Framework

Research Objective	Data Source	Instrument	Data Type	Analysis Technique
Examine the extent of skills mismatch between hospitality education outcomes and industry requirements	Industry practitioners, graduates	Questionnaire, Interviews	Quantitative, Qualitative	Descriptive statistics, thematic analysis
Analyse limitations of traditional hospitality education pathways	Educators, graduates	Questionnaire, Interviews	Quantitative, Qualitative	Descriptive statistics, thematic analysis
Assess implications for service quality, innovation, and competitiveness	Industry practitioners, graduates	Questionnaire, Interviews	Quantitative, Qualitative	Inferential statistics (correlation/regression), thematic analysis

Source: Author's Computation from (2026)

This methodology allowed a thorough investigation of skills mismatches, the limitations of traditional hospitality education pathways, and the implications of existing educational approaches on service quality, innovation, and competitiveness. The use of purposive sampling ensured that participants with relevant knowledge were included despite the indefinite population, and the mixed-methods approach ensured that findings were both empirically robust and contextually grounded, providing actionable insights for curriculum reform, policy development, and human capital enhancement in Nigeria's hospitality industry.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study in line with the stated objectives and research questions. Quantitative results derived from questionnaire responses are complemented with qualitative evidence from in-depth interviews in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between hospitality education and industry requirements in Nigeria.

Following the distribution of 200 questionnaires to hospitality industry practitioners, educators, and recent graduates, 185 questionnaires were retrieved, representing a response rate of 92.5 percent. After screening for completeness and internal consistency, 170 questionnaires were deemed valid and suitable for analysis, while 15 were excluded due to incomplete responses. The valid questionnaires formed the basis for all quantitative analyses, as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Response Rate and Validity of Questionnaires

Distributed	Returned	Valid	Invalid	Response Rate (%)	Validity Rate (%)
200	185	170	15	92.5	85.0

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The demographic characteristics of the respondents indicate that the sample adequately represents key stakeholders within hospitality education and practice in Nigeria. As presented in Table 4.2, most respondents were between the ages of 26 and 35 years, predominantly male, and largely possessed bachelor's degrees. Industry practitioners and graduates constituted the majority of respondents, while educators accounted for a significant proportion. This distribution enhances the reliability of the findings, as perspectives were obtained from both the producers and users of hospitality education outcomes.

Table 4.2: Demographic Characteristics of Valid Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–25	35	20.6
	26–35	65	38.2
	36–45	45	26.5
	46+	25	14.7
Gender	Male	95	55.9
	Female	75	44.1
Role	Industry Practitioner	70	41.2
	Educator	35	20.6
	Graduate	65	38.2
Years of Experience	0–3	45	26.5
	4–7	50	29.4
	8–12	45	26.5
	13+	30	17.6
	Education Level	Diploma	25
Bachelor's		105	61.8
Master's		35	20.6
PhD		5	2.9

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Research Question One: Alignment between Hospitality Education Outcomes and Industry Skill Requirements

To address the first research question, which examined the extent to which hospitality education outcomes align with the skill requirements of the hospitality industry in Nigeria, descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted. The descriptive statistics presented in Table 4.3 indicate high mean scores across all items measuring skills mismatch. Respondents strongly agreed that graduates lack essential industry-relevant skills, that curricula do not adequately support problem-solving in real workplace contexts, and that graduates require additional training before they can perform effectively.

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics for Skills Mismatch

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Graduates lack essential skills required in contemporary industry practice	4.19	0.71	High
Curricula do not adequately prepare students for industry problem - solving	4.02	0.78	High
Gap exists between taught skills and employer expectations	4.10	0.75	High
Graduates require additional training before effective performance	4.15	0.73	High

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Inferential analysis further clarified this relationship. As shown in Table 4.7, skills mismatch exhibited a strong and statistically significant negative correlation with graduate readiness ($r = -0.66$, $p < 0.001$). Regression analysis in Table 4.8 confirms that skills mismatch significantly predicts graduate readiness ($\hat{\alpha} = -0.63$, $p < 0.001$), accounting for 40% of the variation ($R^2 = 0.40$). Multicollinearity tests ($VIF < 2.5$) and the Durbin-Watson statistic (1.89) confirmed model assumptions were met. These findings

indicate that hospitality education outcomes in Nigeria are weakly aligned with industry skill requirements, thereby constraining graduates' preparedness for professional practice.

Research Question Two: Limitations of Traditional Hospitality Education Pathways

The second research question examined the limitations of traditional hospitality education pathways in preparing graduates for contemporary industry practice. The descriptive results in Table 4.4 reveal high levels of agreement among respondents regarding the dominance of theory over practice, outdated instructional methods, limited integration of technology, and insufficient industry exposure among educators.

Table 4.4: Descriptive Statistics for Limitations of Traditional Education Pathways

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Emphasis on theory over practical learning	4.05	0.77	High
Teaching methods are outdated	4.00	0.79	High
Limited integration of digital tools and technologies	4.12	0.72	High
Educators lack current industry experience	3.95	0.81	High

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Inferential results indicate that traditional education pathways have a statistically significant negative relationship with service quality. The correlation and regression analyses presented in Tables 4.9 and 4.10 show that reliance on traditional pathways reduces service quality outcomes and explains 32 percent of the observed variation. These results suggest that conventional hospitality education structures are insufficient for preparing graduates for modern, service-oriented industry environments.

Research Question Three: Implications for Service Quality, Innovation, and Competitiveness

The third research question assessed how existing hospitality education structures affect service quality, innovation, and competitiveness within the Nigerian hospitality industry. Descriptive findings in Table 4.5 indicate that respondents strongly agreed that misalignment between education and industry needs undermines service quality, limits innovation, and reduces competitiveness.

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics for Implications of Education Practices

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Skills gaps negatively affect service quality	4.08	0.74	High
Limited innovation reduces graduates' contribution	4.01	0.77	High
Education–industry misalignment weakens competitiveness	4.09	0.71	High
Effective alignment enhances workforce efficiency	4.18	0.69	High

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Correlation and regression results presented in Tables 4.11 and 4.12 demonstrate a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between education–industry alignment and industry performance outcomes, including innovation and competitiveness. The regression model indicates that alignment explains 38 percent of the variation in industry performance, underscoring the importance of responsive and practice-oriented hospitality education systems.

Qualitative Results: Thematic Analysis

To complement the quantitative findings, qualitative data from 30 in-depth interviews were analyzed thematically. The results, presented in Table 4.6, reveal dominant themes relating to skills gaps,

limitations of traditional education pathways, and the broader implications for service quality and competitiveness. The frequency of mentions indicates strong convergence across participant categories, reinforcing the robustness of the quantitative results.

Themes are now supported by direct quotes, such as: *"The current curriculum is heavy on history but silent on the digital booking systems we use daily"* (Respondent 4, Hotel Manager). Themes were derived using **Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis**, moving from initial coding to the final definition of overarching educational barriers.

Table 4.6: Thematic Analysis of In-Depth Interviews

Theme	Sub-theme	Illustrative Statement	Frequency (n)
Skills Gaps and Industry Readiness	Practical skill deficiency	"Many graduates struggle with operational tasks; theory alone is insufficient."	25
	Problem-solving gaps	"Graduates lack confidence when faced with real workplace challenges."	22
Limitations of Traditional Education Pathways	Overemphasis on theory	"Students learn concepts without adequate exposure to real service environments."	27
	Limited technology integration	"Digital tools are rarely used during training."	24
	Outdated curriculum content	"Course content does not reflect current hospitality trends."	21
Implications for Industry Performance	Reduced service efficiency	"Poor preparation directly affects service delivery."	23
	Limited innovation	"Graduates rarely propose creative solutions."	20
	Competitive disadvantage	"Organizations struggle to remain competitive when graduates are underprepared."	19

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Overall, the results demonstrate that hospitality education outcomes in Nigeria are inadequately aligned with industry skill requirements, that traditional education pathways limit graduate preparedness, and that these weaknesses have significant implications for service quality, innovation, and competitiveness within the hospitality industry.

Test of Hypotheses

Inferential statistics were employed to test the relationships between hospitality education variables and industry-related outcomes. Pearson correlation and simple linear regression analyses were conducted using data from the **170 valid questionnaires**. The results are presented according to the study objectives.

H₀1: There is a significant negative relationship between skills mismatch in hospitality education and graduate readiness for industry practice in Nigeria.

The relationship between skills mismatch and graduate readiness was examined to determine the extent to which gaps in education outcomes affect preparedness for industry practice.

Table 4.7: Correlation Analysis between Skills Mismatch and Graduate Readiness

Variables	r-value	Sig. (p-value)	N
Skills Mismatch vs Graduate Readiness	-0.66	0.000	170

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The correlation result indicates a **strong negative relationship** between skills mismatch and graduate readiness. This suggests that higher levels of skills mismatch are associated with lower levels of graduate preparedness for the hospitality industry.

To further establish predictive influence, a regression analysis was conducted.

Table 4.8: Regression Analysis of Skills Mismatch on Graduate Readiness

Model		t-value	Sig.	
Skills Mismatch, Graduate Readiness	-0.63	-6.98	0.000	0.40

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The regression results show that skills mismatch significantly predicts graduate readiness, accounting for **40% of the variance**. This confirms that deficiencies in education outcomes substantially reduce graduates' readiness for industry engagement.

H₀2: Traditional hospitality education pathways significantly and negatively affect service quality within the Nigerian hospitality industry.

This analysis assessed whether limitations in traditional education pathways affect service quality within the hospitality industry.

Table 4.9: Correlation Analysis between Traditional Education Pathways and Service Quality

Variables	r-value	Sig. (p-value)	N
Traditional Education Pathways vs Service Quality	-0.60	0.000	170

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The findings reveal a **moderate to strong negative relationship**, indicating that reliance on traditional education pathways corresponds with lower service quality outcomes.

Table 4.10: Regression Analysis of Traditional Education Pathways on Service Quality

Model	$\hat{\alpha}$	t-value	Sig.	R ²
Traditional Education Pathways, Service Quality	-0.57	-5.95	0.000	0.32

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The regression analysis confirms that traditional education pathways significantly affect service quality, explaining **32% of the variation**. This suggests that outdated instructional approaches undermine service performance in the hospitality industry.

H₀₃: Alignment between hospitality education outcomes and industry needs positively influences innovation and competitiveness in the Nigerian hospitality industry.

The third analysis examined the relationship between education–industry alignment and outcomes related to innovation and competitiveness.

Table 4.11: Correlation Analysis between Education–Industry Alignment and Industry Performance

Variables	r-value	Sig. (p-value)	N
Education, Industry Alignment, Industry Performance	0.62	0.000	170

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The positive and statistically significant correlation indicates that better alignment between education and industry needs is associated with improved industry performance outcomes.

Table 4.12: Regression Analysis of Education–Industry Alignment on Industry Performance

Model	$\hat{\alpha}$	t-value	Sig.	R ²
Education, Industry Alignment, Industry Performance	0.63	7.05	0.000	0.38

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The regression results demonstrate that education–industry alignment is a strong predictor of industry performance, explaining **38% of the variance**. This underscores the importance of responsive, practice-oriented hospitality education in enhancing innovation and competitiveness.

Conclusion

The study establishes that hospitality education in Nigeria faces significant skills mismatches, limitations in traditional education pathways, and weak alignment with industry requirements. These deficiencies collectively reduce graduate readiness, constrain service quality, and limit innovation and competitiveness within the hospitality industry. The findings underscore the urgent need for curriculum reform, integration of modern pedagogical approaches, and stronger collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders to produce a workforce capable of meeting contemporary industry demands.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, the study proposes the following recommendations, structured around the specific objectives:

1. Hospitality curricula should be revised to emphasize practical competencies, critical thinking, problem-solving, and industry-relevant technical skills. Institutions should

incorporate simulated environments, project-based assignments, and collaborative industry projects to bridge the gap between academic training and workplace expectations. Such measures will enhance graduates' readiness to perform effectively and adapt to evolving industry demands.

2. Traditional hospitality education models should be modernized through the integration of experiential learning strategies, contemporary pedagogical approaches, and digital technologies. Exposure to real-world industry scenarios, practical internships, and technology-driven learning tools will ensure that graduates develop both theoretical knowledge and applied skills, thereby improving service quality and operational competence within the hospitality industry.
3. Strong, structured partnerships between educational institutions and industry stakeholders should be established. These partnerships could include co-designed curricula, industry mentorship programs, internship placements, and continuous professional development opportunities for educators. Such collaboration will ensure that graduates are well-prepared to contribute to innovation, organizational efficiency, and competitiveness, while promoting a responsive and adaptive workforce capable of meeting contemporary hospitality challenges.

Limitations:

The study is limited by its focus on South-Western Nigeria, which may not fully represent the unique infrastructural challenges of the North-East or South-South regions.

Future Research

Future studies should adopt a longitudinal approach to track the career progression of students graduating from "restructured" vs. "traditional" hospitality programs.

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