

Innovative human resources management: key competencies expected from hospitality graduates in Ghana

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Abstract

Purpose: The study aimed to determine the key competencies required from hospitality graduates from the hospitality industry perspective.

Research methodology: The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Overall, 43 hotel managers in the Ghanaian hospitality industry were conveniently sampled. Data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire. The study used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) version 23 to analyse data collected.

Results: Results from the study indicate that the “key competencies” required from hospitality graduates from the industry perspective include good inter-personal skills, innovation and ability to think of new ways of doing things, ability to maintain professional standards, customer-oriented, critical thinking ability, self-motivation, friendly and approachable, good communication skills.

Limitation: The study focused only on hospitality employers in Ghana; therefore, findings from the study cannot be generalised to other hospitality employers in different countries.

Contribution: The study emphasises the need for hospitality educational institutions in Ghana to assess the tourism and hospitality industry's competencies to produce graduates who will fit in the job market.

Keywords: *Attributes, Employers, Knowledge, Skills*

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1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, the tourism and hospitality industry gained significant attention among governments across the globe, policy makers and researchers. The nexus between the industry's global essence lies between its contribution to socio-economic development and livelihood empowerment. The multidimensional nature of tourism and hospitality make the industry one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries. As a major component of the tourism industry, the hospitality sector is one of the largest contributors of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the global economy (Turner and Freiermuth 2017).

According to United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO 2014), tourism thrives when there is enhanced global mobility and increased surplus income to spend on unsought products and services. A major disruption in these two elements suggests a major decline in tourism and hospitality demands. The sharp disruption of the global economy by the Covid-19 means that, international mass mobility is truncated, income earning propensities of individuals are declined, people's intrinsic desire to travel for

recreational activities has also declined since people have now become more concerned about their health. In the context of tourism and hospitality, the industry will see major declines if players within the industry do not adopt sustainable operational mechanism and strategies. According to [World Travel & Tourism Council \(2020\)](#), players within the industry can adopt innovative measures such as package redesigning and home delivery services to limit the negative impact of the pandemic on the industry. As the hospitality industry continues to grow, there is a need for innovative human resources for the plethora of jobs in the industry ([Armoo and Neequaye 2014](#)).

In Ghana, while efforts are being made by the Government to progress the travel and tourism industry through infrastructural expansion, it is important to note that, building efficient, effective and robust human resource base is considered as one of the key facets upon which the travel and tourism industry thrives ([IATA 2020](#)). The tourism and hospitality industry is about providing tourists with memorable experiences. This is increasingly challenging in a technology-driven world where tourists have needs and expectations that need to be met and exceeded continuously. Thus, there is a pertinent emphasis on tourism and hospitality professionals to be adequately trained and prepared to meet the demands of the various industry stakeholders. From the global point of view, numerous authors ([see Alhelalat 2015, Wang, Ayres, and Huyton 2010, Zhang, Qu, and Yang 2006](#)), suggest competencies required from hospitality graduates from the industry and literature perspective because [Klimoski and Amos \(2012\)](#) and [Jiang and Alexakis \(2017\)](#) posit that hospitality industry employers continuously complain about finding graduates with relevant skills and knowledge. The ever-changing business world has confronted new challenges in operating activities and business entities acknowledge that addressing sustainability issues in the hospitality industry delivers enormous benefits to the society, the environment, and to businesses themselves through reduced costs and risks of doing business, increased brand reputation, increased attractiveness to talent or competitiveness ([Turner and Freiermuth 2017](#)). In this regard, The National Tourism Development Plan of Ghana (2013- 2027) emphasises on innovative human resources as well as sustainable entrepreneurship in the hospitality industry due to low quality of workforce by advocating for an immediate innovative capacity-building framework (Nation Tourism Development Plan (2013-2027), 2016).

Contemporary employers in the hospitality industry consider graduates' relevant skills; this means that intellectual brilliancy or qualification does not guarantee a job offer to graduates ([Mohamad et al. 2018](#)). Therefore, entering the job market without the expected competencies could lead to limited promotional opportunities, job-hopping, underemployment, and unemployment. Given this, [Cranmer \(2006\)](#) and [Kleeman \(2011\)](#) contend that, in an attempt to ensure innovative human resource management and sustainability in tourism industry, there is the need for higher education institutions to integrate core, key, transferable and employability skills into the two to four years learning experience of graduates to commensurate with hospitality industry's demands. [Nikadimovs et al. \(2017\)](#) believe that ensuring innovative human resource management in the hospitality industry is largely reliant on graduates' competencies as these graduates are the future leaders responsible for resolving the challenges that the industry currently faces. From the foregoing reviews, it is demonstrated that as part of addressing the new challenges of sustainable tourism business in this modern society, there is a need to explore key graduate competencies required from the hospitality industry and literature perspective in the Ghanaian context. The current study's motivation lies in the examining and compilation of current competences required for success in the hospitality business, which can form a basis for further studies and enrich the Ghanaian hospitality education and industry. The work will be useful to researchers, practitioners, lecturers as well as learners to facilitate skill development, supervision and management in general.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

For the past decades, several studies advocate for different sets of graduates' competencies required from the hospitality industry ([Anthony 2015](#)) to ensure innovative and sustainable human resources. These include studies that focused on hospitality ([Alhelalat 2015, Zhang, Qu, and Yang 2006](#)), the hospitality industry in general ([Asirifi et al. 2013, Subramanian and Shin 2013](#)), and some special areas of hospitality ([Millar, Mao, and Moreo 2010, Shum, Gatling, and Shoemaker 2018, Williams 2015](#)). From a global perspective, previous empirical studies have been conducted by researchers to assess the competencies of hospitality graduates and industry expectations across several parts of the world.

[Zhang et al. \(2006\)](#) set out to study the problems of current hospitality and tourism tertiary education for undergraduates in China. A survey was conducted in three universities offering undergraduate tourism and hospitality programmes in Beijing. A mixed-method approach was used to gather data from students, teachers, and managers. In their study, [Zhang et al. \(2006\)](#), identified that, most of the subjects that are taught within the context of tourism education are misplaced. They also confirmed that most of the courses embedded in tourism education in China have little relevance to building the skills, competences and abilities of graduate to fit the human resource gap of the tourism and hospitality industry in China. The study revealed that a little above 20% of tourism and hospitality graduate in China find themselves in tourism and hospitality related careers and jobs while more than 70% find themselves in other tourism and hospitality non-related firms. [Zhang et al. \(2006\)](#) further state that, enrolment in tourism and hospitality education is increasing in China yet the industry is still grappled with lower supply of skilled. The gap identified in this study is that there is a clear misplacement on the subjects embedded in tourism education towards achieving the industry's core competences.

[Shariff, Kayat, and Abidin \(2014\)](#) examined the perceptions and expectations of graduate competencies from the industry perspective. The study data was collected from Human Resource Managers of 4-star and 5-star lodging properties in Peninsular Malaysia. Findings from the study indicate that 'ability to work in teamwork' was perceived by industry stakeholders as an essential competency, although it stands as a second competency the industry required the graduates to possess. However, it was revealed that the graduates' 'ability to use technology,' in contrast, was perceived to be the most insignificant competency by the industry but stands as the first competency the industry required the graduates to have before entering the industry. Based on the findings, the study concluded that in order for the graduates to remain key players in the industry, working in teamwork is essential, but ability to use technology is a must.

In a similar study, [Alhelalat \(2015\)](#) examined the skills needed for hospitality graduates and non-hospitality graduates in the hotel industry. A quantitative approach and questionnaires were adopted for the study. A total number of 41 hotel executives were sampled from four to five-star hotels in Jordan through conventional methods. The study revealed that 55% of first-time graduate employees also lacked Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills which have become a vital component of the industry. As suggested by [Kalargyrou and Woods \(2011\)](#), employers within the tourism and hospitality industry require graduates to have a better disposition of the utilization of ICT to enhance efficiency in the industry. According to ([Andrews 2015, Balakrishnan 2016](#)), the integration of ICT based infrastructure within the context of tourism and hospitality business operations is gaining a lot of attention. [Kalargyrou and Woods \(2011\)](#) maintain that travel and tourism firms such as airlines, hotels, tour operators, and destination managers are continually integrating and upgrading their ICT infrastructural base to enhance their competitiveness and efficiency. While this development is evident, lack of ICT education in the tourism and hospitality curriculum implies that, graduates will lack the ability to fill in this gap.

[Kleemann \(2011\)](#) explored hospitality employers' perceptions on the competencies expected from new graduates in the hospitality industry. The study report findings that from highest to lowest, perceived competencies expected from new graduates were communication, teamwork, professional qualities, conceptual/analytic, work culture, organization/planning, leadership, and learning theory and practice. Moreover, the study reported on the importance attached to these skills or competencies by hospitality employers. Findings from this indicate that all the skills, excluding learning theory and practice, were rated at least somewhat important. Among these revelations, communication was rated or perceived higher than the other skills. Based on these findings, the study emphasised that above listed competencies were those skills valued in the hospitality industry, and should be considered in preparing students for entry into the workplace. In a similar study by [Mohamad et al. \(2018\)](#), the competencies perceived by hospitality undergraduates in both public and private universities in Malaysia was explored. The study used purposive and snowball sampling technique to recruit participants for the study. The study results show that respondents' competencies include communication skill, lifelong learning and information management, teamwork skill, technical skill, moral and professional ethics, critical thinking and problem solving, leadership skill, and entrepreneurial skill.

[Srisangkaew \(2018\)](#) embarked on a gap analysis of graduates' employability competency in 4 to 5-star hotels in Bangkok from hospitality industry stakeholders' perspective. The study that revealed that all three stakeholders (hospitality managers, hospitality educators, and hospitality internship students) involved in the study mutually concluded that the "Communication" and "Willingness to learn" are the most critical perceived competencies required from graduates to remain integral in the hospitality industry. In comparison, the three stakeholders perceive the "Adaptability & Flexibility" and "Customer Service & Cultural Sensitivity" as among the highest performance.

[Alexakis and Jiang \(2019\)](#) investigated hospitality managers' perceptions of hospitality students' skills and knowledge and compared them to United States hospitality undergraduate curricula. They used the responses of 206 surveyed managers who rated 19 skill/knowledge items for analysis. The curriculum from 20 leading U.S. hospitality programs was selected and compared to the survey results. The curriculum inquiry indicated that all programs primarily focused on teaching professional skills for various hospitality concentrations. The results suggested essential competencies of communication skills and higher learning skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving should remain ([Alexakis and Jiang 2019](#)).

[Anthony, Mensah, and Amenumey \(2019\)](#) studied the competency requirements expected from hospitality management graduates in Ghana and found that both industry and academia agreed that students required conceptual, administrative, leadership and technical competencies to function effectively in the industry. However, her study concluded that there were gaps in competency requirements between the hospitality industry and what was offered by academia. She recommended the need for greater collaboration in producing competent graduates for the industry. These findings strongly support the need for collaboration between universities and industry in developing the right calibre of graduates. There is the need to align the tourism and hospitality curricula to the industry's needs to ensure the effective growth and development of the industry.

3. Research methodology

This study focused on the key competencies expected from hospitality graduates from a literature and industry perspective. In an attempt to make the findings robust, the study applies positivism in the conduct of the study. Therefore, quantitative survey design was employed as it is used to create meaning and new knowledge by quantifying data. Moreover, this study's population consisted of all three-star and four-star hotel managers from Ghana's hospitality industry. Overall, 70 hotel managers (employers) in the Ghanaian hospitality industry were targeted for the study. In all, 43 out of 70 hospitality employers were purposively and conveniently contacted to participate in the study.

The data for the study was gathered using a structured survey questionnaire, administered to hospitality industry employers (based on [Kokt and Strydom 2014](#)), which consisted of:

1. **Section A:** Demographic profile of respondents.
2. **Section B:** Competencies expected from hospitality graduates and
3. **Section C:** Recommendations from employers.

The section A questions sought to obtain some biographical information from the respondents (age, gender, highest academic qualification and Position). The Section B, used six-point Likert-type scale to extract scores of either low or high values. Cronbach's alpha was used to gauge the reliability of the survey instruments ([Taber 2018](#)). Depending on their availability, hospitality employers were either requested to complete online google form questionnaires on WhatsApp/or via email. The quantitative data collected for the study was analysed descriptively using tables generated by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) version 23. Moreover, study embarked on factor analysis. Factor analysis in theory helps to reduce a large number of variables into a smaller set of factors. The factor analysis helped the researcher to summarize the information contained in the likert scale into a smaller measure known as factors. In this study, the principal component analysis was employed to reduce the data gathered from the likert scale to make it easier to handle.

4. Results and discussions

This section presents the results and discussions of the quantitative study conducted. The section was further categorized into three sub-section namely descriptive statistics, competencies industry requires from hospitality graduates and factor analysis of key competencies expected from hospitality graduates.

4.1. Descriptive statistics

This section describes the demographic variables of hospitality graduates. The demographic data comprised of gender, age, highest qualification and current position. Overall, 19 male and 24 female respondents represented 44% and 56% of the total 43 respondents, respectively. The majority of the respondents were aged between 31 – 40 years (44%), followed by respondents aged between 41 – 50 years (21%). Also, 19% of respondents were aged between 20 – 30 years, while only 16% were above 50. Again, out of the total 43 respondents, the majority obtained Master's Degree (40%) followed by BTech/Honours Degree holders (28%). Moreover, 9% each of respondents had acquired Advanced Diploma, Diploma and Post Graduate Diploma. Also, only 5% of the respondents held a Doctoral Degree. Finally, out of the total number of 43 respondents, the majority (37%) were Managers / Supervisors at their departments whilst 19% were Lecturers at educational institutions. Also, 16% of respondents were Hotel / General Managers whereas 12% were Entrepreneurs within the industry. In addition, 9% work as Chefs / F&B Managers while 5% were Administrators at their various establishments. Only 2% of respondents indicated to have Retired from their employment or working in the hospitality industry.

4.2 Competencies industry require from hospitality graduates

In this sub-section, hospitality management (employers) responses on competencies required from the industry are presented.

a. Knowledge required from hospitality graduates from the perspective of industry employers

This section deals with hospitality industry employers' perception about the knowledge required from hospitality graduates to succeed in the hospitality industry. The findings are presented in table 1 below in percentages

Table 1: Knowledge required from hospitality graduates from industry employers

| Q | | | | | | | N | |
|-----|--|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|--------|--------|----------------|
| | | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Slightly disagree | Slightly agree | Agree | | Strongly agree |
| 5.1 | Hospitality graduates know the laws that govern hospitality establishments | 4.60% | 9.30% | 16.30% | 18.60% | 25.60% | 25.60% | 43 |
| 5.2 | Hospitality graduates have basic understanding of hospitality marketing | 9.30% | 4.70% | 11.60% | 11.60% | 37.20% | 25.60% | 43 |
| 5.3 | Hospitality graduates have sufficient knowledge of | - | 16.30% | 9.30% | 23.20% | 44.20% | 7.00% | 43 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----|
| | finance and accounting | | | | | | | |
| 5.4 | Hospitality graduates know how the various hospitality divisions operate, e.g. room division, front office, etc. | 4.60% | 2.30% | 7.00% | 14.00% | 34.90% | 37.20% | 43 |
| 5.5 | Hospitality graduates know how to utilise the various types of utensils, tools and equipment | 4.70% | 9.30% | 4.70% | 20.90% | 37.20% | 23.20% | 43 |
| 5.6 | Hospitality graduates know how to maintain the various utensils, tools and equipment | 2.30% | 11.60% | 16.30% | 14.00% | 30.20% | 25.60% | 43 |

Table 1 (question 5.1) shows that 25.6% of hospitality industry employers representing majority agreed and strongly agreed that hospitality graduates know the laws that govern hospitality establishments. However, the minority of 4.60% of hospitality industry employers strongly disagreed that hospitality graduates know the laws that govern hospitality establishments. Also, from question 5.2 as indicated in table 1 above, 37.2% of respondents representing majority indicated that hospitality graduates had basic understanding of hospitality marketing while minority of 4.70% disagreed to the statement. In addition, concerning question 5.3, largest percentage (44.2%) of the respondents stated that hospitality graduates had sufficient knowledge of finance and accounting. Moreover, 37.2% of respondents (question 5.4) keenly affirmed that hospitality graduates are familiar with various hospitality divisions' operations, e.g. room division, front office, etc.. In contrast, minority of 2.30% of respondents disagreed with the statement. Moreover, another 37.2% (question 5.5) representing majority revealed that hospitality graduates know how to utilise the various types of utensils, tools and equipment whilst minority of 4.70% of hospitality employers strongly disagreed and slightly disagreed that hospitality graduates know how to utilise the various types of utensils, tools and equipment. Out of the 43 respondents, 30.2% (question 5.6) agreed that hospitality graduates know about maintaining the various utensils, tools and equipment, meanwhile, minority of 2.30% of the respondents strongly disagreed that hospitality graduates know about maintaining the various utensils, tools and equipment

b. Skills required from hospitality graduates from the perspective of industry employers

This section deals with hospitality industry employers' perception about the skills required from hospitality graduates to succeed in the hospitality industry. The results are presented in table 2 in percentages.

Table 2: Skills required from hospitality graduates from industry employers

| Q | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Slightly disagree | Slightly agree | Agree | Strongly agree | N |
|---|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|---|
|---|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|---|

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------|--|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-----------|
| 6.1 | Hospitality graduates possess adequate organisational skills, like event planning skills | 2.30% | 14.00% | 9.30% | 23.30% | 30.20% | 20.90 | 43 |
| 6.2 | Hospitality graduates have good communication skills | 9.30% | 7.00% | 7.00% | 18.60% | 32.50% | 25.60 | 43 |
| 6.3 | Hospitality graduates have good inter-personal skills | 9.30% | 4.70% | 13.90% | 16.30% | 32.50% | 23.30% | 43 |
| 6.4 | Hospitality graduates possess good digital skills | 4.70% | 16.30% | 13.90% | 30.20% | 30.20% | 4.70% | 43 |
| 6.5 | Hospitality graduates have good decision-making skills | 4.70% | 11.60% | 9.30% | 18.60% | 34.90% | 20.90% | 43 |
| 6.6 | Hospitality graduates have good problem-solving skills | 4.70% | 16.30% | 6.90% | 27.90% | 27.90% | 16.30% | 43 |

Table 2 shows that 30.2% of hospitality industry employers representing majority, in question 6.1 stated that hospitality graduates possess adequate organisational skills, like event planning skills. However, minority of 2.30% of the respondents disagreed to the statement. Moreover, 32.5% of respondents representing majority (question 6.2 and question 6.3) concurred that hospitality graduates have good communication skills as well as possessing good inter-personal skills. In addition, the majority of 30.2% of the respondents in question 6.4 slightly agreed that hospitality graduates possess good digital skills whilst minority of 4.70% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. Furthermore, 34.9% of hospitality industry employers, representing majority, in question 6.5 indicated that hospitality graduates have good decision-making skills whereas 4.70% of the hospitality industry employers strongly disagreed to the statement. Out of the 43 respondents, 27.9% of hospitality industry employers in question 6.6 somewhat agreed or shared the opinion that hospitality graduates have good problem-solving skills, meanwhile, minority of 4.70% have disagreed that hospitality graduates have good problem-solving skills.

c. Attributes and abilities required from hospitality graduates from the perspective of industry employers

This section focuses on the perception of hospitality industry employers about the attributes and abilities required from hospitality graduates to grow and succeed in the hospitality industry. Table 3 below shows the findings from this study in percentages.

Table 3: Attributes and abilities required from hospitality graduates from industry employers' perspective

| Q | | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Slightly disagree | Slightly agree | Agree | Strongly agree | N |
|-----|--|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|--------|----------------|----|
| 7.1 | Hospitality graduates are friendly and approachable | 11.60% | 4.70% | 9.30% | 11.60% | 39.50% | 23.30% | 43 |
| 7.2 | Hospitality graduates are customer-oriented | 7.00% | 11.60% | 7.00% | 9.30% | 37.20% | 27.90% | 43 |
| 7.3 | Hospitality graduates are good team players | 4.70% | 6.90% | 11.60% | 16.30% | 37.20% | 23.30% | 43 |
| 7.4 | Hospitality graduates are generally self-motivated | 9.30% | 9.30% | 11.60% | 23.30% | 32.60% | 13.90% | 43 |
| 7.5 | Hospitality graduates have critical thinking abilities | 2.30% | 14.00% | 20.90% | 18.60% | 27.90% | 16.30% | 43 |
| 7.6 | Hospitality graduates are able to adapt to environmental change | 4.60% | 14.00% | 7.00% | 11.60% | 48.80% | 14.00% | 43 |
| 7.7 | Hospitality graduates have the ability to maintain professional standards | 7.00% | 11.60% | 7.00% | 4.60% | 41.90% | 27.90% | 43 |
| 7.8 | Hospitality graduates are innovative and can think of new ways of doing things | 4.60% | 16.30% | 4.60% | 16.30% | 32.60% | 25.60% | 43 |
| 7.9 | Hospitality graduates possess the ability to write business communications | 14.00% | 14.00% | 11.60% | 20.90% | 23.30% | 16.20% | 43 |

According to Table 3 above, 39.5% of hospitality industry employers (question 7.1) agreed that hospitality graduates were friendly and approachable. Also, 37.2% of respondents (question 7.2 and question 7.3) hold the view that hospitality graduates were customer-oriented as well as being good team players. Additionally, 32.6% of respondents (question 7.4) affirmed that hospitality graduates were generally self-motivated, while 27.9% had critical thinking abilities (question 7.5). Similarly, 48.8% of respondents (question 7.6) stated that hospitality graduates could adapt to environmental change, whereas 41.9% indicated that hospitality graduates possessed the ability to maintain professional standards (question 7.7). According to data collected, 32.6% of respondents (question 7.8) hospitality graduates were innovative and could think of new ways of doing things while 23.3% mentioned those hospitality graduates possessed the ability to write business communications (question 7.9).

4.3 Factor analysis of key competencies expected from hospitality graduates

In this regard, the study ascertained the key competencies expected from graduates in the hospitality industry. In determining this, various competencies variables from the questionnaire on knowledge, skills and attributes expected from hospitality graduates formed twenty-one (21) variables to be checked for normality and then factor analysed into two main factors. The Bartlett's test of sphericity which shows the strength of the relationship among variables was significant at $p < 0.05$ and the sampling adequacy measured by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) produced a value of 0.858. The factor loadings from the rotated component matrix produced two factors, with eleven variables substantially loaded on two factors and the results can be read from table 4 below. For easy reading of the table, loadings that are less than 0.5 were omitted. This resulted in the gap on the table 4.

Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix

| | Component | |
|--|-----------|---|
| | 1 | 2 |
| good inter-personal skills | .905 | |
| innovative and able to think of new ways of doing things | .904 | |
| ability to maintain professional standards | .893 | |
| customer oriented | .849 | |
| critical thinking ability | .841 | |
| self-motivation | .839 | |
| friendly and approachable | .833 | |
| good communication skills | .829 | |
| good problem-solving skills | .786 | |
| good decision-making skills | .774 | |
| able to adapt to environmental change | .753 | |
| good team players | .735 | |
| good digital skills | .684 | |

| | | |
|---|------|------|
| organizational skills, like event planning skills | .651 | .592 |
| the ability to write business communications | .638 | .556 |
| know the laws that govern hospitality establishments | .565 | .510 |
| know how to maintain the various utensils, tools and equipment | | .873 |
| sufficient knowledge of finance and accounting | | .817 |
| utilise the various types of utensils, tools and equipment | | .817 |
| knowledge of how the various hospitality divisions operate, e.g. room division, front office, etc | .543 | .678 |
| basic understanding of hospitality marketing | .623 | .628 |

From table 4 above, variables substantially loaded on these two factors or component (1 and 2) are good interpersonal skills, innovation and ability to think of new ways of doing things, ability to maintain professional standards, customer-oriented, critical thinking ability, self-motivation, friendly and approachable, good communication skills and ability to maintain the various utensils, tools and equipment (Operational skills). In this regard, these variables were named “key competencies” expected from graduates from the hospitality industry. The identified key competencies imply that hospitality industry employers expect hospitality graduates to possess applied and business-like competencies whilst giving less attention to the theoretical and conceptual capabilities of hospitality graduates. These findings resonate with those of [Kim, Park, and Choi \(2017\)](#), [Enz, Renaghan, and Geller \(2007\)](#), [Anthony \(2015\)](#) and [Anthony et al. \(2019\)](#). In this view, [Protogerou, Kontolaimou, and Caloghirou \(2017\)](#) described innovative human capital as crucial to a firm’s capacity to absorb and organise knowledge from competent staff for productivity enhancement purposes and innovation. Innovative human capital is, therefore a pertinent component for organisations to achieve economic value and sustainability.

5. Conclusion

The study identified the key competencies expected from hospitality graduates from a literature and industry perspective. The success of hospitality graduates in the hospitality industry mostly relies on the acquisition and demonstration of required competencies to function effectively in diverse roles within the industry. Given this, hospitality experts and practitioners generally expect hospitality graduates to possess competencies that help solve job-related problems and keep guests and customers happy. Therefore, hospitality industry employers require hospitality graduates to possess practical and technical competencies in order to meet these needs ([Tesone, Ricci, and Ricci 2015](#); [Yang, Cheung, and Song 2016](#); [Balakrishnan 2016](#)). Review of extant studies (literatures) established that hospitality graduates' key competencies include good interpersonal skills, leadership skills, problem solving skills, teamwork, ability to use technology, good decision-making skills, and good communication skills. The current study also revealed that the “key competencies” required from hospitality graduates in Ghana are good inter-personal skills, innovative and able to think of new ways of doing things, ability to maintain professional standards, customer oriented, critical thinking ability, self-motivation, friendly and approachable, good communication skills and ability to maintain the various utensils, tools and equipment. [Ali, Nair, and Hussain \(2016\)](#) indicated that due to the hospitality industry's growth and the

rapid changes associated with it, there is the demand that hospitality curriculum moves at the same pace to be in accordance with the needs of industry. Therefore, there is the need for higher education institutions to integrate “key competencies” as revealed in table 4 into the learning experience of graduates as expected from the hospitality industry and literature perspective.

The identified competencies imply that hospitality industry employers expect hospitality graduates to possess applied and business-like competencies while giving less attention to hospitality graduates' theoretical and conceptual capabilities. Moreover, due to the dynamic nature and changing guests' needs of the hospitality industry, continuous research is needed to keep abreast with current expectations hospitality industry practitioners have regarding hospitality graduates' competencies. This is consistent with previous research where continuous research and investigation have been identified to be necessary. Researchers such as [Baum \(2006\)](#), [Spowart \(2011\)](#), [Sisson and Adams \(2013\)](#) and [Wessels, du Plessis, and Slabbert \(2017\)](#) concluded that constant research is required to provide an updated and relevant understanding and knowledge of what competencies the hospitality industry experts believe are desirable in the present time.

Hospitality industry professionals and employers seek to relate work attributes to competencies for success in the industry. This is in line with [Kokt and Strydom \(2014\)](#), who agree that industry practitioners expect hospitality graduates to be qualified and be able to cope with challenges that they encounter. [Nduro et al. \(2015\)](#) also divulged that a more significant part of the skill set required for the hospitality industry could be gained through hands-on training. Hence, it is fundamental for hospitality education to create more opportunities to allow students pursuing programs in hospitality management to undertake regular industrial attachments to equip them with competencies expected by the industry. The above discussion, therefore, has implications for curriculum and human development within hospitality education. The purpose of the curriculum used in training hospitality students is to churn out graduates who are prepared and equipped with needed skills and competencies to make impact within the hospitality. Periodic update of the hospitality curriculum is vital for hospitality graduates to be relevant to the industry. Since education and training are interrelated, they play an important role in human resource development in the hospitality and tourism sector. The curriculum used to teach and prepare hospitality graduates for industry must endeavour to focus on equipping graduates with these “key competencies” in order to thrive in the hospitality industry.

Limitation and study forward

It is argued that no research is absolute; therefore the current study has some limitations. First, the study was limited to hospitality employers in Ghana, therefore findings from the study cannot be generalised to other hospitality employers in different country. Future studies should focus on hospitality graduates' self-assessment of their competencies to help ascertain the gaps between hospitality graduates' competencies and the competency expectations from the hospitality industry. No study covers all aspect of the research problem. Moreover, the studies' method was quantitative approach and had some limitations on thoroughly explaining the variables involved in the study. Because of this, the study recommends, and in-depth studies specifically qualitative in nature to explore the perceived graduates' competencies from the industry perspective.

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