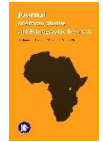African Studies

An empirical study of Kirkpatrick's evaluation model and perceived competence in hospitality practice: Evidence from undergraduate hospitality students in Kenya

Research article

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Abstract
The study aimed at examining the effectiveness of Kirkpatrick's four levels on undergraduate hospitality students' perceived competence in hospitality practice. It adopted the concurrent mixed methods design and targeted final year undergraduate hospitality students in Kenyan Universities offering hospitality management. A total of 204 students completed questionnaires. In addition, 12 heads of departments and lecturers were interviewed. Data were analyzed using descriptive, thematic and inferential approaches. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to test the effects of Kirkpatrick's model's four levels on perceived competency. The study revealed that both the students and lecturers were satisfied with activities evaluating students at each level. The inferential analysis results confirmed that evaluation of reaction and evaluation of results had positive and significant effects on perceived competence in hospitality practice. Evaluation of behaviour had a negative and significant effect, while evaluation of learning had no significant effect on perceived competence in hospitality practice. It was concluded that each level of the Kirkpatrick's model had a unique role to play in evaluation. However, future studies should seek to use experimental approaches to replicate the findings.

Keywords: Kirkpatrick's model, perceived competence, hospitality practice, experiential learning

Introduction

The effectiveness of a model for evaluating training outcomes of undergraduate students is central to questions of competence development. A central tenet in university experiential learning in hospitality management is that using practical delivery evaluation; students can acquire skills in food and beverage production and service that will ultimately enhance their overall hospitality practice. A large body of literature underscores the critical role that employees in hospitality establishments such as restaurants, airlines, and hotels, play in the success of the market, organizational competitiveness, service delivery, and financial performance (Wirtz & Jerger, 2016). Similarly, arguments are advanced to the effect that this group of employees is often engaged in interpersonal interactions with the public, warranting a demonstration of good emotional and technical competencies (Jung & Yoon, 2012), required when carrying out tasks (Fernandes, Morgado & Rodriquez, 2018). Hospitality management students provide the primary human resource in the hospitality industry. Consequently, practitioners and academicians concur that hospitality training programmes should enhance competencies for the training and development of competent individuals (Wang & Tsai, 2014).

As a result of the requirement to enhance emotional and technical competencies in undergraduate hospitality programmes, most universities recognize the need to complement theoretical learning with real-world skills practical learning. Research demonstrates a consensus that comprehensive hospitality education cannot afford to ignore the practical aspects of learning (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2012). Moreover, scholars underscore the role placement play in exposing students to practical experiences in real-world contexts that enables them to test theoretically acquired skills (Stansbie, Nash & Chang 2016). In addition, placements correlate positively with achieving a wide latitude of competencies, including problem-solving, management, and leadership (Lin et al., 2017; Gruman, Barrows & Reavley, 2013).

Practical learning in hospitality comes in various forms, including internship, practicum, work placement, project-based learning, work-based learning, and lab-based learning, all of which seek to expose students to real-world skills (Ren & McKercher, 2021). However, it is argued that practical learning involving industrial placement should be based on clear pedagogical goals that can be evaluated (Ren & McKercher, 2021). Indeed, evidence shows that experienced employees apply different techniques when exposing trainee students to practical training, leading to different outcomes (Felicien et al., 2014). Under such circumstances, the faculty and institutional management evaluate practical training based on the Kirkpatrick model that is globally recognized for evaluating learning and training programmes (Hornet et al., 2016).

University students pursuing hospitality management in Kenya are exposed to practical training both within the institutions and industry. Under this training, they are duly assessed and evaluated by the university staff and industry management. Despite going through such a comprehensive evaluation process and being declared competent, concerns are still raised regarding the inability of Kenya's hospitality graduates and university graduates in general to meet

the job market expectations (Francis et al., 2020; Kamau & Waudo, 2012). Therefore, this research aimed to analyze the effectiveness of Kirkpatrick's evaluation model in the context of perceived competence in hospitality practice among undergraduate hospitality students in Kenya.

Literature Review

This study is anchored on Kirkpatrick's four-level model with a desire to design a delivery evaluation scale that pursues good evaluation practices. The diverse nature of the hospitality industry makes it challenging to identify the precise competencies that hospitality management students should be exposed to during practical training. According to Jiang and Alexakis (2017), hospitality stakeholders have usually guided the competencies hospitality undergraduate students' should be taught. However, over the years, there have been many competencies that the industry has constantly emphasized.

According to Sisson and Adams (2013), the bulk of competencies (86%) required by hospitality graduates are soft skills. Meanwhile, Ruetzler et al. (2014) argue that the industry needs more technical skills and identify seven technical skills essential for hospitality students and industry professionals: academic performance, time management, social networking, oral and written communication, spreadsheet acumen, and strategic planning. Zaitsera, Kozlor, and Nikolskaya (2017) identify soft skills such as communication skills as crucial in the industry. Interpersonal skills such as teamwork, listening skills, employee relations, problem-solving, and public speaking have also been associated with competencies required of hospitality graduates (Bharwani & Janharu, 2013; Nohd Shariff & Zainol Abidin, 2015). Other competencies that feature consistently regarding hospitality graduates include; digital competence (Morozov & Morozova, 2019), leadership competencies (Shum, Garling & Shoemaker, 2018), and self-management competencies (Jackson & Wilton, 2017).

Therefore perceived competence in hospitality practice is the extent to which hospitality undergraduate students feel that they have acquired the required competencies to succeed in the hospitality industry. We measure perceived competence in hospitality practice using undergraduate hospitality students' achievement, leadership, innovation, and values & knowledge. Research has shown the existence of a gap between what hospitality practitioners are using in the field and what academicians are producing (Yuan, Chuang & Gregory, 2017). Such gaps bring into question the efficacy of the practical delivery evaluation of undergraduate training in hospitality management.

Kirkpatrick's evaluation model comprising four levels has primarily been used to evaluate training programmes (Dewi & Kartowagiran, 2018; Dorri, Akbari & Sedeh, 2016; Reio et al., 2017). The model focuses on four aspects of training. The first aspect is 'reaction', for which the interest is on how the trainee or intern reacts to the learning experience (Rouse, 2011). The level of engagement and satisfaction manifests the reaction that the trainee elicits. The second aspect of evaluation under Kirkpatrick's model is the evaluation of learning. Evaluation of learning is a

pretest post-test approach that seeks to measure the increase in knowledge (Rouse, 2011). Evaluation of learning brings out the confidence, commitment, and competency exuded by the trainee. Behaviour evaluation is identified as the third aspect of evaluation that Kirkpatrick's model suggests. In behaviour evaluation, the focus is on the trainees' ability to apply and share competencies gained in undertaking tasks (Dorri et al., 2016). Results evaluation represents the fourth and final aspect of training that is evaluated under the Kirkpatrick's model. This form of evaluation concentrates on determining the interns or trainees effect on the business or environment (Reio et al., 2017).

Empirical evidence demonstrates that the Kirkpatrick evaluation model has been used to good effects in diverse contexts. Chang (2010) used the hospitality industry context to examine Kirkpatrick's evaluation model. Focusing on hotels reservations sales agents, Chang sampled 69 agents. The agents were exposed to a training program in sales, and their training outcomes in skills and knowledge and job performance were then evaluated at the four levels of Kirkpatrick's model. Using paired samples t-test, Chang (2010) found Kirkpatrick's model effective in evaluating the required training outcomes.

Alsalamah and Callinan (2021) conducted a bibliometric analysis of the Kirkpatrick model after 60 years. They were motivated by the need to establish the model's utility and effectiveness. Using a '5Ws + 1H' model (what, when, why, where, who, and how), they retrieved 416 articles on Kirkpatrick's model. They determined that Kirkpatrick's model remains practical, suitable, and applicable in diverse contexts.

Ho et al. (2016) used Philip's and Kirkpatrick's models to explore practices hotel managers use in training evaluation and their perceptions of the practices. They conducted in-depth interviews with six hotel managers and employed questionnaires for managers of hotels with rooms exceeding 30. They demonstrated that activities in the training education models were significant. Kirkpatrick's model has also been used successfully to evaluate Cabin crew food safety training from an airline's perspective (Abdelhakim et al., 2018).

Although Kirkpatrick's evaluation model remains the most well-known and used training evaluation model, it has received criticism over the years. Most notably, by Bushnell (1990), who argues that Kirkpatrick's model focuses on training outcomes, not the training process, Brinkerhoff (1987) argues that Kirkpatrick's model is devoid of instructional design functions, like instructional design planning, needs analysis, development, and implementation among others. In his criticism, Bushnell (1990) posits that the onus is on the organization using Kirkpatrick's model to determine if training goals are being met, assess whether trainees acquire required competencies, and identify changes that target improvement.

Following these criticisms, this study enters the conversation by seeking to examine the effectiveness of Kirkpatrick's evaluation model on perceived competence by analyzing the contribution of each of the four levels of evaluation. We postulate that the use of Kirkpatrick's

evaluation model in practical delivery evaluation in undergraduate hospital experiential training has no significant effect on perceived competence in hospitality practice.

Methods

Data collection

We examine final year undergraduate students' accounts of practical delivery evaluation using a concurrent triangulation mixed methods study that subsumes quantitative and qualitative methods; conducted after industrial attachment. The study sampled final-year hospitality undergraduate students through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Firstly, students were stratified across the respective universities chosen on the university's criteria for a customized course in hospitality management. Secondly, the simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 241 final year hospitality undergraduate students (Kenyatta = 37, Maseno = 23, UoE = 34, MMU = 24, University of Eastern Africa = 10, USIU = 30, TUK = 24, TUM = 13, Kabianga = 19, Moi = 27). All students who were sampled were invited to participate in dropped and picked surveys. Several students completed the survey (N = 204), conducted with two graduate assistants' assistance. A sampling of hospitality lecturers and heads of the department was purposive based on the criterion that they handled final year hospitality undergraduate students and included interviews (N = 12).

Participants

This study focused on final year hospitality undergraduate students of different ages, both female and male, married or otherwise, mode of university admission, and influence in programme choice. Focusing on students' demographic characteristics was appropriate considering that characteristics such as gender (Malubay et al., 2015), age (Tamtekin & Bayir, 2016)l and parental income (Tamketin & Bayir, 2016) have been shown to influence students' choice of the university course. Table 1 presents the demographic profile for the 204 focal students.

Table 1 Students' Demographic Profile

Demographic characteristic		n	%
Age	Below 20yrs	5	2.5%
	21-25yrs	177	86.8%
	26-30yrs	17	8.3%
	Above 30yrs	5	2.5%
Your gender	male	77	37.7%
	female	127	62.3%
Marital status	married	26	12.8%
	single	171	84.2%
	widowed	1	0.5%

	divorced	2	1.0%
	separated	3	1.5%
Which admission criteria are you?	Government-sponsored	123	60.3%
	Parallel	47	23.0%
	Private	34	16.7%
Who influenced your decision to choose the program?	self	118	57.8%
	parents	22	10.8%
	guardians	6	2.9%
	high school	11	5.4%
	family	8	3.9%
	grades scored	8	3.9%
	friend	6	2.9%
	government placement	25	12.3%

Analysis

We begin by conducting descriptive analyses to determine how final year undergraduate students regard practical delivery evaluation using each of the four levels of Kirkpatrick's model. Next, we conduct a thematic analysis of lecturers and heads of departments to obtain their account on practical delivery evaluation. Lastly, we employ the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach to model the direct effects of practical delivery evaluation on undergraduate hospitality students' perceived competence in hospitality practice.

Findings

Undergraduate student's accounts of practical delivery evaluation using Kirkpatrick's model.

Final year undergraduate hospitality students generally described their satisfaction with Kirkpatrick's models' evaluation of (1) evaluation of reaction to the worth of practical training, the success of conducting practical training, the conduciveness of practical training environment, delivery of practical element, and resource use to support training; (2) evaluation of behaviour elicited in the application of learned competencies, sharing of knowledge, behaviour change, and active participation in practical training; (3) evaluation of the effect of practical training on reduction of waste and minimization of costs, increased productivity, and achievement of learning outcomes; and (4) evaluation of learning in terms of increased knowledge, skills, interest in practical training, demonstration of in-depth skills, and contribution to knowledge creation and training.

Table 2 Undergraduate hospitality student's accounts of practical delivery evaluation

	Strongly dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Moderately satisfied	Satisfied	Strongly satisfied
Evaluation of reaction to…	%	%	%	%	%
1. worth of practical training	4.5%	5.9%	15.5%	27.7%	46.4%
2. Success in conducting of practical's	3.6%	9.1%	12.7%	28.2%	46.4%
3. Conducivess of environment for practical training	3.6%	5.9%	18.2%	29.5%	42.7%
4. Delivery the practical elements	2.7%	10.5%	13.6%	32.7%	40.5%
5. use of adequate resources to support practical's	1.8%	9.5%	20.5%	39.1%	29.1%
Evaluation of behavior elicited in…					
1. ability to apply learned competencies	0.5%	2.3%	11.4%	31.4%	54.5%
2. ability to share knowledge	1.8%	2.3%	14.5%	25.0%	56.4%
3. behavior change after training	0.5%	10.5%	15.9%	29.1%	44.1%
4. recommending practical's to others	2.3%	6.4%	17.7%	25.9%	47.7%
5. active participation during practical training	1.4%	6.4%	17.7%	24.1%	50.5%
Evaluation of effect to organization…					
1. ability to reduce wastage and minimize costs	2.7%	7.3%	12.3%	18.2%	59.5%
2. ability to produce more	2.7%	4.1%	14.5%	29.5%	49.1%
3. achieved the learning outcomes	1.4%	8.6%	15.9%	18.2%	55.9%

Evaluation of increased knowledge in…					
1. Acquisition of new knowledge	4.5%	5.0%	13.6%	23.6%	53.2%
2. acquisition of new skills	2.3%	6.8%	5.5%	25.5%	60.0%
3. stimulated interest in practical training	5.5%	5.0%	13.6%	20.9%	55.0%
4. being organized and well prepared training	2.3%	4.1%	16.4%	23.6%	53.6%
5. contributing to knowledge and training	5.5%	5.0%	10.9%	26.8%	51.8%
6. demonstrating in-depth skills in the subject area	2.3%	6.4%	14.1%	23.6%	53.6%

Lecturers and HODs accounts of practical delivery evaluation under Kirkpatrick's model

Lecturers and HOD's appeared to corroborate students' accounts, albeit implicitly. From the narratives reported verbatim, the theme of "guide to evaluation' was discerned as the essence of Kirkpatrick's model. A HoD remarked that:

>"…evaluation and assessment of practical learning are done through a guide which is used to score and critique students products".

One lecturer observed that: *"…there is a form used to capture different skills, and the scheme is very elaborate".* Evaluation of learning was also reflected in narratives such as *"…evaluation and assessment of the assigned tasks are based on students capability to produce required outcomes"* made by an HoD from one of the universities.

Practical delivery evaluation and students perceived competence in hospitality practice.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the effectiveness of practical delivery evaluation through Kirkpatrick's four levels on students' perceived competence in hospitality practice. SEM was employed due to its ability to handle latent variables such as the ones under investigation. We postulated that practical delivery evaluation using Kirkpatrick's four levels of reaction, behaviour, learning, and results did not directly affect undergraduate hospitality students' perceived competence in hospitality practice. Validation of the structural model was based on three absolute fit indices; goodness of fit index (GFI > 0.9), absolute goodness of fit (AGFI > 0.9), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA < 0.05) (Newson, 2017); and two relative fit indices; Normed Fit Index (NFI > 0.9) and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI > 0.9) (Kenny, 2015).

The initial structural model (Fig. 1) was not a good fit (GFI = 0.736, AGFI = 0.570, NFI = 0.739, TLI = 0.665, RMSEA = 0.194).
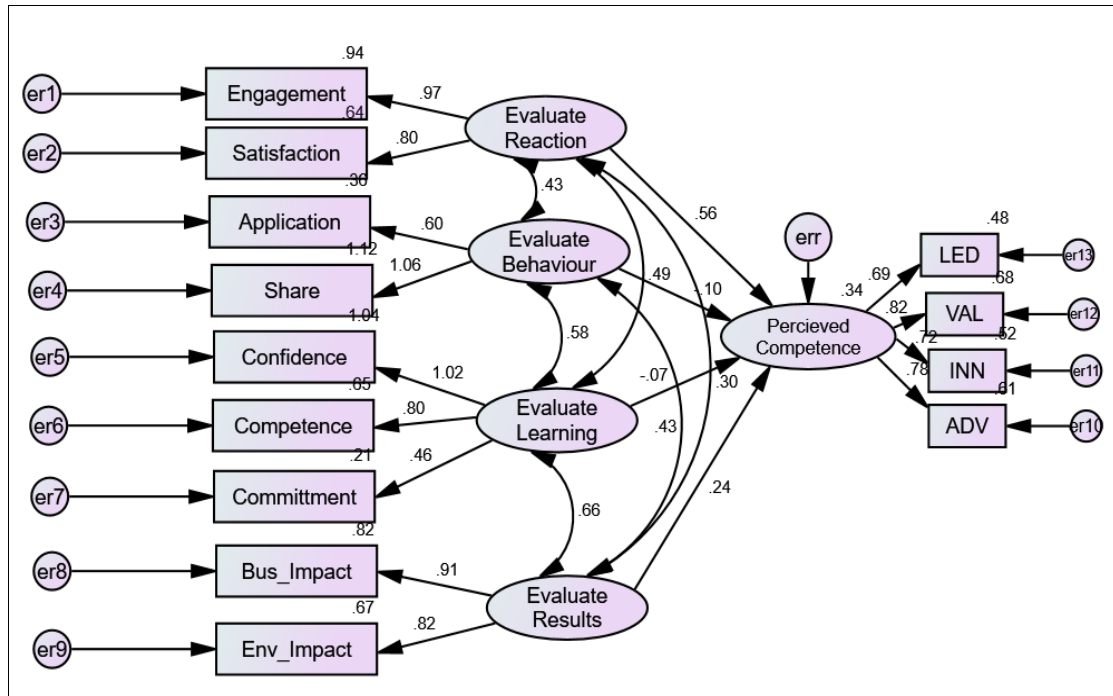

Fig 1 initial structural model

For a good fit, the initial model was modified using the suggested post-hoc modification indices. The error terms were therefore correlated as follows:

$er1 \leftrightarrow er6, er2 \leftrightarrow er3, er2 \leftrightarrow er4, er3 \leftrightarrow er5, er3 \leftrightarrow e7, er3 \leftrightarrow er9, er4 \leftrightarrow er6,$
$er4 \leftrightarrow er7, er4 \leftrightarrow er9, and\ er5 \leftrightarrow e9$.

The fit of the resulting structural model (Fig. 2) was now good (GFI = 0.927, AGFI = 0.918, NFI = 0.930, TLI = 0.943, RMSEA = 0.043). This model indicated that practical delivery evaluation explained only 34% of undergraduate hospitality students perceived competence in hospitality practice.
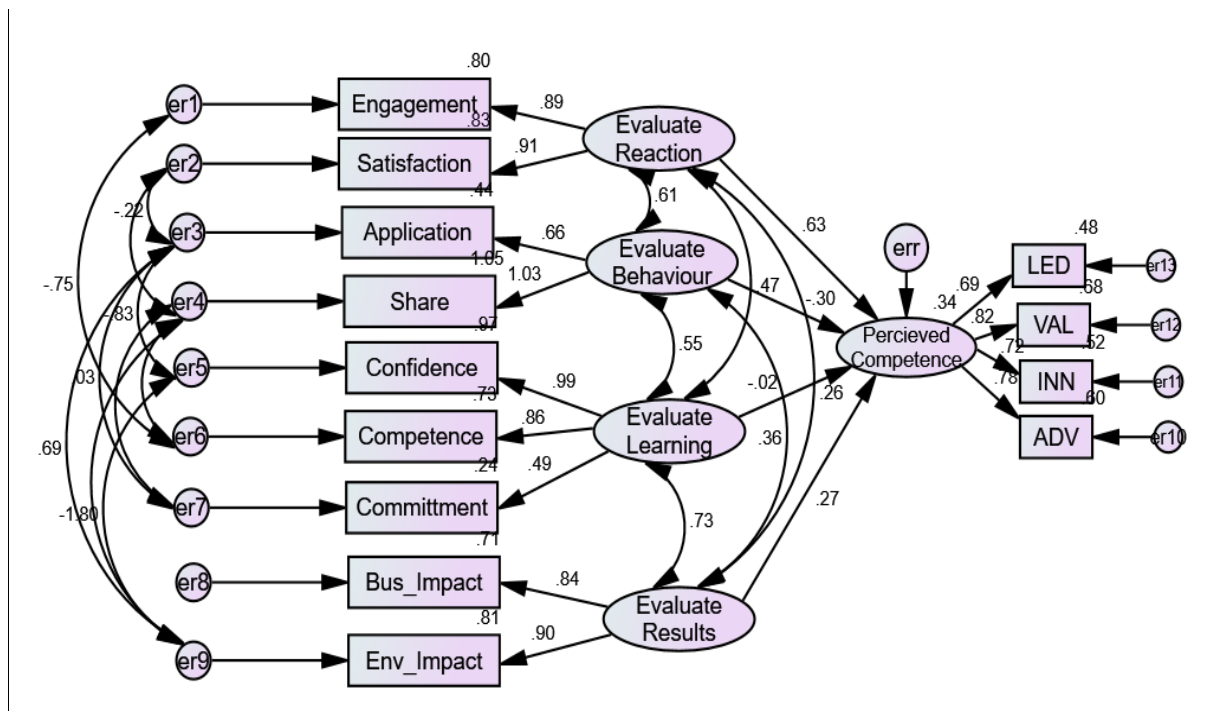
Fig 2 Modified structural model

The maximum likelihood regression weights (Table 3) indicated that practical delivery evaluation through the four levels had mixed effects on undergraduate hospitality students perceived competence in hospitality practice. Evaluation of reaction (b = 0.382, p < 0.001) and evaluation of results (b = 0.185, p < 0.05) had positive and significant effects on students perceived competence in hospitality practice. Evaluation of behaviour (b = -0.185, p < 0.05) had a negative and significant effect on students perceived competence in hospitality practice, while evaluation of learning (b=-.014, p = 0.870) had a negative but non-significant effect on students perceived competence in hospitality practice.

Table 3
Maximum Likelihood Estimates
Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Percieved_Competence	<---	Evaluate_Reaction	.382	.069	5.524	***	par_6
Percieved_Competence	<---	Evaluate_Behaviour	-.367	.122	-2.997	.003	par_7
Percieved_Competence	<---	Evaluate_Learning	-.014	.086	-.164	.870	par_8
Percieved_Competence	<---	Evaluate_Results	.185	.085	2.193	.028	par_9

Discussion

This paper has examined how practical delivery evaluation of experiential hospitality learning using Kirkpatrick's model's four levels impact undergraduate students' perceived competence in

hospitality practice. We found that undergraduate hospitality students and lecturers were overall satisfied with the activities used to evaluate their reaction to training, the behaviour they elicit after training, their learning in terms of increased knowledge, and evaluation of their impact on the environment and organization after training. In this satisfaction, students (and lecturers) identified various satisfying aspects that were consistent with other research on Kirkpatrick's model had yielded previously (Dewi & Kartowagiran, 2018; Dorri et al., 2016; Reio et al., 2017; Rouse, 2011). They included activities used to evaluate their reaction to training (e.g. worth of the practical training, conduciveness of environment, and resource use); activities used to evaluate their behaviour (e.g. application of knowledge and knowledge sharing); activities used to evaluate learning (e.g. increased knowledge, skills, and interests); and activities used to evaluate the results of training (e.g. impact on the organization and environment). All of which made practical delivery in hospitality practice seem both practical and natural.

The satisfaction elicited towards practical delivery evaluation was indeed based on the fact that the tools used in evaluation guided competency development by giving room for a critique of training outcomes. Certainly, some students elicited dissatisfaction with Kirkpatrick's approach to evaluation, supporting other scholars (Brinkerhoff, 1987; Bushnell, 1990). However, the proportion of this dissatisfied group was relatively small.

Essentially, this paper adds to existing knowledge by showing that Kirkpatrick's four-level model can be successfully used for practical delivery evaluation involving undergraduate hospitality students from the Kenyan context (Abdelhakim, 2018; Alsalamah & Callinan, 2021; Chang, 2010; Ho et al., 2016). However, this paper is a novel one in reporting how each level of Kirkpatrick's model impacts a training programmes competency development. The study underscored the positive effects of evaluation of trainee reaction and training results on students' perceived competence in hospitality practice. However, the negative effects reported for evaluating behaviour and learning were perhaps an indicator that the four levels could be complementary, as suggested by some research (Goh et al., 2018; Draper, 2012).

Limitations

This study was not without limitations. Our university-based scope is not representative of Kenya's hospitality industry in terms of institutions offering hospitality training. By relying on this scope, participants were primarily concentrated in the western region of Kenya with more universities found in the region. Yet given that hospitality practice in Kenya is most vibrant within the Coastal tourism circuit (Ikwaye, 2019; Ikwaye et al., 2019), it is possible that including hospitality graduates from other middle-level colleges would have enhanced the external validity of the findings. Future studies should look at the possibility of widening the scope to include middle-level college students. Our study is also limited in its use of self-reported questionnaires to gather data from students. Although questionnaires are efficient and economical in data collection, they have also been faulted for eliciting socially desirable responses that are, in most cases, snapshots (Patten,

2016). Perhaps the finding showing negative impacts of evaluation of behaviour and evaluation of learning may have resulted from socially desirable responses. Future studies should look into the potential of using full experimental designs that will not require questionnaires.

Implications and conclusion

Despite the reported limitations, important implications were noted from the findings. The findings suggest that undergraduate hospitality students perceive evaluation of practical delivery based on Kirkpatrick's four-level model as justified and suitable for developing their competencies in hospitality practice. Such a suggestion is indeed good for the hospitality industry since it provides an avenue for coming up with evaluation tools with activities that specifically target: assessment of students' reaction to practical delivery training, behavior they elicit after training, changes in learning outcomes, and impacts that the trainee has on organization and environment after training. The findings showing that evaluation of student reaction to training and evaluation of training results impact undergraduate students' perceived competence in hospitality practice positively confirms that every level of Kirkpatrick's model has a specific role to play. However, in showing that evaluation of the behavior they elicit and learning outcomes impacts perceived competency negatively, the study indicates that undergraduate hospitality students perceive evaluation of practical delivery differently depending on what is being evaluated. Although such an indication opens room for further interrogation of the impact of each of Kirkpatrick's four levels, it does suggest that the four levels complement each other.

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