



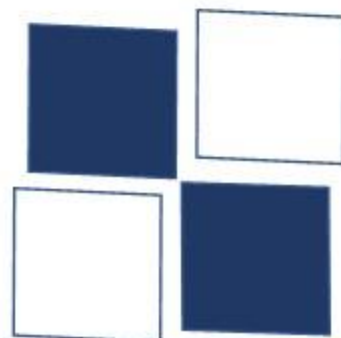
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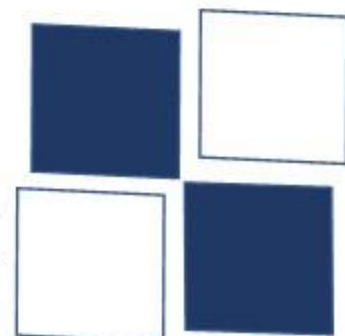
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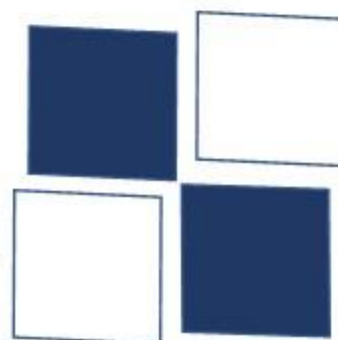
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## Article

### Challenges and Strategies for managing Customer Services Education and Tourism in the Post-COVID-19 pandemic: A Comparative Study of Tanzania and Kenya

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#### Abstract

Customer services has received a lot of attention by scholars. However, the disruptions of Corona virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic has challenged the ways in which customers are served particularly for the tourism industry. Past literature shows that some of the challenges of customer services is communication. In expanding the scope on the phenomenon of customer service, this study's main objective is to examine challenges and strategies for managing customer services education and tourism in the post-COVID-19 pandemic in Tanzania and Kenya. The methodology approach is a literature review method followed by content analysis. The findings and implications are provided in order to improve customer services education in relation to tourism for both countries.

**Keywords:** Customer services education, tourism, post-COVID-19, Tanzania, Kenya

#### Introduction

Tourism around the world was affected by Corona virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic. Various countries including those in the African continent had COVID-19 measures such as social distancing, wearing face masks, closing of schools, universities and other education institutions (Bamgboye et al., 2021; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2021). However, tourism is recovering and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) noted that there was growth of 4% international tourist arrivals worldwide in 2021 (UNWTO, 2022). The tourism recovery also registered an increment of 12% in

international tourist arrivals in 2021 for the African continent (UNWTO, 2022). Though the growth rate in international tourist arrivals is promising, this is still slow compared to the growth levels in the pre-COVID-19 global pandemic hence it is crucial to improve in all areas of the tourism sector including education.

In education, other scholars like Daniel (2022) noted that there is a paradigm shift for the education sector while others (Figueroa & Michel, 2022; Jackson, 2022; Mkwizu & Kimeto, 2022) are calling for changes in programs and publication in order to meet the challenges of the post-COVID-19 pandemic. Equally, in Kenya, Mungai et al. (2021) found that the tourism education has faced challenges including enrolment in tourism programs due to tuition fees and future prospects while Kimeto et al. (2019) had highlighted that one of the challenges in tourism education is learning resources. In Tanzania, Anderson and Sanga (2018) noted that the tourism education has challenges related to development of skills while Mgonja (2019, 2020) commented that tourism education is a relatively new phenomenon in Tanzania.

Given the challenges noted in previous studies (Anderson & Sanga, 2018; Kimeto et al., 2019; Mgonja, 2019, 2020; Mungai et al., 2021) conducted in Kenya and Tanzania on tourism education, there is still need to expand the scope of study on tourism education due to less attention on customer services education. Additionally, the existence of less attention on customer services education, the effects of COVID-19 and the general call for changes in education has therefore motivated this paper to highlight attention on customer

services education by exploring challenges and strategies for managing customer services education particularly in the tourism sector which was adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this paper was to examine customer services education and tourism in Tanzania and Kenya. In addressing this objective, the paper's question was; *Are there any similarities and differences on challenges and strategies for managing customer services education and tourism between Tanzania and Kenya?*

The significance of this paper's outcome is to provide guidance to the tourism institutions and stakeholders to review their customer services education and tourism in the post-COVID-19. Furthermore, previous studies such as Mgonja (2019) advocated for more research on tourism education. Therefore, this study's findings on customer services education and tourism can assist the managers and tourism education practitioners hence the managerial and industrial implications for improving the tourism sector in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Literature Review

### Post-COVID-19

All the countries around the world were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, although the magnitude and intensity varied over time. The travel and tourism industry heavily affected when movements of people were restricted due to border closures and national lockdowns (Lanquar et al., 2021). Kenya and Tanzania being dependent on international tourism were among the countries adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The emergence of COVID-19 has really devastated the tourism industry in a number of ways but recovery has been witnessed in several countries when restrictions were removed. Tourism growth predictions were altered the moment the pandemic aggressively hit global economy (Polyzos et al., 2020). The tourism industry is susceptible to any disasters or risks especially health and

safety crises (Estevao & Costa, 2020). Zhong et al. (2021) alluded that the industry is sensitive and fragile thus susceptible to innumerable crises. The tourism industry in the past has experienced numerous crises which affected tourists demand in destinations for a period of time. These crises include natural disasters (e. g. tsunamis or earthquakes), terrorist attacks, health crises (e. g. SARS or Ebola), financial crises and political instability (Polyzos et al., 2020; Neuberger & Egger, 2020). According to Reichel et al. (2007), crises affect tourists travel behavior, choice of a destination and changes tourists' demand. As compared to other crises, the tourism industry almost came to a standstill due to COVID-19 (Government of Kenya, 2020).

The dramatic spread affected supply and demand side of the tourism industry for a prolonged period of time (Gosling et al., 2021; Kreiner & Ram 2020). Nevertheless, COVID-19 triggered the industry with positive changes and updates. Numerous researchers feel that the pandemic is an opening for the tourism industry to re-think its strategies (Brouder, 2020; Lapointe, 2020; Tremblay-Huet, 2020; Ying et al., 2020). In fact, Zhang (2020) asserted that technology and innovation in the industry was initiated during the period of COVID-19 and that more will be realized in the future. On the other hand, Baum et al. (2020) criticized the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry as the loud "amplification" of normal business operations.

During the COVID-19, studies were interrupted in all sectors including hospitality and tourism. The tourism industry being the most affected, the pandemic may have given students of hospitality and tourism to have second thoughts on the career prospects since the effects were enormous. Xu et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of having additional skills and innovative knowledge for management and operations in the hospitality and tourism industry. The new acquired skills and knowledge will be useful in cost control, technology adoption, crisis management, corporate social responsibility, and in sustainability.

Tourism has gained new psyche after COVID-19 together with travel movements and this has led to complexity and change in patterns of consumer demands for tourism products and destinations (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). Key drivers to new consumer demand intentions discovered include safety, cleanliness and hygiene management (Yu et al., 2021). Destination of tourists' preferences comprise visiting more remoterural and natural destinations or participating in outdoor activities away from overcrowded places (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). Therefore, the essential element for planning destination recovery after the pandemic is to understand tourism behaviour (Golets et al., 2020).

### **Customer Services Education (CSE) and Tourism**

Tourism in the post-COVID-19 pandemic is faced with challenges in its recovery phase including skills requirement due to changes in customer demands as indicated by Rogerson and Rogerson (2021) and Xu et al. (2022). The tourism and hospitality industry support the potential of customer engagement as evident in the literature by So et al. (2016). Numerous scholars acknowledge the importance of customer engagement and proposed that the outcome should develop an understanding of customer experience (Bowden, 2009; Mollen & Wilson, 2010), customer retention and an increased brand loyalty that impacts on customers positively and increases profitability to an organization (Hollebeek, 2011). Customer engagement has shown great potential in contemporary research on how customers can participate in order to improve business performance and customer value (Hollebeek, 2011; Jakkola & Alexander, 2014). Also, customer engagement is behavioural thus customers' participation is critical (Vivek, 2009).

According to Simumba and Nchito (2018), success or failure of our businesses and destinations depends on service in hospitality and tourism industry. High quality service provision should be the top priority in this industry. Customer service

hence becomes very significant specifically during hard economic times when customers are seeking value for their money (Hudson & Hudson, 2013). Customer service has stood as an integral part of delivering marketing promises to guests and as a way of achieving business profitability in the industry (Erdly & Kesterson-Townes, 2002). The customers of today are more demanding; therefore, they desire excellent service, which is empathic, responsive and of high quality (Sonkova & Grabowska, 2015).

Simumba and Nchito (2018) found that customer engagement can provide the opportunity to the hospitality and tourism proprietors to learn new ideas from customers which in turn improve customer service delivery. Service quality is a critical element of the hospitality and tourism industry (Perman & Mikinac 2014). Engaging service quality contributes to a repeat visit and recommendation to loved ones Nasution and Mavondo(2008) and also perceived destination competitiveness (Kimeto, 2021). Hospitality and tourism are a labour -intensive industry and in need of skilled workforce that possess great sense of skills, aptitudes and knowledge (Sheldon et al., 2011). Other researchers supported by pointing out that improving skills and knowledge of the workforce can boost destination competitiveness and viability of the industry will be maintained (Mei, 2017; Mayaka & King, 2002). Customer engagement is motivated mostly by the ability of employees to enhance customers' self-esteem. This is achieved when employees provide quality services, value customers and fulfill promises made to tourism and hospitality customers (Feather & Chun, 2008).Greatest barrier to engagement is communication breakdown between service providers and the customers especially the front-line employees(Simumba & Nchito, 2018), yet Neves and Eisenberger (2012) asserted that effective communication contributes to an organization's success and customer satisfaction. Tsai et al. (2009) emphasized that most employees fail to realize the importance of communication to meeting

organizational goals.

A study conducted in Australia by Wang and Ryan (2015) discovered that employers in tourism are looking for additional skills while hiring graduates. These skills include communication skills, teamwork, and problem-solving efficiency along with specialised knowledge. Educators however, contradicted the outcomes since their focus is mainly on theoretical paradigm of the discipline (Wang & Ryan, 2015). Hospitality and tourism related services require education competence to enable employees effectively operate and successfully make internal processes in meeting organizational goal (Simumba & Nchito, 2018). This is aligned to Kim (2008) findings that employees must be trained specifically towards customer orientation and to acquire the requisite skills and personalities for the industry. Collaboration and partnership between educators and employers on curricula development should be embraced to ensure tourism education is tailored to meet and exceed the expectations of the tourism industry in terms of skills and competencies (Kimeto, 2021; Tsai, 2017).

As the tourism industry moves towards recovery from the pandemic, training and educational resources should be put in place to facilitate up-skilling and create a more resilient workforce (Wyman, 2020). Tourism educators have highlighted essentials for a student during the post-COVID-19 period to include creativity, innovation, digital knowledge and vocational skills along with the addition of

subjects such as crisis management, business resilience, health and safety measures be incorporated in the tourism academics (Tiwari et al., 2020). The findings from (Xu et al. 2022; Kaushal and Srivastava (2021) and Losekoot et al. (2018) recommends that Hospitality and tourism requires talents with multiple skills and competencies. These may include four thematic skills and competencies: leadership, methodological/technical, professional and social (Zehrer & Mossenlechner, 2009). The purpose of the inclusion of essential skills and competencies, and additional of new subjects is to prepare students to take up challenges of post-COVID-19 and come with strategies of any future threats to the industry.

Customer services training is provided in Kenya and Tanzania. For examples, in Tanzania, customer services training is evident at Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) which offers short course training on customer services skills (SUA, 2020) while in Kenya, for instance, the Kenya Institute of Management (KIM) offers customer services training (KIM, 2022). However, there is inadequate scholarly literature on customer services education and tourism in the context of Kenya and Tanzania as most of the reviewed studies have centered on education in tourism in general. Table 1 provides a summary of relevant articles covering education in tourism that were conducted in Kenya and Tanzania by highlighting the various methodologies and findings.

**Table 1: Education in tourism for Kenya and Tanzania**

Kenya			
Source	Study Area	Methods	Findings
Muragu, Nyaderaand Mbugua (2021)	Gearing up for the new normal: Kenya's tourism sector before and after the COVID-19 pandemic	Literature review	The quality of human resources is needed to drive the sector into recovery. This means, a new set of strategists, management and administrators with knowledge and experience in post-crisis recovery is needed, and the existing ones restructured and

			retrained to keep up with the changes in the sector.
Kimeto (2021)	Tertiary Tourism graduate employees and tourism employers' perceptions on tourism skills and competencies relevant for providing quality tourism services in Kenya	The study adopted a cross sectional survey research design in which data was collected and analyzed quantitatively	Tourism industry requires more than one skill and competencies to meet and exceed customers' needs. Therefore, a graduate who has successfully undergone tertiary tourism education is perceived to have acquired the right skills and competencies to work in tourism industry.
Kimeto, Kambona and Odiwuor (2019)	Factors determining tertiary tourism education quality in Kenya: The perspective of tourism graduate employees and tourism employers	A cross sectional survey research design was adopted and collected data was analyzed quantitatively	The results indicated that three factors, namely 'Teaching and Learning Process', 'Learning Resources' and Program Content Structure' were perceived relevant in explaining tertiary tourism education quality
Kabii, Okello and Kipruto (2017)	Effects of Tour Guides Training on their Performance in Kenya	The study was explanatory in nature and examined factors that affect guides performance.	It confirmed that guides in Kenya irrespective of their education level professional qualification, work experience and terms of employment require more training on mammal, reptiles, the culture of East Africa, communication and computer skills in order to perform better and offer the customer better services and experiences.
Mayaka and Prasad (2012)	Tourism in Kenya: An analysis of strategic issues and challenges	Literature review	There is a need for reform in the higher education sector. They must realize the importance of responsive, innovative well-trained tourism industry workforce and, therefore national developmental goals. The Policy response in the area of training and education has either been lacking or disjointed. Thus, the Ministry of Tourism has to come up with strategic initiatives to address the human resource needs of the entire tourism sector



			since there is no evidence of commensurate strategies and implementation mechanisms to achieve this goal
Tanzania			
Source	Study area	Methods	Findings
Anderson and Sanga (2018)	Academia-Industry partnership for hospitality and tourism education in Tanzania	Quantitative	Tourism education has challenges on skills development due to barriers such as language, inadequate training facilities, shortage of qualified educators, poor enforcement of national curricula, limited internship and placement opportunities.
Mgonja (2019)	The Nature of Tourism Education Programs in Developing Countries: The Case of Tanzania	Literature review	Tourism education in the country is a relatively recent phenomenon.  Recommended for more research on quality of the programs and comparative studies with other developing countries in the region.
Mgonja (2020)	Evaluating Leisure and Recreation Study Programmes in Training Institutions in Tanzania: Implications for Tourism Development and Destination Competitiveness	Quantitative with online data collection method	There are 70 related tourism training institutions. Most of the training institutions focus more on tourism and hospitality, hotel management and tour guiding.

### Methodology

The research methodology deployed in this paper is a literature review method followed by content analysis. For the literature review method, this paper selected the integrative literature review indicated by Vicente-Saez and Martinez-Fuentes (2018). Furthermore, Raju and Phung (2021) noted that the research question will determine the literature review method. Accordingly, Salah (2020) stated that the integrative literature review

provides new expectations to emerge from the reviewed literature. Therefore, this study adopted the integrative literature review to address the specific objective of examining customer services programs and tourists' activities by comparing two countries namely Kenya and Tanzania which were both adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this study synthesised a selection of literature which only included the relevant information related to customer services education and

tourism in the selected countries using the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Since this study did not engage in collection of primary data, the selection of the integrative literature review method was appropriate by using secondary data ranging from journal articles, books to reports. Additionally, Snyder (2019) noted that an integrative literature review selection is best if the purpose of the study is not intending to cover all articles that have ever been published on the topic and instead combine perspectives from the reviewed literature to create new perspectives. In Snyder (2019), the integrative literature review involves 4 phases which are design; conduct search and selection of articles; analysis; and structuring and writing the review. Hence, this study focused only on integrating relevant literature designed around the topic of customers services education and tourism to aid tourism practitioners and stakeholders in the tourism sector in the post-COVID-19 era.

Further in the design phase of this study, the paper posed the question of *“Are there any similarities and differences on challenges and strategies for managing customer services education and tourism between Tanzania and Kenya?”*. The second phase involved searching for articles through search engine using words *“education in tourism”, “customer services education in Kenya”* and *“customers services education in Tanzania”*. Only those articles that had relevant information were included in the analysis and those that did not have the required information were excluded. The third phase was the analysis and the fourth phase was the structure in terms of a Table presentation of summary of reviews based on the relevant reviewed literature.

To provide a better perspective in examining the similarities and differences on challenges and strategies for managing customer services education and tourism between the two countries in the following section of findings and discussion, this paper complemented the integrative literature review with content analysis.

Previous studies in the field of tourism have adopted such a research methodology. For instance, tourism studies such as Khan (2022) and Mkwizu (2020) applied both integrative literature review with content analysis. The study by Khan (2022) was interested in applying the integrative literature review and content analysis to investigate adoption of digital marketing strategies in the tourism industry in Pakistan while Mkwizu (2020) concentrated on digital marketing and tourism with opportunities for Africa. Content analysis involved providing a common theme or themes that represent the summary of reviews.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The findings from the literature review has shown that there are limited studies on customers services education that have been carried out globally, regionally and even nationally, yet the pathway to post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery in tourism is a complex challenge to governments, academia, employers and workers that needs to be re-looked at because the industry was the worst hit by the pandemic. According to Watkis (2015) for an organization to achieve customer satisfaction, it has to have an excellent customer service displayed by their workforce. Sunbird (2015) also found that human capital is a critical resource for the ultimate profitability and an enabler of a business objective. To achieve customer service, organizations must hire the right personnel and train the current workforce to perform willingly and passionately at optimum levels (Heskett, et al., 2014). This is because in employee’s satisfaction today, loyalty and commitment determine customer satisfaction of tomorrow, loyalty, commitment and the profit of the organization. A study by Abu-El Samen et al. (2011) suggested that the right customer service skills from an employee competency approach will satisfy the customer and keep them loyal in the emerging market. Besides, empirical studies have found that a well-treated customer will definitely perceive positively services of an organization, more

loyal, ready to pay higher prices, perceive the services to be of high quality and no complain (Akroush et al., 2005; Stamatis, 1996; Woods, 1999).

For the tourism sector to be able to respond to emergencies, a range of skills is required, for example, advance digitization in hotel service and virtual tours (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022). This is because a lack of necessary skills will place constraints on the tourism sector's recovery from the crisis (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic is a wakeup call for the tourism stakeholders to re-think the future of the sector. With the characteristics of the service industry, it may not be easy to provide excellence in customer service because this requires employees to be equipped with skills and knowledge that are of high importance in the industry (Madanchian et al., 2022) since the provision of customer service is not a choice for an organization anymore but away of survival. The focus of hospitality and tourism enterprises should be to create unique, memorable and positive experience to the customers (Walls et al., 2011) by furnishing quality and better services, and greatest value for money (Simumba & Nchito, 2018). Tourism industry in Tanzania and Kenya therefore, requires more than one skill and competencies for day-to-day service delivery and for crisis management in future since the perceived implication is of high value.

### **Similarities and differences in challenges and strategies in customer services education and tourism between Kenya and Tanzania**

From the reviewed literature on customer services education and tourism between Kenya and Tanzania, this study can identify that the similarity for these two countries is that there are limited studies on customer services education in relation to tourism that have been conducted in these two countries. Existing literature covers mainly education in tourism by highlighting common challenges for Kenya and Tanzania which this study categorizes in themes of

"Skills development and competencies", "Communication and language", and "Quality of human resources and educators". Both countries have suggested strategies including "policy", "re-training" and "quality of programs" as indicated in Mayaka and Prasad (2012), Muragu et al. (2021), and Mgonja (2019). There is a difference between Tanzania and Kenya in terms of existing literature in education in general whereby Kenya has more studies compared to Tanzania and this supports the suggestion by Mgonja (2019) of Tanzania that more research is needed to capture education in tourism. In fact, Mgonja (2020) noted that the training institutions in Tanzania focus more on tourism and hospitality, hotel management and tour guiding whereas Kabii et al. (2017) and Kimeto (2021) strongly indicated the need for more training in Kenya. In the absence of scholarly literature on customer services education and tourism, the strategies involving "policy reforms", "engage in more research" and "re-training" can be extended towards customer services education to strengthen customers services programs in Kenya and Tanzania as an attempt to cope with the changing demands from the tourism sector in the post-COVID-19.

### **Conclusion**

This paper aimed at examining customer services education and tourism using a literature review approach and content analysis by comparing Kenya and Tanzania. The findings from the reviewed literature has revealed that there is a similarity between Kenya and Tanzania on the challenge of limited studies on customer services education in relation to tourism that have been conducted in these two countries. Another similarity is that there is the challenge on existing literature in both countries which is mainly on education in tourism with no concentration on customer services education. This implies that Kenya and Tanzania have limited studies which have been carried out in reference to customer services education and tourism. Furthermore, there is a difference between Tanzania and Kenya in terms of existing

literature in education in tourism in general whereby Kenya has more studies compared to Tanzania.

For the identified literature on education in tourism that highlighted common challenges for Kenya and Tanzania, this study has categorized and emerged the themes as “Skills development and competencies”, “Communication and language”, and ‘Quality of human resources and educators”. Whilst both countries have suggested strategies including “policy”, “re-training” and consideration on “quality of programs”, this study re-emphasizes that the strategies for both countries on customer services education and tourism should be on the requirement of more than one skill which can be themed as “Multiple skills” and competencies for day-to-day service delivery and for crisis management in future. This further suggests that for the tourism sector to be able to respond to emergencies then “multiple skills” is necessary. Additionally, the strategy on “engage in more research” advocated for education in tourism in general, can also be extended towards customer services education to strengthen and sharpen customers services programs in the tourism sectors of Kenya and Tanzania in the post-COVID-19.

### **Implications**

This paper provides a practical implication to the education practitioners in tourism and tourism stakeholders in general to improve the customer services education to match the post-COVID-19 efforts in tourism recovery. Customer services education should aim at providing new skills but also “multiple skills” and competencies. Given the findings from this study on the need to improve customer services education, the managerial and industrial implication is for managers and the tourism industry to collaborate and improve by offering better training to students but also encourage further research on the area of customer services education in relation to tourism. In addition, the existence of limited studies on customer services education and tourism in

both countries has an academic implication for the research community to do more investigation on customer services education in terms of customer services programs versus tourism activities so as to improve the tourism sector in the post-COVID-19.

### **Recommendations**

To achieve acquisition of new skills as well as multiple skills and competencies in the post-COVID-19, this paper recommends that there should be collaboration and partnership between educators and employers on curricula development by emphasizing the hospitality and tourism students on preparedness for all future eventualities. This paper also recommends for “Refresher courses” that should be undertaken by employees for crisis management in future.

### **Limitations and direction for further studies**

This study had limitations in the use of literature review as a research methodology complemented by content analysis as an attempt to provide literature review perspective on the issue of customer services education and tourism. The paper is also confined to two countries within Africa. With these shortfalls as the study limitations, this paper’s direction for further studies is for future research to use quantitative and qualitative methods to advance the understanding of customer services education and tourism in the post-COVID-19.

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