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# Addressing the Skilled Labor Crisis in Tourism, Hospitality, and Leisure through Human Capital Development

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the study:** This study explores human capital productivity strategies implemented by tourism, hospitality, and leisure business leaders in southern Nigeria to improve employee productivity despite limited access to specialist tourism, hospitality, and leisure educational institutions.

**Methodology:** A qualitative multicase study design grounded in Human Capital Theory was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry leaders, site observations, and company documents. Data were analyzed using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method with thematic coding and triangulation.

**Main Findings:** Seventeen themes were identified, grouped into challenges, strategies, and business outcomes. Five major strategies improved employee productivity: recruiting workers with strong social capital, enforcing ethical work standards, conducting in-house training, motivating employees through rewards and recognition, and adopting affordable technologies. These strategies enhanced workforce performance, service quality, organizational efficiency, and business sustainability.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** This study extends Human Capital Theory by demonstrating how tourism, hospitality, and leisure businesses in Nigeria can strengthen workforce productivity without relying on specialist educational institutions, offering practical human capital development strategies applicable to other developing countries and emerging tourism economies.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry has become one of the fastest-growing economic sectors globally. Annually, this sector generates revenues of over USD 7 trillion, contributes approximately 9.5% to the world's gross domestic product, and employs approximately 266 million people worldwide [1], [2]. This contribution indicates that this industry not only plays a role as a driver of economic activity but also functions as an important instrument in encouraging regional development, expanding employment opportunities, and improving community welfare. On the other hand, the rapid development of this industry has not been accompanied by adequate human resource readiness. The problems that arise are not only caused by the limited number of workers, but also by the low availability of individuals with the technical competence, emotional

intelligence, and interpersonal skills needed to meet the demands of service to customers with increasingly complex characteristics and expectations [3]–[7]. This crisis is estimated to have the potential to eliminate approximately 14 million jobs and cause a decline in global gross domestic product of up to USD 610 billion. Therefore, human resource development is an urgent strategic agenda for the sustainability of the tourism, hospitality, and recreation industry [3]–[5]. Given the industry's highly dependent nature on service quality, human resource capacity is a critical factor in determining an organization's productivity, competitiveness, and sustainability [8].

The issue of human resource development becomes more complex when examined in the context of developing countries. Various obstacles, such as limited tourism-focused educational institutions, suboptimal quality vocational education, weak institutional support, and relatively unstable economic conditions, hinder the production of a competent workforce. Nigeria is one country that reflects this condition. As Africa's most populous country and one of the region's major economies, Nigeria ranks 131st out of 141 countries in the tourism competitiveness index published by the World Travel and Tourism Council, indicating the low quality of human resources in the tourism sector [9]–[11]. A similar situation can also be found in Indonesia. Despite its rich natural and cultural resources, which are major tourist attractions, this sector contributes only about 4.8% to the national gross domestic product and creates more than 22 million jobs, both directly and indirectly [11]. However, workforce development still faces various structural challenges, including limited vocational education specifically oriented towards the hospitality sector, low public interest in pursuing careers in the tourism sector, and high employee turnover [12]. The similarity of characteristics between Nigeria and Indonesia suggests that the experience of human resource development in one developing country has the potential to provide valuable references for other developing countries facing similar institutional challenges.

This research is based on Human Capital Theory, introduced by Adam Smith in 1776 and later developed into one of the main theories explaining the economic value of investments in education, training, and individual competency enhancement [13]–[16]. According to Human Capital Theory, investments in employee knowledge, skills, and competencies will provide economic benefits to individuals in the form of increased career opportunities and income [17]. At the same time, these investments also benefit organizations through increased productivity, innovation capacity, and sustainable competitive advantage [18]. Several recent studies have shown that investments in human resources can minimize the negative impact of labor market uncertainty on organizational performance, particularly in the tourism, hospitality, and recreation industries in developing countries with limited institutional support [19].

Although Human Capital Theory has been widely used as a conceptual foundation in tourism and hospitality research, there are still research gaps that need to be addressed. Most previous studies emphasize the role of educational institutions, vocational training, and government policies in supporting human resource development [20]–[22]. This research contribution is crucial in enriching our understanding of workforce capacity building through an institutional approach. However, research specifically examining how company leaders in the tourism, hospitality, and recreation sectors design, implement, and maintain human resource development strategies at the organizational level is still very limited, especially in developing countries with less than optimal institutional support. Furthermore, research examining human resource development from an organizational perspective has not provided a comprehensive explanation of leadership strategies that can improve workforce productivity in resource-constrained environments [23]. Consequently, empirical evidence regarding human resource development practices directly initiated by company leaders remains relatively limited, even though they are primarily responsible for improving employee competency and productivity. The urgency of this research has increased following the Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic, which exacerbated various workforce issues in the tourism and hospitality industry. The pandemic has not only exacerbated labor shortages but also increased employee turnover, pushed large numbers of workers out of the industry, and widened the workforce competency gap [24]–[26]. Although various organizations have made efforts to rebuild their human resource capacity, empirical evidence on the strategies implemented by corporate leaders to restore employee competency and improve organizational productivity remains very limited. This limited evidence hinders the development of effective policies and practical strategies to address the human resource crisis, particularly in developing countries.

This research offers novelty in three main aspects. First, it shifts the focus of the study from the role of educational institutions and government policies to the role of corporate leaders as key actors in human resource development at the organizational level. Second, it expands the application of Human Capital Theory by analyzing the implementation of human resource development strategies in organizations operating in developing countries with limited institutional support. Third, in addition to producing findings relevant to the Nigerian context, this study also evaluates the potential applicability of the research findings to other developing countries with similar characteristics, particularly Indonesia. This is expected to contribute more broadly to the development of human resource management theory and practice.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to identify the various human resource development challenges faced by leaders in the tourism, hospitality, and recreation industry in southern Nigeria, both at the macro and organizational levels. Furthermore, the study analyzes the strategies implemented by these leaders to improve

employee competency and productivity. Furthermore, the study evaluates the impact of these strategies on organizational performance and examines their potential for application in other developing countries with similar characteristics, particularly Indonesia.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

### 2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multicase study design grounded in an interpretivist epistemological orientation. A qualitative approach was selected because the research questions require in-depth exploration of the knowledge and experiences of the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry leaders regarding their human capital development strategies, a phenomenon that is inherently contextual, subjective, and not adequately captured through numerical data alone [27], [28]. The normative dimension of this epistemological stance reflects a commitment to producing knowledge that not only describes practice but also provides a foundation for transforming it. A multicase design was adopted because it enables cross-organizational and cross-regional comparison, strengthening the analytical robustness and transferability of findings. The study encompassed three tourism, hospitality, and leisure organizations operating across two subregions of southern Nigeria, one in the southeast and two in the south-south, providing sufficient contextual variation to support meaningful comparative analysis.

### 2.2 Research Participants

Three participants were purposively selected from distinct tourism, hospitality, and leisure leadership positions to ensure triangulation of perspectives and maximize variation in organizational roles and experiential backgrounds. Inclusion criteria required participants to: (a) be above the age of 18; (b) hold management or ownership positions with a minimum of five years of full-time or part-time experience in the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry; and (c) represent organizations with structured and functional human capital development programs consistent with the study's conceptual framework. P1 is an owner-CEO with a doctoral degree and a geology background; P2 is a human resource manager with a legal background at the top management level; and P3 is a mid-level operations manager holding a first degree. The three organizations represented different ownership structures: one independent, privately owned, one independent, publicly owned, and one belonging to a private chain, enhancing the comparative scope of the study. Purposive selection of three participants across three organizations was considered appropriate given the bounded nature of the multicase design and the depth of data generated through extended semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentary analysis [29]. The participant profiles are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Profile

| Code | Position | Educational Background | Gender | Organization Type | Subregion |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | Owner-CEO | Doctorate (Geology) | Male | Independent Private | Southeast Nigeria |
| P2 | HR Manager (Top Management) | Law Degree | Female | Independent Public | South-South Nigeria |
| P3 | Mid-Level Operations Manager | First Degree | Male | Private Chain | South-South Nigeria |

*Note.* All participants had a minimum of five years of experience in tourism, hospitality, and leisure management and represented organizations with functional human capital development programs.

As shown in Table 1, the three participants represented distinct hierarchical levels, executive ownership, senior human resource management, and mid-level operations, across three organizationally and structurally diverse tourism, hospitality, and leisure establishments operating in two subregions of southern Nigeria. This purposive variation ensured that the data captured a broad spectrum of leadership perspectives on human capital development, from strategic decision-making at the ownership level to operational implementation at the middle management level, thereby strengthening the analytical depth and transferability of the findings

### 2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through three complementary methods to enable source triangulation, as summarized in Table 2. First, semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with each participant using eight guiding questions covering human capital development experiences, human resource management strategies, impact on employee performance, influence on turnover, relationship to business outcomes, strategies for enhancing industry attractiveness, and operational challenges. Each interview lasted a maximum of 45 minutes and was conducted face-to-face at a private location within the participants' workplace to minimize distractions and ensure confidentiality. Interviews were recorded using two applications on a password-enabled mobile device and

subsequently transcribed manually. One participant declined voice recording; her responses were nonetheless documented in full. All participants reviewed and validated their transcripts through member checking prior to analysis.

Second, field observations were conducted across all three organizational sites over multiple visits to capture contextual data not accessible through interview accounts alone, including employee induction procedures, on-site work performance, and emergency drills. Third, documentary analysis was conducted on company records, including a training manual titled Hotel Business Training and Development, which provided empirical data on actual training standards, content, and implementation practices.

Table 2. Data Collection Instruments and Coverage

| Method | Description | Purpose |
|---|---|---|
| Semi-structured interview | 8 guiding questions, max 45 minutes per participant | Explore human capital development strategies, challenges, and business outcomes |
| Site observation | Multiple visits across 3 organizational sites | Capture contextual data not accessible through interviews |
| Documentary analysis | Training manual: Hotel Business Training and Development | Verify actual training standards and institutional practices |

*Note.* Data from all three sources were triangulated with one another and with the study's conceptual framework.

As presented in Table 2, the three data collection methods were deliberately selected to serve complementary and mutually reinforcing functions. Interviews provided the primary source of participant perspectives and experiential knowledge; observations enabled verification of interview accounts against actual organizational practices; and documentary analysis supplied institutional evidence of training standards and content that extended beyond what participants articulated verbally. The integration of these three sources through triangulation reduced the risk of single-source bias and enhanced the credibility and confirmability of the findings

### 2.4 Data analysis

Data were analyzed using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method [30] with the aid of NVivo software. The analytical process proceeded through five sequential stages, as presented in Table 3. First, significant statements were extracted from interview transcriptions in direct response to each interview question. Second, memos were written for each statement, articulating the meaning of the participant's experience or perception. Third, meaning units were constructed from the clustered memos. Fourth, repeated meaning units were eliminated, and similar ones merged to form invariant codes. Fifth, consolidated codes were grouped into thematic categories. Of the 236 significant statements extracted across all three participants, 17 themes were identified and classified into three overarching categories: challenges, strategies, and business outcomes. Data saturation was achieved after the third interview, at which point the combination of themes from the first and second participants covered all themes contributed by the third participant, confirming the completeness of the data [29].

Table 3. Data Analysis Stages

| Stage | Procedure | Output |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Extraction of significant statements from interview transcripts | 236 significant statements |
| 2 | Memo writing, articulating the meaning of each statement | Meaning memos |
| 3 | Formation of meaning units from clustered memos | Meaning units |
| 4 | Elimination of repeated units and merging of similar ones | Invariant codes |
| 5 | Grouping of codes into thematic categories | 17 themes in 3 categories |

*Note.* Analysis was conducted using NVivo software. Three thematic categories were identified: challenges, strategies, and business outcomes.

As illustrated in Table 3, the five-stage analytical process systematically reduced 236 significant statements into 17 themes, ensuring that the final thematic structure remained grounded in the empirical data rather than the researcher's a priori assumptions. NVivo facilitated transparent documentation of all coding decisions, supporting the dependability and confirmability of the findings, while data saturation after the third interview confirmed the sufficiency of the dataset for addressing the study's research objectives.

### 2.5 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

The trustworthiness of the findings was established through multiple strategies aligned with Lincoln and Guba's criteria [31], [32]. Credibility was addressed through methodological triangulation, comparing data from three participants occupying different organizational positions across two distinct subregions and using three data sources (interviews, observations, and documents). Member checking was conducted via email, with participants invited to validate interview transcriptions and confirm the accuracy of extracted themes, thereby strengthening confirmability. Transferability is supported by the thick descriptive accounts provided throughout the findings, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to comparable developing countries in the tourism,

hospitality, and leisure contexts. Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of all analytical decisions in an audit trail archived within NVivo.

All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the anonymity of their organizations. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. No incentives were provided to influence participation. All research records, including audio recordings, transcripts, and encrypted electronic files, are stored in a secure, password-protected repository accessible only to the researcher and will be retained for five years before permanent deletion in compliance with institutional data management protocols.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis yielded 236 significant statements grouped into 17 themes across three categories. Table 4 presents the overall frequency distribution of themes by category.

Table 4. Frequency of human capital development Themes in Southern Nigeria (N = 236 Significant Statements)

| Theme Categories | Frequency | % Sub-Total | % Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Challenges | | | |
| Macroeconomics | 53 | 65.43% | 22.46% |
| Microeconomics | 28 | 34.57% | 11.86% |
| Challenges Subtotal | 81 | 100% | 34.32% |
| Strategies | 80 | 100% | 33.90% |
| Business Outcomes | 75 | 100% | 31.78% |
| Total | 236 | - | 100% |

The nearly equal distribution of themes between challenges (34.32%), strategy (33.90%), and business outcomes (31.78%) indicates that in formulating human capital development strategies, the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry leaders intuitively consider these three dimensions simultaneously, a finding that supports the view that an effective human capital development strategy must be responsive to existing challenges while being oriented towards desired business outcomes.

### 3.1 Human Capital Development Challenges at the Macroeconomic and Microeconomic Levels

The findings identified six challenge themes distributed between the macroeconomic (four themes) and microeconomic (two themes) levels. Table 5 presents the frequency and relative weight of each challenge theme.

Table 5. Frequency of Human Capital Development Challenge Themes at the Macroeconomic and Microeconomic Levels

| Level | Challenge Theme | Frequency | % Sub-Total | % Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Macro | Policy & Governance Failure | 25 | 30.86% | 10.59% |
| Macro | Insecurity / Security | 12 | 14.81% | 5.08% |
| Macro | Negative Industry Perception | 8 | 9.88% | 3.39% |
| Macro | Poor Electricity Infrastructure | 8 | 9.88% | 3.39% |
| Micro | Characteristics of Prospective Employees | 16 | 19.75% | 6.78% |
| Micro | Lack of Interest in tourism, hospitality, and leisure as a Career | 12 | 14.81% | 5.08% |
| Total | Challenge Subtotal | 81 | 100% | 34.32% |

**Policy and Governance Failures**

The most dominant theme in the challenges category was the failure of government policies and governance (10.59% of the total), which was consistently expressed by all three participants. Excessive bureaucracy, burdensome levies, and weak policy support for the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry create operational burdens that directly drain resources that could be allocated to employee development.

> *P1: "Another challenge we have is government levies and fees. The government would charge fees, from pollution fees, knowing that you do not have any other method than to generate your electricity. You will pay pollution fees, you will pay environmental fees, you will renew your impact assessment study every 3 years... Ad hoc task forces formed by the government harass life out of the hotel business; we are harassed, badly harassed by the task forces, and that is a big challenge."*
> *P2: "Negative government policies have resulted in foreign investors not being willing to invest in the country."*

**Electricity Insecurity and Infrastructure**

Insecurity (5.08%) and poor electricity infrastructure (3.39%) were the next most significant macroeconomic challenges. All three organizations studied were forced to allocate substantial resources to provide their own security (including paying for government security personnel and installing CCTV) and to use diesel generators to address frequent power outages.

> ***P1:*** *"This moves a lot of capital from the industry into generating power, and that has taken quite a lot of money off the workforce."*

**Characteristics of Prospective Employees**

The most prominent microeconomic theme was the character of prospective employees (6.78%). Managers emphasized that in an industry that relies on guest trust, employee integrity and personal character are fundamental prerequisites that cannot be compensated for by technical skills alone.

> ***P2:*** *"Human resources is meant to discover and encourage potential, to build and inform them to perform without micromanaging, but persons with no qualifications and the requisite experience are employed, making the dread of society get employed in the hospitality industry."*
>
> ***P1:*** *"These are people who go into people's rooms, and you must be sure of their integrity that they never tamper with things belonging to guests, in which case the hotel is put in a bad light."*

**Lack of Interest in Tourism, Hospitality, and Leisure as a Career**

The low interest of young people in careers in the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry (5.08%) was identified as a structural barrier that makes it difficult to recruit qualified potential workers. The tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry is not viewed as a prestigious career destination, but rather as a last resort for those unable to find work in other sectors.

> ***P2:*** *"The industry is not seen as a career path, rather as an alternative... people do not seek a career in the hospitality industry by choice but by the circumstances of life; there is no passion for the industry. Therefore, we need to convince people."*

### 3.2 Five Human Capital Development Strategies Implemented by the tourism, hospitality, and leisure Industry Leaders

The five identified strategic themes provide direct responses to the primary research questions. Table 6 presents the frequency distribution of strategic themes and their ranking based on their frequency of occurrence in the data.

Table 6. Frequency of human capital development Strategy Themes in the Southern Nigerian tourism, hospitality, and leisure Industry

| human capital development Strategy Theme | Frequency | % Sub-Total | % Total | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Remuneration, Awards & Recognition | 35 | 43.75% | 14.83% | #1 |
| Recruitment Practices & Temporary Workforce | 23 | 28.75% | 9.75% | #2 |
| Training | 15 | 18.75% | 6.36% | #3 |
| Technology (Affordable) | 4 | 5.00% | 1.69% | #4 |
| Institutionalization of Ethics & Compliance | 3 | 3.75% | 1.27% | #5 |
| Total Strategy | 80 | 100% | 33.90% | - |

**Strategy 1 - Remuneration, Awards, and Recognition**

The strategy most frequently mentioned by all three participants was remuneration, rewards, and recognition (14.83%), reflecting the real challenge that only 18% of hospitality employees find their salaries satisfactory. Managers develop creative and diverse reward systems to compensate for the limitations of basic wages.

> ***P3:*** *"HR uses the salary and the service charge, which gives the energy to bring the mind to work. Employees do their best in hospitality organizations that provide welfare."*
>
> ***P1:*** *"The recognition of skills, recognition of teamwork, recognition of effectiveness in one's role, recognition of leadership skills are all rewarded... We have in the industry a way of rewarding staff. It is secret; it is not an open thing. Staff who have done exceedingly well are rewarded with bonuses."*
>
> ***P2:*** *"Encouraging those who stand out and rewarding them publicly. Employees who improve themselves are also encouraged, for example, an employee learned the French language, thereby increasing the value of the hotel. As a result, he got a new position that exposed him and gave him*

*more opportunities. We recognize that employees maintain decorum; we give a financial incentive for good performance."*

**Strategy 2 - Character-Based Hiring Practices**

Facing a limited-skilled labor market, the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry leaders developed a recruitment approach that prioritizes the character and social capital of prospective employees over formal qualifications.

***P1:*** *"Getting the right people with the correct mix of skills and with the correct service mentality is important... There has to be a level of trust in the workers that you have, and in that case, it is key to recruiting people who are honest, people who will tell the truth, and people who will do the service."*

The use of temporary workers, including students undergoing work experience, is an adaptive strategy that allows the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry to meet short-term labor needs while providing real-world experience to the industry's next generation.

***P1:*** *"The tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry is an industry that can make use of temporary skills and temporary staffing."*

**Strategy 3 - Training**

Training is the most universal human capital development strategy and was recognized by all three participants as an indispensable component of human capital development efforts. Various training formats were implemented in a complementary manner.

***P1:*** *"In the industry, the major areas of training are housekeeping, safety, security, firefighting, and emergency response. The supervisors take new employees around and introduce them to the system, then give a formal training on how the whole thing works."*

***P2:*** *"The specialized training schools are encouraging, their products are often better... [our organization] conducts yearly training by consultants because of regular changes in the workforce."*

The training manual content obtained from P3, which covers topics such as occupational hazard management, food safety, customer satisfaction, complaint handling, professional conduct, stakeholder management, and finance, provides tangible evidence of the comprehensiveness of the industry's independently developed in-house training program.

**Strategy 4 - Institutionalization of Ethics and Compliance**

Internalizing ethical standards from the outset of recruitment and maintaining compliance through a clear system of oversight and consequences was the fourth strategy identified.

***P2:*** *"Institutionalizing ethics and compliance is essential to discourage miscreants from committing offenses. We use the query, which, after the third occurrence of the same offenses, we can exercise our legal right to hire and fire. We discourage indiscipline but recognize staff who maintain decorum."*

**Strategy 5 - Adopt Affordable Technology**

Despite having the lowest frequency of occurrence among the five strategies (1.27%), selectively and cost-effectively implemented technology remains a relevant component of human capital development strategy, particularly information management technology at the front desk and CCTV surveillance systems.

***P1:*** *"Managing the software part that is linked to the business is also a very major problem because you have to have the maintenance engineer constantly coming. We hardly use most of the software that you just bought off the shelf; you have to use those that are sustainable."*

### 3.3 Business Outcomes of Human Capital Development Strategy Implementation

The six identified business outcome themes provide an overview of the multidimensional impact of human capital development strategy implementation. Table 7 presents the frequency distribution of the business outcome themes.

Table 7. Frequency of Business Output Themes for Human Capital Development Strategy Implementation

| Business Outcomes Theme | Frequency | % Sub-Total | % Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Employee Productivity | 22 | 29.33% | 9.32% |
| Corporate Reputation | 16 | 21.33% | 6.78% |
| Employee Turnover | 13 | 17.33% | 5.51% |
| Customer satisfaction | 10 | 13.33% | 4.24% |
| Cost Escalation | 8 | 10.67% | 3.39% |
| Slow Growth | 6 | 8.00% | 2.54% |

| Business Outcomes Theme | Frequency | % Sub-Total | % Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 75 | 100% | 31.78% |

As shown in Table 7, the business outcomes span both positive and negative dimensions. Employee productivity (9.32%) and corporate reputation (6.78%) were the most frequently cited positive outcomes, indicating that effective human capital development investment generates returns not only in workforce performance but also in organizational image and competitive positioning. Employee turnover reduction (5.51%) and improved customer satisfaction (4.24%) were also associated by participants with the implementation of remuneration, recognition, and training strategies, suggesting measurable downstream effects on service quality and workforce stability. Conversely, cost escalation (3.39%) and slow growth (2.54%) represent negative outcomes attributed not to human capital development strategy failure but to unresolved macroeconomic challenges, particularly the substantial capital diversion required to self-fund electricity generation and security provision. These negative outcomes reinforce the central argument of this study: that industry-driven human capital development efforts, however effective internally, remain structurally constrained by the macroeconomic and governance environment, and that policy-level interventions are a necessary complement to organizational human capital development investment.

### 3.4 Visualization of the Relationship of Themes Between Participants

Figure 1 presents a comparison diagram of themes between Participant 1 (P1/CEO-owner) and Participant 2 (P2/HR manager) generated through NVivo analysis, illustrating the shared themes (in the center) and the themes specific to each participant (on the left and right).

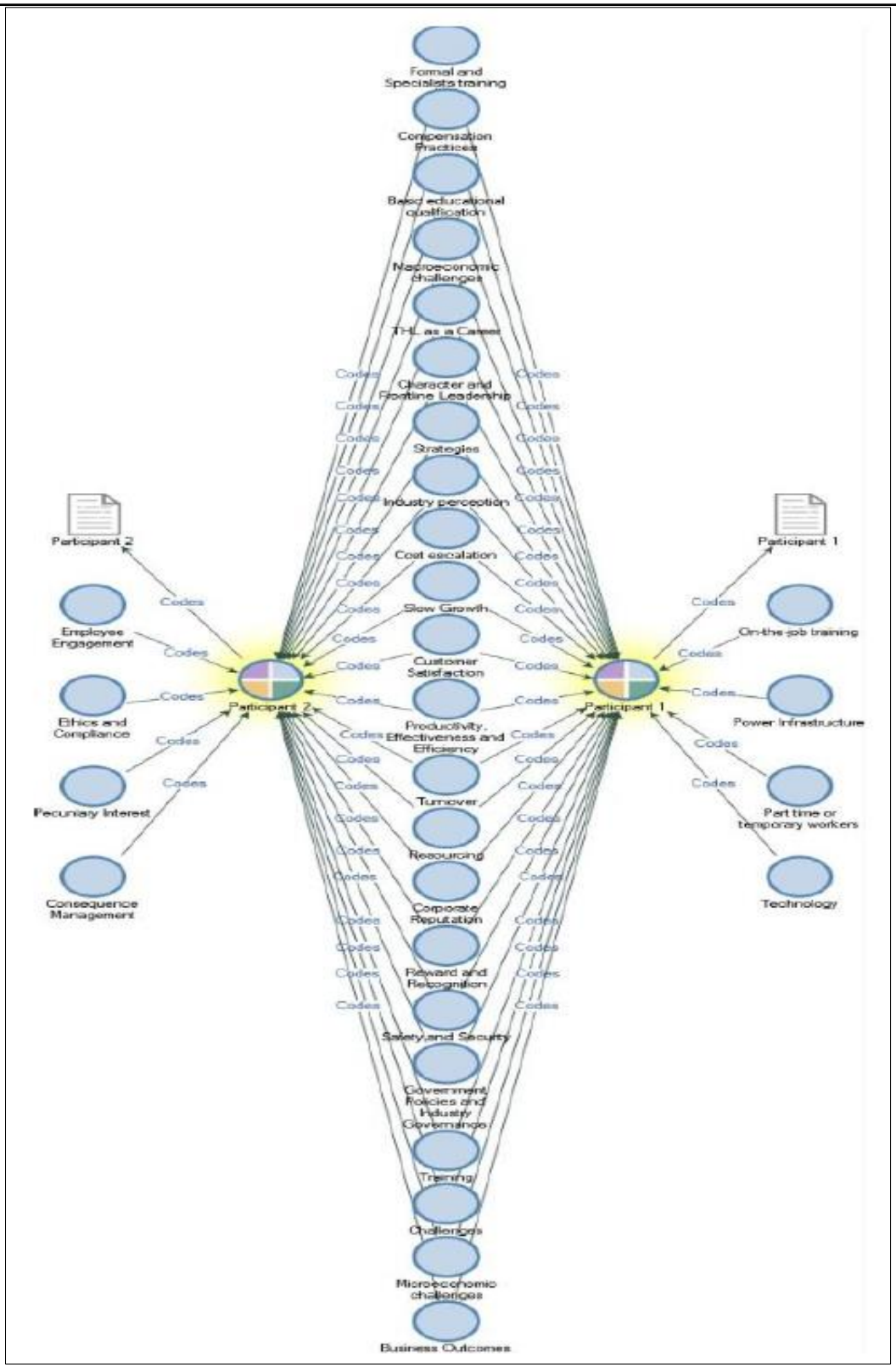



Figure 1. NVivo Theme Comparison Diagram: Participant 1 and Participant 2

As shown in Figure 1, P1 and P2 shared a substantial number of themes, particularly regarding policy and governance failures, remuneration and recognition strategies, and employee productivity outcomes. Themes unique to P1 centered on operational infrastructure challenges, specifically electricity and security costs, reflecting P1's direct ownership responsibility for capital expenditure decisions. Themes unique to P2 reflected a human resource management perspective, with greater emphasis on ethical compliance, recruitment criteria, and the management of employee character as a workforce development challenge. The high degree of theme overlap between P1 and P2 indicates strong convergence at the strategic and macroeconomic challenge levels, while the

participant-specific themes demonstrate that organizational role and hierarchical position shape the experiential emphasis of human capital development practice.

Figure 2 complements the comparison of themes between Participant 2 (P2) and Participant 3 (P3/middle manager). All three comparison charts (Figures 1, 2, and the P1-P3 comparison in the original study) collectively confirm high theme convergence among the three participants, which is an indicator of achieving data saturation, the condition where the addition of new participants no longer produces themes that are substantively different from existing ones.

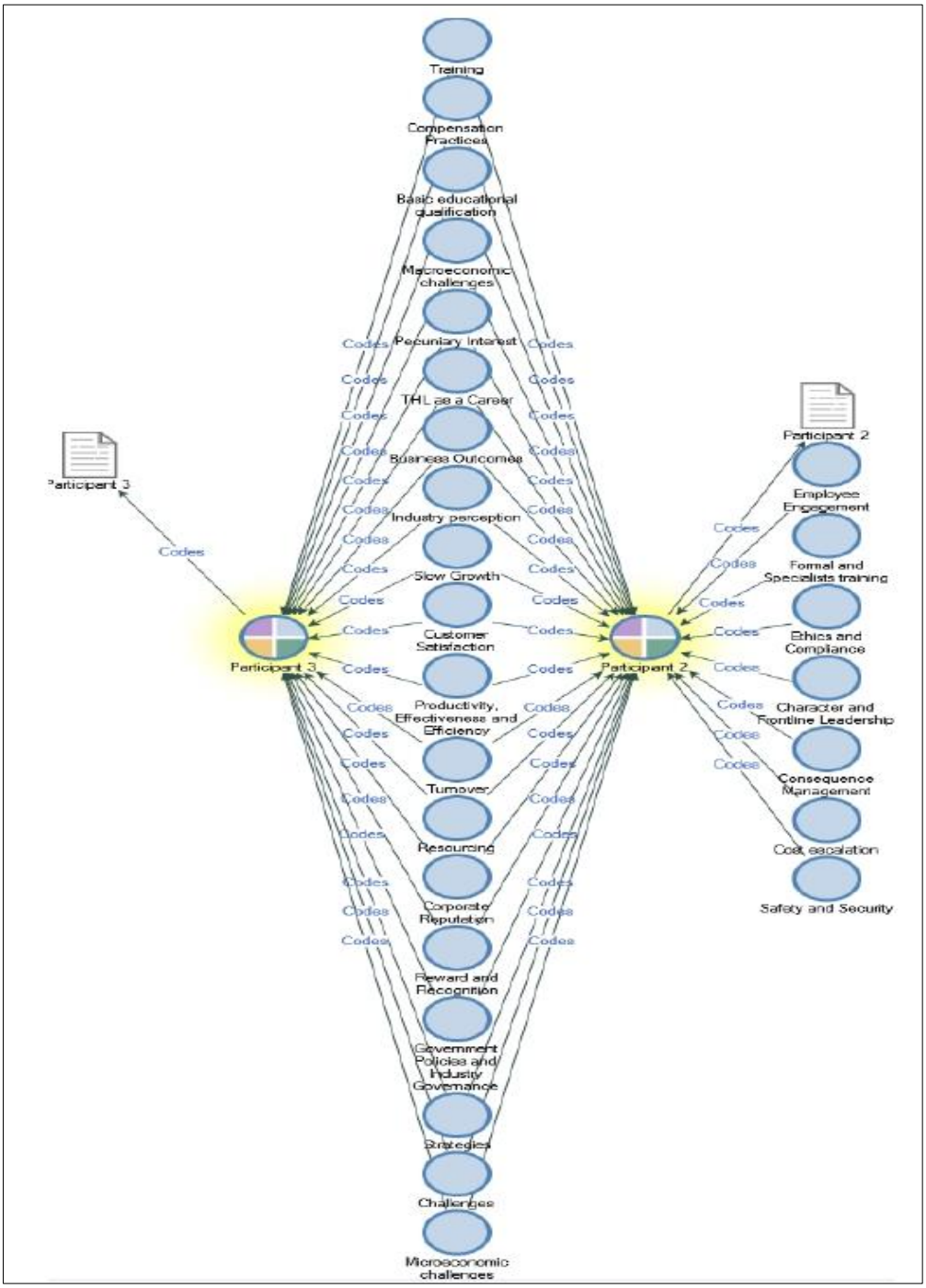



Figure 2. NVivo Theme Comparison Diagram: Participant 2 and Participant 3

As illustrated in Figure 2, P2 and P3 demonstrated strong thematic convergence on strategy-related themes, particularly training practices and reward systems, consistent with both participants' direct involvement in day-to-day human resource and operational management. Themes unique to P3 reflected a frontline operational perspective, including the practical use of technology at the service delivery level and the role of service charge

systems in employee motivation, while themes unique to P2 retained a stronger governance and compliance orientation. Together, all three comparison charts, Figures 1, 2, and the P1–P3 comparison, collectively confirm high theme convergence among the three participants, constituting a robust indicator of data saturation: the condition in which the addition of further participants yields no substantively new themes beyond those already identified in the existing dataset.

**3.5 Discussion**

The findings of this study consistently support and extend key propositions from recent human capital development and tourism human resource management literature. First, regarding the prioritization of remuneration and recognition as key human capital development strategies, research consistently demonstrates that perceived fair compensation and meaningful recognition systems are among the strongest predictors of employee engagement and retention in the hospitality industry [33]. Studies of hospitality employees' post-pandemic work experiences further confirm that employees are increasingly unwilling to accept low compensation as the implicit cost of working in a vocationally meaningful industry [34]. Second, regarding character-based recruitment and social capital, recent scholarship emphasizes that in the face of artificial intelligence and automation increasingly permeating hospitality services, human competencies such as empathy, creativity, and relationship-building are becoming increasingly indispensable sources of competitive advantage [28]. This provides further justification for the character-based recruitment strategy identified in this study [37]. The use of temporary student workers as an adaptive workforce flexibility mechanism has been recognized as an effective channel for both meeting short-term labor needs and introducing young people to the tourism, hospitality, and leisure careers [38], [39]. Third, regarding training, the accelerated pace of change in the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry, driven by digitalization and evolving post-pandemic customer expectations, makes regular in-house training not merely an optional investment but a fundamental operational necessity [40]. The training content documented in P3's organizational manual, covering both technical competencies, such as food safety, and interpersonal competencies, such as complaint handling and customer satisfaction, reflects the holistic training approach advocated by recent literature [41], [42].

Beyond supporting previous studies, the findings also make several theoretical contributions to the human capital development literature. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, this study demonstrates that investments in human capital extend beyond formal education and structured training to include character-based recruitment, ethics induction, reward systems, and affordable technology adoption as complementary mechanisms for enhancing workforce productivity. These findings suggest that, particularly in developing-country tourism, hospitality, and leisure organizations operating under institutional constraints, organizational leadership plays a more central role in human capital development than has generally been emphasized in previous studies.

The novelty of this study lies in identifying an integrated human capital development model that combines five mutually reinforcing strategies character-based recruitment, ethics induction, in-house training, rewards, and affordable technology to improve workforce productivity. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasized educational institutions, government policies, or isolated human resource management practices [20]–[23], this study demonstrates how business leaders themselves strategically integrate these practices within resource-constrained organizational settings. This perspective broadens the application of Human Capital Theory from institutional investment toward leader-driven organizational capability development in the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry.

While these findings largely reinforce existing human capital development and tourism workforce literature, they also expose several unresolved issues that remain insufficiently explored, particularly in developing-country tourism contexts. These unresolved issues can be grouped into four major research gaps warranting further investigation. First, there is an employee perspective gap: this study adopted an exclusively managerial perspective, leaving unexamined how employees on the receiving end of human capital development strategies perceive the effectiveness of training programs, experience reward systems, and make turnover decisions, questions that are crucial to a complete understanding of human capital development in the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry [35]-[37]. Second, there is a quantitative impact measurement gap: future studies employing quantitative or mixed-methods approaches are needed to evaluate the relative effectiveness and cost-efficiency of different human capital development strategies, as well as their contribution to organizational performance outcomes [46], [47]. Third, there is a cross-cultural perspective gap: the transferability of findings from the southern Nigerian context to other developing countries, including Indonesia, requires careful consideration of differences in organizational culture, industrial relations norms, and local labor market conditions [48]. Fourth, there is a technology and digitalization gap: how human capital development strategies must adapt to contexts in which chatbots, self-check-in systems, and AI-based revenue management are becoming industry standards remains entirely unexplored in this study, a dimension of growing relevance for contemporary tourism, hospitality, and leisure management [49], [50].

These research gaps become even more important when viewed against the rapidly changing global tourism labor landscape. The urgency of studying human capital development strategies in the travel and tourism

industry in developing countries is heightened by several mutually reinforcing contexts. First, the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has created a serious scarring effect on the global travel and tourism industry's human resource landscape. More than 62 million jobs in the travel and tourism sector were lost in 2020, and many experienced workers chose not to return to the industry when the recovery began, creating an even more serious competency crisis than the already alarming pre-pandemic situation. Second, the accelerated digitalization of hospitality services is creating a new competency paradox. On the one hand, technology is automating some of the technical functions of employees, reducing the need for basic technical competencies [51], [52]. On the other hand, technology is actually increasing customer expectations regarding the quality of remaining human interactions, as customers who choose to interact with humans (rather than machines) now have higher expectations for the added value provided by those interactions. This creates a new urgency for human capital development that focuses on competencies that cannot be automated. Third, in developing-country contexts such as Indonesia, where tourism is increasingly positioned as a strategic driver of economic recovery and economic growth, strengthening the quality of tourism human resources has become a critical policy priority. Without effective and sustainable human capital development strategies, efforts to enhance destination competitiveness and service quality may be constrained by persistent workforce capability gaps [53].

The findings of this study have significant practical implications for various stakeholders in the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry, particularly in developing countries like Indonesia. For the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry leaders and managers, a key implication is the importance of viewing human capital development not as a cost burden but as a strategic investment [54]. The five identified strategies, namely character-based recruitment, ethics induction, in-house training, rewards, and affordable technology, can be implemented incrementally with relatively affordable investment, even for medium-sized tourism, hospitality, and leisure organizations in Indonesia [55]. For policymakers, the findings on the dominance of macroeconomic challenges (particularly policy and governance failures) underscore the importance of the government's role in creating a conducive ecosystem for human capital development investment in the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry [56]. Supportive policy measures should encompass tax incentives for the tourism, hospitality, and leisure companies that invest in employee training, regulatory reforms to reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, improvements in security and basic infrastructure, and active government-industry collaboration in developing national tourism, hospitality, and leisure competency standards [57], [58].

For vocational tourism education institutions, the findings reinforce the importance of strengthening connections between formal education and industry practice [59]. The positive role played by students as temporary workers and potential future employees supports the development of more structured cooperative education and internship programs aligned with industry needs. For researchers, the findings provide an empirical foundation for comparative investigations across different tourism destinations and developing-country contexts [60], [61]. Cross-country comparative studies may offer valuable insights into how cultural, institutional, and economic factors shape the effectiveness of human capital development strategies and thereby contribute to the advancement of tourism management theory and practice.

Despite these practical and theoretical contributions, the findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the study involved only three participants. Although data saturation was achieved, the small sample limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the participating organizations. Second, the research was confined to two subregions of southern Nigeria and focused exclusively on the hotel and accommodation subsector; therefore, human capital development practices in other tourism-related sectors may differ. Third, the findings reflect a specific post-pandemic context characterized by labor shortages, workforce disruption, and rapid technological change, meaning the long-term effectiveness of the identified human capital development strategies remains uncertain and warrants longitudinal investigation. Finally, as an exploratory qualitative case study, the research provides rich contextual insights but does not allow causal inference between human capital development strategies and organizational performance. Future studies using larger samples and quantitative or mixed-methods approaches are needed to validate and extend these findings.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study explored the human capital development challenges, strategies, and business outcomes of the tourism, hospitality, and leisure industry leaders in southern Nigeria, with attention to their transferability to comparable developing country contexts. The five strategies identified, character-based recruitment, ethical induction, in-house competency training, reward and recognition systems, and adoption of affordable technologies, collectively constitute a pragmatic and replicable response to structural human capital development deficits in resource-constrained tourism, hospitality, and leisure environments. The central finding is that successful tourism, hospitality, and leisure business leaders are constructing internal human capital development ecosystems that combine values-based selection, ethics socialization, experience-based training, and innovative motivation mechanisms, a bottom-up, industry-driven approach that not only compensates for the absence of top-down institutional support but may also provide a more sustainable workforce development foundation precisely because

it is grounded in real operational contexts. Theoretically, this study extends human capital theory by demonstrating that productivity gains consistent with human capital theory predictions are achievable through industry-driven investment strategies that bypass, rather than depend upon, formal educational institutions, a contribution of particular relevance to the growing literature on human capital development in developing economy service sectors.

The findings also provide practical implications for tourism, hospitality, and leisure stakeholders in developing countries, including Indonesia. Industry leaders should strengthen internal human capital development through values-based recruitment and structured in-house training, while governments should promote supportive policies that reduce bureaucratic barriers and enhance the attractiveness of tourism careers. Vocational education institutions should further strengthen partnerships with industry to improve curriculum relevance through structured work-integrated learning. Future research is encouraged to employ longitudinal mixed-methods designs to evaluate the effects of individual human capital development strategies on organizational performance, including productivity, employee turnover, and service quality, across broader tourism contexts in Indonesia and other emerging tourism economies.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, M.A.M. and O.K.U.; Methodology, M.A.M., O.K.U., and B.J.; Software, M.A.M.; Validation, O.K.U., B.J., and A.W.; Formal Analysis, M.A.M. and B.J.; Investigation, M.A.M. and O.K.U.; Resources, O.K.U. and B.J.; Data Curation, M.A.M.; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, M.A.M. and O.K.U.; Writing – Review & Editing, B.J. and A.W.; Visualization, M.A.M.; Supervision, B.J. and A.W.; Project Administration, M.A.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

Not applicable.

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