



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 (THL) industry constitutes one of the world's fastest-growing economic sectors, generating over USD 7 trillion in annual turnover, contributing 9.5% to global GDP, and employing approximately 266 million people worldwide [1], [2]. Despite this economic significance, the industry faces a serious structural threat: a projected loss of 14 million jobs and a potential GDP contraction of USD 610 billion attributable to a skilled labor shortage crisis anticipated to peak in 2024 [3]-[5]. This crisis is not merely quantitative, a shortage in the number of available workers, but fundamentally qualitative: the unavailability of human resources with the technical competence, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal capacity necessary to deliver consistent service quality to increasingly diverse and demanding customer segments [6], [7]. Given the

inherently labor-intensive nature of THL operations, quality human capital (HC) constitutes the most critical determinant of competitive advantage for THL organizations [8].

The human capital development (HCD) challenge intensifies in developing country contexts, where limited specialized THL educational institutions, weak business support infrastructure, and macroeconomic volatility create compounding barriers to workforce capacity building. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and one of its largest economies, presents a particularly critical case: ranked 131st out of 141 countries in the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) global competitiveness index, with human resource conditions among the weakest globally [9]-[11]. Indonesia presents a comparably instructive context: despite significant cultural and natural tourism assets, Indonesia presents a comparably instructive context: despite significant cultural and natural tourism assets, the sector contributes approximately 4.8% to national GDP and employs over 22 million workers directly and indirectly [11], yet faces analogous structural challenges including limited hospitality-specific vocational training, low public perception of THL careers, and persistently high employee turnover rates [12]. The structural parallels between Nigeria and Indonesia make cross-contextual learning between these two developing economies both relevant and potentially generative for regional tourism workforce development policy.

Human Capital Theory (HCT), introduced by Adam Smith in 1776 and systematically developed since the 1960s, provides the theoretical foundation for this study [13]-[16]. HCT posits that investments in education, training, and competency development generate quantifiable economic returns for individual employees in the form of enhanced earning capacity [17], and for organizations in the form of increased productivity and sustained competitive advantage [18]. Recent scholarship has extended HCT to THL-specific contexts, demonstrating that targeted human capital investments significantly moderate the negative effects of labor market volatility on organizational performance, particularly in developing country settings where institutional support is limited [19].

Notwithstanding this theoretical progress, a critical gap persists in the literature. The overwhelming majority of existing HCD research in the THL sector focuses on the contributions of educational and governmental institutions, systematically overlooking the role of industry practitioners themselves in building and sustaining workforce capacity [20]-[22]. Empirical studies specifically examining the HCD strategies deployed by THL business leaders, particularly in developing countries with constrained institutional environments, remain scarce [23]. This gap is consequential: industry-driven HCD strategies represent the most proximal and often the most practically impactful mechanism through which workforce productivity is shaped in contexts where institutional infrastructure is insufficient.

The urgency of this inquiry is further amplified by the structural disruptions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated pre-existing turnover pressures, catalyzed large-scale workforce exits across the global hospitality industry, and deepened existing competency deficits [24]-[26]. The post-pandemic reconfiguration of the global hospitality labor market demands HCD strategies that are not only innovative and resilient but structurally calibrated to the institutional realities of individual developing economies, particularly those in which the pandemic's scarring effects on workforce composition and competency levels remain unresolved. Understanding how THL business leaders in Nigeria have successfully navigated these conditions offers actionable insight for policymakers and industry practitioners across comparable developing country contexts.

Unlike previous studies that examine HCD through the lens of educational institutions or national policy frameworks, this study adopts an industry-practitioner perspective, foregrounding the agency of THL business leaders as human capital developers operating under conditions of institutional scarcity. By grounding the analysis in HCT and employing a qualitative multicase design, this study generates both theoretically grounded and practically transferable insights into workforce productivity development in resource-constrained THL environments.

This study therefore pursues three interconnected objectives: to identify the HCD challenges confronting THL industry leaders in southern Nigeria at both macroeconomic and microeconomic levels; to explore the HCD strategies implemented by these leaders that have demonstrably improved employee productivity; and to examine the business outcomes resulting from these strategies, with attention to their transferability to comparable developing country contexts including 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 THL 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 THL 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 THL 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 THL industry experience; 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 private-owned, one independent public-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 THL management experience 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 THL 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 HCD 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 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 country THL 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 HCD 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%

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Theme Categories	Frequency	% Sub-Total	% Total
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 HCD strategies, THL industry leaders intuitively consider these three dimensions simultaneously a finding that supports the view that an effective HCD strategy must be responsive to existing challenges while being oriented towards desired business outcomes.

3.1 HCD 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 HCD 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 THL 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 THL 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 resource is meant to discover and encourage potentials, to build and inform them to perform without micromanaging but persons with no qualifications and the requisite experience are employed making the dread of the society get employed in the hospitality industry."

P1: "These are people who go into people's room, 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 THL as a Career

The low interest of young people in careers in the THL industry (5.08%) was identified as a structural barrier that makes it difficult to recruit qualified potential workers. The THL 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 HCD Strategies Implemented by THL 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 HCD Strategy Themes in the Southern Nigerian THL Industry

HCD 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 team working, 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. Staffs that have done exceedingly well are rewarded by bonuses."

P2: "Encouraging those that 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 to expose him and to give 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, THL 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 THL industry to meet short-term labor needs while providing real-world experience to the industry's next generation.

P1: "THL is an industry that can make use of temporary skills and temporary staffing."

Strategy 3 - Training

Training is the most universal HCD strategy and was recognized by all three participants as an indispensable component of HC 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 a formal training to tell 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 staffs that 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 HCD 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 HCD Strategy Implementation

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

Table 7. Frequency of Business Output Themes for HCD 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%
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 HCD 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 HCD 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 HCD efforts, however effective internally, remain structurally constrained by the macroeconomic and governance environment, and that policy-level interventions are a necessary complement to organizational HCD 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).

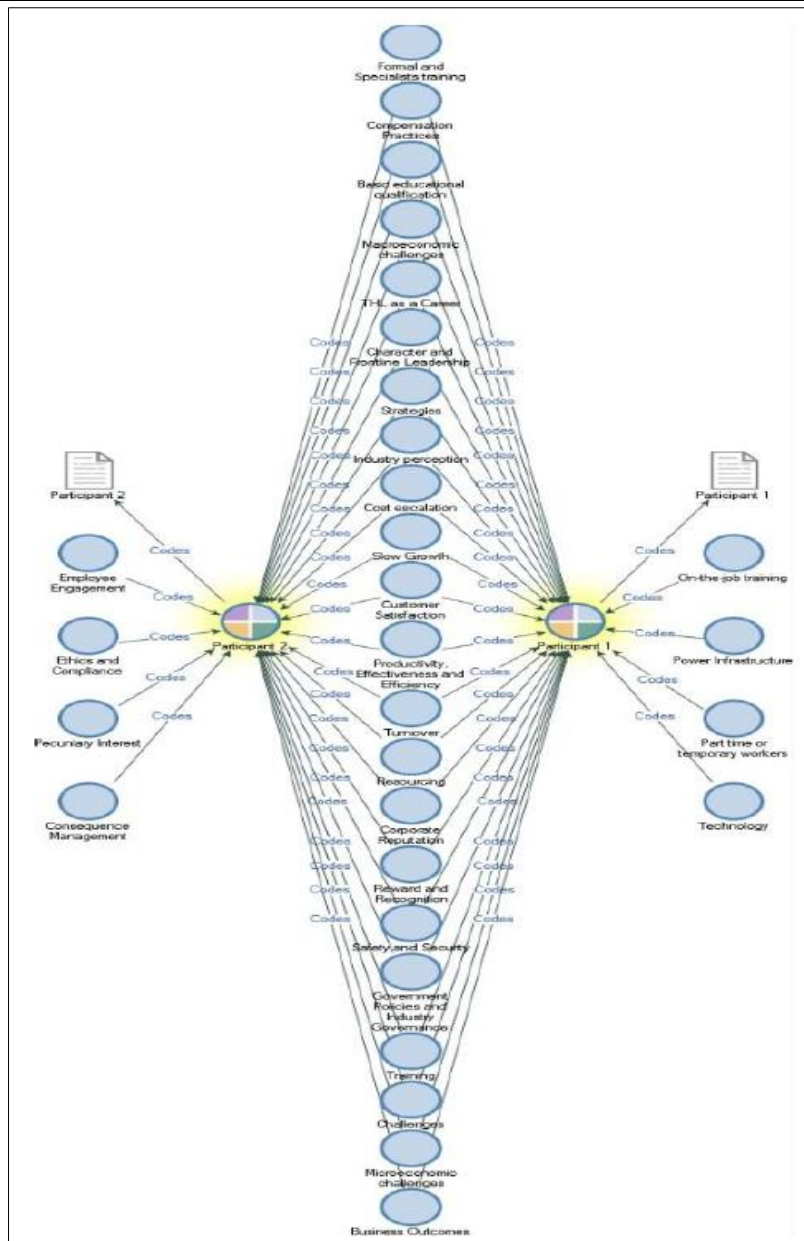


Figure 1. NVivo Theme Comparison Diagram: Participant 1 and Participant 2

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 HCD 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.

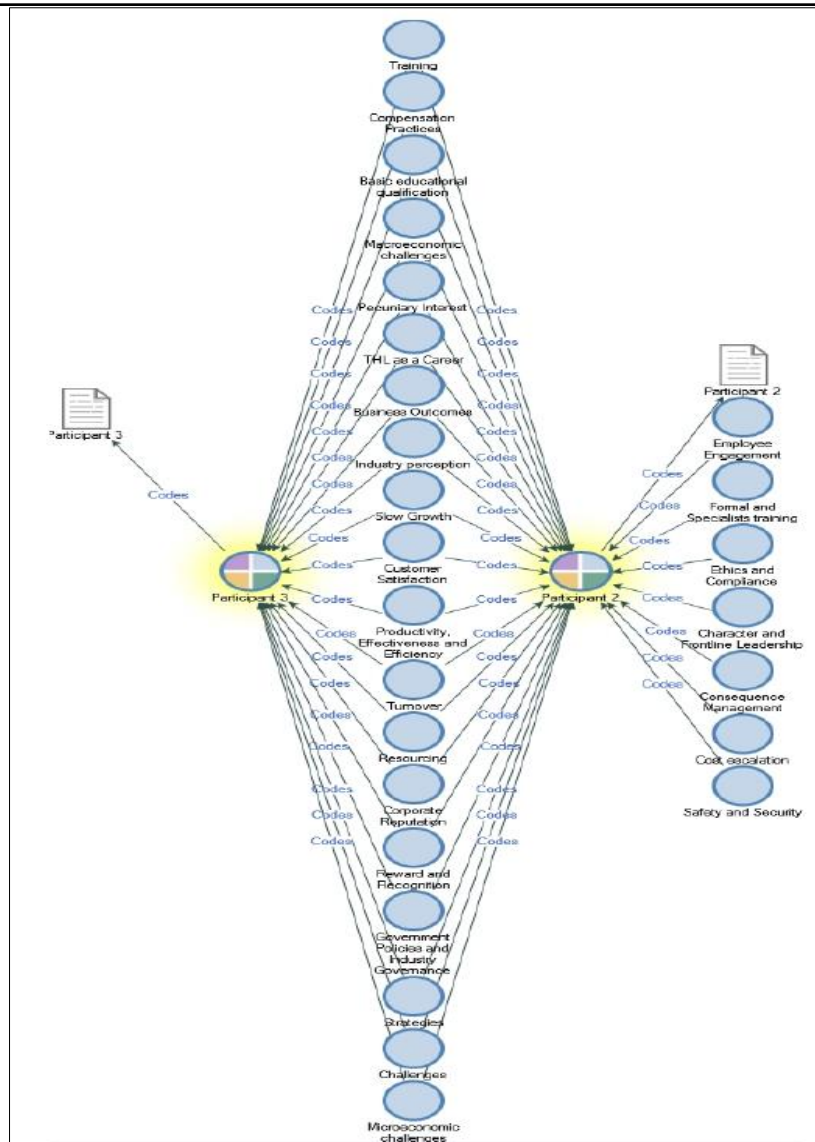


Figure 2. NVivo Theme Comparison Diagram: Participant 2 and Participant 3

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 HCD and tourism human resource management literature. First, regarding the prioritization of remuneration and recognition as key HCD 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 THL careers [38], [39]. Third, regarding training, the accelerated pace of change in the THL 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].

While these findings largely reinforce existing HCD 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 HCD strategies perceive the effectiveness of training programs, experience reward systems, and make turnover decisions, questions that are crucial to a complete understanding of HCD in the THL 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 HCD 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 HCD 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 THL management [49], [50].

These research gaps become even more important when viewed against the rapidly changing global tourism labor landscape. The urgency of studying HCD 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 HCD 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 THL industry, particularly in developing countries like Indonesia. For THL industry leaders and managers, a key implication is the importance of viewing HCD 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 THL 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 HCD investment in the THL industry [56]. Supportive policy measures should encompass tax incentives for THL 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 THL 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 HCD 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 size limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized beyond the participating organizations. Second, the study was geographically confined to two subregions of southern Nigeria and focused exclusively on the hotel and accommodation subsector. HCD practices in other tourism-related sectors, such as restaurants, tour operations, and recreation services, may differ substantially. Third, the findings reflect conditions at a specific point in time within a post-pandemic environment characterized by labor market disruption, workforce shortages, and rapid technological change. The long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the identified HCD strategies therefore remain uncertain and warrant longitudinal investigation. Finally, as an exploratory qualitative case study, the research design provides rich contextual insights but does not permit causal inference regarding the relationship between specific HCD strategies and organizational performance outcomes. Future research employing larger samples and quantitative or mixed-methods designs would be valuable in testing and extending the findings reported here.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored the human capital development challenges, strategies, and business outcomes of THL 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 HCD deficits in resource-constrained THL environments. The central finding is that successful THL business leaders are constructing internal HCD 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 HCT 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.

These findings carry practical implications for THL stakeholders across developing country contexts, including Indonesia. Industry leaders operating under comparable institutional constraints should prioritize internal HCD capabilities, particularly values-based recruitment and structured in-house training, that are not contingent on ideal external conditions. Governments should introduce policy and regulatory reforms that reduce bureaucratic barriers and enhance the attractiveness of THL careers for young people, while vocational institutions should deepen industry partnerships and expand structured work-integrated learning programs to ensure curriculum relevance. These recommendations apply directly to the Indonesian THL context, where structural parallels with southern Nigeria suggest meaningful transferability of the identified strategies. The study is not without limitations: the three-participant, single-country design constrains generalizability, and the qualitative approach precludes causal inference. Future research should employ mixed-methods longitudinal designs to quantify the impact of each HCD strategy on specific performance indicators, including productivity, turnover rates, and service quality, across larger and more geographically diverse THL industry samples 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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