

## PERCEPTION OF TOURISM EDUCATION PROGRAMME: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN KWARA STATE UNIVERSITY, MALETE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Tourism education is a collection of formalized teachings which transmit knowledge, foster skills and character that equip students for their career in the industry. However, its appreciation among the university community is imprecise. Thus, this study investigates Perception of tourism education programme: implications for sustainability in Kwara State University. The research is guided by three main objectives: to investigate the general perception of the tourism education program among students, educators, and industry professionals; to find out the extent to which students' perception of the program influences their enrolment in tourism education programs at universities; and to assess the level of awareness among lecturers regarding tourism education for sustainability in education. A mixed method was adopted for the study, in which the hybrid explanatory/confirmatory method was used. The study employs a QUAN + qual mixed design (Quantitative driven simultaneous design). While the core component is quantitative, the supplemental component is qualitative. The quantitative portion of the study was conducted using a descriptive survey research design. The study's population consists of all tourism students and lecturers from Kwara State University, Malete. The data for this study were statistically analysed using descriptive statistics of mean to answer the research questions and recommendations were made based on the findings.*

**keywords:** Education, Hospitality, Sustainability, Tourism, Tourism Education

### Introduction

Tourism is the world's largest and fastest growing sector of the global economy. It comprises major sub-sectors like hospitality, which involves accommodation, food and beverages service, event, recreation and entertainment; transportation; attractions and travel service sectors amongst others. These sectors are key to tourism experience, and they make up what is referred to as 'tourism product'. This implies that these sectors are inseparable, without any of them tourism doesn't really exist (Ukpokolo and Folorunso, 2019). However, the hospitality sector is very crucial and can translate to tourism in its expeditions. All other contributing sectors can then be fashioned under the umbrella of tourism and hospitality industry. The expansion of the industry due to continuous demand of the human population in the area of food service, accommodation and trade (local and international) has brought about a consequent increase in the number of workforce required to keep the industry moving (Shoemaker *et al.*, 2007). In the light of this fact, it is safe to say there are numerous career opportunities embedded in this industry for prospective employees who wish to chart a course in this field.

Tourism and Hospitality Management is a multidisciplinary field that plays a crucial role in fostering economic development, cultural exchange, and environmental



sustainability. Despite its growing significance, it is often overlooked as a viable career path by secondary school graduates, especially in developing regions like Nigeria, where there is minimal linkage between secondary school curricula and tourism education. This disconnect has implications for the choice of Tourism and Hospitality Management as a course of study, as well as for the future of sustainable tourism development in the country.

In Nigeria, secondary school education primarily focuses on traditional academic subjects such as science, arts, and commerce, with little emphasis on vocational or professional courses like Tourism and Hospitality. Subjects like Geography, which could serve as a foundation for tourism education, are not explicitly aligned with career paths in the field. As a result, many students are unaware of the opportunities within Tourism and Hospitality Management, and they lack the foundational knowledge to consider it as a viable option. This gap often leads to a low enrolment rate in tourism-related courses at the tertiary level, including Kwara State University. The choice of a course of study is often influenced by societal perceptions, career prospects, and personal interests. However, Tourism and Hospitality Management is frequently misunderstood as a less prestigious field compared to courses in medicine, law, or engineering. This misconception is fuelled by a lack of awareness about the potential of the tourism industry as a driver of sustainable development. The World Travel and Tourism Council (2024), highlights that tourism contributes significantly to global GDP, employment generation, and cultural preservation. Unfortunately, these benefits are not sufficiently communicated to students during their early education, leading to a lack of interest in pursuing tourism education.

Kwara State University, with its commitment to providing world-class education, offers a Tourism and Hospitality Management programme designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in a dynamic and growing industry. However, the institution faces the challenge of attracting students to this programme. Addressing this issue requires an understanding of students' perceptions of tourism education and the factors influencing their choice of study. Thus, this study is informed by the need to bridge the gap between secondary school education and tertiary-level tourism education. It seeks to explore the perception of Tourism and Hospitality Management among students at Kwara State University, with a focus on uncovering the barriers and motivations that influence their decision-making process.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of reorienting the mind set of young individuals toward the potential of tourism as a career path. It highlights the need for a proactive approach in integrating tourism-related topics into secondary school curricula and creating awareness campaigns to showcase the diverse opportunities within the tourism sector. The study seeks to strengthen the linkage between secondary and tertiary education, promote the relevance of Tourism and Hospitality Management, and contribute to the sustainability of the tourism industry in Nigeria. This study is therefore necessitated by the need to enhance students' perception of Tourism and Hospitality Management as a course of study at Kwara State University. It seeks to unravel the underlying factors that influence students' choices and provide actionable recommendations to promote tourism education as a catalyst for sustainability.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the general perception of tourism education programme?
2. To what extent does students' perception of tourism education programme influence the enrolment of students into tourism programme?
3. What is the level of awareness of lecturers on tourism education for sustainability in education?



### Conceptualizing the Prospect of Tourism Education

The World Tourism Organization is the tourism industry's most comprehensive collector of tourism data. In 2009 WTO reported an estimated over 1 billion international tourist arrivals, which generated US\$955 billion world-wide, (UNWTO, 2024). In other words, the equivalent of roughly 17% of the world's population was transported internationally in 2009. Compared to 1950, when 25 million tourists generated US\$8 billion, there have been significant increases in both the volume of international travel and receipts generated. From the period of 1950 to 2020, tourism arrivals had an average annual growth rate of 9%. International tourism receipts (at current prices and excluding international transport costs) had an average annual growth rate of 12% over the same period (UNWTO, 2023).

Owing to the above analysis of the tourism and hospitality industry, it behoves this paper to evaluate certain factors that serves as predictor or that create an impetus for student to choose tourism and hospitality as a discipline in higher institution, with the hope of earning a career in it in the future. This implies that, understanding of tourism education is expedient. As described by Sharma (2019), tourism education is a collection of formalized teachings which transmit knowledge, foster skills and character traits that equip students for their career in the industry. However, its appreciation among the university community is imprecise. Although, when it comes to tourism education, there have been a few research in the aspect of the impact of practical training to help students understand the philosophy, principle and practices of the course (Bashiru *et al.*, 2017); and also some assessment of the role of educational bodies on how tourism studies should be integrated into the university curriculum (Oyedun *et al.*, 2019). In spite of these, there is no tangible evaluation of tourism studies in the aspect of the attitude and perception of the prospective students to tourism as a programme in the university and as a discipline for a course of study.

The tourism industry has been expanding and diversifying at a tremendous pace. Over the past three decades, international arrivals have grown steeply from 183million in 1970, to 450 million in 1991, and the figures have exceeded over one billion by the year 2020. It has been predicted that there will be approximately 937 million international tourist arrivals in 2014 (UNWTO, 2024). According to UNWTO (2023), the international tourist arrivals grew by 7.3% in 2019 to 1.733billion, it's a testament to the fact that the industry employs 1 out of 7 global workforces. Folorunso (2013), defines tourism in two dimensions, as an activity and as an occupation. *As an occupation* is the act of providing welfare need for tourist, the need include transportation, lodging, food, and beverages entertainment and so on. *As an activity* is the voluntary movement of people far and near out or within one's own country in search of pleasure for maximum of 24hours and less than one year. Ukpokolo and Folorunso (2019), on the other hand defines tourism as a voluntary movement of an individual or group of people from their normal domicile to a novel destination, for pleasure, recreation and relaxation and any other activities that are not connected with any form of remuneration.

Tourism industry involves the complex sectors that contributes to the activities of the tourist before the trip, during the trip and after the trip. These sectors are as follows: transportation; attraction and recreations; accommodation; food and beverages; retail services; health insurance; travel agency and tour operator; embassy and high commissions. As postulated by Falabi, and Folorunso (2018), hospitality simply means the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers. It also means the act of providing services to others, as well as demonstrating consistent excellence and quality. Most of all, hospitality should be a "place" where people can still be exceptional individuals

and they can extend their own personality and style. Hospitality includes not only hotels and restaurants, but it also refers to other kinds of businesses that give shelter or food or both to people away from their homes. Holistically, hospitality industry is a broad group of trades that gives services to customers. It focuses on their satisfaction. It acknowledges the needs of guests in a variety of establishments. The hospitality industry refers to various businesses and services linked to leisure and customer satisfaction. A defining aspect of the hospitality industry is that it focuses on ideas of luxury, pleasure, enjoyment, and experiences instead of catering to necessities and just essentials.

Ukpokolo and Folorunso (2019), stress that the hospitality industry is part of a huge group of companies known as travel and tourism industry, which provides the necessary or desirable goods and services to travellers. The hospitality and tourism industries are the largest and fastest growing in the world. The two major sub-sectors within the hospitality industry are; Accommodation - this includes inns, hotels, motels, guest houses, hostels, resorts, serviced apartments and campsites; and Food and Beverage which includes restaurants, catering, bars, cafés, nightclubs, tea and coffee shops. Putting hospitality in the picture with tourism, tourist service providers such as travel agency, tour operators, cruises, car rental, casinos among others form the tourism industry.

To document what the perception of the people is about tourism education, Sharma (2019), affirms that the tourism industry is a major source of employment. The possible sources of these employment opportunities are highlighted in this study. However, sound tourism education is very crucial in order to really take a good advantage of the numerous opportunities available for prospective employees and stakeholders of the industry. The relevance of tourism education cannot be underplayed, the availability of professional and academic course in tourism, hospitality and event management has positioned the industry in a better place for pre-degree students to explore. Adigun, Adediran and Adediran (2021), also posit that educational setting in higher institutions of learning is a well-structured and technically controlled environment where students are tutored in courses directly related to their discipline and career aspirations. Every university programme has basic requirements for its admission, tourism as a course is not one of the most popular among many applicants (Oyedun, *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, higher institutions like Imo State University and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture (formerly, Federal University of Agriculture, Umudike) have had a programme in tourism and hospitality management for about two decades now. Other university added the programme later and quite a number of graduates have been produced since.

The following are the subjects required to study Tourism and Hospitality Management in the higher institutions: Mathematics and English; Geography; Economics; Agricultural Science /Biology; Yoruba and Home Economics. Others are any of Chemistry, History, Literature, Government, Commerce, and Accounting. Credit passes in any 6 of the mentioned courses including Mathematics and English Language may guarantee an admission into the course. In addition, prospective students would be required to pass the compulsory Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) exam as proscribed by decree 33 of 1989 (amended) that established the body. Here are the selected courses relevant for admission to study tourism: Mathematics and English with any two of the following: Geography, History, Economics, Agricultural Science, Biology, Home Economics, Catering craft, Commerce, and Chemistry. Basically, Tourism studies stems from multi-disciplinary studies due to different forms of tourism that we have. However, its foundation is rooted in

culture, nature and architectural designs. Hospitality on the other hand is closer to science, as hygiene, sanitation and food service are the bedrocks of its studies.

The following are some of the selected federal, state and private universities offering tourism studies as a major course.

- 1) Kwara State University
- 2) Imo State University
- 3) Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike
- 4) Osun State University
- 5) University of Abuja
- 6) Federal University, Oye-Ekiti
- 7) Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta
- 8) Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti
- 9) Wesley University, Ondo
- 10) Elizade University, Ilara-Mokin
- 11) Lead City University, Ibadan
- 12) Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti
- 13) Redeemers University, Ede
- 14) University of Portharcourt, Rivers State

Several career opportunities abound in the field of tourism and hospitality management. They include but not limited to the following:

1. Professional consultant
2. Airport attendant
3. Hotelier
4. Tour operator and Travel agents
5. Food and beverage merchandising
6. Tourism and hospitality educator
7. Catering and event planning
8. Mixologist and Bartender
9. Curator
10. Trade guide

Tourism studies is a career-based discipline and is professionally regulated by several local and international bodies which include but not limited to the following:

1. Hospitality and Tourism Management Association of Nigeria (HATMAN)
2. Institute of Management Consultant (IMC)
3. Institute of Hospitality (IoH-UK)
4. Nigeria Hotel and Catering Institute (NHCI)
5. Institute of Tourism Professionals of Nigeria (ITPN)
6. Tourism and Hospitality Council (THC)
7. Nigeria Institute of Management (NIM)
8. International Air Transport Association IATA
9. National Association of Nigeria Travel Agencies (NANTA)
10. Hotel and Personal Services Employers' Association of Nigeria (HOPESEA)

Education is basically the process of dispensing skills, knowledge and character to a person in a formal or informal way. In nation building, education is key. Tourism education is usually channelled towards preparing and equipping students to become professionals in their field and be able to dominate the industry. Despite the recent increase in awareness of tourism as a course of study in the universities, the general perception of the people about the programme is worth is evaluating. Lack of understanding of what the scope of the course is, is one thing, inability to fully explore the opportunities the course can offer is another.



However, the relationship between human resource and tourism is a vital one that is crucial to the nation's economy in generating workforce. This creates the needs for prospective and existing employees in this industry to seek education and acquire skills in the field of tourism. Bashiru *et al.*, (2017), affirms that formal education is the key to unlocking the mainstream platform of economic supportive industry. Tourism falls into this league, and its education provides platform for both practical and theoretical approach in acquiring necessary skills to thrive in this industry, this makes the graduate of this course professional at what they do. It should be noted that professional skills may be developed via several channels which include skills acquisition programme organised by the government or private stakeholders, and this training can be backed up by structurally dispensed knowledge that is obtainable in the universities system (Barrows, Power and Reynold, 2012).

Yirbekyaa, *et al.*, (2021), assert that capacity building in tourism is an important aspect of tourism destination development. A sound workforce has a way for creating an atmosphere that makes tourists want to have a repeat visit to a destination. As submitted by Lambulira *et al.*, (2022), tourism education enables tourism development through the constant supply of qualified human resources that meet the requirements and the needs of the industry, and contribute to the overall tourist experience. Casual workers may not have the aural and the swagger to cajole tourist into exploring the tourism destination. Equally, it takes educated tourism personnel to ensure that green and responsible tourism are practiced at the tourist destination. This is done in order to put the attractions at the destination and the destination itself into a reusable state. Tourism education is therefore a critical backbone for the sustainability of the tourism industry. Bashir *et al.*, (2017), back up this claim by asserting that tourism education at university level is essential for best practice in the industry. This is why higher institution of learning are now considering tourism as an academic discipline even up to post graduate level, with the aim of turning out skilled personnel that steer the wheel of the industry in order to reap the maximum benefits accruable through tourism.

The perception of the students towards tourism remains one of the key aspects of tourism education. This is on the bedrock that many of the prospective university students and some undergraduates lack the orientation about the career opportunities in tourism. On the part of the educators, that is the lecturers, their shortcoming lies in their inability to centre tourism introductory courses on the prospects and career opportunities in the course. This submission was echoed by Barrows *et al.*, (2012), who opine that practical training enables students to recognize the key components of their course of study and shapes their perception of the course. It is believed that students with positive perceptions of their career in tourism are usually more passionate in studying the course. They tend to see it as a venture that is beneficial and supports their growth (Yirbekyaa *et al.*, 2021). Another factors that also affect the degree of students' perception of tourism education is the academic level of the students (Lambulira *et al.*, 2022). This feeling also transcend into their career expectations (Barrows *et al.*, 2012). On this note, Lambulira *et al.*, (2022), document that first year students perceive tourism careers in a more positive way than higher level students and even those who have industry experience. On the contrary, Bashir *et al.*, (2017), assert that higher level students have better perception of tourism education and its career prospect than first year students or other pre-degree students. Negative perception from higher level students can generate a wider lack of interest in the course as they tend to be less enthusiastic about the course and its career prospect. Lambulira *et al.*, (2022), stress that low wages, instability, long work hours, lack of job security, lack of best practice and high labour turnover are the factors that contributed to negative perception of the higher level students and graduate students. People do not fancy a stressful and low societal status jobs; tourism is seen as part of these.

In the light of the above, Yirbekyaa, *et al.*, (2021), are of the opinion that career counselling prior to embarking on a course of study in tourism education is a crucial element in shaping the perception of the applicants and undergraduates. The ideal thing is that, this must be done in the early stage of the student enrolment and university can develop their brochures to educate prospective students about the course of studies they offer including tourism as the case may be, as many people tend to avoid selecting tourism as a course since they do not have an understanding of what it is all about like other popular courses such as medicine, law, engineering and so on. Bashiru *et al.*, (2017), on the other hand however, differ that the understanding of a course may not be full until the students is fully integrated into the university system. They however support the idea of practical approach to tourism education which can be carried out through detailed industrial exposure and field trips.

Yirbekyaa *et al.*, (2021), quip that tourism industry needs qualified and skilful workforce to thrive in the face of it being positioned as a driving tool for economic development. This makes it essential to have trained graduates who will not only learn about tourism in the university, but how it can be applied through socio-economic and environmental approaches. This implies that the university students are not limited to tourism education alone, but along the course of their studies, they are exposed to other subjects that enables them to appreciate tourism as a discipline. Through this, they become creative in their thinking about tourism and their intellectual capacity is enlarged through their exposure to innovative methods of teaching employed by the educators (lecturers). Similarly, Lambulira, *et al.*, (2022), assert that tourism lecturers are expected to be trained on the aspect of how to educate new students of tourism studies, who lack basic understanding of the course. Oyedun *et al.*, (2019), equally stress that educational institutions perform a significant function in impacting formal tourism education to the prospective tourism workforce and equally prepare undergraduate for their careers.

## **Theoretical Analysis**

### **Planned Behavior Theory (PBT)**

This theory was propounded by Ajzen (1991), and it aligns well with the focus on understanding students' perceptions and decision-making processes regarding their choice of Tourism and Hospitality Management as a course of study. The choice of this theory is justified because it explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence individuals' intentions and behaviors. It is particularly useful in understanding and predicting behaviors that require conscious decision-making, such as choosing a course of study.

Some of the essential components of TPB and its relevance to the study include: Attitudes Toward Behaviour, which refers to an individual's positive or negative evaluation of a particular behavior. In this context, students' attitudes toward Tourism and Hospitality Management as a field of study will play a critical role in their choice. For example, students may view the course as either valuable and prestigious or irrelevant and unpromising. The implication is that understanding students' attitudes helps in identifying whether they perceive the course as beneficial for their career goals and how their perception influences enrollment. Equally, Subjective Norms, which refers to the influence of social pressures or societal expectations on an individual's decision-making. Many students in Nigeria choose courses based on societal and familial expectations, with a preference for traditionally prestigious fields like law or medicine. The implication of this is that the study can explore how societal misconceptions and the influence of parents, teachers, and peers shape students' perceptions



of tourism education; lastly, Perceived Behavioural Control, which is described as the individual's perception of their ability to perform a behavior based on the resources and opportunities available. For example, students may feel that they lack the background knowledge (from secondary school) or career prospects to succeed in Tourism and Hospitality Management. The implication of this is the understanding of the perceived barriers that can help develop strategies to improve access to resources, career counseling, and awareness programs to encourage interest in the programme. Behavioral Intention also has an important implication as it posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control collectively influence an individual's intention to engage in a behavior. In this case, it directly relates to students' intentions to choose Tourism and Hospitality Management as a course of study.

### **The Social Cognitive Career Theory**

The Social Cognitive Career Theory was propounded by Lent *et al.* (2002), and it explores how self-efficacy and role models influence students' choices. It is considered by this study because of its relevance to how social factors determine career choice and to some extent, perception of certain courses. This theory is boosted by three closely related variables: self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals. Meanwhile, the framework of TPB covers examining external influences, such as secondary school education, societal norms, and career expectations, on students' decision-making; and designing interventions to address negative perceptions and enhance perceived value and accessibility of the programme. This provides the link with social cognitive career theory. This enables this study to systematically identify and analyse the factors influencing students' attitudes, social pressures, and perceived control, which in turn affect their willingness to choose Tourism and Hospitality Management as a course of study. This theoretical framework will also support actionable recommendations to promote tourism education and improve enrolment.

### **Methodology**

Mixed method was adopted for this study, in which the hybrid explanatory/confirmatory method was used. The study employs a QUAN + qual mixed design (Quantitative driven simultaneous design). While the core component is quantitative, the supplemental component is qualitative. The quantitative portion of the study was conducted using a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study for quantitative data comprised of 151 tourism and hospitality management students from Kwara State University, Malete. For the qualitative aspect of the study, 10 lecturers from the Faculty of Education were purposively selected and interviewed. For the quantitative data, no sampling was conducted because the population of the study was sizeable and manageable to cover. Therefore, the study was a census study where all the tourism students participated in the study. However, for the qualitative aspect of the study, a structured questionnaire tagged Questionnaire on Perception of Tourism Education Programme in Universities (QTEPU) designed by the researchers and duly validated was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach alpha method given the reliability coefficient of 0.85. The instrument had 16 items. The researchers and two research assistants administered 151 copies of the questionnaire, and all were retrieved making 100% return rate, which were used for the analysis. The data gathered for the study were statistically analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions.

### **Results And Discussion**



**Analysis and Presentation of Data**

Research Question 1: What is the general perception of tourism education programme?

**Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the general perception of tourism education programme**

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Tourism education is not a dumping ground for lazy students	2.73	0.80	Agreed
2.	Tourism education is not for intellectual disadvantage students	2.96	0.77	Agreed
3.	Tourism education comprises attainment of practical skills and knowledge in various sector of the economic	3.11	0.78	Agreed
4.	Tourism education leads to acquisition of economic literacy	3.32	1.02	Agreed
5.	Tourism education is a tool for economic development	2.89	0.80	Agreed
6.	It is a programme that provides enormous job opportunities as it is the largest and fastest growing industry in the world	3.22	0.75	Agreed
7.	Tourism education program is very good and can be panacea for poverty alleviation	3.01	0.72	Agreed
8.	Tourism education programme prepares students to be competent in labour force upon graduation	3.33	0.84	Agreed
<b>Grand Mean and Stand Deviation</b>		<b>3.07</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>Agreed</b>

Source: Field Survey 2024

Table 1 reveals a calculated grand mean of 3.07 and standard deviation of 0.81, which shows that tourism students agreed with all the items in Table 1 with mean scores ranges from 2.73 to 3.33. All the eight items have standard deviation ranges from 0.72 to 1.02. This means that the responses of the respondents are not widespread as they are close to their respective mean scores. This implies that the respondents have positive perception about tourism education programme. This was supported by a grand mean and standard deviation score of 3.07 and 0.81.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent does students’ perception of tourism education programme influence the enrolment of students into tourism programme?

**Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the extent to which tourism education programme influence the enrolment of students into tourism programme**

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
9.	I was persuaded to choose tourism education because of my academic abilities	2.70	1.06	High extent
10.	I enrolled into tourism education because of the reputation attached to the programme	2.90	0.90	High extent
11.	I choose tourism programme because of my interest in hospitality management	3.10	0.77	High extent
12.	My enrolment into tourism programme is based on career opportunities	3.17	0.67	High extent
13.	Employment opportunities influence my choice of tourism programme	3.14	0.79	High extent
14.	I did not choose tourism programme because of the societal attitude towards the programme	2.92	0.94	High extent
15.	My parental support and encouragement influenced my enrolment into tourism programme	2.85	0.93	High extent
16.	My choice of tourism programme was influence by my parental education.	2.96	0.96	High extent
<b>Grand Mean and Stand Deviation</b>		<b>2.97</b>	<b>0.88</b>	<b>High extent</b>

Source: Field Survey 2024

Table 2 reveals a calculated grand mean of 2.97 and standard deviation of 0.88, which shows that tourism students agreed with all the items in Table 2 with mean scores ranges from 2.70 to 3.17. All the eight items have standard deviation ranges from 0.67 to 1.06. This means that the responses of the respondents are not widespread as they are close to their respective mean scores. This implies that their perception of students’ perception of tourism education programme influenced their enrolment into tourism programme in universities to high extent. This was supported with a mean and standard deviation score of 2.97 and 0.88 respectively.

**Results of Oral Interview Conducted for Qualitative Data**

**Researcher:** Good morning, Sir/Ma? I want to start by thanking you for the audience to have this interview. As mentioned in our letter of request, the purpose of this interview is purely academic, and all information supplied will be treated with utmost confidentiality. The topic of the research work is “perception of tourism education in universities and the implications for educational sustainability.”

Thank you, can the interview commence?

**Respondent:** As soon as you are ready.

**Researcher:** What is your perception about tourism education?

**Respondents:** Majority of the respondents perceived Tourism education as a critical field that equips students with the knowledge and skills to thrive in the tourism industry. They believe it should go beyond mere teaching about destinations and hospitality. It should also emphasize the importance of sustainability and responsible tourism practices to ensure the long-term viability of the industry.

**Researcher:** How do you define "sustainability" within the context of tourism education?



**Respondents:** Sustainability, in the context of tourism education, refers to integrating economic, environmental, and social considerations into the curriculum. It involves teaching students about responsible tourism practices, minimizing negative impacts on local communities and the environment, and promoting sustainable development that benefits both present and future generations.

**Researcher:** In your opinion, what role does tourism education play in promoting sustainability in the broader field of education?

**Respondents:** The overall role of tourism education is to serve as a catalyst for promoting sustainability in education. When students understand the importance of sustainability within the tourism industry, they are more likely to embrace sustainable practices in other aspects of their lives. It's a way of nurturing a generation of responsible global citizens who value environmental and social stewardship.

**Researcher:** In your interactions with students, do you notice any differences in their attitudes or awareness towards sustainability compared to previous years? If yes, what do you think has influenced these changes?

**Respondents:** Yes, I've observed positive changes in students' attitudes towards sustainability in recent years. I think increased media coverage of environmental issues, such as climate change and overtourism, has raised awareness. Additionally, universities now offer more sustainability-focused courses, which have contributed to students' understanding of their role in promoting responsible tourism.

**Researcher:** Are there any specific resources or initiatives you utilize to keep yourself updated on the latest developments in sustainable tourism education?

**Respondents:** I actively participate in conferences and workshops related to sustainable tourism. Additionally, I am part of online communities and forums where educators exchange ideas and best practices. Keeping in touch with industry professionals and reading relevant research articles also helps me stay up to date with the latest developments.

**Researcher:** From your perspective, what do you believe are the long-term implications of integrating sustainability into tourism education for the broader sustainability goals of the tourism industry?

**Respondents:** Integrating sustainability into tourism education can lead to a more resilient and responsible tourism industry. As graduates enter the workforce with a deep understanding of sustainability, they can influence industry practices and advocate for more sustainable policies. This can result in reduced environmental impact, better community engagement, and ultimately contribute to the industry's long-term sustainability.

**Researcher:** Are there any areas or aspects of sustainability that you think are underrepresented or could be better emphasized in the current tourism education curriculum?

**Respondents:** I believe that cultural sustainability is sometimes overlooked in the curriculum. While environmental and economic sustainability are essential, we must also focus on preserving and celebrating local cultures and traditions. This can be achieved through cultural sensitivity training and incorporating cultural heritage aspects into the courses.

**Researcher:** In your opinion, what steps can universities take to further enhance the awareness and integration of sustainability principles into tourism education?

**Respondents:** First, universities should collaborate with industry experts and organizations to develop up-to-date and relevant sustainability-focused curriculum. Second, they can offer faculty development programs to equip educators with the knowledge and resources to effectively teach sustainability. Third, providing practical learning experiences, such as field trips to sustainable tourism destinations, can enhance students' understanding of sustainability in action.

## Discussion of Findings

The study found that students have positive perception about tourism education programme. This may be because of students' awareness about the career opportunities the programme offered and the exposure to the industry through fieldtrips. This means that practical approach to tourism education which is carried out through detailed industrial exposure and field trips contributes to the students' positive perception about tourism programme. The finding supports the earlier findings of Bashiru *et al.*, (2017), who stated that the understanding of a course may not be full until the students is fully integrated into the university system. Contrary to Lambulira *et al.*, (2022), who stress that low wages, instability, long work hours, lack of job security, lack of best practice and high labour turnover are the factors that contributed to negative perception of the higher-level students and graduate students. Tourism is seen as a stressful and low societal status jobs and people are wary of that fact.

The study also found that students' perception of tourism education programme influenced their enrolment into tourism programme in universities to high extent. This means that the students enrolled for the programme not because of the societal perception but because of the reputation attached to it, their interest in hospitality management, and the career opportunities it offered. This finding is in line with Yirbekyaa *et al.*, (2021), who believed that students with positive perceptions of their career in tourism are usually more passionate in studying the course. They tend to see it as a venture that is beneficial to the achievement of their life goals. This case is echoed by the theory hypothesized by Lent *et al.*, (2002), which emphasized that vocational and academic choices can contribute to life's expected outcome and goals.

The study further revealed that lecturers are highly aware of tourism education for sustainability in education. They believed that tourism education serves as a catalyst for promoting sustainability in education. When students understand the importance of sustainability within the tourism industry, they are more likely to embrace sustainable practices in other aspects of their lives, a way of nurturing a generation of responsible global citizens who value environmental and social stewardship. The lecturers also noted that integrating sustainability into tourism education can lead to a more resilient and responsible tourism industry. As graduates enter the workforce with a deep understanding of sustainability, they can influence industry practices and advocate for more sustainable policies which can result to better community engagement, and ultimately contribute to the industry's long-term sustainability. The finding corroborates the findings of Barrows *et al.*, (2012), who stated that the shortcoming of tourism lecturers, lies in their inability to centre tourism introductory courses on the prospects and career opportunities in the discipline. They therefore opined that practical training enables students to recognize the key components of their course of study and shapes their perception of the course.

## Conclusion

The study examined the perception of tourism education in universities and the implications for educational sustainability. This is a matter of concern, as presently, tourism is considered extremely important industry which contribute to economic development. This study shows that students have positive perception about tourism education programme and students' perception of tourism education programme influenced their enrolment into tourism programme in universities to high extent. The study therefore concludes that there is a need for tourism should go beyond simply teaching about destinations and hospitality; it should

also emphasize the importance of sustainability and responsible tourism practices to ensure the long-term viability of the industry. This is expected to change societal perception about tourism education thereby increasing the interest and enrolment in tourism programme.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings above, this, study recommends that:

1. in order to properly shape the perception of pre-degree student towards tourism as a choice of academic programme, there must a robust re-orientation of applicants through a comprehensive sensitization.
2. the current undergraduates at all levels should be encouraged to undergo career counselling sessions from time to time.
3. the lower-level student should be exposed to courses that will better equip them to be more conversant with their course of study.
4. universities must be deliberate about educational sustainability by collaborating with industry experts and stakeholder to review the curriculum and empower the faculty to fully embrace sustainable practices in education.

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