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Original Article

Socio-Emotional Disposition's Mediation in Technical Skills and Graduate Employability in Tourism and Hospitality Industry—South-Western Uganda

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Despite possessing technical skills, many hospitality graduates in Southwestern Uganda struggle to secure employment. This suggests a possible deficiency in their socio-emotional abilities. The study investigated the mediating effect of socio-emotional disposition in the relationship between technical skills and graduate employability. The research design employed in this study was the cross-sectional quantitative research method with a population of 640 graduates and a sample size of 400 was established for hospitality graduates based on Krejcie, & Morgan's (1970) table and formula. The data was collected employing questionnaires and the data analysis was done by SPSS V. 23 and Smart PLS V 4. The results revealed that the technical skills and socio-emotional disposition of graduates have significant direct effects on the graduates' employability, with path coefficients of ($\beta = 0.348$, $p < 0.001$) for technical skills and ($\beta = 0.716$, $p < 0.001$) for socio-emotional disposition. Sensitively, socio-emotional disposition was also reported to mediate the link between technical skill and employability ($\beta = 0.438$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, socio-emotional disposition increases the level of readiness for employment. The study indicates technical competencies are mandatory prerequisites to getting a job in the hospitality industry; socio-emotional competencies enhance these results. The study recommended that carrying out tracer studies and skills audits, mentorship schemes, certification of future graduates, creating a strong linkage between higher educational institutions (HEIs) and the hospitality sector, and authorities should take into account the programs that encourage socio-emotional enhancement appropriate to the needs of the sector.

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INTRODUCTION

Many tourism and hospitality graduates apply for jobs, and obtaining a job today requires more than technical skills (Booyens, 2020), especially when for the hospitality industry, which requires more soft skills as compared to hard technical skills. The general technical know-how is essential to meet the demand of technical tasks in the workplace (Kim et al., 2021), but socio-emotional competencies are essential for the qualifications of graduates in the labor market (Lara, 2023). In the area of human resource management, one of the emerging issues is that hospitality graduate’s who hail from higher education institutions (HEIs) in southern Uganda have problems placing in employment when they graduate, even though the training institutions equip them technically.

Thus, the research examined the linkage to identify data that might help educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers enhance the employment opportunities of graduates in the hospitality field. If socio-emotional skills training are incorporated with the planned technical skills, then the educational institutions will be able to allow the students to have the best preparations for the competitive market in the hospitality industry (Tushabe et.al, 2024). Thus, this multifaceted strategy contributes to a better result by boosting the employment prospects of participants while also promoting the concept of sustainable development in the hospitality industry by preparing individuals for employment and creating new job opportunities.

Nonetheless, there is a dearth of literature on how socio-emotional skills affect employability in this region. Hence, this research proposes to reduce this gap by establishing the moderating role of socio-emotional disposition in the relationship between technical skills and graduate employability of hospitality students in southern

Uganda. This relationship will be further discussed in the study to identify how socio-emotional competencies can contribute to employability and better employment outcomes in the hospitality graduate employment market.

Problem Statement

In the current hospitality employment market, technical competencies alone cannot ensure job security (Magova, & Kessy, 2020), especially in sectors such as hospitality where human face-to-face interaction is critical. Though the HEIs in southern Uganda aim to endow their students with technical knowledge, most of the graduates still find it hard to get employment (Ushakov et al., 2020). This mismatch between education and employability shows that today’s curricula and training schemes fail to adequately address these essential soft abilities (Asefer, & Abidin, 2021), thus causing a significant gap between the set of skills students acquire and the set of skills that employers require. This gap is an obvious omission to enrich the qualifications of graduates in the direction of improving their employability in various fields to meet the changing dynamics of customer focus among different organizations. In this regard, it is critical to resolve this imbalance when designing educational and training initiatives aimed at the development of individual competencies, as technical and vocational education and training qualifications that incorporate cognition and social and emotional skills should provide graduates with the complete set of skills that will enable them to compete within Kabale District’s tough hospitality environment.

This skills gap has therefore brought questions over the kind of education that students receive as they are trained to fit the current market-world employment (Grero, 2018). Socio-emotional skills, particularly moderating the relationships

between technical skills and employment, are also left relatively unspecified (Jahoda et al., 2008). The relationship between technical skills and employability of hospitality graduates in southwestern Uganda is the recipient of this study to establish the mediating influence of socio-emotional disposition. The results may guide educational institutions and policymakers on how to improve the rate of employment of graduates through the development of a better, broader set of skills needed by the labor market.

Research Hypothesis

This Study was Guided by these Alternative Hypotheses

H1: Technical skills have a positive effect on enhancing the employability of hospitality graduates in southern Uganda.

H2: Socio-emotional disposition has a positive effect on enhancing the employability of hospitality graduates in southern Uganda

H3: Socio-emotional disposition significantly mediates the relationship between technical skill and graduate employability in South-western Uganda.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This study was guided by Social –cognitive theory and Human capital theory.

Social-Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Social-Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) proposed by Lent et al., (1994) explains how graduates' employability prospects in the hospitality industry are influenced by social-emotional skills (SES). The Social-Cognitive Career Theory posits that individuals' self-confidence, beliefs, expected outcomes, and personal career goals shape their career activities and outcomes. That is why the introduction of self-perceived competence in interpersonal contacts and the regulation of emotions within the framework of social-emotional skills can contribute to an increase in the effectiveness of implementing social competencies, including in the hospitality sphere.

Nevertheless, SCCT has been said to have the following weaknesses: it does not capture the complex interplay between values and other tangible aspects that define job readiness. Thus, this study covering the Kabale District can help to fill these gaps and enhance comprehension of the feasibility of SCCT in the hospitality sector. Thus, by breaking down the concept of the regional context into one component of the concept, this research may be able to deduce how various features of industries might affect the definition and usage of social-emotional skills.

Human Capital Theory

According to Schultz's (1961) Human Capital Theory, investment is made in human capital, especially skills and knowledge, and out of it, employability can be enhanced. The social-emotional skills in the hospitality industry in Kabale District are therefore regarded as aspects of human capital development since they are crucial to employee cooperation, students' coping, and conflict resolution within every organization.

Based on the research, SCCT and Human Capital Theory offer an understanding of how social-emotional disposition and technical skills enhance the employability of graduates in the hospitality sector of Kabale District. When synthesizing all these theoretical concepts, research in Kabale District can find out how the cultivation of SE skills under education and training can be effectively facilitated, how graduates are equipped to meet various facets of their working lives, and how human capital assets in the development of the sector should be evaluated.

Theoretical Underpinnings Studies in educational and career development over the last few years have also revealed that graduate employability is not just a matter of technical skills, but more than that (Clarke, 2018; Jackson, 2016). According to this study, employability outcomes are best captured by examining career identity as well as adaptability and intrinsic motivation. Career identity, which is considered a stable and global perception of personal career orientations, is

considered to be a significant influential factor in determining people's career choices and changes.

This argument is further supported by Jackson's qualitative study, which reveals the significance of socio-emotional competencies, including both emotional and interpersonal factors, for boosting the graduates' employability and their coping strategies during the transition (Jackson, 2016). Based on Human Capital Theory, which suggests that soft skills along with hard skills are factors in career success, and Social-Cognitive Career Theory, which has also highlighted that social and cognitive factors also play a role in one's career, this paper develops a mediation model.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent literature highlights the significance of technical skills in enhancing graduate employment prospects in the hospitality sector (Carlisle et al., 2023). Tasks, for instance, comprising of culinary arts, cleaning services, and reception are major categorical requirements of applicable human resource jobs in the hospitality industry. Hoque et al., (2023) stated that employment chances are favored by the graduates with these competencies. This is because employers of the hospitality sector expect graduates to demonstrate practical competency on national services that determine service delivery since the focus is on client satisfaction. The tourism and hospitality industry in Southern Uganda continues to expand, and as a result, graduates need to develop technical skills in order to meet the demand of employers, supporting Hypothesis 1 (H1) that claimed that technical skills will enhance employability.

Furthermore, other researchers show the extended meaning of technical skills, which is not limited to the elements of employment productivity. Selem et al., (2023); Tushabe et al., (2023) opine that technical skills enable graduates to operate hotel ICT software, control stocks, and be in charge of the running operations. Currently, operating in a highly technological business environment is still a plus for the graduates who have adequate skills in handling advanced

systems and equipment. These skills are especially admired by employers hunting for workers who can incorporate the use of technology effectively in their daily operations to support the argument that technical know-how is a significant factor in job-marketability.

Socio-emotional skills are also acknowledged as equally significant for employment, and capturing them has also been cited as paramount importance in hospitality. Lechner et al., (2019) note that communication, interpersonal and emotional competencies, and teamwork competencies are essential in interpersonal management as well as service delivery. In my view, these soft skills that are developed during the course enable graduates to manage relationships with their clients, be able to handle delicate issues, and be able to work effectively with other people, including their peers. Socio-emotional skills are therefore deemed crucial to hospitality personnel given that the nature of the business often requires a high level of guest contact, which in turn defines customer satisfaction and organizational outcomes.

The moderating effects of socio-emotional skills, especially technical skills and work readiness, have emerged more recently in research, including in the hospitality industry (Tushabe, & SSempala, 2024). Also noted that other practical abilities cannot guarantee employment opportunities, and socio-emotional competencies have to accompany these technical ones. According to their work, while technical proficiencies allow graduates to complete purposeful activities required in a given occupation, socio-emotional competencies help them execute a specific task efficiently in practice. The reciprocal relationship provided by the interaction of technical and socio-emotional skills supports Hypothesis 3 (H3), predicting that SE disposition exerts a significant mediating effect on the levels of technical skills and employability.

Therefore, socio-emotional skills as a type play the role of an intermediary that enables the receiving of graduates' technical knowledge in a variety of settings, which proves the mediation

hypothesis. On the other hand, there are indications that technical competencies could be directly relevant to employment prospects, whereas socio-emotional competencies are indeed mediators. For instance, Clarke, (2018) reveals that in technically oriented jobs like kitchen management, technical knowledge is critical, and a lack of SE skills will not have implications for job performance or job prospects. In these cases, skill demand tends to be more focused on technical competencies than on interpersonal skills, especially in job positions that do not involve much contact with customers or where interacting with customers is minimal. The present research conclusion counters the mediation hypothesis since the results suggest that socio-emotional skills do not necessarily mediate between technical skills and employability across all types of jobs.

Nevertheless, going with the majority of modern-day research, the majority of contemporary works support the assertion that it is socio-emotional skills that act as intermediaries between technical skills and employability. Considering the related characteristics of university graduate employment patterns is thus imperative, and it was again observed that regardless of the organizational demands for financial, information, and other technical transactions, the graduates exhibiting high levels of socio-emotional intelligence are likely to be hired in hospitality organizations involving the receipt and provision of customer services. This supports the theory that socio-emotional skills play a significant role in mediating this relationship in Southern Uganda's hospitality industry because the socio-emotional disposition enhances the functional capacity, thus the manifestation of technical skills in the graduates' performance of their duties.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research method to enable the researcher to collect and analyze numerical data and test for relations between the variables. A cross-sectional research design was adopted and this gave a result or picture of the current skills development and

employment status of the hospitality graduates in southwestern Uganda at a given period.

Study Population

The target population was graduates with a degree, diploma, or certificate in tourism and hospitality programs from the three selected institutions that offer tourism and hospitality southwestern Uganda. Graduates of 2018 to 2023 were considered for quantitative data, and other stakeholders for qualitative data. The study targeted hospitality graduates from three key institutions: Uganda College of Commerce, African College of Commerce and Technology, and Kabale University.

The reason for choosing this number of subjects was the fact that a sufficient number of graduates, namely 400, was chosen to be the sample size from the target population of 640 which would allow for generalizing the results. The data were administered in structured questionnaires to determine the technical content knowledge of graduates, socio-emotional skills, and the employment status of the graduates.

Unit of Analysis and Unit of Inquiry

The unit of analysis was the three institutes: the Uganda College of Commerce, Kabale University, and the African College of Commerce and Technology. The units of inquiry were individual employed or unemployed graduates; the questionnaires were distributed to all the participants. The target respondents were 133 graduates from each institute, and other participants were purposefully selected for interviews.

Sample Size

The sampling technique employed was proportional stratified random sampling. This enabled the measurement of the population with a lot of ease and in the shortest time possible. Based on the on Krejcie, & Morgan (1970) table used in determining the proportion of the sample from the various categories of participants, the researcher had to adhere to selecting an appropriate sampling technique that suited the study Iliyasu, & Etikan

(2021); Rahman et al. (2022). Each stratum was randomly sampled for the study, and this approach

guaranteed that the sample would include all sections of the overall population.

Table 1: Sample Size for Quantitative Data

| NO. | Institution | Study population | Sample size | Sampling Technique |
|--------------|--|------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | African College of Commerce and Technology (ACCT), | 220 | 136 | Stratified Random Sampling |
| 2 | Uganda College of Commerce (UCC) | 210 | 132 | Stratified Random Sampling |
| 3 | Kabale University | 210 | 132 | Stratified Random Sampling |
| Total | | 640 | 400 | |

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Data Collection Methods

The development of structured and unstructured questionnaires was guided by the work of Kallio et al. (2016). The series of steps for questionnaire development recommended by the authors was useful in maximizing the quality of the questionnaire. The structured questionnaire used in this study began with a short statement about the objective of the research and ended with an appreciation for participation. To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, the researcher took the following steps: sought guidance from doctoral supervisors; developed the instrument based on the existing tested instrument; see Table for measurement of variables Table four and five and checked for the relevancy of the items or questions concerning the variables under the study. Owing to the feedback from experts, some questions and items were slightly modified, which improved their content validity.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire employed a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (DA), and strongly disagree (SDA), with each of the points assigned a value as follows: SA = 5, A = 4, N = 3, DA = 2, and SDA = 1. The instrument followed the constructs of socio-emotional skills, technical skills and graduate employability for graduate employees. This scale provided more options, allowing respondents to provide a better representation of their attitudes and perceptions. It revealed that choosing the

scale helped differentiate between the respondents' perceptions and follow variations, which researchers are sensitive.

The decision to use standardized questionnaires meant that the collection of the data was well structured and planned, which analyzed the correlation between the variables under study easier. On this basis, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data collected. The frequency distributions of the responses given by the respondents for technical skills and socio-emotional competencies were also calculated using descriptive statistics. Path analysis, which is a type of inferential statistics, was used to establish relationships between technical skills, socio-emotional disposition, and employment status.

Data Analysis Procedures

The quantitative data were analyzed using IBM Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics V.23 and Smart PLS version 4, Data was cleansed to remove any unreliable big data. Data screening was carried out to check for errors arising from incorrect data entry, out-of-range values, missing values, and normality, and then provided solutions for such errors (Field et al., 2009). To determine the items with the above anomalies, descriptive statistics were generated in the form of frequency distribution tables. By determining output from frequencies generated, out-of-range numbers and missing values within the data were displayed under each item (Hair et al., 2017).

The data was checked for outliers using minimum and maximum frequency counts, means, and scatter plots, as these usually result in non-normal and distorted data. Specific assumptions tested included normality of the distribution of data, homogeneity of valence, linearity of data, and

multi-co linearity using procedures prescribed by Field et al., (2009). The test for parametric assumptions included determining the skewness and kurtosis of the statistics, normal probability plots, histograms, and scatter plots (Garson, 2012).

Table 2: Reliability and Validity

| <i>Dimension</i> | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability | No of Items |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Social Emotional Disposition | .932 | .943 | 9 |
| Technical Skills | .848 | .898 | 4 |
| Career Identity | .866 | .904 | 5 |
| Career Motivation | .840 | .887 | 5 |
| Human Capital | .847 | .897 | 4 |
| Personal Adaptability | .843 | .888 | 5 |
| Social Capital | .838 | .885 | 5 |
| Graduate Employability | .847 | .892 | 24 |

Source: Primary Data, 2024

The reliability coefficients Cronbach's alpha of all the dimensions in the study was as follows: 0.838 to 0.932, implying internal consistency that ranges from high to excellent across the constructs. As for internal reliability, Cronbach's alpha value equal to or less than 0.7 is considered bad. This implies that all the constructs attain or surpass the acceptable threshold, hence indicating that the items used to capture each dimension are immensely reliable. For example, in the case of the social-emotional disposition, it has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.932, which indicates an excellent internal reliability measure implying the nine items. The same situation is with the Technical Skills (0.848) and Graduate Employability (0.847) Coefficient, which indicates the high internal validity of the items used to measure the skills and the level of employability of graduates.

These dimensions represent some aspects of graduate employability, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients highly justify the use of the constructs in the study to capture employed graduates' readiness for the job market. Just as with the previous factors, personal adaptability (0.843) and social capital (0.838) have proven to be reliable measurements to support the validity of responses, hence showing how adaptability and social networks positively impact employability. The validities for the constructs

are fairly high, with the composite reliability values ranging from 0.885 to 0.943, and it shows that the construct validity of all the dimensions is high.

Composite Reliability

As such, a composite reliability of 0.943 for the 9-item measure of social-emotional disposition indicates that these items present a sound and valid measure of the construct in question. This is especially crucial, taking into account that it is the socio-emotional competencies that determine employability. Technical Skills (0.898) and Graduate Employability (0.892) are also found to possess a very high level of composite reliability, implying that items used to measure Technical Skills and Graduate Employability provide a very good estimate of the graduates' employability.

In addition, there is a high composite reliability for constructs: skills development (0.921), career identity (0.904), career motivation (0.887), and human capital (0.897), which indicates that the current measures are accurate and consistent. Since these dimensions are critical elements of the employability of graduates, the high validity of these dimensions justified their application in the study in that they represent authentic measures of the skills and attributes that are relevant to the job market. From the above Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values, it is evident that all

the constructs have high internal consistency, therefore affirming that the current study has a reliable measurement model.

Measurement Models

Measurement models are statistical models that are employed to help researchers identify the parameters of the relationships that exist between observed variables (the indicators) and unobserved variables (the factors) (Tarling, 2008). They are important in testing the model of the structure of complex psychological,

educational, and other constructs to ensure that the obtained data are consistent with the theoretical expectations. Measurement models used in structural equation modeling helped in assessing the construct validity and reliability through examination of the factor loadings, error variances, and total model fit. They provided important information to ensure that their application for the measurement of particular constructs is a good representation of the theoretical concepts intended to be measured.

Table 3: Structural Model Socio-emotional Skills Disposition, Technical Skills and Graduate Employability

| <i>Direct Effects</i> | β | Std. Error | T-statistics | p-values | 95% Bias Corrected CI | |
|---|---------|------------|--------------|----------|-----------------------|------|
| Gender \longrightarrow Graduate Employability | .030 | .047 | 0.638 | .523 | .065 | .121 |
| Technical Skills \longrightarrow Graduate Employability | .348 | .032 | 10.732 | .000 | .285 | .412 |
| Technical Skills \longrightarrow Socio Emotional Disposition | .716 | .024 | 29.223 | .000 | .667 | .764 |
| Socio Emotional Skills \longrightarrow Graduate Employability | .612 | .031 | 19.606 | .000 | .550 | .671 |
| <i>Indirect Effects</i> | | | | | | |
| Technical Skills \longrightarrow Socio Emotional Disposition \longrightarrow Graduate Employability | .438 | .027 | 16.198 | .000 | .384 | .490 |
| <i>Total Effects</i> | | | | | | |
| Gender \longrightarrow Graduate Employability | .030 | .047 | 0.638 | .523 | .067 | .119 |
| Technical Skills \longrightarrow Graduate Employability | .786 | .020 | 39.692 | .000 | .740 | .819 |
| Technical Skills \longrightarrow Socio-Emotional Disposition | .716 | .024 | 29.223 | .000 | .661 | .759 |
| Socio-Emotional Skills \longrightarrow Graduate Employability | .612 | .031 | 19.606 | .000 | .550 | .670 |

Source: SPSS Statistics, Primary Data, 2024

The measurement model illustrated in the figure examined the moderated model of socio-emotional disposition between technical skill and graduate employability outcomes among hospitality students in southwestern Uganda. The model included several latent variables: Technical Skills, Socio-Emotional Disposition, Graduate Employability, and Gender were the variables adopted for this study, with Graduate Employability being the dependent variable while the other three—Technical Skills, Socio-Emotional Disposition, and Gender were the independent variables. Technical skills had an overall factor loading of more than 0.8–0.862,

making them very reliable measures of technical skills. Likewise, a socio-emotional disposition with a loading ranging from 0.716 to 0.825 imply that the said indicators are fairly valid in their recognition of the socio-emotional affinity of the students.

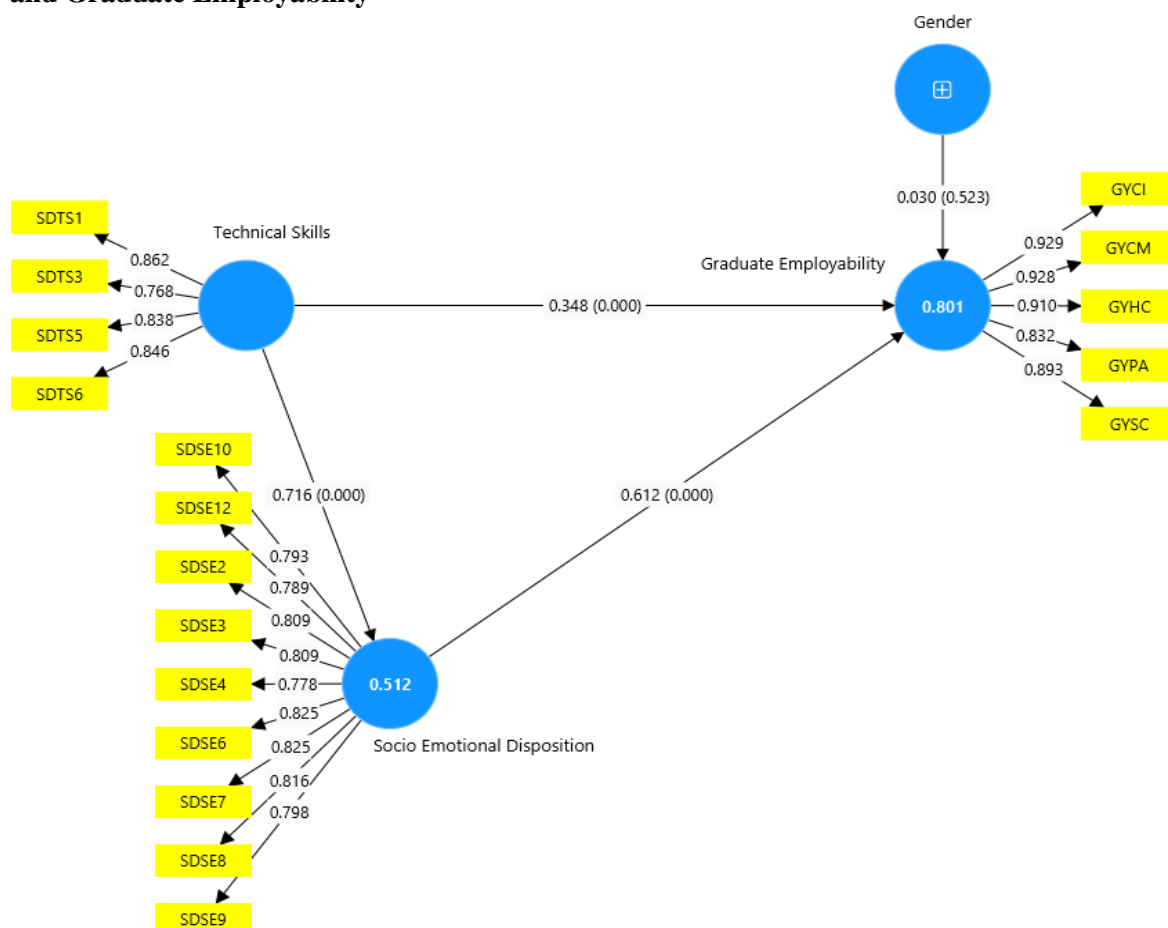
Loads for Graduate Employability, assessed through the indicators, are very high (ranging, for instance, between (0.832 and 0.929), which indicates that these indicators contribute to the overall evaluation of the employability of graduates. The results obtained in this study indicate that ($\beta = 0.612$: $p < 0.000$) imply that socio-emotional skills are significant to

employability. The regression coefficient for technical skills to socio-emotional disposition is substantial ($\beta = 0.716, p \leq 0.000$), implying that the quantity and nature of the technical skills that learners develop enhance their socio-emotional disposition.

Thus, the mediated indirect impact of technical skills on graduate employability equals the product of the two partial indirect coefficients (indirect effects) which also remains statistically significant. Therefore, the result of this study supports the hypothesis that technical skills have a positive direct effect on graduate employability as well as a positive indirect effect through the mediator's socio-emotional disposition.

Thus, the model emphasizes technical competency and socio-emotional attitude as the major factors for enhancing graduate outcomes and employment in the hospitality industry. There is evidence that states that educational programs must implement the kind of skills learning that will enable students to competently perform the roles of searching for jobs online and also gaining appropriate employment. One interesting thing to note is that gender does not seem to be a causative factor for employability within this model's position. These calls for training strategies that offer a balance between the skills and character, or social skills, of the hospitality graduates to enhance their marketability in southwestern Uganda.

Figure 1: Measurement Models for Socio-emotional Disposition Mediation with Technical Skills and Graduate Employability



Source: SPSS Statistics, 2024

The measurement model highlights the significant relationships between technical skills, socio-emotional disposition, and graduate employability

among hospitality students in southwestern Uganda. The coefficient level connects technical skills and graduate employability. The technical

skills were rated as significantly important by hospitality graduates with a mean value of (0.3448, $p < 0.000$), thus implying that they are a key factor that determines employability for the graduating students. The model also shows that technical skills have a significant relationship with graduate employability through socio-emotional disposition in partial mediation. The strong and significant path from technical skills leading to socio-emotional disposition underlines that technical skills enhance socio-emotional aspects such as communication, interpersonal skills, and emotional intelligence skills. Moreover, the significance of the path analysis for socio-emotional disposition to graduate employability (0.612, $p = 0.000$) shows that socio-emotional skills are good predictors of employability. The indirect effect of technical skills is also profound, which signifies that technical skills improve employability both through a direct interface and also through a mediating variable.

With these various relations between the different types of skills demonstrated, it can be theorized that implanting socio-emotional skills into technical skills training regimes can create optimum employability results. Furthermore, the model reveals that employability is not affected by gender (standardized path coefficient = 0.030, $p = 0.523$). This insight enhances the argument for the attainment of gender parity in employment and education opportunities since it opens up the view that the employability results are not likely to be affected by gender within the analyzed data set. It is suggested to equip people with pertinent knowledge through educational programs, which must comprise technical and personal development elements simultaneously.

H1: Technical Skills have a Positive Effect on Enhancing the Employability of Hospitality Graduates in Southern Uganda

A positive and direct significant link is established between technical skills and employability (path coefficients = 0.348, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$), which supports the overwhelming literature on technical skills in the job market. Analyzing the study done

by (Chhinzer, & Russo, 2017), it becomes evident that graduates who come to the job with strong technical skills are most likely to become employed because technical skills have a strong relationship with specific vocational activities. Besides the knowledge of business and customer service, technical skills such as cooking skills, food & beverage service, front office operations, and housekeeping skills are vital to the achievement of job competency in the hospitality industry. This study supports (Jackson, 2014; Jackson, & Bridgstock, 2021) postulation that technical skills are core assets when pursuing first employment.

H2: Socio-Emotional Disposition has a Positive Effect on Enhancing the Employability of Hospitality Graduates in Southern Uganda

The positive influence of socio-emotional disposition on employability is highly consequential (path coefficient = 0.612, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$), corroborating Heckman, & Kautz (2012) arguments about soft skills and employability. In the socio-cultural context of the hospitality industry, transferable competencies for personnel include human relations (Huang et al., 2021), affective skills, customer relations, and interpersonal communication skills. They enable one to improve how they relate with the clients and other personnel at the workplace, thereby improving the morale and quality of services delivered to the clients. The close correlation established in this study supports the importance of socio-emotional competencies in addition to technical training as a means of increasing employment chances.

H3: Socio-emotional Disposition Significantly Mediates the Relationship between Technical Skill and Graduate Employability in South-western Uganda

The presence of the mediation effect of socio-emotional disposition between technical skills and employability here is most pronounced, as the path coefficient is rather high (0.716) and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Technical competencies therefore infer that this aspect plays a role in employability by depending partly on

socio-emotional traits. Yorke, & Knight (2006) on graduate employment stressed that there is a force between soft and hard competencies; this cross-sectional study offers evidence of this complementary style. Based on the above findings, it is evident that educational programs should go beyond the mere acquisition of technical skills and should also incorporate religious efforts into the creation of socio-emotional skills among graduates to improve their qualifications.

DISCUSSIONS

H1: Technical Skills have a Positive Effect on Enhancing the Employability of Hospitality Graduates in Southern Uganda

Technical skills are well known to have the potential to increase the chances of employment in relevant industries, such as hospitality (Ghani et al., 2022), which requires a specific set of competencies in the job area. Technical competencies, on the other hand, are specialized knowledge skills, professional competencies, trade and craft knowledge, and expertise used in a profession and to accomplish technical roles within a profession (Rauner, & Ahrens, 2022). In the hospitality industry, these are as follows: culinary arts, customer relations, event organization and management, cleaning, and hygiene, among others. Research has shown that various benefits accrue to the holder of a technically-oriented skill, which increases his/her, employability, particularly within sectors that offer functional and service delivery jobs, such as the hospitality industry.

On the other hand, other studies also indicated that this concept is very important, but at the same time, technical competencies alone are not enough to guarantee career sustainability. According to Baum (2019), human capital theory revealed that each industry needs technical competencies for qualification of the hospitality workforce, but practical execution of these skills in complicated workplaces is relevant as well. Those who graduated with technical skills may find themselves unable to cope with the dynamic, expanding field of the hospitality industry due to

their inability to solve problems on the go. This has a particular bearing in the South-Western region of Uganda, where the employees working in the hospitality industries are expected to respond to a wide range of complex and unforeseen issues, including customers' complaints and varying requirements of the guests.

Moreover, Zopiatis, & Theocharous, (2018) continue that the employers of the hospitality sector require combination of technical knowledge and other competencies, including communication and teamwork. For instance, Mgaiwa (2021); Senbeto et al. (2023) in their research on the African tourism and hospitality graduates indicates the local employment challenge is influenced by technical know-how, socio-emotional competencies, and flexibility amid changing job market dynamics. The authors point out that for graduates to find job placement in competitive markets such as the Ugandan market, they need to possess both technical competencies as well as interpersonal skills.

In conclusion, there is a need to embrace technical skills to enhance the employability of hospitality graduates in South Western Uganda. They form the basis of job performance, especially in industries where vocational experience is deemed most important, especially for new employees. However, to have long-lasting career success and to prepare for versatile situations in the sphere of hospitality, it is necessary to add other competencies to technical skills. These skills are important, and as the industry grows, it will become important to have a mixture of these skills to be employed and to retain employment.

H2: Socio-Emotional Disposition has a Positive Effect on Enhancing the Employability of Hospitality Graduates in Southern Uganda

Socio-emotional skills are important in explaining the employability of hospitality graduates in South-Western Uganda despite the rising tourism and hospitality industries. These skills refer to relevant knowledge and practical customer skills that are associated with the delivery of services in the hospitality industry, including service of food

and beverage, front office, and event organizing skills (Fraser, 2020). This is especially important in this region, where the tourism industry is becoming a more and more important economic sector. Technical competence is therefore a basic skill that enables graduates who are aspiring to work in the hospitality industry, particularly in the hotel sector.

H3: Socio-emotional Disposition Significantly Mediates the Relationship between Technical Skill and Graduate Employability in South-western Uganda

Socio-emotional disposition thus mediates the relationship between technical skills and employment status by further availing to how hospitality graduates from South-Western Uganda put their technical competencies into practice. Holders of socio-emotional skills by possessing good interpersonal communication, collaboration, and self-organization skills are in a privileged position to show their technical skills to employers (Gruijters et al., 2024). An important characteristic of most careers is interpersonal skills, especially in vulnerable fields such as hospitality, wherein an individual's relation with the clients indeed determines the fate of the trade.

Furthermore, employment socio-emotional skills assist the graduates in coping with issues related to job search as well as socialization within their working environments. Although technical competency plays an important role in the ability to perform several tasks, students with higher levels of emotional intelligence, customer care and adaptability are more suited to responding to the volatile environment of the hospitality industry. It enables them to adapt to different environments, cope with stress while undergoing a job interview, and also present themselves properly to secure and sustain their jobs.

This flexibility also helps them to find new jobs when they are challenged by other similarly qualified counterparts in the labor market. Last but not least, the socio-emotional disposition serves as a factor to retain and succeed in the job and the career. In their work settings, learners with

good soft skills will be able to relate well with the employees and employers, hence likely to produce the right working atmosphere that results in job satisfaction and retention. Their interpersonal conflict solvency, their ability to accept feedback, and staying professional at work enable them to secure more employment and chances to progress in their careers. That is why socio-emotional skills are proven to moderate employment outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

This study revealed that possessing technical skills is a relevant determinant of employment of hospitality graduates in southern Uganda. However, these skills alone do not guarantee long-term employment. This can be argued that tertiary education has not greatly benefited society. The employers' presumptions regarding the graduates are that they are supposed to have technical skills and other attributes that can supplement their performance in the workplace, in addition to a competency-based curriculum. In addition to that, technical skill is another consideration in this job market, particularly for fresh graduates.

The acquired skills help graduates to be prepared to respond to the service requirements in hospitality positions. But then again, the hospitality industry is competitive, and technical skills deemed essential for implementation have to be sharpened more often. Students who do not update their knowledge or skills to improve their technical proficiency and knowledge in the market may struggle to get jobs in the market.

Another important implication of the study is the interactive regression model of technical skills by socio-emotional disposition and employment status. Graduates who have adequate socio-emotional competencies like communication, working in a group, problem-solving, and flexibility are more successful in converting their technical competencies toward job opportunities. These socio-emotional traits can allow the graduates to fit into organizational culture, manage interpersonal relationships in the workplace, and overcome work obstacles more

efficiently than others, which indeed makes them more employable.

Therefore, the promotion and maintenance of a robust socio-emotional character is important, especially for the achievement of long-term sustainability in employment. The present study underlines the importance of devised and comprehensive strategies for graduate training. These training programs which address the two sets of skills will ensure that hospitality graduates are found to be competent in all the hospitality areas when they are hired in the industry.

Recommendations Based on the Findings

Teaching socio-emotional skills have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between technical skills and graduate employability it is recommended that educational institutions integrate socio-emotional skills into the curriculum.

Enhancing practical technical or vocational education and training are significant for initial entry into the hospitality workforce by having a direct influence on the employment prospects of the workforce. Therefore, for hospitality training institutions technical and practical training seems pertinent with a higher priority in that aspect. This may be done through relationships with hotels, restaurants, and other tourist-related facilities to enable the students to gain practical experience as they learn. Expanding the number of internship and apprenticeship opportunities will ensure more graduates acquire situational knowledge that supplements technical knowledge hence making them be more employable.

The results present that socio-emotional competencies enhance the interaction between technical skills on employment. Thus, institutions need to incorporate socialized career development programs that are beyond technical training. These programs should therefore address issues of career identity, career motivation, and career mobility, to make the learner be equipped for not only the first job but for the whole career. Graduates should be provided with workshops, mentoring, and career coaching to ensure that they

have strong personal and professional characteristics to succeed in the workplace.

It therefore becomes imperative for the institutions that offer the educational programs to forge even closer ties with the various players in the industry. The analysis shows that employability relates to technical details apprehension as well as socio-emotional competencies.\

There is a need for policies to be developed and implemented by the respective ministries: the Ministry of Education and Sports, and the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities which will encourage the promotion of skills development programs that include technical as well as soft skills. This means that there is a need to have positive incentives such as subsidies to vocational training in place such as hospitality and those providing continuous professional development programs. Furthermore, there should be institutions which are known as career centers or graduate support agencies that help graduates to seek employment after school.

Conflict of Interest

The authors had no conflict of interest in the publication of this work.

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