

EXAMINATION OF THE ATTITUDE OF GRADUATES JOINING THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN KENYA

KABII FRANCIS (PhD)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine the perception of industry personnel on the attitude of graduates joining the hospitality industry in Kenya. The main objective was to examine the perception of employers in the hospitality industry on the attitude of graduates from universities and technical colleges on their employability and performance in the hospitality industry. The study used qualitative and quantitative research methods. Quantitative data was collected through researcher-administered questionnaires, while qualitative data was collected through interviews. The target respondents were managers, supervisors, and departmental heads who interact with these graduates. The overall perception of university graduates' workplace attitudes was neutral to moderately positive. The data revealed that most respondents rated Kenya Utalii College graduates' attitudes as "good" across all positions. There was statistically significant evidence that the distribution of attitudes toward college graduates differs by respondent's job position. The study recommends additional internships, work placements, and practicum courses for graduates before joining the industry

Keyword: Attitude, Perception, College, University, Difference

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study was to examine the perception of industry personnel on the attitude of graduates joining the hospitality industry in Kenya. The main objective of the study was to examine the perception of employers in the hospitality industry on the attitude of graduates from university, technical colleges on their employability and performance in hospitality industry. This information was sought from supervisors, managers and departmental heads from rated hotels in Kenya who were randomly selected. These respondents were from rated hotels in North and south coast of Kenya, Nairobi, Naivasha and Kisumu. The respondents were found suitable as they interact with this graduate during their internship period, when recruiting for their organizations and in some case after employment. Several studies have been conducted on graduates joining the hospitality industry but limited on comparative studies on their attitude, a gap the research intends to fill.

Several theories provide a foundation for understanding how attitude influences employability and job performance. The Theory of Planned Behavior developed by (Ajzen, 1991) found that attitudes influence behaviors and job performance. Person-Environment Fit Theory suggests that alignment between an individual's attitudes, values, and personality leads to better job

performance and satisfaction. This means that graduates with a positive attitude are more likely to fit into dynamic and service-oriented environments like the hospitality industry. Employers recognize this fit and are more inclined to hire individuals who align with the company's customer-centric values. This is the theory that guided the study.

1.2 Study hypothesis

The following hypothesis was tested:

1. **Null hypothesis:** There is no significant difference in attitude of graduates from universities, Technical and Vocational Colleges.
2. **Alternate hypothesis:** There is significant difference in attitude of graduates from universities, Technical and Vocational College.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

As the tourism sector in Kenya grows, the demand for competent and well-prepared graduate's increases. These graduates come from universities, vocational and technical institutions which training tourism and hospitality programs at certificates, diplomas or degree level. The employers have interactions with these graduates when they are on internship period or during industrial placement period if not when recruiting. They also have an opportunity of comparing their skills and knowledge in the hospitality industry. Among the various attributes employers seek when recruiting, positive attitude is ranked as the most crucial (Otenyo-Matanda, 2019). According to Robbins and Judge (2017), attitude affects how employees perceive their job, colleagues, and guests a factor that directly impacts job performance in the hospitality sector. Positive attitude encompasses optimism, emotional intelligence, resilience, and a service-oriented mindset. In Kenya, Mutinda and Mayaka (2020) emphasize that hospitality graduates with a positive demeanour are more likely to succeed in entry-level positions and advance into supervisory roles. A study by Nzioki and Ondigi (2015) highlighted that frontline hospitality staff in Nairobi hotels who displayed a positive attitude contributed significantly to positive guest reviews and repeat business. Research by Kiiru (2018) on Kenyan hotel managers found that over 75% prioritized attitude over technical skills when hiring fresh graduates. This finding supports the global hospitality intonation: "Hire for attitude, train for skill."

In addition, Mainga, et al. (2022) and De Silva, et l., (2024) pointed out that graduates with a positive attitude, learn faster, adapt better to fast-paced environments, and demonstrate greater job commitment. Despite the recognized importance of attitude, many hospitality training institutions in Kenya still focus predominantly on technical skills. A study by Xu, Tavitiyaman, & Lo, (2022) suggested that curriculum reforms should always include soft skills such as positive psychology, emotional intelligence, and guest relations.

2.1 Graduates' Attitudes and Employment – A Balance Theory Perspective

This study was guide by Heider's Balance Theory (1948). This theory in our case would explores how graduates' attitudes toward their education, potential employers, and themselves influence their employment outcomes (Adejumo, Duimering, & Zhong, 2008). Balance Theory examines triadic relationships among:

- P (Person): The graduate
- O (Other): The employer
- X (Object): The graduate's degree, field of study, or university

A balanced triad (all positive or two negatives, one positive) creates psychological harmony, while an imbalanced triad causes cognitive tension, prompting attitude or behaviour change. If graduates have a positive view of their degree, respect employers, and perceive employers as valuing their qualifications, they exhibit confidence and motivation—leading to higher employability and positive attitude upon employment. If graduates value their degree and the employer, but believe the employer does not value their qualification, imbalance occurs. This can lead to, reduced self-confidence, Doubt about their education Withdrawal from certain job opportunities, Lower employment outcomes despite being qualified and negative attitude after employment. Graduates may adjust their attitudes or career goals to restore balance. Universities and career services should bridge perception gaps between graduates attitude and employment. Graduates' employment prospects are not influenced solely by their qualifications, but also by the perceived alignment between their attitude, self-view, their education, and employer expectations. Maintaining a balanced attitudinal triad fosters confidence, clarity, and career success.

2.2 Factors influencing the graduate's attitude.

Several factors influence the attitude of graduates from different training institutions as they join the industry. These factors can be categorized into individual, institutional, and external influences. Phyu, (2024) noted that graduates who have been trained with up-to-date, industry-relevant knowledge tend to have a more positive attitude towards entering the workforce (Institutions that regularly update their curriculum to align with industry standards produce graduates who feel better prepared.

Institutions that emphasize practical experience through internships, apprenticeships, and hands-on projects equip graduates with the confidence and real-world experience needed to transition smoothly into the industry. This enhances their attitude towards the industry, as they feel better prepared. Graduates from well-known institutions or those with a strong industry connection tend to have a more positive attitude about joining the workforce, as they believe their degree will be well recognized and valued by employers (Thao, et al.,2024).

A strong alumni network can positively influence graduates' attitudes by providing mentorship, networking opportunities, and career guidance, thereby boosting confidence and motivation as they enter the workforce. Keating, & Melis, (2022) acknowledges that the attitudes of peers in training institutions play a significant role in shaping individual outlooks. If a group of graduates holds a positive view of their chosen field or industry, it can influence others to adopt similar attitudes.

Singh, & Blessinger, (2024) found that in some cultures, there is a strong emphasis on securing certain types of employment (e.g., government jobs or prestigious firms), which can impact a graduate's initial attitude toward the industry. Those from cultures with high expectations may feel pressure or reluctance in joining specific industries.

A graduate's internal drive, work ethic, and career ambitions play a big role in shaping their attitude towards entering the workforce. Highly motivated graduates are more likely to be optimistic and proactive, while those with lower motivation may feel uncertain or disengaged Chapman, (2024). Graduates with a clear vision of career progression and opportunities within their industry are likely to have a positive attitude towards entering the workforce. Those who lack a clear path for growth may approach industry work with hesitation or dissatisfaction.

The potential for a competitive salary can impact a graduate's attitude towards entering a particular industry. If the industry offers competitive salaries, graduates may be more motivated and positive about their entry into the workforce.

Graduates who have access to career counseling, job placement services, or industry connections through their institutions often feel more confident and ready to enter the workforce.

3.0 STUDY METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design was adopted in the study. The study also used qualitative and quantitative research methods. Quantitative data was collected through researcher administered questionnaire while qualitative data was collected through interviews. The target respondents were managers, supervisor and departmental heads who normally interact with these graduates. These respondents were from hotels that were rated from 2 stars to 5 stars and were randomly selected. A sample of 159 respondents participated in the study. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS which generated statistical tests such as frequencies, chi-square goodness of fit, and chi square test of independence needed to test relationships and dependence. Content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondent's profiles

A total of 159 respondents (98 males and 72 females) participated in the study. Their job position ranged from General Managers 94 (51.1%), Division Heads 26 (14.1%), supervisors 22 (12.0%) and operations Managers 14 (7.6%).

The hotel rating of the respondents was Two-star hotels, 8 respondents (4.3%), Three-star hotels 52 respondents (28.3%), Four-star hotels 63 respondents (34.2%) and Five-stars hotels 36 respondents (19.6%) which was satisfactory and representative.

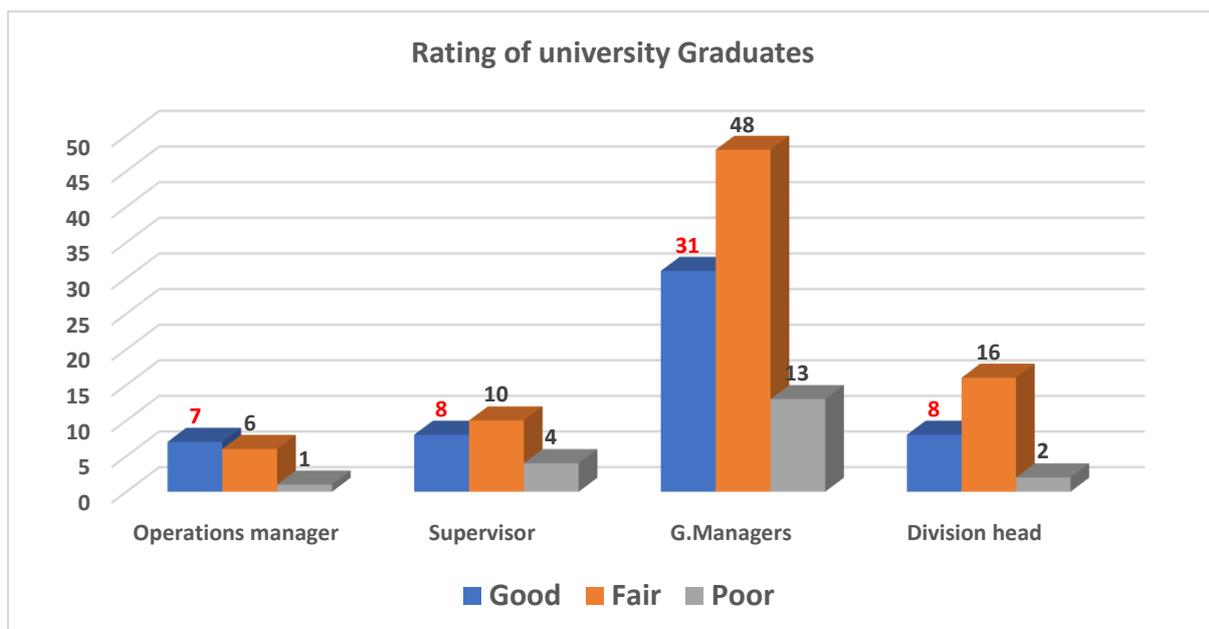
4.2 Perception of Managers, Supervisors and Divisional Heads on University Graduate Attitudes upon Employment

To assess how different respondents perceive the attitudes of university graduates in the workplace different categories of respondent were asked to give their opinions. The majority of respondents (53.1%) rated university graduates' attitudes as "Fair", indicating that graduates meet expectations but often do not exceed them. Only 33.8% of respondents rated graduates' attitudes as "Good", suggesting that a relatively small proportion demonstrated outstanding workplace behaviours. A minority (13.1%) viewed graduates' attitudes as "Poor", signalling

that overt dissatisfaction is limited but notable. "Fair" was the dominant perception across all positions with Higher-ranking positions (like Managers and Division Heads) tended to be more neutral ("Fair") rather than overly positive ("Good") or negative ("Poor"). Overall, only one-third of respondents viewed graduates' attitudes positively ("Good").

Rating of graduate's attitude by Managers, supervisors and divisional heads Managers who represented the largest sample group rated university graduates as fair (52.2%), indicating a neutral or moderate view of graduates. About 14.1% of the rated their attitude as poor indicating some concern or unmet expectations.

It was also found that 50% of operations managers rated graduates as having a good attitude. Supervisor's ratings were more mixed, with 36.4% of them rating graduates' attitude good as compared to 18.2% who rated them as poor. This suggests that supervisors may have observed more behavioural or performance issues among graduates, possibly due to their closer day-to-day interactions. Most division heads rated the graduates fair (61.5%), with only 30.8% of the rating university graduate's attitude as good.



The overall perception of university graduates' workplace attitudes is neutral to moderately positive. Most respondents, especially at the managerial and division head levels, find graduates' attitudes acceptable but not exceptional. However, lower and non-managerial roles show more critical views, with a higher proportion of "Poor" ratings. This suggests that while university graduates generally meet basic expectations, there is significant room for improvement, particularly in professionalism, engagement, and workplace readiness.

To test if there was any relationship between the respondent's position and their rating, Chi Square test of independence was done. It hypothesised that:

1. Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant relationship between respondent position way they rated and graduate's attitude.

2. Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant relationship between respondent position way they rated and graduates attitude. To test if their existed any relationships, chi square test of independent was taken.

The Chi square test of independence findings was ($\chi^2 = 7.55$ (df) = 8, p-value = 0.478.) Since the p-value (0.478) was greater than significance level of 0.05.

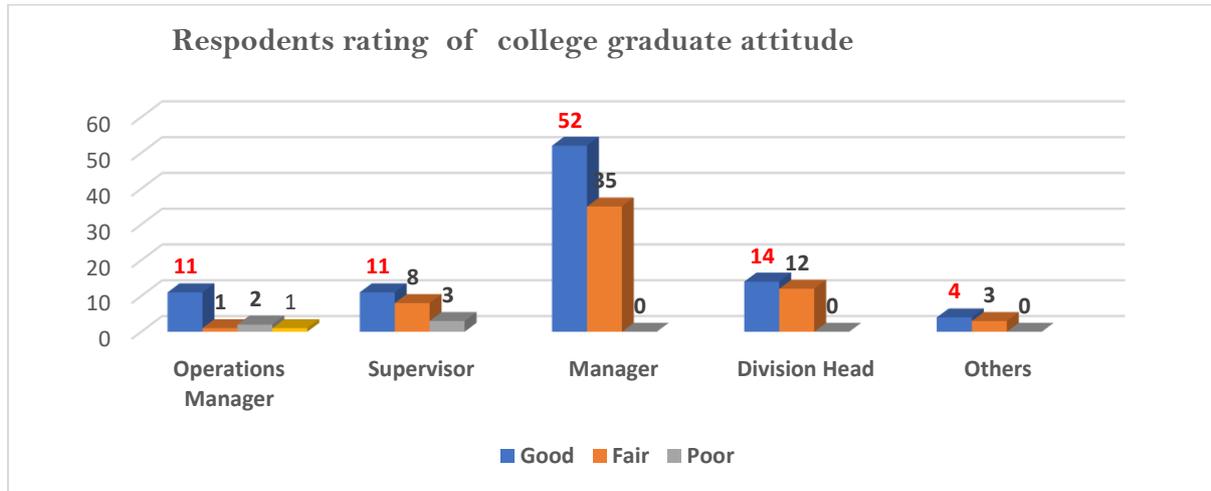
The study failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no statistically significant relationship between the respondents' positions and their ratings of university graduates' attitudes, meaning that respondent's position and rating were independent.

4.3 Perception of managers, supervisors and divisional heads on attitude of graduates from technical and vocational schools.

Respondent in different position were asked to rate the attitude of graduated from technical and vocational schools who they have interacted with during their employment, internship or interviews.

Respondents Job Position	Rating Attitude of College Graduates			Total
	Good	Fair	Poor	
Operations Manager	11	1	2	14
Supervisor	11	8	3	22
Manager	52	35	0	88
Division Head	14	12	0	26
Others	4	3	0	7
	92	59	5	157

A large majority of rated them "Good" (92 out of 156 = 59%) suggesting a very positive perception. Only 5 respondents rated graduates as "Poor", and they all came from Operations Managers and Supervisors. Managers and Division Heads gave zero "Poor" ratings, and leaned heavily toward "Good" and "Fair" Operations Managers had a wider spread of responses, with 2 out of 14 (14%) giving a "Poor" rating. Supervisors also showed a more critical view, with 3 "Poor" ratings Managers showed strong positivity—60% "Good", 40% "Fair", and no "Poor". Division Heads and Others were also entirely positive (100% Good or Fair).



Overall, college graduates’ attitude was viewed positively across all groups (Good + Fair = over 96% of responses). Negativity (Poor or Other) was very low (only 6 responses out of 157 total). The Operations Manager were more critical (higher "Poor" rate) as compared to Division Heads and Others have no "Poor" ratings at all — just Good or Fair.

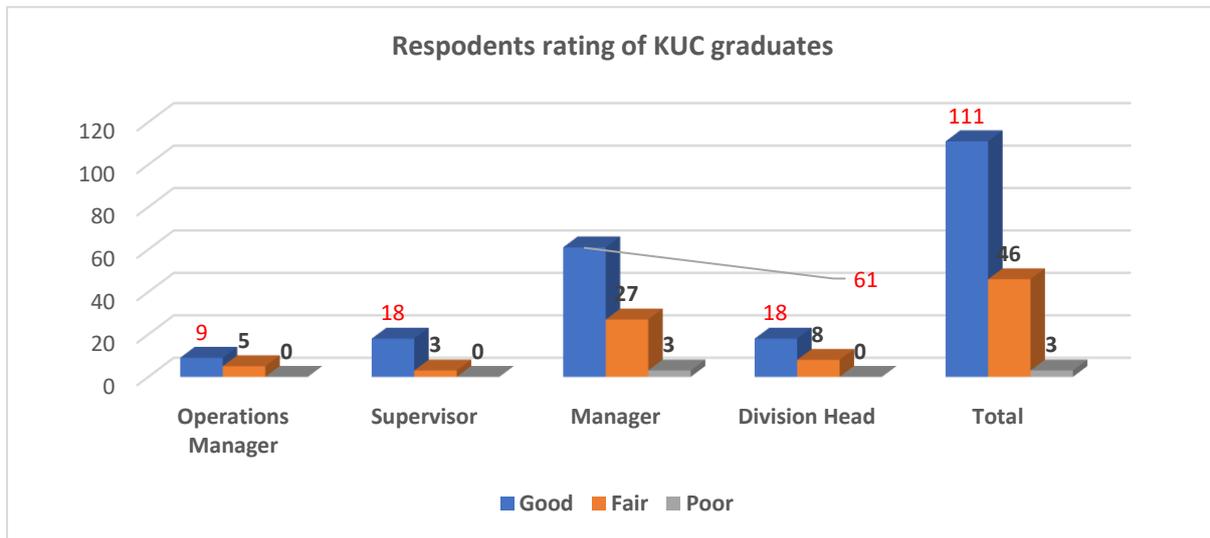
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	conclusion
Pearson Chi-Square	23.071a	12	0.027	<i>There was statistically significant evidence that the distribution of attitudes toward college graduates differs by job position</i>
Likelihood Ratio	22.994	12	0.028	
Linear-by-Linear Association	0	1	0.988	
N of Valid Cases	157			

Chi square test of independence finding was ($\chi^2 = 23.07(df) = 12, p= 0.027$) Because the p-value (≈ 0.027) was below 0.05, the study rejected the null hypothesis of independence at the 5% level. In other words, there was statistically significant evidence that the distribution of attitudes toward college graduates differs by job position.

4.4 Perception of managers, supervisors and divisional heads on attitude of graduates from Kenya Utalii College (KUC).

Respondents were also asked to rate the attitude of KUC graduate comparison with university graduate and those from public and private colleges. The managers formed the largest group (91 respondents), with 67.0% rating the attitude of KUC graduates as “Good,” 29.7% “Fair,” and 3.3% “Poor.” Those in the supervisory position were overwhelmingly positive with 85.7% of them rating their opinion as “Good” and 14.3% “Fair,” with no “Poor. Operations managers had the highest “Fair” proportion (35.7%), and no “Poor” ratings. The overall rating very positive: out of 160 respondents, 111 (69.4%) said “Good,” 46 (28.8%) “Fair,” and only 3 (1.9%) “Poor.

In comparison, it was noted that the attitude of KUC graduate was rated higher than those from universities and other colleges with about 69% of all respondents rating their attitude as good



4.5 Findings on relationship between respondent’s position and their perception on attitude

A Chi-Square test of independence was conducted to assess the relationship between the respondent position (categorical) and the attitude toward KUC graduates (categorical). Given the presence of expected cell counts below 5, the assumptions of the Chi-Square test were violated. To address this issue, a Monte Carlo simulation version of Fisher’s Exact Test was also performed.

Pearson Chi-Square Value: 23.235, Degrees of Freedom (df): 12, Asymptotic Significance (p-value): 0.026. The Pearson Chi-Square test suggested a significant association between respondent position and attitude toward KUC graduates, with a p-value of 0.026. However, the test results are invalid due to a violation of the Chi-Square test assumptions. Specifically, 60% of cells had expected counts below 5 (minimum = 0.04), which significantly affects the reliability of the Chi-Square results. This non-significant result indicates that, after correcting for assumption violations, there is no statistically significant association between the position of respondents and their attitudes toward KUC graduates. After applying Fisher’s Exact Test, which is more appropriate in this case due to the small expected frequencies, it was found that there was no significant relationship between the position of respondents and their evaluation of KUC graduates’ attitudes.

The data revealed that most respondents rated KUC graduates' attitudes as "Good" across all positions, with very few respondents rating attitudes as "Poor". The minimal variation across categories, especially in the "Poor" column, likely reflects a general positive perception of KUC graduates rather than meaningful differences across respondent positions.

There is no evidence of a statistically significant association between the position of respondents and their attitude toward KUC graduates. The results suggest that, regardless of role, respondents generally hold a favourable view of KUC graduates' attitudes. Therefore, we

conclude that position within the organization does not significantly influence how respondents' rate KUC graduates' attitudes.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Managers who represented the largest sample group rated university graduates as fair indicating a neutral or moderate view of graduates and unmet expectations. Operations managers rated graduates as having a good attitude. Supervisor's ratings were more mixed, and ranged from good to poor.

The overall perception of university graduates' workplace attitudes was neutral to moderately positive. Most respondents, especially at the managerial and division head levels, found graduates' attitudes acceptable but not exceptional. However, lower and non-managerial roles showed more critical views, with a higher proportion of "Poor" ratings. This suggests that while university graduates generally meet basic expectations, there is significant room for improvement, particularly in professionalism, engagement, and workplace readiness.

There was no statistically significant relationship between the respondents' positions and their ratings of university graduates' attitudes, meaning that respondent's position and rating were independent

A large majority of respondents rated the attitude of graduates from technical and vocational institutes as "Good" suggesting a very positive perception. Overall, college graduates attitude was viewed positively across all groups. There was statistically significant evidence that the distribution of attitudes toward college graduates differed by job position with managers and supervisors having the highest rating.

In comparison, it was noted that the attitude of KUC graduate was rated higher than those from universities and other colleges with most managers, supervisors and divisional heads rating their attitude as good.

Technical colleges emphasize practical, skills-based training, including internships and real-world hospitality work while some University programs focus more on theory, management concepts, leaving graduates less prepared for entry-level operational roles. Some employers perceive university grads as having higher expectations in terms of salary and responsibility, even when they lack relevant experience. Technical college graduates were viewed as more humble, adaptable, and ready to work hard from the ground up.

The study recommends additional internships, work placements, and practicum courses for graduates before joining the industry. Positive attitude must be emphasised. Collaboration between hotels, restaurants, and resorts and training institution be enhanced to facilitate hands-on learning opportunities and attitude building. Other concentrating on Teaching core hospitality skills such service etiquette, food & beverage operations, housekeeping, Communication, Conflict resolution, Time management, Cross-cultural sensitivity that finally affect graduates' attitude upon recruitment should be enhanced

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