

Determinants of the Responding Level of Affective Learning in Tourism and Hospitality in Kenya: Implications for Perceived Acquisition of Soft Skills

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/ejhtr.2013/vol13n1120>

Published February 23, 2024

Citation: Marete N.N., Korir J., and Imbaya B.O. (2025) Determinants of the Responding Level of Affective Learning in Tourism and Hospitality in Kenya: Implications for Perceived Acquisition of Soft Skills, *European Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, Vol.13, No.1, pp.,1-20

Abstract: *The tourism and hospitality industry are fast transitioning into a people-centrist industry that requires graduates with the requisite industry-specific soft skills. Affective learning has been recognized among hospitality professionals as an avenue through which students' personal and emotional needs can be fulfilled, raising their perceptions of acquisition of desired skills. Despite associating the affective learning domain with the development of soft skills, scholars have failed to demonstrate the contribution of individual affective domain levels to students perceived acquisition of such skills. Therefore, this paper leverages the humanistic theory of learning to establish determinants of the responding level of the affective domain and their implications to perceived acquisition of soft skills. A sample of 262 second and third-year diploma students in tourism and hospitality courses were conveniently drawn from institutions in Nairobi County. The paper uses the PLS-SEM framework to show that active participation, complying with phenomena, and reacting to stimuli are significant determinants of the responding level in tourism and hospitality diploma training. In addition, the paper demonstrates that the responding level effects are positive and significant predictors of perceived acquisition of soft skills among tourism and hospitality diploma students. The paper concludes that the responding level of the affective domain provides tourism and hospitality institutions with the opportunity to tailor their diploma programs and objectives towards experiential learning and development of industry-specific soft skills. An expanded scope of tourism and hospitality diploma students is, however, likely to enhance external validity of the findings.*

Keywords: determinants, affective learning, responding level, soft skills, perceived acquisition

INTRODUCTION

The fast-paced and competitive world of hospitality has galvanized investment in staff training and development as a lynchpin for long-term success (Bardarova et al., 2013; Dicen et al., 2019, Lashley, 2018). However, while there has been interest on affective learning in hospitality and tourism, not much has been explored regarding determinants of the various levels of affective learning and the resulting consequences to acquisition of soft skills (Chau & Cheung, 2017; Volker et al., 2023). Most concerning, are the criticisms being directed to institutions of higher learning because of the little attention programs offered give to affective learning outcomes such as the responding level outcomes (Mais-Thompson et al., 2017). The responding level of affective learning is not a new concept. It has received wide acknowledgement as a fundamental level of learning in Bloom's affective taxonomy. According to Bloom's revised taxonomy (Krathwohl et al., 1973), the responding level encompasses learners' active participation, attending to and reacting to phenomena, leading to learning outcomes such as compliance and satisfaction in responding as well as a willingness to respond.

Mais-Thomson et al. (2024) discuss the concept of the responding level of affective learning in tourism and hospitality from an emotional intelligence perspective, arguing that although being trained to serve and entertain, hospitality and tourism professionals are also trained to be sensitive to guests' emotions, needing to demonstrate new behaviour sets gained through experience. Tapping the aspects of compliance, willingness and satisfaction in responding, hospitality and tourism training programs ought to be well-designed to not only focus on technical skills, but also emphasize emotional intelligence (Volker et al., 2023). Ciapponi (2019) further concludes that emotional intelligence is particularly critical for hospitality and tourism professionals, due to the dual role it plays in successful delivery of service and in the building of a strong and motivated team.

In other words, by leveraging the responding level of affective learning, tourism and hospitality establishments stand to benefit from individuals showing enthusiasm for action and interest in outcomes (Rowe et al., 2023). Consequently, training programs in hospitality and tourism seeking to enrich students experiential learning and visibility should be willing to complement cognition with affection (Wu et al., 2019). Kraiger et al. (1993) asserted that cognitive ability acts as a foundation for affective learning, which itself is critical to acquisition of behavioural and practical skills. Therefore, Wu et al. (2019) pointed out that teaching pedagogy that leans towards the affective domain prepares trainees in among other skills, reviewing value choices, revising value systems, reflecting on beliefs, and adopting creative and innovative approaches. However, few studies emphasize the importance of the individual affective learning domain levels, including the responding level, in hospitality and tourism training programs.

Soft skills are of critical relevance to the hospitality and tourism industry. The sector has experienced remarkable changes in recent times, leading to differences in soft skills among employees, and warranting a paradigm shift in training programs (Runda et al., 2024). Acknowledging the critical role of soft skills training in hospitality and tourism is likely to nurture a positive attitude among hospitality personnel allowing them to be accommodative and friendly to customers (Colaco, 2024). Despite the significant benefits of soft skills in the workplace, the tourism and hospitality sector in Kenya like other sectors, has not escaped the soft skills menace that faces the country. Evidence highlights how lack of soft skills, including lack of effective communication, critical thinking, teamwork, time management and problem solving is negatively impacting youth jobs (Luvizu, 2023, Mbuthia, 2023, Ng'etich 2019; Onyango, 2023).

The skills gap problem in tourism and hospitality training in Kenya has been associated with the supply led training that most institutions adopt when the industry is demand driven (Francis et al., 2020). There are several conceptual papers on development of soft skills among hospitality students, however most of these studies concentrate on industrial placements as opportunities of developing these skills resulting in inadequate clarification of the role played by the affective skills (Losekoot et al., 2018; Zekry et al., 2023). In addition, these studies fail to articulate the determinants of the specific levels of the affective domain and their resulting consequences to perceived acquisition of soft skills among students. Therefore, this paper examines determinants of the responding level of the affective domain with reference to diploma training in tourism and hospitality and their influence on perceived acquisition of soft skills among students within institutions offering the tourism and hospitality diploma program.

Although the diploma in tourism and hospitality management program remains quite popular in institutions of higher learning in Kenya, featuring prominently in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions as well as in public and private universities, it has not attracted enough scholarly attention. Tourism and hospitality literature on training and internship focuses mostly on University tourism and hospitality programs at the expense of the diploma program (Arma & Arma, 2021; Francis et al., 2020; Farmaki, 2018, Vo et al., 2022). However, the popularity of the diploma program in tourism and hospitality management in Kenya suggests its significance in the industry. In fact, a diploma program in tourism and hospitality management is associated with offering students a wide spectrum of career options in addition to hands-on experience in areas such as event planning, customer service, and marketing (Askren & James, 2021).

Objective of the study

The main objective of this study was to establish determinants of the responding level of the affective domain and their implications to perceived acquisition of soft skills. Therefore, rest of this paper is organized as follows: First the study reviews the humanistic theory of learning

seeking to justify the importance of soft skills in the emerging interpersonal nature of the hospitality industry. The study then reviews the concept of affective learning, and existing empirical studies relating responding level affects to soft skills development, and formulating hypothesis. Next, the study methodology outlining the design, sampling, data collection and analysis approaches are presented. The paper then highlights the study findings and concludes with a discussion of findings, implications, recommendations and future research directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Humanistic Theory of Learning

The workplace in today's competitive business environment is becoming increasingly interpersonal, requiring that graduates in any educational discipline should acquire relevant soft skills. Research shows that despite being relatively new, the clamour for soft skills competency is gaining prominence in career progression (Nikadimors & Iranchenko, 2020, Tholen, 2017). Soft skills are defined as character traits and interpersonal skills that enable individuals to interact seamlessly with others (Kenton, 2024). Soft skills complement hard skills which mainly relate to occupational skills and knowledge.

In the tourism and hospitality industry, soft skills are critical for survival. The industry relies on a combination of both hard and soft skills, blending managerial, operational, and interpersonal skills (Solnet et al., 2019). The industry particularly expects graduates that are well versed with customer service, communication, problem-solving, cultural awareness, and attention to detail in addition to strong leadership (Dhaliwal & Misra, 2020). We therefore operationalize perceived acquisition of soft skills as the feeling among students that the hospitality training program offers targeted training and workshops that focus on soft skills such as teamwork, communication, adaptability and problem-solving.

The humanistic learning theory proposed by Abraham Maslow, later supported by Carl Rogers and James Bungental in the early 1900's pointed out that learning is a natural perception whose ultimate goal is self-actualization (Mukhalalati & Taylor, 2019). The argument is that learning is hierarchical with individuals functioning from basic physiological survival desires and climbing up to self-actualization, a state where they perceive their cognitive, physical and emotional needs to have been realized. The theory emphasizes learner's autonomy and freedom, requiring that learning programs should take cognizant of the fact that the learning motivation should materialize from the learner and as such the learner should do so in their/own free will and desire for knowledge (Aliakbari et al., 2015).

Affective learning

Affective learning outcomes are the brain child of Krathwohl et al. (1964) being conceived to focus on 'affects' or the states of mind in contrast to the cognitive focused-model that

emphasizes mental tasks as the desired learning goals (Arora & Sharma, 2018). In Krathwohl et al. (1964) conceptualization of affective learning, the learning levels comprising of receiving, responding, valuing, organizing, and characterizing are structured in line with the doctrine of internalization, which allows an individual's affect to grow and guide the individuals behaviour (Seels & Glasgow, 1990 as cited in Ozer-sanal et al., 2019, p. 708). Retrospectively, affects are context-specific and experiential-based, and often foster a growth mindset that facilitates organizational change (Arora & Shamia, 2018). Therefore, individual affective domain levels have explicit measurable milestones that are used to determine growth through the level.

Scholars have emphasized on the importance of the responding level of affective domain in training, amplifying elements such as active participation, complying with phenomena, and reacting to stimuli as being critical to soft skills development in tourism and hospitality (Huertas-Valdivia, 2021; Islam & Kirillova, 2021; Paskova & Zelenka, 2024). However, mere identification of elements amplified in the responding level does not reveal whether they adequately determine the responding level and how they ultimately influence acquisition of soft skills. Hospitality educators are now focusing on formulating training objectives that promote emotional hospitality in the knowledge that graduates require skills to navigate the changing terrain of the industry and to emotionally connect with guests (Rellon, 2024).

Active Participation and the Responding Level

A number of scholars have associated active learning with the responding level of the affective domain without necessary referencing it as a determinant. For instance, Huertas-Valdivia (2021) in a study that referenced experiential learning using role play, discussed active participation relative to responding to phenomena in training. The study revealed that active participation introduced a real-world environment that enhanced responsiveness to learning. Chau and Cheung (2017) on their part demonstrated that active learning nurtures a practical learning environment that promotes knowledge seeking behaviour laced with a responsive spirit. An exploratory study conducted in the higher education context revealed that active participation in tourism and hospitality enhances response and participation to presentations and provision of feedback allowing for skills development (Nyanjom & Wilkiris, 2021). The following hypothesis was therefore formulated.

H_{a1}: *Active participation is a significant determinant of the responding level of the affective learning domain in tourism and hospitality diploma program.*

Complying with phenomena and the Responding Level

Various scholars have also probed the role of complying with phenomena in the responding level of the affective domain. In a qualitative study leveraging budget hotels, Musavengane (2019) implicitly discussed the critical role of complying with phenomena in responsible tourism, seen as a vector in the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In their study conducted in the Nigerian hospitality industry, Oriade et al. (2021) discussed the significant role of

complying with phenomena in responding to sustainable awareness and organizational culture in the hotel industry. Elsewhere, through their book chapter featuring social responsibility in the tourism context, Paskova and Zelenka (2024) highlighted the value of complying with codes of conduct and ethics, including fair trade, ISO standards, green management, and SA8000 towards the realization of social responsibility in hospitality and tourism. From the Kenyan context, Merab's (2023) cross sectional study using 202 food handlers drawn from fine dining hotels revealed that exposure to the responding level element of complying with phenomena during training enhanced compliance with hygiene regulations and food safety management. This led to formulation of the following hypothesis.

H_{a2}: *Complying with phenomena is a significant determinant of the affective learning domain in tourism and hospitality diploma training.*

Reacting to stimuli and the Responding level

A number of scholars in the field of tourism and hospitality have underscored the importance of reacting to stimuli as a responding level affect. Islam and Kirillova (2021) used a constructivism approach to probe the role of non-verbal cues as reaction to discussions and others contributions in hotels. Using focus group interviews, they demonstrated that non-verbal cues are a responding avenue that enhances guest reciprocity and engagement. In their study among student interns drawn from the Filipino hospitality context, Malate et al. (2023) used the interpretive phenomenological inquiry to show that non-verbal communication tools such as proxemics paralinguistic, kinesics, and facial expressions represents a crucial reaction to stimuli that not only generates customer experience but also augments service quality. In retrospect this hypothesis was developed.

H_{a3}: *Reacting to stimuli is a significant determinant of the responding level of the affective domain in tourism and hospitality diploma training.*

Effect of responding level of Affective learning on perceived Acquisition of soft skills

Several studies have demonstrated the significance effect of the affective domain on acquisition of soft skills. In their qualitative tradition study, Mais-Thompson et al. (2024) used Jamaica's Community Colleges to appraise pedagogical practices and the curriculum offered for hospitality and tourism management. They determined that although affective practices were included in pedagogy, learning activities had no linkage to learning outcomes. They observed that exposure of students to affecting learning was only facilitated through informal improvisation that nurtured desired work-related skills. Avdimiotis (2019) used a qualitative study that targeted employees drawn from hotels in Northern Greece to explore tacit knowledge and emotional intelligence management. The study revealed that behaviour patterns, an 'affect' of emotional learning had a strong effect on tacit knowledge. In another study, Nyanjom and Wilkins (2021) took cognizance of the integral nature of emotional labour towards guest-host interactions to

show that emotional skills development is not given explicit recognition in the curriculum. Clearly, while scholars continue to explore affective learning and skills development in tourism and hospitality, little or no interest has been extended to the nexus between specific levels of affective domain and soft skills development. Hence this study formulated the following hypothesis.

H_{a4}: *The responding level of the affective domain has a significant effect on perceived acquisition of the soft skills among tourism and hospitality diploma students.*

The research is conceptualized in Figure 1

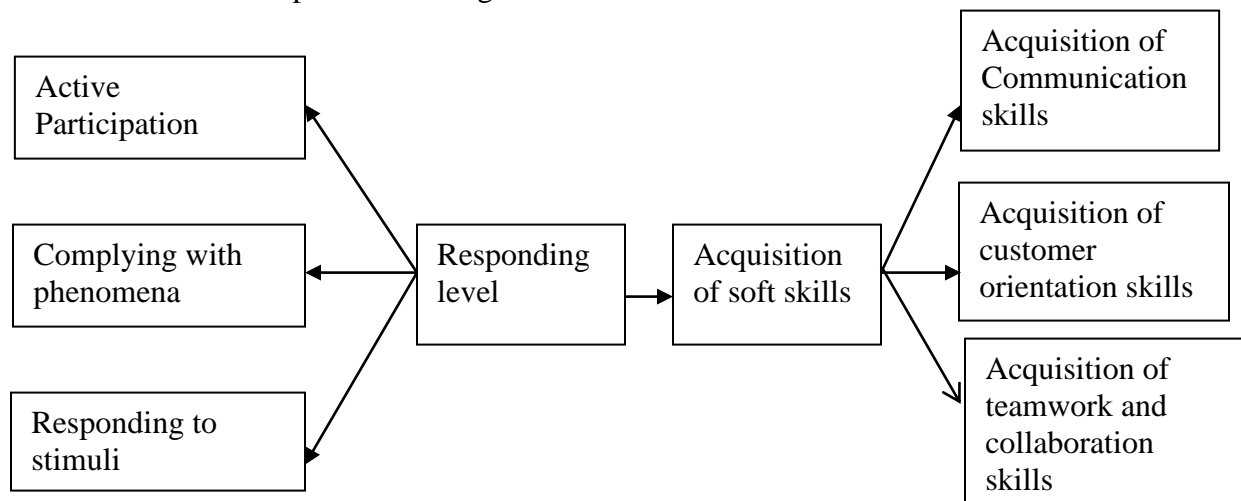


Figure 1 Research Conceptualization

METHODOLOGY

Research instruments

This paper investigated how the responding level of the affective domain, through its amplified elements, including active participation, complying with phenomena, and responding to stimuli influenced perceived acquisition of soft skills among tourism and hospitality diploma students. The instrument for assessing the responding level and perceived acquisition of soft skills was developed based on a prior qualitative survey targeting tourism and hospitality trainers. The responding level construct (active participation, complying with phenomena, responding to stimuli) and the perceived acquisition of soft skills construct (acquisition of communication skills, acquisition of customer orientation skills, and acquisition of teamwork and collaboration skills) were operationalized after an interview with the trainers focusing on elements amplified by the tourism and hospitality program for the responding level and key soft skills emphasized in training. The identified measures were then verified through a comprehensive review of

literature on the taxonomy of affective learning (Hoque, 2016; Nelson et al., 2020; Pla & Cohen, 2024) and critical soft skills for the tourism and hospitality (Hussain et al., 2024; Tankovic et al., 2021). A total of thirty items were initially selected to measure the responding level and perceived acquisition of soft skills. Next, the tool was piloted among twenty-five diploma trainees drawn from tourism and hospitality institutions in a different County, prior to being given to hospitality experts to ascertain the content and scope of coverage. From the total of 30 items, 26 were retained (10 for the responding level construct and 16 for the perceived acquisition of soft skills construct). The instrument comprised of 5-point Likert type items in the strongly disagree to strongly agree continuum.

Study Population and Sampling Design

This study used a target population of tourism and hospitality students in their 2nd and 3rd years. This cohort of students were deemed to have been exposed to some tourism and hospitality affects through their industrial attachment. By reflection, the population for this study comprised of 822 students distributed in five institutions of higher education located in Nairobi County. The sampling units for this study were the respective colleges offering the diploma program in tourism and hospitality while the units of analysis were 2nd year and 3rd year students in the diploma program. The sampling formula by Krejcie and Morgan adapted by Nayan et al. (2020) produced a sample size of 262 students. After confirming the response rate and cleaning data for missing values and outliers, 240 cases were retained for analysis. In the 240 retained cases, 77.9% were female against the 22.1% who were male students. A majority of the students (48.8%) were in the age bracket of 20 to 24 years and most of them were enrolled in tourism management (23.3%), hospitality management (19.2%), or hotel management courses (15.0%).

Analytical Models

The four hypotheses formulated for this study were subjected to Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The PLS_SEM is one of the structural Equation Models (SEM) that have been credited with offering scholars' suitable means of simultaneously estimating and modeling complex relationships (Hair et al., 2022). In this study, PLS-SEM models were particularly relevant in causal predicting the determinants of the responding level of the affective domain and the resulting influence on perceived acquisition of soft skills. Moreover, the PLS-SEM model is becoming increasingly popular in tourism and hospitality studies (Ali et al., 2018; Assaker & O' Connor, 2023; Mostafiz et al, 2019).

This study considered the two analytical models. The first model was the responding level model with four outer models specified in equation 1-4 and one inner model in equation 5. The second model related the responding level with perceived acquisition of soft skills. This second model had two outer models based on reflective constructs (equation 6 and equation 7), and one inner model (equation 8).

Model 1: Responding level model

Path diagram

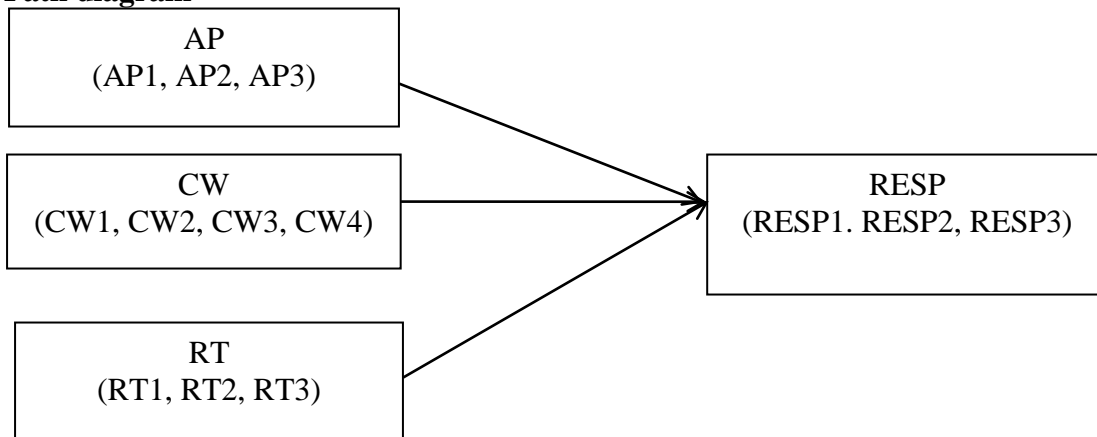


Figure 2 Model 1: Responding level model

Outer Models

$$AP = \lambda_1 AP1 + \lambda_2 AP2 + \lambda_3 AP3 + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots \text{Equation 1}$$

$$CW = \lambda_4 CW1 + \lambda_5 CW2 + \lambda_6 CW3 + \lambda_7 CW4 + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots \text{Equation 2}$$

$$RT = \lambda_8 RT1 + \lambda_9 RT2 + \lambda_{10} RT3 + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots \text{Equation 3}$$

$$RESP = \lambda_{11} RESP1 + \lambda_{12} RESP2 + \lambda_{13} RESP3 + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots \text{Equation 4}$$

Inner Model:

$$RESP = \beta_1 AP + \beta_2 CW + \beta_3 RT + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots \text{Equation 5}$$

Where AP represents the active participation construct, CW the compliance with construct, RT the ‘reacting to’ construct, and RESP the responding level construct. ε is the random error representing unpredictable variations in the dependent constructs at each equation level.

Model 2: Responding level and Perceived Acquisition of soft skills

Path diagram

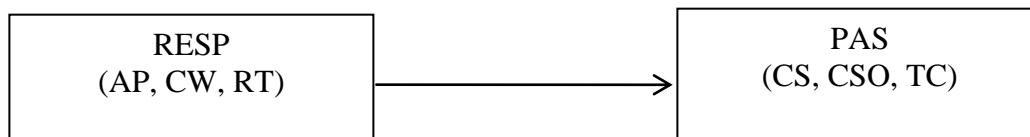


Figure 3 Model 2: Responding level and Perceived Acquisition of soft skills

Outer models

$$RESP = \lambda_1 AP + \lambda_2 CW + \lambda_3 RT + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots \text{Equation 6}$$

$$PAS = \lambda_4 CS + \lambda_5 CSO + \lambda_6 TC + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots Equation 7$$

Inner Model

$$PAS = \beta_1 AP + \beta_2 CW + \beta_3 RT + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots Equation 8$$

Where PAS represents the perceived acquisition of soft skills construct measured through communication skills (CS), customer service orientation (CSO) and teamwork and collaboration (TC). ε is the random error.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Descriptive Results of the Responding Level Elements

Results of the descriptive analysis of the responding level elements amplified in the tourism and hospitality program offered to diploma students are presented in Table 1. These results indicated that the responding level of affective domain of learning as a foundational level has been given great emphasis in the program through active participation to presentations and contributions to others inputs, complying with deadlines, rules and regulations, and reacting to suggestions and verbal encouragements.

Table 1 Responding Level of Affective Learning in the Tourism and Hospitality Diploma Program

	SA	D	MA	A	SA	M	SD
Active participation							
1.The training offers ample opportunities for responding and participating in presentations.	1.3%	2.1%	2.5%	37.1%	57.1%	4.47	.759
2.The training allows use of non-verbal cues in responding to contributions by other trainees.	0.4%	1.3%	1.7%	34.6%	62.1%	4.57	.637
3.The training fosters trust and engagement through feedback	0.4%	1.7%	1.7%	37.1%	59.2%	4.53	.659
Complying with							
4.The training necessitates adherence to rules, standards, and regulations.	9.2%	0.0%	17.5%	47.5%	25.8%	3.81	1.108
5.The training nurtures compliance ethos.	9.2%	5.8%	12.9%	37.5%	34.6%	3.83	1.228
6.The training provides specific deadlines to complete assigned tasks.	3.3%	5.8%	26.7%	50.4%	13.8%	3.65	.906
7.The training promotes positive, energizing, and solution-oriented relationships.	9.2%	0.0%	6.7%	36.3%	47.9%	4.14	1.165
Reacting to							
8.The training encourages making suggestions to others to improve their contributions	9.2%	0.0%	14.6%	22.9%	53.3%	4.11	1.224
9. The training encourages positive proposals to improve discussions.	9.2%	5.8%	17.9%	35.4%	31.7%	3.75	1.223
10.The training recommends provision of verbal encouragement to others.	9.2%	0.0%	19.2%	16.3%	55.4%	4.09	1.253

The Responding Level Model




The outer loadings of the responding level model shown in Table 2 revealed that all the reflective indicators with the exception of RESP 1 had acceptable loadings (≥ 0.7), indicating that they largely represented the respective latent variables. The very low loading for RESP 1 (-0.017) led to its removal from the structural model.

Table 2 Outer Loadings for the Responding Level Model

	Active participation (AP)	Comply with (CW)	React to (RT)	Responding Level (RESP)
AP1	0.962			
AP2	0.815			
AP3	0.925			
CW1		0.931		
CW2		0.906		
CW3		0.859		
CW4		0.936		
RESP1				-0.017
RESP2				0.971
RESP3				0.971
RT1			0.961	
RT2			0.785	
RT3			0.911	

The resulting inner model (Fig 1) together with the path coefficients (Table 3) revealed that the three elements, active participation ($b=0.006$, $p = 0.039$), complying with ($b=0.491$, $p<0.001$), and reacting to ($b=0.532$, $p<0.001$) were positive and significant determinants of the responding level of the affective domain in the tourism and hospitality diploma program offered to diploma students in institutions in Nairobi County. The three elements together accounted for 99.6% of the variance in the responding level ($R^2 = 0.996$).

Table 3 Path Coefficients for the Responding Level Model

Construct	Regression coefficient (β)	p-values
1. Active participation  Responding Level	0.006	0.039
2. Complying with  Responding Level	0.491	0.000
3. Reacting to  Responding Level	0.532	0.000

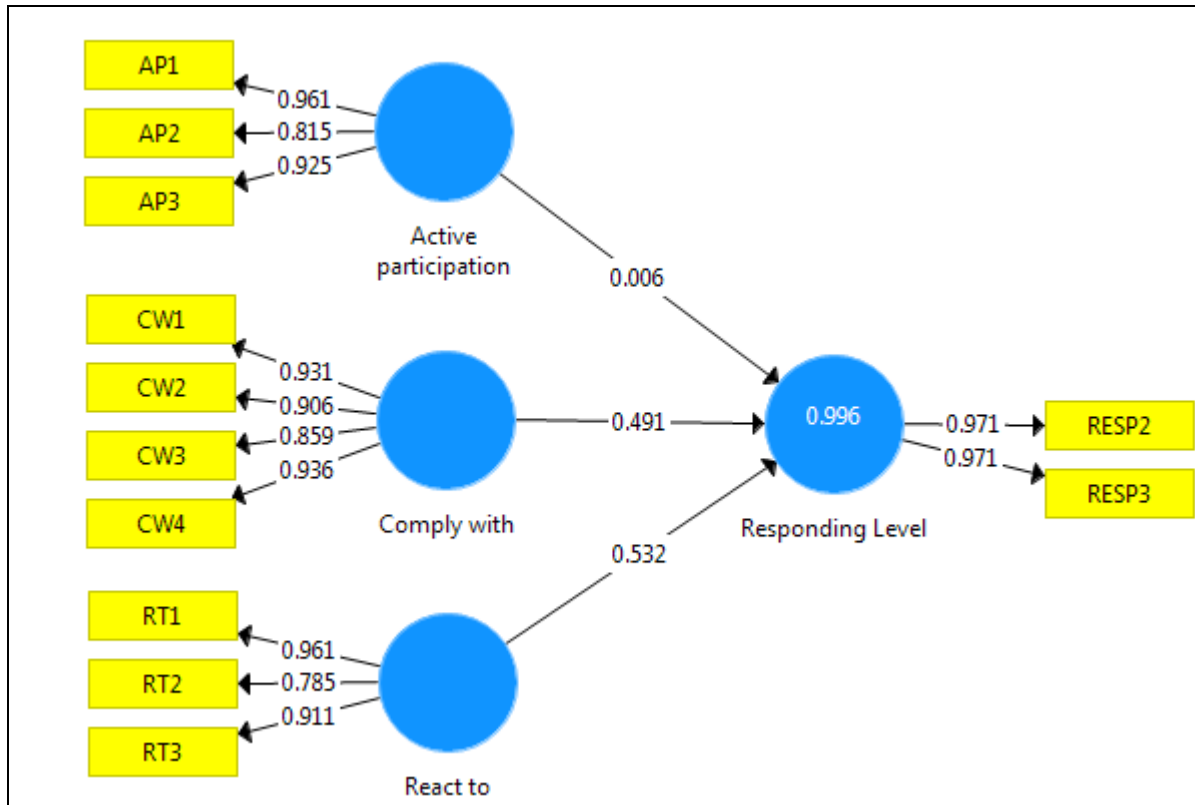


Fig 4 Outer and Inner Models for the Responding Level Model

Therefore, the final analytical model for the responding level model is as shown in equation 9
 $RESP = 0.006AP + 0.491 CW + 0.532 RT + \varepsilon$ Equation 9

Responding Level and Perceived Acquisition of Soft Skills Model

The outer loadings of the effect of the responding level on perceived acquisition of soft skills model confirmed that most of the indicators were strong contributors to their respective reflective constructs (Table 3), indicating their validity in measuring the specific constructs. The outer loadings for the second indicator for reacting to (RT 2) and for the team work and collaboration (TC) indicator of acquisition of soft skills were relatively smaller than the 0.7 threshold. However, they were within the acceptable range and were retained in the structural model (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 4 Outer Loadings for the Responding Level and Perceived Acquisition of Soft Skills Model

	AP	CW	PAS	RT
AP1	0.908			
AP2	0.947			
AP3	0.956			
CS			0.755	
CSO			0.985	
CW1		0.859		
CW2		0.851		
CW3		0.781		
CW4		0.869		
RT1				0.829
RT2				0.663
RT3				0.834
TC			0.652	

Results of the inner model (Fig 2) confirmed that the responding level measured via active participation, complying with, and reacting to contributed up to 98.7% in the variance of perceived acquisition of soft skills ($R^2=0.987$). Moreover, the three elements of the responding level, active participation ($b=0.734$, $p<0.001$), complying with ($b=0.577$, $p<0.001$), and reacting to ($b=-.118$, $p<0.001$) were positive and significant predictors of perceived acquisition of soft skills (Table 4).

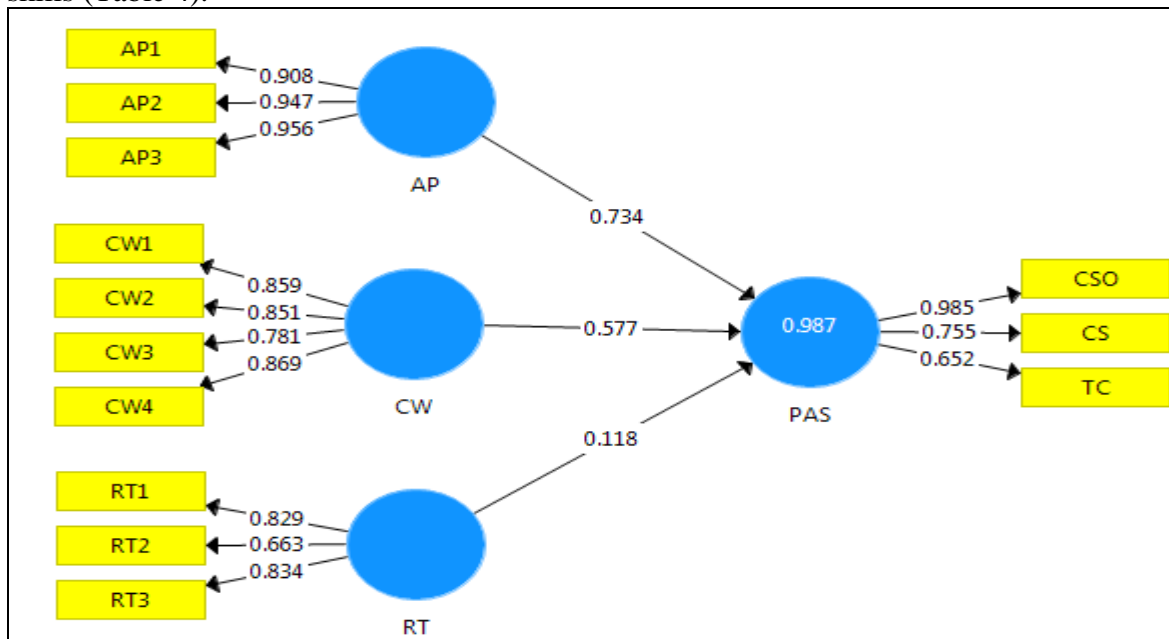





Fig 5 Outer and Inner Models for the Responding Level and Perceived Acquisition of Soft Skills Model

Table 5 Path Coefficients for the Responding Level and Perceived Acquisition of Soft Skills Model

Construct		Regression coefficient (β)	p-values
1. AP	 PAS	0.734	0.000
2. CW	 PAS	0.577	0.000
3. RT	 PAs	0.118	0.000

The resulting final model for the effect of the responding level of the affective domain on perceived acquisition of soft skills in the context of the tourism and hospitality diploma program offered in institutions in Nairobi County is as shown in equation 10.

$$PAS = 0.734AP + 0.577CW + 0.118RT + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots Equation 10$$

DISCUSSION

The responding level as a low-level affective concept is well amplified in the tourism and hospitality diploma program offered in institutions in Nairobi County. This foundational level emphasizes trainee’s capability to not only participate actively in the learning, but to also comply with task deadlines, rule, standards and regulation, and other expected industry attributes as they also react to stimuli during the learning. Through these findings, this study underscored the importance associated with active participation in relation with trainee’s emotional growth (Huertas- Valdivia, 2021). Moreover, by showing that complying with phenomena is amplified in the tourism and hospitality program, the study builds on scholars who have attributed responsible and sustainable tourism to compliance with industry expectations (Meacham et al., 2019; Musavengane, 2019; Oriade et al., 2021).

Based on the findings showing that active participation, complying with phenomena, and reacting to stimuli are significant determinants of the responding level of the affective domain, we can argue that the tourism and hospitality diploma program offered in institutions in Nairobi County can be made practical and experiential-oriented by formulating curricula that exploit and optimize the learning of the ‘affects’ of active participation and reacting to stimuli while, complying with industry expectations. Research has documented that active participation amounts to effective teaching, where teaching strategies are designed and structured to enable students to learn by getting individually actively engaged rather than being passive listeners (Saunders, 2011). The bottom line is that the tourism and hospitality diploma program should embrace experiential learning by leaning towards the responding level affects, noting that experiential learning has been identified as a very effective approach to learning in tourism and hospitality education (Croft & Wang, 2023).

The study identifies the responding level of affective learning as a significant predictor of perceived acquisition of soft skills in tourism and hospitality diploma training. The responding

level affects that are being referenced are active participation, complying with phenomena, and reaction to stimuli. This finding is a novel contribution to the discourse on development of soft skills required in the tourism and hospitality industry. Previous studies have acknowledged the importance of affective domain objectives in emotional intelligence (Bichelmeyer et al., 2009; Kustyarini, 2020). Yet, unlike this study, these previous studies failed to show how individual affective domain levels can account to formulation of the affective learning objectives. Therefore, hospitality stakeholders and educators should emphasize on individual affective domain level “affects” such as those of the responding level when designing training programs, and then formulate training objectives that drive students towards soft skills acquisition.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Acquisition of soft skills in the tourism and hospitality diploma program is an important goal for the affective hospitality, that is key to today’s global business competitiveness. Guiding institutions to design curricula and formulate objectives that builds on students’ inherent affects is critical towards their perceived acquisition of such skills. The responding level affects such as active participation, complying with phenomena, and reacting to stimuli can focus tourism and hospitality diploma programs and objectives towards students experiential learning and subsequent development of industry-specific soft skills. The study findings suggest that the responding level affects can be used effectively to help tourism and hospitality diploma students to perceive themselves as having achieved different soft skills.

Suggestions for further research

The main limitation of this study lies in the use of trainees’ perceptions. Future research should seek to diversify responses by considering other data sources, bearing in mind that trainees perceptions relate to their individual attitudes and beliefs towards learning, and may be avenues of response bias. Moreover, the study used a convenient cohort of trainees drawn from only five institutions in Nairobi County. The findings of this study cannot be generalized and need to be interpreted cautiously when applied to tourism and hospitality trainees in institutions from other counties. Future research should consider widening the scope of tourism and hospitality institutions to reflect other counties in Kenya.

Acknowledgement

N-IM, I-BO and K-JC contributed to the design of this study, data collection and analysis and interpretation of the results, N-IM further contributed to the writing of the paper.

Funding

We declare unequivocally that this study received no funding of any form.

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