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Bridging the Curriculum–Competency Gap in Hospitality Education: Curriculum Relevance, Industry Readiness and Relevance Decay in Ghana

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ABSTRACT: Purpose – This study examines the curriculum–competency gap in hospitality Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Ghana. It considers how curriculum relevance, experiential learning and job competency relate to industry readiness, while also examining what happens to curriculum–industry alignment as occupational and technological requirements change.

Design/methodology/approach – The study uses directed qualitative content analysis of 12 purposively selected regulatory, development, institutional, industry and media documents published between 2021 and 2026. The analysis combined theoretically informed coding with comparison across sources, allowing both anticipated relationships and additional patterns in the documentary evidence to be identified.

Findings – The evidence shows that curriculum relevance is important for developing competencies that reflect occupational requirements, but relevant content alone does not ensure that graduates are prepared for work. Experiential learning provides opportunities for learners to apply and refine curriculum-based knowledge in workplace settings. Industry readiness consequently depends not only on competency development but also on whether those competencies correspond with what hospitality employers currently require. The analysis also points to a temporal problem: as technologies, work practices and employer expectations change, an initially relevant curriculum may become progressively less aligned with industry requirements if educational adaptation is slow. This pattern informed the concept of curriculum relevance decay, while curriculum adaptability emerged as an institutional response to the problem.

Research limitations/implications – The findings are based on documentary evidence and do not provide longitudinal confirmation of curriculum relevance decay. The concept should therefore be treated as a theoretically informed explanation requiring further empirical testing through longitudinal, multi-stakeholder and quantitative research.

Practical implications – Maintaining curriculum relevance requires more than periodic curriculum review. Hospitality TVET institutions need continuing engagement with employers, meaningful workplace learning, appropriate technologies and mechanisms for identifying emerging competency requirements before substantial gaps develop.

KEYWORDS: competency-conversion mechanism, curriculum adaptability, curriculum relevance decay, hospitality TVET, industry readiness

1. INTRODUCTION

Hospitality work has changed considerably in the competencies it demands from employees. Technical knowledge remains important, but effective performance increasingly depends on a wider combination of digital capability, customer orientation, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability and professional judgement. For Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), this creates a practical challenge: graduates need to leave training not only with recognised qualifications but with capabilities that correspond with what hospitality workplaces actually require.

Ghana has introduced a number of reforms intended to strengthen this connection between training and employment. Competency-Based Training (CBT), occupational standards, Sector Skills Bodies, Workplace Experience Learning (WEL) and increased industry participation have all become part of the country's attempt to make TVET more responsive to labour-market needs (CTVET, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2026). These reforms provide an institutional basis for bringing employers and training providers closer together.

The existence of such mechanisms, however, does not necessarily mean that the competencies developed through training always correspond with those required at work. In hospitality, graduates may enter occupations involving front-office operations, food and beverage services, housekeeping, customer relations and restaurant operations, among others. Training offered through institutions such as HOTCATT covers several of these occupational areas (Nyadzi, 2025). Yet programme completion cannot, on its own, establish that a graduate can perform effectively in the workplace. Practical exposure may be inadequate, interpersonal capabilities may still need development, and technologies encountered during training may differ from those being used by employers.

It is this discrepancy that the present study describes as the curriculum–competency gap: the difference between the competencies developed through hospitality TVET and those needed for effective performance in contemporary hospitality work. Viewed in this way, curriculum relevance

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cannot be judged simply by whether appropriate subjects appear in a programme. It also involves the extent to which training reflects occupational requirements, provides opportunities for practical application, responds to technological change, develops transferable employability skills and can adjust when workplace requirements change.

Experiential learning is particularly important in this relationship. Hospitality is an applied field, and many of its competencies develop through contact with actual or realistic service situations. Workplace exposure allows learners to test what they have been taught, work with customers and colleagues, respond to operational problems and become familiar with expectations that are difficult to reproduce fully in the classroom. Ghana's emphasis on WEL and practical hospitality training reflects this concern (Konadu-Boakye, 2022; CTVET, 2026). The issue, therefore, is not only whether relevant competencies appear in the curriculum but whether learners have adequate opportunities to turn what they have learned into capabilities they can demonstrate at work.

There is another difficulty that receives less attention: the workplace itself does not remain unchanged. Hospitality operations are increasingly shaped by digital reservation systems, technology-mediated customer interactions, data-supported decision-making and emerging applications of artificial intelligence. In Ghana, the pace of digital adoption across SMEs has also been documented as a significant driver of organisational change (Asante et al., 2026). These developments can alter both the tasks employees perform and the competencies employers expect them to possess. A curriculum that corresponds well with occupational requirements when it is introduced may consequently become less relevant if workplace practices change while curriculum content, teaching technologies, educator capabilities and workplace-learning arrangements remain largely unchanged.

This temporal problem makes curriculum relevance different from a condition that can simply be achieved and then assumed to persist. What matters is not only whether a curriculum is relevant when it is designed or reviewed, but whether that relevance can be maintained. Where the pace of occupational change exceeds the capacity of the education system to respond, the correspondence between curriculum-developed competencies and industry-required competencies may gradually weaken.

The Ghanaian context brings this problem into particularly clear view. Considerable effort has been made to develop a competency-based and demand-driven TVET system, yet recent evidence continues to identify difficulties in skills alignment. The Ghana TVET Report, for example, draws attention to infrastructure constraints, outdated workshop equipment, inadequate industry exposure among some facilitators, challenges with WEL implementation and uneven collaboration with employers (CTVET, 2026). UNICEF's assessment of skills supply and demand in Ghana similarly identifies curriculum misalignment, weaknesses in practical and soft skills, infrastructure limitations and insufficient private-sector engagement (UNICEF Ghana, 2025).

These findings reveal a tension that deserves closer examination. Ghana has institutional arrangements intended to bring training closer to industry, but documentary evidence still points to gaps between skills development and employer requirements. The question is therefore broader than whether mechanisms for curriculum–industry alignment exist. It concerns how effectively those mechanisms translate into relevant competencies and, importantly, whether they can continue to do so as occupational requirements change.

Hospitality-education research has already established the importance of closer correspondence between curricula and industry needs. Gursoy and Swanger (2005), for instance, emphasised the need for hospitality programmes to respond to industry expectations. Workplace and work-integrated learning have also been associated with graduates' preparation for employment (Wardle, 2016). More recent research shows that employers, educators and students do not necessarily attach the same importance to the competencies expected of work-ready hospitality graduates, strengthening the case for sustained interaction between educational institutions and industry (Nguyen et al., 2023). Within Ghana, concerns have likewise been raised about industry-relevant hospitality competencies and the need for curricula that respond more closely to workplace expectations (Dwesini, 2017).

What remains less developed in this literature is an explanation of how curriculum–industry correspondence behaves over time. Most assessments of curriculum relevance effectively provide a snapshot: they consider whether the curriculum matches industry requirements at the time of investigation. This tells us relatively little about what happens after technologies, work processes or employer expectations change. Although collaborative and regular curriculum review has been recommended in tourism and hospitality education (Wang et al., 2015), the continuing maintenance of relevance has received less conceptual attention. A curriculum may be appropriate at one stage and yet become progressively less suitable if educational adjustment trails developments in the workplace.

There is also room to clarify the role of experiential learning in this process. Its value in hospitality education is widely recognised, but describing experiential learning simply as a desirable feature of training does not fully explain why it matters. In the present study, its significance lies in the opportunity it gives learners to put curriculum-derived knowledge and skills to work. Through practice, feedback and exposure to real occupational conditions, intended learning can be tested and developed into capabilities that graduates are able to demonstrate. Experiential learning can therefore be examined as a competency-conversion mechanism rather than merely another component of the curriculum.

A related theoretical issue concerns the difference between developing competencies and ensuring that those competencies fit the job. These are connected, but they are not identical. Education and training may build considerable knowledge and skill without guaranteeing that the resulting capabilities correspond with the requirements of a particular occupation. This distinction becomes even more important where job requirements are changing. A graduate may possess substantial human capital and still encounter difficulty at work because the capabilities developed during training no longer provide a sufficiently close match with what the occupation demands.

The study brings Human Capital Theory and Person–Job Fit Theory together to address this distinction. Human Capital Theory explains how investment in education and training contributes to productive knowledge and capabilities (Becker, 1964). Recent applications of this theory in hospitality and hotel workforce contexts similarly show that when technological deployment outpaces human capital development, the resulting competency gap constrains organisational performance (Mohammed, 2026a, 2026a). Person–Job Fit Theory, particularly its demands–abilities perspective, shifts attention to whether those capabilities correspond with the requirements of the job (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Used together, the theories allow competency development and competency–job alignment to be examined as related but analytically distinct processes.

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Within this framing, experiential learning occupies the space between what a curriculum intends students to learn and what graduates eventually demonstrate in practice. Curriculum adaptability adds a further dimension by recognising that occupational requirements do not stand still. Institutions may need to revise content, strengthen educator capability, update technologies and adjust workplace-learning arrangements as industry conditions evolve.

The contribution of this study consequently lies in connecting these issues within a single dynamic account of curriculum–competency alignment. Using documentary evidence from Ghana's hospitality TVET environment, the study examines how curriculum relevance, experiential learning, job competency and industry readiness relate to one another. The integration of Human Capital Theory and Person–Job Fit Theory distinguishes the development of productive capability from its correspondence with occupational requirements. Experiential learning is examined as the practical process through which curriculum-derived learning may become demonstrable capability. The analysis then extends beyond the conventional point-in-time view of curriculum relevance by considering what happens when the requirements of hospitality work change more quickly than education and training can respond.

Against this background, the study addresses four research questions:

RQ1: How is curriculum relevance associated with the job competency of hospitality TVET graduates?

RQ2: How does experiential learning connect curriculum relevance with the development of job competency among hospitality TVET graduates?

RQ3: How is graduate job competency associated with industry readiness within Ghana's hospitality sector?

RQ4: How do industry and technological dynamism influence curriculum relevance, curriculum adaptability and the competency requirements of hospitality graduates?

These questions guide the directed content analysis while leaving room for the documentary evidence to extend or qualify the initial theoretical expectations. This is particularly important for the temporal dimension of curriculum relevance, where patterns emerging across regulatory, development, institutional and industry sources may reveal relationships not adequately captured by a static curriculum–competency model.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Curriculum Relevance in Hospitality TVET

The usefulness of a vocational curriculum ultimately depends on its connection with the work for which learners are being prepared. In hospitality TVET, this means that programme content, teaching, learning activities and assessment should reflect the competencies graduates are likely to need in actual hospitality settings. Academic coherence is important, but it is not enough if graduates leave training with capabilities that differ substantially from those expected by employers.

This issue is particularly significant in hospitality because workplace performance draws on several types of competency at the same time. Employees may need technical proficiency in front-office operations, food production, food and beverage service or housekeeping, while also being expected to communicate effectively, work with others, solve service problems and respond professionally to customers. Spowart (2011) highlights this wider competency profile in hospitality graduate preparation, while Gursoy and Swanger (2004) draw attention to the value of industry involvement in determining what hospitality programmes should teach. Employer participation is important because occupational expectations do not necessarily remain unchanged while a curriculum is being delivered.

The question of relevance is also context dependent. Hospitality programmes differ across countries and institutions, reflecting differences in educational systems, labour markets and industry structures. Recent international evidence confirms considerable variation in hospitality curricula, making it difficult to assume that a programme considered relevant in one setting will necessarily meet the occupational needs of another (Dinan, 2025).

In Ghana, attempts to bring TVET training closer to the workplace can be seen in the move towards competency-based and demand-driven training. Occupational standards, Competency-Based Training and stronger industry participation are intended to ensure that training reflects labour-market requirements rather than being developed largely within educational institutions (CTVET, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2026). This policy direction places curriculum relevance at the centre of the relationship between TVET and employment.

For the purposes of this study, five aspects of curriculum relevance are important. Industry alignment concerns whether programme outcomes correspond with occupational requirements. Practical orientation relates to the extent to which learners have opportunities to use what they are taught. Digital and technological responsiveness considers whether training reflects technologies being adopted in hospitality operations. Employability-skills integration covers capabilities such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving that cut across particular occupational tasks. The fifth dimension, curriculum adaptability, concerns whether programmes can adjust when workplace requirements change.

Taken together, these dimensions suggest that curriculum relevance is better viewed as an ongoing relationship between education and work than as a characteristic determined only when a programme is designed. A hospitality curriculum may contain appropriate subjects and still lose some of its occupational value if what happens in the workplace changes while the programme remains largely the same.

2.2 Experiential Learning in Hospitality Education

Relevant curriculum content provides a starting point for competency development, but students also need opportunities to use what they have learned. This is especially important in hospitality, where many aspects of professional performance become meaningful only when learners encounter customers, colleagues, service problems and the operational pressures of actual or simulated workplaces.

Kolb's (1984) account of experiential learning is useful in explaining this process. Learning develops through experience and the subsequent interpretation of that experience, rather than through the passive acquisition of information alone. For hospitality students, the significance of this process becomes evident when classroom knowledge has to be applied to situations that are less predictable than those encountered during formal instruction.

Consider customer service, for example. Students can learn service principles in class, but handling an unhappy guest requires them to interpret a situation, communicate appropriately, exercise judgement and decide how to respond. Similar considerations apply to teamwork, front-

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office operations, food and beverage service, housekeeping and other hospitality functions. Practical exposure allows students to encounter these demands and learn from the consequences of their actions.

Work-integrated learning creates opportunities for such encounters through internships, industrial attachments, apprenticeships, simulations, workplace mentoring, field projects and industry-based assessment. Jackson (2015) shows that workplace-based experiences can contribute to professional capability because they place learners in contexts where academic learning must be used rather than simply recalled. Evidence from hospitality education similarly indicates that internships and workplace experiences contribute to students' learning and professional development by exposing them to situations that cannot be reproduced fully in classrooms (Nghia & My Duyen, 2018).

The important issue, then, is not simply whether a programme contains a practical component. What matters is what learners are able to do with that experience. Workplace exposure can provide opportunities to test existing knowledge, recognise gaps in understanding, receive feedback and develop greater confidence in performing occupational tasks.

This study consequently treats experiential learning as a competency-conversion mechanism. The term is used to capture the movement from curriculum-based learning towards capability that can be demonstrated in practice. A relevant curriculum may specify appropriate competencies, but practical engagement provides the setting in which those competencies can be exercised, refined and adapted to workplace conditions. This helps explain why curriculum relevance by itself may not guarantee graduate competence.

2.3 Job Competency in the Hospitality Industry

Competency becomes visible in what a person is able to do when faced with the requirements of a job. It encompasses knowledge and technical skill, but also the behaviours, attitudes and personal capabilities needed to perform effectively. Le Deist and Winterton (2005) emphasise this multidimensional character of competence, showing why occupational performance cannot easily be reduced to a single type of skill.

This distinction matters for hospitality education because programme completion and occupational performance are not necessarily equivalent. A qualification confirms that prescribed educational requirements have been met; it does not automatically show how effectively a graduate will handle a demanding service encounter, work with colleagues, use workplace technologies or respond when established procedures do not fit an unexpected situation.

Hospitality competency therefore extends well beyond technical preparation. Spowart (2011) identifies the importance of wider graduate capabilities, while the earlier work of Chung-Herrera et al. (2003) shows that hospitality performance involves technical, interpersonal and managerial competencies. The interpersonal dimension is especially difficult to separate from everyday hospitality work because service delivery involves repeated interaction with customers, supervisors, colleagues and other stakeholders.

Digitalisation has widened this competency profile. Reservation systems, electronic payments, online distribution platforms, customer-management technologies and other technology-supported processes have become embedded in hospitality operations. The ability to use such technologies is increasingly part of occupational performance rather than an additional specialist competence. The European Commission (2022) similarly conceptualises digital competence in terms of confident, critical and responsible engagement with digital technologies.

At the same time, the competencies required today may not be sufficient throughout a graduate's working life. Hospitality employees encounter new technologies, changing customer expectations and unfamiliar service situations. They therefore need the capacity to learn and adjust as work changes. This is consistent with Fugate et al. (2004), who identify adaptability as an important component of navigating changing employment conditions.

Against this background, the study examines job competency across four related areas: technical, interpersonal, digital and adaptive competency. Technical competency concerns occupation-specific performance. Interpersonal competency covers communication, teamwork, customer interaction and professional behaviour. Digital competency relates to the use of technologies relevant to hospitality work. Adaptive competency captures the ability to learn, solve problems, remain flexible and respond to changing workplace circumstances.

These categories are useful because documentary sources do not necessarily speak about graduate competency in the same way. Regulatory bodies may emphasise occupational standards, employers may be more concerned with practical performance, and training institutions may focus on the competencies specified within programmes. Reading these perspectives together makes it possible to examine both what graduates are expected to know and whether the capabilities being developed remain appropriate for contemporary hospitality work

2.4 From Job Competency to Industry Readiness

Although job competency and industry readiness are closely connected, they refer to different questions. Competency asks whether a graduate possesses the capabilities needed to perform occupational tasks. Industry readiness goes further by asking whether those capabilities correspond sufficiently with current workplace requirements for the graduate to function effectively.

This distinction also separates industry readiness from the broader idea of employability. Fugate et al. (2004) conceptualise employability in relation to an individual's capacity to navigate employment opportunities. In the present study, industry readiness has a narrower occupational meaning: the extent to which hospitality graduates can enter the workplace with competencies that fit what employers presently require.

A graduate may therefore obtain employment without being fully ready for the job. Considerable additional training may still be needed before expected performance standards are reached. Conversely, graduates whose technical, interpersonal, digital and adaptive capabilities correspond closely with workplace demands may require less adjustment after entering employment. Jackson (2015) similarly shows that graduate transition into work involves the ability to apply relevant capabilities rather than simply possessing academic qualifications.

Person–Job Fit Theory helps to explain this distinction. Its demands–abilities perspective focuses on the correspondence between what a job requires and the knowledge, skills and abilities an individual brings to it (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Applied to hospitality TVET, readiness is therefore strongest where the capabilities developed through education provide a close fit with the demands graduates encounter at work.

This interpretation also helps clarify the developmental logic underlying the study:

Curriculum Relevance → Experiential Learning → Job Competency → Industry Readiness

The stages are related, but each addresses a different issue. Curriculum relevance concerns whether education is oriented towards appropriate occupational requirements. Experiential learning gives students opportunities to use and refine that learning. Job competency concerns the

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capabilities they are subsequently able to demonstrate. Industry readiness concerns the fit between those capabilities and what hospitality workplaces currently demand.

The distinction is important because capability development does not guarantee capability alignment. Graduates may have acquired substantial knowledge and skill and yet remain insufficiently prepared if the capabilities developed during training differ from those now required in the workplace.

2.5 Industry and Technological Dynamism

The relationship between curriculum and workplace competency takes place within an industry that continues to change. Hospitality organisations respond to developments in technology, customer expectations, competition, sustainability and service delivery, and these changes can alter the work employees are expected to perform. Earlier research documented the substantial influence of information technologies on tourism and hospitality operations (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Law et al., 2014). More recent developments involving artificial intelligence, automation and robotics have extended this transformation (Ivanov & Webster, 2019; Tussyadiah, 2020).

Technology is especially visible in everyday hospitality operations. Reservation and distribution systems, electronic and contactless payments, online customer interfaces and data-supported decision-making have changed how employees interact with customers and perform routine tasks. As these technologies become embedded in work, training institutions face a wider challenge than periodically adding new topics to a syllabus. They may also need suitable instructional technologies, educators who understand contemporary practice and workplace-learning environments where students can encounter current systems.

The difficulty is that educational and industry change do not necessarily proceed at the same speed. Formal curriculum revision may require consultation, approval, staff preparation and investment in equipment. A new technology or service practice can spread through industry much more quickly. The result is that a curriculum that corresponded reasonably well with occupational requirements when introduced may become less well aligned several years later.

This possibility changes how curriculum relevance should be understood. Rather than asking only whether a programme is relevant, it becomes necessary to ask whether that relevance can be maintained. Continuing industry involvement becomes important because employers can provide information about changes that may not yet be reflected in formal programmes (Gursoy & Swanger, 2005).

The capacity to respond to such information is captured in this study through curriculum adaptability. Adaptability involves recognising changes in occupational requirements and making appropriate adjustments within a reasonable period. Depending on the nature of the change, this may involve revising content, altering pedagogy, developing educators' capabilities, acquiring technologies or improving workplace-learning arrangements.

Several channels can provide evidence that adjustment is needed. Employer consultation may reveal changing performance expectations; occupational standards can indicate shifts in competency requirements; graduate tracer studies can show where former students experience difficulty; and feedback from workplace learning can expose differences between institutional preparation and actual practice. Monitoring technological developments can provide additional warning of competencies likely to become important.

Obtaining this information, however, is only part of the process. Institutions also need the capacity to act on it. Where curriculum review, educator development, technology investment and industry partnerships respond reasonably quickly to emerging requirements, alignment may be preserved. Where these responses lag behind workplace change, the competencies developed through training may progressively correspond less well with those required by employers.

Industry and technological dynamism therefore introduce a time dimension into curriculum relevance. The issue is not simply whether the curriculum and industry are aligned at one moment, but what happens to that relationship as occupational requirements continue to move. This provides the conceptual basis for examining curriculum adaptability and, later in the paper, the possibility of curriculum relevance decay when the rate of industry change exceeds the capacity of the training system to adjust.

The revised version preserves the five curriculum-relevance dimensions and the four competency dimensions in your original paper, as well as the pathway from curriculum relevance through experiential learning and job competency to industry readiness. It also preserves your important distinction that technological change can outpace formal curriculum revision, which provides the foundation for the later concept of curriculum relevance decay

2.6 Theoretical Foundation

This study draws on Human Capital Theory and Person–Job Fit Theory to explain the curriculum–competency relationship in hospitality TVET. The theories address related but distinct aspects of graduate preparation: the development of productive capabilities through education and training, and the correspondence between those capabilities and the requirements of the workplace.

2.6.1 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory views education and training as investments through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills and other productive capabilities (Becker, 1964). Applied to hospitality TVET, the theory suggests that curriculum relevance matters because the nature and quality of training influence the competencies graduates develop. Where curriculum content, teaching and assessment reflect occupational requirements, training is more likely to produce capabilities that are useful in hospitality employment.

Relevant curriculum content alone, however, may not be sufficient. Hospitality work requires learners to apply technical knowledge alongside interpersonal, digital and problem-solving capabilities in practical settings. Experiential learning therefore provides an important connection between curriculum and competency by allowing learners to practise, refine and adapt what they have learned under workplace or workplace-related conditions.

Human Capital Theory consequently explains how education can contribute to competency development, but it does not fully explain whether the competencies developed correspond with what employers currently require. This limitation makes Person–Job Fit Theory relevant to the study.

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2.6.2 Person–Job Fit Theory

Person–Job Fit Theory focuses on the compatibility between individuals and the jobs they perform. Of particular relevance is demands–abilities fit, which concerns the correspondence between an individual's knowledge, skills and abilities and the requirements of a job (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

This perspective helps distinguish competency development from industry readiness. Hospitality graduates may acquire substantial knowledge and skills through education but still be inadequately prepared where those capabilities do not correspond with current workplace requirements. Industry readiness therefore depends not simply on possessing competencies, but on the degree to which technical, interpersonal, digital and adaptive competencies fit contemporary hospitality demands.

This correspondence can also change over time. Technologies, work processes and employer expectations continue to evolve, meaning that competencies that provided a good occupational fit at one point may become less adequate later. Person–Job Fit Theory therefore provides a useful basis for examining how changing industry requirements affect the continuing alignment between graduate capability and workplace demand.

2.6.3 Integration of the Theories

The two theories provide complementary explanations of the curriculum–competency gap. Human Capital Theory explains how education and training contribute to competency development, while Person–Job Fit Theory explains whether the competencies developed provide an adequate fit with occupational requirements.

Experiential learning connects these processes by providing opportunities for curriculum-based knowledge and skills to be applied and refined in practical settings. The resulting theoretical relationship is:

Curriculum Relevance → Experiential Learning → Job Competency → Industry Readiness

This relationship is situated within a changing occupational environment. Industry and technological developments may alter the competencies required in hospitality, making the capacity of training institutions to respond to change increasingly important. The study therefore considers curriculum adaptability as the capacity to adjust curriculum content, pedagogy, technologies, educator capability and workplace-learning arrangements in response to changing occupational requirements.

The integrated perspective moves the analysis beyond the assumption that curriculum relevance is fixed. It allows the study to examine both how competencies are developed and how their correspondence with workplace requirements may change over time. These theoretical ideas informed the initial analysis, while the documentary evidence remained open to patterns that extended or qualified the framework.

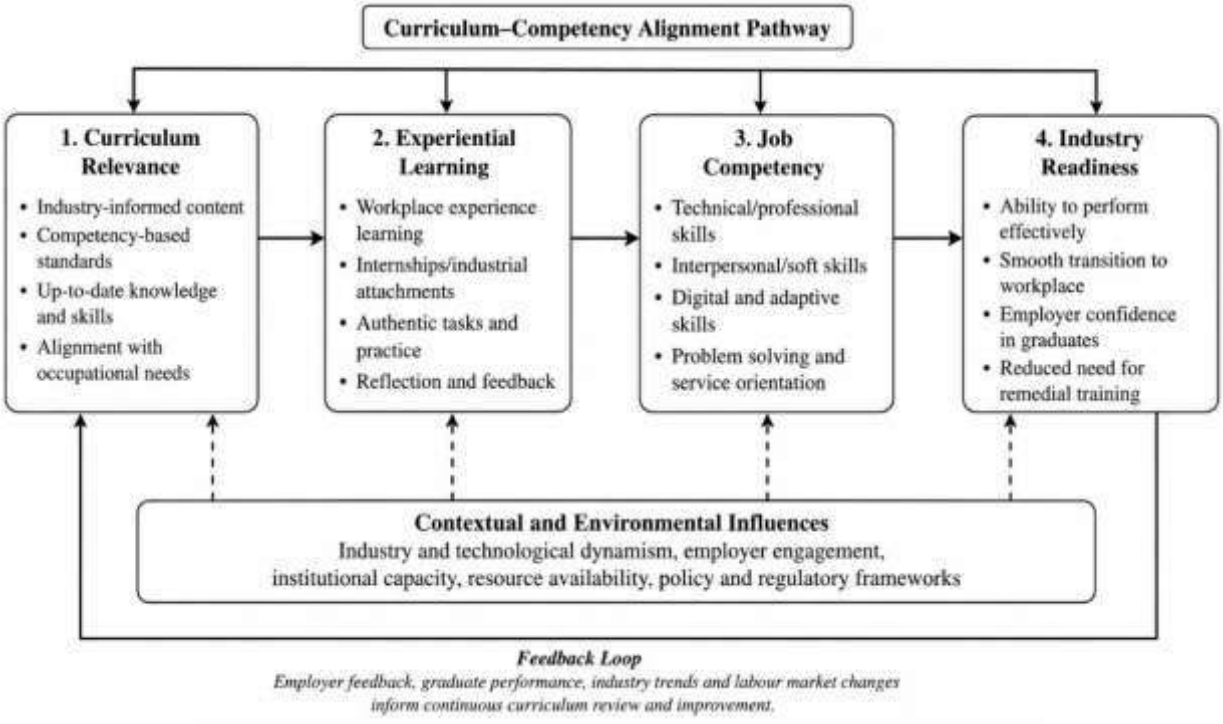


Figure 1: Initial analytical framework developed before analysis Methodology

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design and Study Context

This study used a qualitative design based on directed qualitative content analysis to examine the curriculum–competency gap in hospitality Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Ghana. A directed approach was considered suitable because the study began with concepts already established in theory and previous research but also sought to identify patterns that might not be adequately explained by those concepts. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) describe directed content analysis as particularly useful where existing theory provides an initial basis for coding while allowing the empirical material to extend or refine the analytical framework.

The initial analytical orientation was informed by Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), Person–Job Fit Theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), and the relationships developed in the literature among curriculum relevance, experiential learning, job competency and industry readiness. These concepts provided direction for examining the documents without treating the anticipated relationships as predetermined findings.

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Ghana was selected as the study context because of the considerable policy attention given to strengthening the connection between TVET and employment. Recent reforms have emphasised Competency-Based Training (CBT), occupational standards, Sector Skills Bodies, Workplace Experience Learning (WEL) and greater industry participation in skills development (CTVET, 2021, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2026). At the same time, recent assessments continue to identify curriculum misalignment, practical-skills limitations and mismatches between skills supply and employer requirements (UNICEF Ghana, 2025). This combination of formal mechanisms for industry alignment and continuing evidence of competency gaps made Ghana an appropriate setting for the analysis.

Hospitality was selected because of its strongly applied character and its reliance on a combination of technical, interpersonal and increasingly digital capabilities. The sector also provides a useful setting for examining changing competency requirements because service technologies, customer expectations and operating practices continue to evolve.

3.2 Documentary Sources and Selection

The study relied on documentary evidence rather than interviews or survey data. Purposive documentary sampling was used to identify sources capable of providing information relevant to the research questions. The search focused on four broad groups of material: government and regulatory publications, development and policy reports, institutional and industry publications, and established media reports documenting hospitality and TVET developments. The final corpus covered the period 2021–2026, enabling the analysis to capture recent policy developments as well as contemporary concerns about curriculum, workplace learning and changing competency requirements.

Documents were retained where they addressed one or more of the following issues:

curriculum relevance or occupational alignment;
competency development;
workplace or experiential learning;
graduate preparedness or industry readiness;
employer expectations;
technological change;
industry participation in TVET; or
curriculum responsiveness and adaptation.

Preference was given to documents that provided substantive evidence rather than passing references to these issues. Sources also needed to be identifiable, publicly accessible and sufficiently detailed to permit interpretation in relation to the study questions.

The final corpus consisted of 12 documents representing regulatory, development, institutional, industry and media perspectives. The study did not seek numerical representativeness. Corpus adequacy was instead judged by the relevance of the documents to the analytical questions and by the range of perspectives represented. As reported in the manuscript, the retained sources collectively addressed the principal categories required for cross-source examination of curriculum relevance, competency development and changing occupational requirements.

Table 1. Documentary Corpus Included in the Analysis

No.	Source	Year	Source category
1	CTVET, *Ghana TVET Report: Third Edition*	2026	Government/regulatory
2	CTVET, *Ghana TVET Report: Second Edition*	2023	Government/regulatory
3	UNICEF Ghana, *Skills Supply and Demand Side Assessment*	2025	Development/policy
4	CTVET, *Government Bridges the Gap Between Industry and TVET*	2023	Government/regulatory
5	CTVET, industry-engagement publication	2023	Government/regulatory
6	CTVET, Sector Skills Bodies Secretariat publication	2021	Government/regulatory
7	Konadu-Boakye, HOTCATT experiential-learning report	2022	Institutional/media
8	Mensah & Okang Addae, HOTCATT graduate-training report	2023	Institutional/media
9	Etefe, Ghana Hotels Association certification report	2024	Industry/media
10	BusinessGhana, CTVET–Ghana TVET Service–Jospong collaboration	2025	Industry/media
11	*Business & Financial Times*, HOTCATT capacity commentary	2025	Industry/media
12	Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts, HOTCATT workforce-development initiative	2025	Government/institutional

Source: Documentary corpus reported in the study.

One point is worth making explicit in the manuscript: media sources were not treated as equivalent to regulatory or development reports. Their value lay in documenting identifiable statements, institutional initiatives and industry perspectives relevant to hospitality training. Interpretations based on these materials were therefore considered alongside, rather than substituted for, regulatory and development evidence.

3.3 Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded through repeated reading, initial coding, cross-source comparison and higher-order interpretation. The first stage involved reading the 12 documents to identify passages directly relevant to the research questions. Attention was given not only to statements describing existing TVET arrangements but also to evidence of difficulties, inconsistencies and changes in occupational requirements.

The second stage involved deductive coding. Five categories derived from the theoretical framework and literature review were used to organise the initial analysis:

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curriculum relevance;
experiential learning;
job competency;
industry readiness; and
industry and technological dynamism.

These categories and their operational meanings are already specified in the manuscript.

Table 2. Initial Coding Framework

Analytical category	Operational focus	Indicative documentary evidence
Curriculum relevance	Correspondence between training and occupational requirements	Industry alignment, occupational standards, curriculum responsiveness
Experiential learning	Application of curriculum learning in practical settings	WEL, internships, apprenticeships, practical training
Job competency	Capabilities required for occupational performance	Technical, interpersonal, digital and adaptive competencies
Industry readiness	Correspondence between developed competencies and current workplace demands	Job readiness, employer expectations, graduate preparedness
Industry and technological dynamism	External change affecting competency requirements	Digitalisation, new technologies, changing workplace practices

The categories were used as starting points rather than as fixed themes into which every passage had to fit. Material that could not be adequately represented by the initial framework was retained for further examination. This was important because a directed approach can otherwise encourage researchers to see only what the theoretical framework has prepared them to expect.

The third stage involved comparison within and across source categories. Evidence from regulatory documents was considered alongside development reports, institutional materials and industry or media sources. The purpose was not to count how frequently a particular word or idea appeared. Greater attention was given to whether different sources described similar relationships, whether they presented conflicting accounts, and whether evidence from one source qualified claims made in another.

For example, regulatory sources described occupational standards, industry participation and other mechanisms intended to promote demand-driven training. These accounts were considered alongside development evidence reporting continuing curriculum and skills mismatches. Such comparisons allowed the analysis to distinguish between the **existence of formal alignment mechanisms** and evidence concerning their **realised outcomes.**

The coding and comparison process produced four principal thematic areas corresponding broadly with the research questions:

1. curriculum relevance and graduate job competency;
2. experiential learning as a competency-conversion mechanism;
3. job competency and industry readiness; and
4. industry and technological dynamism, curriculum adaptability and changing competency requirements.

These themes were not treated as independent findings. Their relationships were examined across the corpus to understand how the curriculum–competency gap was represented by different sources.

3.4 Development of the Emergent Curriculum Relevance Decay Theme

An important part of the analysis concerned evidence that did not fit neatly within a static interpretation of curriculum relevance. The literature review had raised the possibility that curriculum–industry alignment could weaken as occupational requirements changed. However, curriculum relevance decay was deliberately not included among the five formal deductive coding categories. This distinction is already made in the attached manuscript and is methodologically important.

During cross-source comparison, several strands of evidence began to converge. Some documents described continuing curriculum or competency mismatches; others reported rapid technological change, obsolete training resources, changing workplace requirements or institutional efforts to respond through digitalisation and curriculum adaptation. Considered separately, these observations addressed different aspects of TVET. Read together, however, they pointed towards a temporal problem: alignment achieved at one stage may become more difficult to maintain when occupational requirements change faster than educational provision.

This recurring pattern provided the empirical basis for refining curriculum relevance decay as an interpretive theme. This does not mean that the documents themselves used the term *curriculum relevance decay*. They did not. The term represents the researcher's conceptual interpretation of a pattern identified across the documentary corpus. Maintaining this distinction is important. The study therefore treats curriculum relevance decay as an **emergent analytical concept supported by cross-source evidence**, rather than as a directly observed variable or an established causal relationship.

3.5 Attention to Convergent and Divergent Evidence

The analysis considered both supporting and contradictory evidence.

Convergence was identified where different source types pointed towards a similar interpretation. For example, regulatory emphasis on workplace learning could be compared with institutional evidence describing experiential hospitality training. Similarly, evidence of technological change could be considered alongside reports concerning the adequacy of equipment, instructor exposure and curriculum responsiveness.

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Divergence was equally important. Formal mechanisms intended to promote industry alignment were not interpreted as evidence that alignment had necessarily been achieved. Where regulatory documents described structures for demand-driven training but development sources continued to identify skills mismatches, the apparent tension was retained rather than resolved in favour of either account.

This approach was particularly important for the study's central argument. Evidence that Ghana has established occupational standards, Sector Skills Bodies, CBT and WEL does not contradict evidence of continuing competency gaps. The two sets of evidence can coexist: one describes mechanisms intended to support alignment, while the other raises questions about the extent to which alignment is realised and sustained.

The analysis therefore focused on **convergence, divergence and contradiction rather than frequency alone,** consistent with the procedure reported in the original manuscript.

3.6 Analytical Audit Trail

To strengthen transparency, evidence was organised so that interpretations could be traced back to the documentary sources from which they were developed.

For each relevant extract, the analytical record identified the source, year, source category, relevant passage, initial coding category and subsequent interpretation. Where available, page or paragraph locations were retained.

Table 3. Analytical Audit Trail: A Simplified Structure of the Analytical Matrix

A simplified structure of the analytical matrix was:

Document ID	Source/year	Relevant passage	Initial code	Analytical category	Interpretation	RQ
D01	CTVET (2026)	Relevant documentary extract	Industry engagement	Curriculum relevance	Industry participation supports curriculum–occupation alignment	RQ1
D03	UNICEF Ghana (2025)	Relevant documentary extract	Curriculum misalignment	Curriculum relevance/job competency	Formal alignment mechanisms coexist with reported skills gaps	RQ1
D07	Konadu-Boakye (2022)	Relevant documentary extract	Experiential training	Experiential learning	Practical exposure supports application of curriculum learning	RQ2
D10	BusinessGhana (2025)	Relevant documentary extract	Technological change	Industry/technological dynamism	Changing technology may reduce the continuing relevance of existing resources	RQ4

The purpose of the matrix was not to quantify codes but to maintain a clear connection between documentary evidence and the interpretations reported in the findings.

3.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was considered in relation to **credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability**, following Lincoln and Guba (1985), as stated in the original manuscript.

Credibility was supported through comparison across different types of documentary evidence. Regulatory sources provided information about policy intentions and institutional mechanisms, development reports offered independent assessments of skills and labour-market conditions, while institutional, industry and media materials provided evidence of hospitality-training practices and employer concerns. Agreement across these different sources strengthened interpretations, while disagreement was retained and examined rather than removed.

Dependability was addressed through the use of explicit source-selection criteria, a defined documentary corpus and a consistent coding procedure. The initial categories were specified before the main analysis, while subsequent thematic development was documented separately.

Confirmability was supported by maintaining a distinction between **documentary evidence and researcher interpretation.** This was especially important for curriculum relevance decay. The underlying evidence concerned technological change, curriculum misalignment, changing competency requirements and constraints on educational responsiveness; the concept of curriculum relevance decay represents the interpretation developed from their convergence.

Transferability was addressed by describing the Ghanaian TVET and hospitality context, the documentary corpus and the analytical procedure in sufficient detail for readers to judge whether the findings may have relevance to other settings.

3.8 Reflexivity

Directed qualitative content analysis carries a particular risk: existing theory may draw the researcher's attention towards evidence that confirms anticipated relationships while making contradictory evidence less visible.

Reflexive attention was therefore given to passages that qualified or challenged the initial framework. The analysis did not assume, for example, that the presence of industry-engagement structures demonstrated effective curriculum–industry alignment. Nor was evidence of technological change automatically interpreted as evidence of curriculum obsolescence.

Interpretive claims were made only after comparison with other material in the corpus.

The distinction between **sensitising concept, documentary observation and final interpretation** was particularly important in developing curriculum relevance decay. The possibility of declining relevance had been considered during conceptual development, but the final meaning of

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the construct was refined through the documentary evidence rather than treated as a result that the analysis was required to produce. This is consistent with the methodological account in the current manuscript.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The study relied exclusively on publicly accessible documentary material and did not involve interviews, surveys or collection of private information from human participants. All documentary sources were identified and attributed. Direct quotations were linked to page or paragraph numbers where these were available. Media reports were used cautiously and treated as evidence of documented institutional or industry discourse rather than as substitutes for regulatory or development evidence. The analysis also avoided attributing claims to documentary sources that they did not make. In particular, curriculum relevance decay is an interpretation developed by the researchers; it is not presented as terminology used by CTVET, UNICEF Ghana, HOTCATT or the other documentary sources.

4. FINDINGS

The analysis revealed four closely connected areas in the documentary evidence. The first concerns the relationship between curriculum relevance and the competencies expected in hospitality work. The second relates to the role of practical and workplace learning in developing those competencies. The third concerns the correspondence between graduate capability and industry readiness. The final area captures a more dynamic issue: changes in technology and occupational requirements can alter what employers need, creating pressure for curricula and training arrangements to adjust. Across these areas, the documents did not present an entirely uniform picture. Regulatory sources generally described mechanisms intended to strengthen the relationship between training and employment, whereas development and industry evidence also pointed to continuing skills gaps and implementation difficulties. This contrast was analytically useful because it allowed the study to distinguish between the existence of curriculum–industry alignment mechanisms and the extent to which alignment appears to have been achieved in practice.

4.1 Curriculum Relevance and Graduate Job Competency

Curriculum relevance was strongly represented in the regulatory documents through the language of occupational standards, demand-driven training and industry participation. CTVET's policy direction places employers and industry bodies within the processes through which occupational competencies and training requirements are identified. The 2026 Ghana TVET Report makes this relationship explicit, stating that "industry engagement is vital for improving programme relevance" (CTVET, 2026, p. 5).

This emphasis is consistent with earlier CTVET publications describing Sector Skills Bodies and industry participation in curriculum development, occupational standards and skills formation. Within these documents, curriculum relevance is therefore understood largely in terms of whether the competencies developed through training correspond with labour-market requirements.

The development evidence presents a less settled picture. UNICEF Ghana's (2025) skills supply-and-demand assessment identifies **"**curriculum misalignment" and reports discrepancies between the skills supplied by the education and training system and those sought by employers. This evidence does not necessarily contradict the regulatory framework. Instead, it points to a difference between establishing institutional arrangements intended to promote demand-driven training and achieving consistent competency alignment in practice.

This distinction is central to the curriculum–competency gap examined in the study. The documentary evidence indicates that mechanisms for improving relevance are present, but it also shows that mismatches remain observable. Curriculum relevance cannot therefore be inferred solely from the existence of occupational standards, industry committees or competency-based programmes. What ultimately matters is whether these mechanisms influence the competencies learners actually develop.

The documents also suggest that relevance has several practical dimensions. Occupational alignment is important, but the evidence extends to practical preparation, contemporary technologies and transferable capabilities. Industry sources emphasise the need for graduates who can perform rather than simply demonstrate theoretical knowledge. This places technical competence alongside communication, customer service, problem-solving and other capabilities required in hospitality work.

Taken together, the evidence supports an association between curriculum relevance and competency development, while also showing why the relationship should not be assumed to be automatic. A curriculum can be designed around occupational requirements and yet encounter difficulties in implementation, resources, practical exposure or responsiveness to changing workplace needs.

4.2 Experiential Learning as a Competency-Conversion Mechanism

The second theme concerns what happens between learning about an occupational task and being able to perform it in practice.

The HOTCATT evidence gives experiential learning a prominent role in hospitality preparation. Konadu-Boakye (2022, para. 10) reports that **"***the HOTCATT training programmes are focused on training individuals through experiential learning."* This emphasis is important in a sector where competence often has to be demonstrated through service delivery rather than through theoretical understanding alone.

Other documentary evidence similarly positions workplace exposure as a means of connecting institutional learning with practical experience. The Workplace Experience Learning arrangements identified in the corpus provide opportunities for learners to encounter work practices, workplace expectations and occupational conditions outside conventional classroom instruction. BusinessGhana's (2025) reporting on TVET collaboration also connects workplace experiential learning with practical exposure.

Read together, these sources suggest that practical learning performs a more specific function than simply adding experience to a programme. It provides an environment in which curriculum-derived knowledge can be used, tested and refined.

This distinction helps explain the concept of competency conversion developed in the study. The documents do not themselves use that term. It is an interpretation of the recurring relationship between what learners are taught and the opportunities provided for them to put that learning into practice. Experiential learning therefore appears to occupy an important position between curriculum relevance and job competency. Relevant content establishes what students are expected to learn, but workplace and practical exposure provide opportunities for that learning to become usable capability.

The evidence does not imply that every form of workplace exposure will produce the same result. The quality of the experience matters. Where practical activities are poorly structured, workplace supervision is limited or students have little opportunity to perform meaningful tasks, simply

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being present in a workplace may contribute relatively little to competency development. The documentary emphasis on WEL and structured practical learning is therefore significant because it points to the need for purposeful application rather than exposure alone.

4.3 Job Competency and Industry Readiness

A third pattern in the documents concerns the difference between possessing a qualification and being prepared to meet workplace expectations. UNICEF Ghana's (2025) assessment identifies weaknesses in the practical and transferable capabilities available in the labour market. Industry-oriented sources included in the corpus similarly emphasise practical and contemporary competencies in discussions of hospitality workforce development. The combined evidence suggests that educational attainment cannot automatically be treated as evidence of occupational readiness.

This distinction is particularly relevant to hospitality. Graduates may possess formal knowledge of service operations while still requiring further development in practical execution, customer interaction, communication, problem-solving or the use of current technologies. The question for industry readiness is therefore not simply whether competencies have been developed, but whether they correspond with what employers need graduates to do.

The hospitality evidence from Etefe (2024) and Nyadzi (2025), as summarised in the manuscript's evidence table, reinforces the industry's emphasis on practical and contemporary capabilities. This suggests that readiness is relational: it depends on the fit between the graduate's competency profile and the requirements of the workplace entered.

The distinction can be expressed as:

qualification ≠ automatic workplace readiness

and

competency possession ≠ competency–job alignment

This pattern provides empirical support for using Person–Job Fit Theory alongside Human Capital Theory. Education may contribute to productive capability, but industry readiness depends on whether that capability corresponds with current occupational demands.

The evidence also shows why practical, interpersonal and digital competencies should not be treated as separate concerns. Hospitality performance frequently requires them at the same time. An employee may need to operate a technological system while communicating with a customer and responding to an unexpected service problem. Readiness therefore reflects a combination of capabilities rather than mastery of a single competency domain.

4.4 Industry and Technological Dynamism

The fourth theme emerged from evidence showing that the requirements against which curriculum relevance and graduate readiness are judged are themselves changing. Technological change was particularly visible in the corpus. BusinessGhana (2025) reports that **"***frequent technological changes often render them obsolete,"* referring to the challenge of maintaining up-to-date technologies and equipment within training environments. This concern is consistent with evidence from Ghanaian SME contexts, where digitalization has been shown to transform organisational capability requirements at a pace that can exceed institutional responses (Asante et al., 2026). This observation is important because obsolete resources affect more than institutional infrastructure. They can also influence what students are able to practise before entering workplaces using newer systems.

The evidence therefore introduces a time dimension into the curriculum–competency relationship. A programme may initially reflect industry practice, yet its correspondence with the workplace can weaken if technologies and occupational requirements change while teaching resources, content or instructor capability remain largely unchanged.

The documents also provide evidence of institutional responses to this pressure. Konadu-Boakye (2022), for example, reports the introduction of e-learning **"***to meet the current digitalisation trend."* Such responses show that training institutions are not necessarily passive in the face of change. They can modify learning arrangements as new requirements become visible.

The important issue arising from the evidence is therefore the relative pace of change. Technological innovation can alter workplace practices quickly, whereas educational adjustment may require curriculum review, staff development, equipment acquisition and institutional approval. Where these processes move at different speeds, maintaining alignment becomes difficult.

This pattern led the analysis towards the closely related issue of curriculum adaptability.

4.5 Curriculum Adaptability

Curriculum adaptability emerged from the evidence as the capacity to respond when occupational requirements change. The documents indicate that such adjustment can occur through several routes, including stronger industry engagement, changes in learning arrangements, technology upgrading and efforts to keep training connected with contemporary workplace requirements.

This is broader than formal curriculum revision. If industry adopts a new technology, for example, responding effectively may require more than inserting the technology's name into a course outline. Instructors may need training, institutions may need appropriate equipment, and learners may need practical opportunities to use the technology.

The evidence on e-learning reported by Konadu-Boakye (2022) illustrates one form of response to digitalisation. CTVET's emphasis on industry engagement provides another, since continuing interaction with employers can help institutions identify changes in competency requirements before those changes are fully reflected in existing programmes.

Curriculum adaptability can therefore be understood from the documents as involving both information and response. Institutions first need mechanisms through which emerging workplace requirements become visible. They then need sufficient capacity to translate that information into changes in curriculum, pedagogy, technologies, instructor development or workplace-learning arrangements.

This finding becomes particularly important when considered alongside the evidence of continuing curriculum misalignment and technological change. Together, these strands raise the possibility that the relevance of a curriculum may deteriorate where adaptation is persistently slower than change in the workplace.

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4.6 Emergent Pattern: Curriculum Relevance Decay

Cross-source comparison revealed a pattern that was not adequately captured by treating curriculum relevance as a fixed condition. Regulatory documents showed continuing efforts to strengthen curriculum–industry alignment through industry engagement, occupational standards and demand-driven TVET. At the same time, UNICEF Ghana (2025) identified continuing curriculum misalignment and discrepancies between the skills supplied through education and training and those required by employers. Other documents pointed to technological change and the possibility that training equipment and technologies could become outdated, while institutional evidence showed attempts to respond to digitalisation and changing training requirements.

Although these observations address different aspects of the TVET system, their significance became clearer when considered together. They indicate that curriculum relevance may change over time rather than remain stable once alignment has been achieved. A curriculum may correspond reasonably well with occupational requirements at one point, but that correspondence may weaken as technologies, work processes and competency requirements change. Where educational adjustment is slower than these developments, the difference between the competencies developed through training and those required in the workplace may gradually widen.

This pattern is conceptualised in the present study as curriculum relevance decay, referring to the potential gradual weakening of correspondence between curriculum-developed competencies and industry-required competencies when occupational and technological change proceeds more quickly than educational adaptation. The concept does not imply that an entire curriculum suddenly becomes irrelevant. Rather, it draws attention to the possibility that particular aspects of a curriculum may lose some of their occupational relevance as industry requirements evolve.

Importantly, *curriculum relevance decay* is not a term used in any of the documents analysed. It emerged from the researchers' interpretation of converging evidence concerning curriculum misalignment, technological change, changing competency requirements and institutional responses. The study therefore does not claim to have directly measured curriculum relevance decay or established the rate at which it occurs. Instead, the documentary evidence points to conditions under which curriculum–industry correspondence may become increasingly difficult to maintain.

The evidence also suggests that such weakening is not inevitable. Institutions may preserve or restore alignment by identifying emerging occupational requirements and responding through curriculum renewal, educator development, technology upgrading and stronger workplace-learning arrangements. Curriculum adaptability therefore emerged as an important mechanism through which the potential effects of curriculum relevance decay may be reduced.

4.7 Cross-Source Interpretation of the Curriculum–Competency Gap

Looking across the different sources, it is difficult to trace the curriculum–competency gap to one particular problem. The evidence instead points to weaknesses at different stages of the training process. In some cases, what is taught may not sufficiently reflect what hospitality employers currently require. In others, students may learn relevant content but have too few opportunities to put that knowledge into practice. There is also the possibility that graduates leave training with useful competencies that do not fully match the demands they encounter at work. This becomes particularly important in areas where technology and working practices are changing quickly.

Practical experience appears to matter in this regard. A relevant curriculum can provide students with the knowledge and skills expected in hospitality, but classroom learning alone may not prepare them for the situations they will face at work. Workplace experience gives students an opportunity to use what they have learned, deal with actual service situations and develop greater confidence in performing occupational tasks. What eventually matters for industry readiness, however, is whether these capabilities are close enough to what employers expect from graduates entering the workplace.

The difficulty is that employer expectations do not remain unchanged. New technologies, changing customer expectations and different ways of organising hospitality services can alter the competencies required for particular jobs. Training that was well aligned with industry needs when a programme was developed may therefore become less adequate if these changes are not reflected in what and how students are taught.

This makes the ability of TVET institutions to respond to change particularly important. This observation parallels findings from hospitality workforce research, where the barriers constraining reskilling in response to AI deployment are identified as organisational and environmental rather than technological — mirroring the institutional constraints on curriculum adaptation identified in the present study (Mohammed, 2026a, 2026a).Curriculum adaptability is not simply about rewriting a curriculum. It also involves keeping teaching practices, instructors' industry knowledge, training technologies and workplace-learning opportunities reasonably close to developments in the sector. Where institutions are able to make these adjustments, the connection between training and employment is more likely to be preserved. Where change in the industry moves considerably faster than the educational response, the gap between what graduates have learned and what they are expected to do at work may become wider. In this sense, the issue is not only whether a hospitality curriculum is relevant when it is developed, but whether it can remain relevant as the industry itself changes.

Table 4. Summary of Themes and Supporting Documentary Evidence

Theme	Selected documentary evidence	Principal source(s)	Interpretation
Curriculum relevance and competency	"Industry engagement is vital for improving programme relevance."	CTVET (2026, p. 5)	Industry engagement supports curriculum–occupation alignment
Curriculum–competency gap	"Curriculum misalignment" and reported discrepancies between skills supplied and employer requirements	UNICEF Ghana (2025)	Formal alignment mechanisms do not necessarily eliminate competency gaps
Experiential learning	"The HOTCATT training programmes are focused on training individuals through experiential learning."	Konadu-Boakye (2022, para. 10)	Experiential learning provides practical application of curriculum learning
Practical application	Workplace Experience Learning connects institutional education with practical workplace exposure	BusinessGhana (2025)	Workplace experience supports competency conversion

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Theme	Selected documentary evidence	Principal source(s)	Interpretation
Job competency and readiness	Employer concerns regarding graduates' practical and transferable capabilities	UNICEF Ghana (2025)	Qualification attainment cannot automatically be equated with workplace readiness
Hospitality competency	Industry emphasis on practical and contemporary capabilities	Etefe (2024); Nyadzi (2025)	Hospitality readiness requires occupationally relevant capabilities
Technological dynamism	"Frequent technological changes often render them obsolete."	BusinessGhana (2025)	Technological change may reduce the continuing relevance of training resources
Curriculum adaptability	E-learning introduced "to meet the current digitalisation trend."	Konadu-Boakye (2022)	Institutions can respond to technological and occupational change
Curriculum relevance decay	Cross-source convergence of technological change, curriculum misalignment, resource constraints and changing competency requirements		

5. DISCUSSION

This study set out to understand the curriculum–competency gap in Ghana's hospitality TVET system by examining the relationships among curriculum relevance, experiential learning, job competency and industry readiness. The documentary evidence broadly supports these relationships, but it also points to a problem that is less visible when curriculum relevance is treated as a fixed condition. The requirements of hospitality work continue to change, and the capacity of training institutions to respond to those changes becomes part of the alignment problem itself. This temporal dimension provides the basis for the study's concepts of **curriculum** adaptability and curriculum relevance decay.

5.1 Curriculum Relevance and the Development of Job Competency

The first finding concerns the connection between curriculum relevance and graduate competency. Regulatory documents place considerable emphasis on industry engagement, occupational standards and demand-driven training. CTVET (2026), for example, describes industry engagement as important for improving programme relevance. At the same time, UNICEF Ghana (2025) reports curriculum misalignment and discrepancies between the skills available in the labour market and those required by employers. The significance lies in the coexistence of these two forms of evidence: Ghana has structures intended to strengthen curriculum–industry alignment, yet competency mismatches remain observable.

This finding is consistent with longstanding arguments in hospitality education that curricula need to reflect industry expectations (Gursoy & Swanger, 2004, 2005). It also agrees with research showing that hospitality work requires a mixture of technical and transferable capabilities rather than disciplinary knowledge alone (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Spowart, 2011). More recent evidence that students, educators and employers may assign different levels of importance to particular hospitality competencies further demonstrates why industry alignment cannot be assumed simply because a programme has been designed with employability in mind (Nguyen et al., 2023).

The present findings add an implementation perspective to this discussion. Curriculum relevance cannot be established only from curriculum documents or institutional arrangements. Occupational standards, Sector Skills Bodies and industry consultation provide mechanisms through which relevance can be pursued, but their presence does not demonstrate that learners ultimately acquire the competencies employers need. What matters is how these arrangements affect programme content, teaching, practical learning, assessment and the resources available for training.

This distinction also helps explain why curriculum relevance in the present study was represented through several dimensions. Industry alignment establishes the connection with occupational requirements, while practical orientation concerns opportunities to apply learning. Digital and technological responsiveness addresses the changing tools and systems used at work, and employability-skills integration captures capabilities such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving. Curriculum adaptability adds the capacity to adjust these elements as workplace requirements change.

The findings therefore support Human Capital Theory, but with an important qualification. Education and training can contribute to productive capability (Becker, 1964), yet the occupational value of that investment depends partly on what kind of human capital is developed and whether it remains useful in the environment in which graduates eventually work.

5.2 Experiential Learning and the Conversion of Curriculum Learning into Capability

The second finding concerns experiential learning. The documentary evidence gives practical and workplace-based learning a prominent role in hospitality preparation. HOTCATT's emphasis on experiential learning and the wider policy attention given to Workplace Experience Learning indicate that practical exposure is regarded as an important part of developing occupational capability.

This is consistent with Kolb's (1984) view that learning develops through engagement with experience and reflection on that experience. It also accords with evidence showing that workplace and work-integrated learning can strengthen graduate capability by giving students opportunities to apply what they have learned in authentic settings (Jackson, 2015; Nghia & My Duyen, 2018).

The contribution of the present study is to specify more clearly **w**here experiential learning sits in the curriculum–competency relationship. Rather than treating internships, WEL and practical training simply as desirable additions to a programme, the findings suggest that they perform a conversion function.

Relevant curriculum content represents intended capability. Students may understand procedures, concepts and standards through formal instruction, but occupational competence requires them to use that knowledge under conditions that involve customers, colleagues, time pressure, technologies and unexpected problems. Practical experience provides the setting in which this transition can occur.

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The study describes this process as **competency conversion**:
curriculum-derived learning → practical application → feedback and adjustment → demonstrable occupational capability.
The term should not be understood as implying that exposure automatically produces competence. The quality of workplace learning matters. An internship that offers little supervision or restricts students to peripheral activities may provide substantially less developmental value than an experience in which learners undertake meaningful tasks, receive feedback and reflect on their performance.
This qualification is important for TVET policy. Increasing the number of students placed in workplaces is not necessarily equivalent to improving experiential learning. Attention needs to be given to what students actually do during workplace exposure and how those experiences connect with intended competencies.

5.3 Job Competency and Industry Readiness: Capability Is Not the Same as Fit

The third finding provides support for distinguishing competency development from industry readiness. The documents indicate concerns about practical, transferable and contemporary capabilities, suggesting that qualification attainment cannot automatically be equated with preparedness for work.
Human Capital Theory alone does not fully explain this distinction. A graduate may have accumulated considerable knowledge and skill and therefore possess human capital, but those capabilities may still correspond imperfectly with the requirements of a particular job. Person–Job Fit Theory provides the additional explanatory lens needed here. From the demands–abilities perspective, fit depends on the correspondence between the abilities possessed by an individual and those required by the job (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).
This makes industry readiness relational rather than simply individual. Readiness cannot be determined solely by asking whether a graduate is competent. It also requires asking:

Competent in relation to what occupational requirements?

A graduate may possess strong technical skills but lack the digital competence now expected in a technology-intensive hotel. Another may be technically capable but require substantial development in communication or customer handling. Conversely, a graduate whose technical, interpersonal, digital and adaptive capabilities correspond closely with current occupational requirements is more likely to enter employment with a stronger degree of readiness.
The integration of Human Capital Theory and Person–Job Fit Theory is useful precisely because the theories address different parts of this problem. Human Capital Theory helps explain the development of productive capability through education and training. Person–Job Fit Theory explains why the value of those capabilities also depends on their correspondence with the demands encountered at work.
The curriculum–competency problem can therefore persist even when students have learned considerably. The issue may be, but it may insufficient capability also be inappropriate or outdated capability.

5.4 Industry and Technological Dynamism Change the Meaning of Relevance

The fourth finding introduces the dynamic element of the framework. The documentary evidence indicates that technological developments can make training resources obsolete and that institutions are responding, at least in some instances, through initiatives such as digital learning. These findings need to be interpreted against the broader transformation of hospitality through information technologies, digital platforms, automation and artificial intelligence (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Law et al., 2014; Ivanov & Webster, 2019; Tussyadiah, 2020).
Much of the discussion of curriculum relevance asks whether what students are taught corresponds with what industry requires. The findings of this study indicate that this question is incomplete because the point of comparison is moving.
Suppose a hospitality curriculum corresponds closely with prevailing occupational requirements when it is introduced. If reservation technologies, customer-service systems or operating practices subsequently change, that curriculum does not necessarily retain the same level of relevance. Its continuing value depends partly on whether educational provision changes with the workplace.
Curriculum relevance should therefore be understood as temporally contingent. This does not mean that every curriculum component becomes obsolete whenever a new technology appears. The evidence and theoretical framework support a more differentiated interpretation. Some competencies are likely to remain useful over comparatively long periods. Communication, customer orientation, teamwork and professionalism are examples. Competencies tied closely to particular technologies or operating procedures may be more susceptible to change.
The implication is that curriculum relevance may have different degrees of durability across competency domains. This provides a stronger explanation of why curriculum adaptability becomes important.

5.5 Curriculum Adaptability and the Maintenance of Alignment

The study's findings suggest that maintaining relevance requires more than periodic curriculum review. Institutions need ways of recognising changes in occupational requirements and translating that information into educational responses.
Industry engagement provides one such mechanism. Employers can identify new competency requirements and reveal areas in which graduate preparation no longer corresponds adequately with workplace practice. Graduate tracer studies, occupational-standard reviews and feedback from WEL can provide additional signals. Monitoring technology adoption may be particularly important where new systems alter occupational tasks quickly.
However, receiving information about change is different from being able to respond to it.
An institution may know that hotels are adopting new digital systems but lack the equipment required to train students on comparable technologies. Educators may require industry exposure or professional development before new practices can be incorporated effectively into teaching. Formal curriculum revisions may also require administrative and regulatory processes that take considerably longer than changes occurring in industry.
For this reason, curriculum adaptability is conceptualised here as an institutional capacity, not merely the frequency with which curriculum documents are revised. It includes the capacity to update content, pedagogy, instructional resources, educator capability and workplace-learning arrangements in response to changing occupational requirements.
This interpretation extends the concept of curriculum relevance from alignment-to-alignment maintenance.

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A curriculum is not adaptable simply because it can be reviewed. It is adaptable when the wider training system can detect meaningful changes and respond before the difference between what is taught and what is required becomes substantial.

5.6 Curriculum Relevance Decay

The principal emergent contribution of the study concerns what may happen when such adaptation does not occur quickly enough. Cross-source comparison brought together evidence of curriculum misalignment, technological change, resource obsolescence, changing competency requirements and institutional responses. None of the documents refers directly to *curriculum relevance decay*. The concept was developed to explain the temporal pattern produced when these strands of evidence were considered together. Curriculum relevance decay is defined as the gradual weakening of correspondence between curriculum-developed competencies and industry-required competencies when occupational and technological requirements change more rapidly than education and training systems adapt.

6. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study contributes to hospitality TVET and skills-development research by moving the discussion of curriculum relevance beyond whether educational content corresponds with industry requirements at a particular point in time. Four related contributions emerge from the analysis: the conceptualisation of experiential learning as a competency-conversion mechanism, the integration of competency development with competency–job alignment, the introduction of a dynamic perspective on competency fit, and the development of curriculum relevance decay as an explanation of how curriculum–industry alignment may weaken over time.

6.1 Experiential Learning as a Competency-Conversion Mechanism

The first contribution concerns the role assigned to experiential learning. Existing research has established the value of internships, workplace learning and other forms of practical experience in preparing students for employment (Jackson, 2015; Nghia & My Duyen, 2018). The present study develops this argument by locating experiential learning more precisely within the curriculum–competency process.

The documentary evidence shows that practical learning is not simply an additional component of hospitality training. HOTCATT, for example, explicitly places experiential learning within its approach to training, while Ghana's wider TVET framework incorporates Workplace Experience Learning as a mechanism for connecting institutional preparation with the workplace.

This study conceptualises that role as competency conversion. Curriculum relevance determines, in part, what learners are expected to know and be able to do, but those intended competencies still have to be exercised under practical conditions. Workplace experience provides opportunities to apply knowledge, encounter occupational problems, receive feedback and adjust performance. Experiential learning therefore helps explain the transition from curriculum-derived learning to demonstrable occupational capability.

The proposed relationship is:

Relevant Curriculum → Experiential Application → Competency Development

This interpretation adds specificity to the curriculum–competency relationship. It also suggests that assessments of curriculum quality should consider not only what appears in programme documents but the opportunities learners actually have to convert intended learning into practice.

6.2 Integrating Human Capital Development with Competency–Job Alignment

The second contribution comes from bringing Human Capital Theory and Person–Job Fit Theory together.

Human Capital Theory explains why investment in education and training can develop productive knowledge and capabilities (Becker, 1964). This provides a useful foundation for understanding hospitality TVET, but it does not fully explain why graduates who have acquired knowledge and skills may still encounter difficulties meeting employer expectations.

Person–Job Fit Theory addresses this problem from a different direction. Its demands–abilities perspective focuses on the correspondence between an individual's capabilities and what a job requires (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). The integration of the two theories therefore makes it possible to distinguish competency formation from competency alignment.

This distinction is theoretically important because possessing human capital does not necessarily imply that the human capital developed provides an adequate fit with contemporary occupational requirements. A graduate may have acquired considerable technical knowledge, for instance, but still require further preparation if the workplace demands technologies, interpersonal capabilities or adaptive skills that received insufficient attention during training.

The study therefore proposes that industry readiness depends on more than competency accumulation:

Educational Investment → Competency Development

but

Competency Development + Correspondence with Current Job Requirements → Industry Readiness

The contribution is not the claim that the two theories are inherently incompatible or that their combination creates a new general theory. Rather, their integration provides a more complete explanation of the curriculum–competency problem examined in this study. Human Capital Theory explains the development of productive capability; Person–Job Fit Theory explains why the occupational usefulness of that capability also depends on what the job currently requires.

6.3 From Static Competency Fit to Dynamic Competency Fit

The third contribution introduces time into the competency–job relationship.

Person–Job Fit is often discussed as correspondence between an individual's characteristics and job requirements at a particular point. In vocational education, however, competency development and occupational application are separated by time. Students may begin training under one set of industry conditions and enter employment after technologies, work practices or employer expectations have changed.

The documentary evidence makes this issue visible. The corpus contains evidence of technological change, concerns about obsolete training resources and institutional efforts to respond to digitalisation. These developments mean that the occupational requirements against which graduate competency is evaluated do not remain constant.

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The study therefore distinguishes between static competency fit and dynamic competency fit. Static fit concerns correspondence between capability and job requirements at a given point. Dynamic fit concerns the maintenance or restoration of that correspondence as occupational requirements change.

This distinction extends the theoretical interpretation of industry readiness. Readiness is not necessarily permanent. A graduate who possesses a strong competency–job fit today may experience weaker fit later if the occupation changes and the individual's capabilities are not updated. Similarly, a curriculum that provides strong preparation at one stage may provide weaker preparation later if training does not evolve with industry.

Two forms of adaptability become important within this dynamic interpretation. At the institutional level, curriculum adaptability helps educational provision respond to changing occupational requirements. At the individual level, adaptive competency can help graduates learn, adjust and respond when workplace demands change.

The implication is that vocational competency should be understood not only in terms of what graduates know when they complete training but also in terms of their capacity, and the capacity of the training system, to maintain correspondence with changing work.

6.4 Curriculum Relevance Decay

The fourth and principal conceptual contribution is the development of curriculum relevance decay.

Much of the curriculum–industry alignment literature is concerned with whether curricula reflect contemporary employer requirements. The present study introduces a temporal question: what happens to that alignment after industry requirements change?

Cross-source analysis showed an important tension. Ghana's TVET system contains formal mechanisms intended to promote demand-driven training, including occupational standards, industry engagement, competency-based training and Workplace Experience Learning. At the same time, the documentary corpus contains evidence of curriculum misalignment, technological change, resource obsolescence and continuing competency gaps.

Rather than treating these observations as contradictory, the study interprets them dynamically. Curriculum–industry alignment may be achieved to some degree at one point but become more difficult to maintain as the workplace changes.

The study defines curriculum relevance decay as:

the gradual weakening of correspondence between curriculum-developed competencies and industry-required competencies when occupational and technological requirements change more rapidly than the education and training system adapts.

Conceptually:

Rindustry change>Rcurriculum adaptation⇒increased risk of curriculum relevance decay

The expression is conceptual rather than a statistically estimated relationship.

This distinction is important because curriculum irrelevance and curriculum relevance decay are not the same phenomenon. Curriculum irrelevance describes insufficient correspondence with occupational requirements. Curriculum relevance decay describes a process through which an initially relevant curriculum may progressively lose some of that correspondence.

The concept consequently shifts attention from achieving curriculum relevance to maintaining curriculum relevance.

Curriculum adaptability becomes particularly important within this formulation. If institutions can identify emerging competency requirements and respond through curriculum renewal, educator development, technology upgrading and revised workplace-learning arrangements, the deterioration of alignment may be reduced. Where adjustment remains slower than workplace change, the curriculum–competency gap may widen.

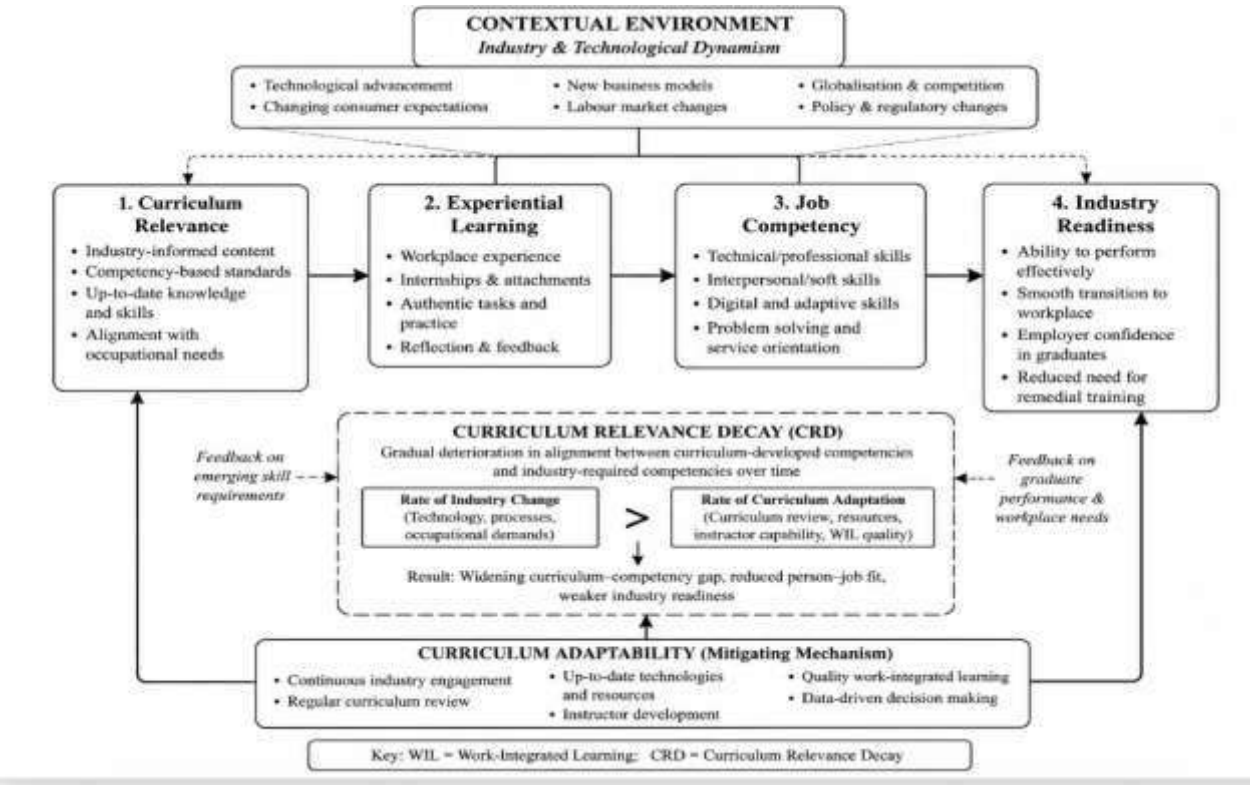
The documentary evidence does not establish the rate, duration or causal effect of curriculum relevance decay. The concept should therefore be treated as a theoretically informed proposition emerging from qualitative cross-source analysis and requiring further empirical testing.

6.5 Integrated Theoretical Contribution

Taken together, the study provides a more dynamic explanation of the curriculum–competency relationship. Human Capital Theory explains how education and experiential learning contribute to competency development, while Person–Job Fit Theory explains whether those competencies correspond with workplace requirements. This distinction shows that developing relevant capabilities does not automatically guarantee industry readiness.

The framework also recognises that hospitality requirements change as technologies, work practices and employer expectations evolve. Curriculum adaptability is therefore important for maintaining the connection between training and industry needs. Where educational adjustment does not keep pace with industry change, the gap between curriculum-developed and industry-required competencies may widen, creating the conditions for curriculum relevance decay. The study therefore extends curriculum–industry alignment from a static concern with developing relevant competencies to a dynamic concern with maintaining their relevance as industry requirements change.

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7. PRACTICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings have implications for TVET institutions, hospitality employers, policymakers and the wider hospitality skills-development ecosystem. The central implication is that curriculum–industry alignment should be treated as a continuous process rather than an outcome achieved through periodic curriculum revision. As occupational requirements change, institutions require mechanisms for detecting emerging competency needs and translating them into timely educational responses.

7.1 Establishing a Curriculum-Relevance Monitoring and Early-Warning Mechanism

A practical implication arising directly from the concept of curriculum relevance decay is the need to identify emerging misalignment before it becomes substantial.

TVET institutions and relevant regulatory bodies could establish a curriculum-relevance monitoring and early-warning mechanism that periodically compares curriculum-developed competencies with emerging occupational requirements. Such monitoring could draw on several sources: employer feedback on graduate performance;

graduate tracer studies; Workplace Experience Learning reports; occupational-standard reviews;

technology-adoption trends; instructor industry-exposure reports; and evidence from sector skills bodies and professional associations. The purpose would not be to revise an entire curriculum whenever an employer adopts a new technology. Rather, the mechanism would identify patterns indicating that a competency, technology or work practice is becoming sufficiently important to require an educational response.

This would shift curriculum management from periodic correction after substantial gaps appear towards earlier detection of emerging divergence.

7.2 Making Curriculum Review More Responsive to Occupational Change

Formal curriculum review remains important, but the findings suggest that conventional review cycles may not always be sufficiently responsive where industry requirements change rapidly.

Institutions could therefore distinguish between major curriculum review and continuous curriculum updating. Major reviews may continue to follow established regulatory cycles, while smaller adjustments could occur between formal reviews through updated teaching cases, technology-based exercises, industry projects, guest practitioner sessions and revised workplace-learning activities.

Particular attention should be given to competencies that are more susceptible to rapid change. Digital reservation systems, data-supported operations, electronic customer interfaces and emerging AI applications may require more frequent updating than foundational capabilities such as teamwork, communication and customer orientation.This differentiated approach would allow institutions to preserve stable foundational learning while responding more quickly to areas where occupational change is faster.

7.3 Strengthening Experiential Learning as Competency Development

The competency-conversion argument also has practical implications for Workplace Experience Learning.

If experiential learning helps translate curriculum-derived learning into occupational capability, the quality of workplace experience becomes as important as its availability. Simply placing students in hotels or related organisations does not guarantee meaningful competency development.

WEL arrangements should therefore specify:

what competencies students are expected to practise;

what tasks they should perform;

how workplace supervisors should provide feedback;

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how institutional supervisors should monitor learning; and
how workplace experience should be assessed.
Structured learning agreements between institutions, employers and students could make these expectations explicit.
Post-placement reflection could also be used to identify discrepancies between what students were taught and what they encountered at work. Such information would make WEL useful not only for student development but also as a source of evidence for curriculum improvement.

7.4 Deepening Employer Participation

The findings reinforce the importance of industry participation, but they also suggest that participation needs to extend beyond occasional curriculum consultation. Hospitality employers can provide information about emerging technologies, changing customer expectations, evolving service practices and weaknesses observed among new graduates. Regular engagement with hotels, restaurants, tourism businesses and relevant professional associations can therefore function as a continuing source of labour-market intelligence. Sector Skills Bodies can play an important coordinating role by bringing employers and training institutions together around changing occupational requirements. Employer participation should also extend to practical training. Industry practitioners can contribute through guest instruction, joint assessment, mentoring, curriculum advisory roles, educator attachments and structured student placements. The objective is not to allow individual employers to determine educational curricula. Rather, it is to create continuing channels through which broader changes in occupational practice become visible to training institutions.

7.5 Updating Educator Industry Capability

Curriculum adaptability depends partly on the capabilities of those who teach it. Where hospitality technologies and work practices change, instructors who have limited recent exposure to industry may find it difficult to translate new occupational requirements into teaching. Periodic industry attachment for TVET educators could therefore complement student WEL.
Such attachments would allow instructors to observe contemporary technologies, service practices, customer-management systems and workplace expectations directly.
The information gained could then influence teaching materials, simulations, practical exercises and assessment.
Educator development is especially important because updating curriculum documents without updating the capabilities of those responsible for implementation may produce little practical change.

7.6 Technology and Training Infrastructure

The documentary evidence concerning technological obsolescence also has implications for infrastructure investment.
Training students on technologies that differ substantially from those used in contemporary hospitality workplaces can contribute to the curriculum–competency gap even where the formal curriculum is appropriately designed.
Institutions may not be able to purchase every technology adopted by industry. Partnerships can therefore provide alternative routes to access. Hotels and technology providers could support demonstrations, shared laboratories, software access, simulation platforms and structured exposure during WEL.
Where physical technology is expensive, simulation and cloud-based systems may provide opportunities for students to become familiar with contemporary operating environments before entering employment.
Technology investment should therefore be guided not simply by the age of existing equipment but by its occupational relevance.

7.7 Protecting Foundational Competencies While Updating Digital Skills

A dynamic curriculum should not be interpreted as one that continually replaces established competencies with new technologies.
The findings instead support a balance between durable foundational capabilities and changing occupational competencies.
Communication, teamwork, customer orientation, professionalism, problem-solving and adaptability remain important even as hospitality becomes more technologically intensive. Indeed, technology may increase rather than reduce the importance of some interpersonal capabilities by shifting employees towards more complex customer interactions.
Curriculum renewal should therefore preserve these foundational competencies while integrating contemporary digital capabilities.
Adaptive competency deserves particular attention. Graduates cannot be trained in advance for every technology or work process they will encounter. Developing the capacity to learn unfamiliar systems, solve new problems and adjust to changing work may therefore provide some protection against the consequences of future occupational change.

7.8 Policy Implications for Ghana's TVET System

At the policy level, the findings support Ghana's existing emphasis on demand-driven TVET, occupational standards, Sector Skills Bodies and Workplace Experience Learning. The documentary evidence, however, suggests that the existence of these structures does not by itself guarantee sustained curriculum–industry alignment.
The policy challenge is therefore to strengthen the feedback loop between industry change and educational response.
CTVET and related agencies could consider incorporating curriculum-relevance monitoring into programme quality-assurance processes. Reviews could examine not only whether institutions comply with approved curricula but whether training resources, instructor capabilities and workplace-learning arrangements remain sufficiently aligned with current occupational practice.
A sector-based competency observatory could also be considered. For hospitality, such a mechanism could periodically identify emerging occupations, technologies and competency requirements and communicate these developments to training providers.
This would complement existing occupational standards by providing more frequent information between major standard-setting or curriculum-review exercises.

7.9 Implications for Hospitality Employers

Responsibility for reducing the curriculum–competency gap does not rest solely with educational institutions.
Hospitality employers benefit from graduates who enter work with relevant capabilities and therefore have an interest in contributing to skills development. Employers can support institutions through meaningful student placements, curriculum consultation, practitioner teaching, technology exposure and feedback on graduate performance.

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They can also contribute by identifying competency changes before they become widespread gaps.

A stronger relationship between employers and institutions may reduce the tendency for industry to identify graduate deficiencies only after recruitment. Instead, employers become part of the process through which future competency requirements are communicated to training providers.

7.10 A Shift from Curriculum Review to Curriculum-Relevance Management

The findings suggest that curriculum relevance should be managed as an ongoing process rather than addressed only during periodic reviews. Hospitality TVET institutions need regular feedback from employers, graduates and workplace learning to identify changes in skills, technologies and occupational practices.

This approach, described as curriculum-relevance management, does not require constant curriculum revision. Instead, it involves monitoring changes in the industry and making timely adjustments where gaps emerge. For Ghana, this would strengthen existing TVET structures by ensuring that programmes are not only relevant when approved but remain relevant as workplace requirements change.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations that also point to opportunities for further research. First, it relies on documentary evidence rather than the direct experiences of hospitality graduates, employers and TVET educators. Future studies could use interviews, focus groups or surveys to examine whether the relationships identified in the documents are reflected in workplace experiences.

The study is also limited to Ghana and draws on 12 publicly available documents published between 2021 and 2026. Although these sources provide different regulatory, development, institutional and industry perspectives, they may not capture all aspects of the curriculum–competency gap. Comparative studies across African countries and research incorporating curriculum documents, employer competency frameworks and graduate tracer studies could provide a broader understanding of the issue.

As a qualitative study, the findings identify patterns and relationships but cannot establish causality. In particular, curriculum relevance decay emerged from the interpretation of evidence on technological change, curriculum misalignment and educational adaptation rather than from direct measurement over time. Longitudinal research is therefore needed to examine whether curriculum relevance actually weakens when industry requirements change faster than training systems can respond.

Future quantitative studies could also test the relationships proposed in the framework, including the role of experiential learning in connecting curriculum relevance with job competency and the role of curriculum adaptability in maintaining alignment with changing industry requirements. Further research could examine whether technical, interpersonal, digital and adaptive competencies change at different rates, and whether adaptive competency helps graduates cope with changing workplace demands. Extending the framework to other rapidly changing sectors would also help determine whether the concepts developed in this study have relevance beyond hospitality.

9. CONCLUSION

This study examined the curriculum–competency gap in Ghana's hospitality TVET system using evidence from regulatory, development, institutional, industry and media sources. The findings show that although mechanisms such as Competency-Based Training, occupational standards, industry engagement and Workplace Experience Learning are intended to strengthen the connection between training and employment, gaps between curriculum-developed competencies and workplace requirements remain.

The analysis also highlights the importance of experiential learning in helping students turn what they learn into capabilities they can use at work. Yet developing competencies is only part of the challenge. Graduates are better prepared for employment when their technical, interpersonal, digital and adaptive capabilities correspond with what hospitality employers currently require.

A key contribution of the study is the recognition that this correspondence can change over time. As technologies, work practices and employer expectations evolve, a curriculum that was once well aligned with industry needs may gradually become less relevant if training does not adjust. The study describes this emerging pattern as curriculum relevance decay and identifies curriculum adaptability as important for maintaining alignment.

The broader implication is that curriculum relevance should not be treated as something achieved once through curriculum design or periodic review. Hospitality TVET institutions need to remain responsive to changes in the workplace through industry engagement, practical learning, educator development and timely curriculum adjustment. The challenge is therefore not simply to prepare graduates for today's hospitality industry, but to develop a training system capable of remaining relevant as the industry changes.

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