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Enhancing Tourism Education with Artificial Intelligence for Post-COVID-19 Workforce Readiness

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Abstract

This study investigates how artificial intelligence (AI)-enhanced education can address critical skill gaps and strengthen workforce resilience in the post-COVID-19 tourism sector. It examines whether current tourism curricula align with industry expectations, with particular focus on digital competencies, experiential learning, and entrepreneurial readiness. A mixed-methods descriptive research design was employed, combining structured questionnaires with thematic analysis of qualitative data. The study sampled 36 tourism businesses in the Midlands Meander, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Thematic analysis and descriptive statistics revealed widespread employer dissatisfaction with graduates' digital and AI readiness (75%) and specific gaps in crisis management and adaptive skills. Businesses adopting digital solutions showed stronger post-pandemic recovery trajectories, underscoring the need for AI-integrated

curriculum reform to better prepare graduates for the demands of the evolving tourism industry. This study provides empirically grounded evidence from an under-researched emerging-market context, reconceptualising AI integration as structural curriculum reform rather than supplementary enhancement. The findings offer important policy and pedagogical insights to strengthen tourism education and improve graduate readiness for a rapidly evolving global tourism industry.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial competencies, Artificial intelligence in education, Tourism workforce development, Digital skills, Post-pandemic recovery, Curriculum reform.*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the most severe disruptions to global tourism in recorded history. It caused mass workforce displacement, deepened institutional uncertainty, and forced a fundamental rethinking of human capital development. The pandemic served to expose deep-seated vulnerabilities in tourism educational frameworks, which had failed to modernise at a rate commensurate with the sector's increasingly sophisticated technological landscape (Bama & Abrahams, 2023). Today, the industry demands graduates who are not merely digitally literate but capable of deploying artificial intelligence (AI) tools, managing crises, and driving innovation-led recovery. In this context, Stylianou and Pericleous (2025) highlight a significant lack of empirical research regarding the digital skills readiness of tourism graduates, a deficiency that has considerable implications for employability and sectoral competitiveness. Building on Bama & Abrahams (2023), this study examines how AI can serve as a vehicle for curriculum reform. It aims to explore how tourism programmes can better align with post-pandemic digital industry demands and to assess the implications of AI-enhanced pedagogy for graduate competency and workforce readiness. Evidence is drawn from 36 tourism enterprises in the Midlands Meander, KwaZulu-Natal, a region of growing strategic importance to inland tourism diversification (Cusack, 2021), to generate actionable, evidence-based reform strategies.

Tourism education encompasses degree programmes, vocational training, and professional development designed to equip individuals for careers in tourism and hospitality (Sreenivasan & Singh, 2024). Tiwari et al. (2020) argue that tourism education must remain dynamically aligned with industry evolution, an imperative made urgent by the post-pandemic

need for graduates who can navigate AI-augmented operations and volatile market conditions. Characterised by a multifaceted composition of accommodation, craft, agricultural tourism, and rural hospitality enterprises, the Midlands Meander provides a contextually rich, non-metropolitan case study for the analysis of these dynamics. Three research objectives guide this study: (1) to assess employer satisfaction with tourism graduates' digital and professional readiness; (2) to identify competency gaps impeding post-pandemic employability; and (3) to evaluate AI-enhanced pedagogical strategies for building long-term workforce resilience. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on AI, entrepreneurship, and educational reform in Africa's tourism sector.

1. Literature Review

1.1 The Education-Industry Misalignment

The study's core objective is grounded in a substantial and growing body of literature documenting the persistent misalignment between academic preparation and industry expectations in tourism and hospitality education. Historically, tourism curricula have privileged the acquisition of theoretical knowledge over the development of practical, adaptive, and technology-oriented competencies, a structural bias that leaves graduates underprepared for the dynamic realities of industry employment (Ndibalema, 2025). The pandemic profoundly intensified this misalignment, revealing fundamental deficits in digital literacy, crisis management competencies, and the mastery of 21st-century skills across the graduate cohort (Carlisle et al., 2021).

AI-driven tools such as predictive analytics, intelligent chatbots, and VR simulations are now integral to contemporary tourism operations, yet their systematic incorporation into higher education curricula remains limited (Aydin & Sirkeci, 2024). Aydin & Sirkeci (2024) note that the pace of AI evolution demands continuous curriculum revision and sustained faculty development, both of which present significant opportunities and structural challenges for resource-constrained institutions. Inadequate digital infrastructure exacerbates these challenges in many African contexts. Ndibalema (2025) identifies limited access to digital equipment and insufficient institutional investment as systemic barriers to curriculum reform that predate the pandemic and have intensified since.

Within South Africa, national AI adoption is gaining momentum through initiatives such as the Siyanda AI assistant and Cape Town's AI

Hub (South African Tourism, 2025). However, significant and spatially uneven equity concerns remain. Rural and peri-urban tourism enterprises, including those in the Midlands Meander, face constraints in connectivity, availability of digital hardware, and foundational digital literacy among students and educators. These risks widen the gap between aspirational national policy and operational reality (Ndibalema, 2025; UNESCO, 2024). Addressing these inequities requires not only curriculum redesign but also targeted infrastructure investment and system-level equity planning.

Böckelmann (2023) and Kumar & Chansoria (2021) emphasise that, as tourism becomes more technologically dynamic, continuous professional development and cross-industry partnerships are essential to enable the workforce to adapt to rapid technological change and shifting consumer behaviour. AI-driven reskilling platforms offer scalable mechanisms for ongoing competency development. Çinar (2020) and Reichenberger & Raymond (2021) similarly argue that educational programmes must align with technological trends, including AI-powered contactless services, virtual tourism applications, and sustainable operational practices, if graduates are to remain competitive in the post-pandemic global market.

1.2 Industry Expectations versus Academic Preparation

The pandemic catalysed intensifying demands for curriculum reform, particularly in the domains of digitalisation, AI integration, crisis management, and sustainable tourism practice. Mínguez et al. (2021) assert that the post-pandemic tourism landscape necessitates a workforce capable of navigating volatile, technology-driven environments with significant agility. Güner & Cilginoğlu (2024) identifies AI-powered virtual learning platforms, adaptive learning algorithms, and intelligent tutoring systems as critical mechanisms for delivering the personalised, real-time learning experiences that conventional instructional approaches are structurally unable to provide.

Despite tourism's acknowledged importance for workforce development, curricula have consistently failed to keep pace with employer expectations: employers prioritise practical skills and operational readiness, whereas academic programmes disproportionately emphasise theoretical frameworks (Paydya, 2019). Böckelmann (2023) advocates for an interdisciplinary curriculum integrating digital technology, economics, sustainability, and entrepreneurship, an approach demonstrably better suited to the multifaceted demands of contemporary tourism practice.

Çinar et al. (2024) further identify AI-driven applications, including intelligent chatbots, data-driven decision-support tools, and immersive VR training simulations, as capable of meaningfully enhancing both the quality of learning experience and the practical preparedness of graduates.

The benefits of AI in education cannot, however, be assumed to be equitably distributed. In South African higher education, unreliable broadband, hardware shortages, and limited digital literacy among students and educators represent structural barriers to AI adoption (Ndibalema, 2025). Ethical concerns are equally significant: algorithmic bias may disadvantage marginalised students; AI-generated content raises academic integrity issues; and the risk of human role displacement means graduates must learn not only to use AI tools but to evaluate their deployment critically. The responsible integration of AI intelligence within the South African tourism education system necessitates a nationally contextualised and equity-conscious approach. South Africa's tourism education system still largely relies on traditional teaching methods, leaving students unprepared for roles requiring digital skills, AI knowledge, and an understanding of sustainability (Zhao & Watterston, 2021). Addressing this gap is crucial for making the local workforce more competitive and for helping South Africa's tourism industry succeed globally.

1.3 Experiential Learning and Entrepreneurial Readiness in a Digital Era

Practical, hands-on learning is widely recognised as a fundamental part of effective tourism education and directly supports this study's goal of finding reform strategies to enhance graduate employability. Stemele & Sucheran (2021) show that structured internships and practical training opportunities facilitate the integration of theoretical frameworks and professional practice more effectively than didactic classroom instruction alone. However, comparative evidence reveals significant differences in programme effectiveness: high-income countries, especially Germany's dual vocational system, which systematically combines workplace experience with academic learning (Life in Germany, 2024), stand in sharp contrast to low- and middle-income countries, where limited industry-academia collaboration and resource shortages hinder experiential learning outcomes (Hyasat, 2022).

AI-driven technologies offer promising and scalable mechanisms for bridging this experiential gap. VR and augmented reality (AR) applications

have been increasingly explored in tourism education to create immersive simulated environments in which students can engage substantively with real-world tourism management challenges without the logistical and financial barriers of fieldwork (Bretos et al., 2023). These AI-powered simulations not only reduce institutional resource demands but also extend meaningful experiential learning to students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds who would otherwise be excluded from field-based programmes, a particularly important equity dimension in the South African context.

Stylianou & Pericleous (2025) and UNESCO (2024) highlight a deficit in digital skills and entrepreneurial thinking among tourism graduates, emphasising that existing experiential learning models must be redesigned to incorporate these competencies systematically. Lucia et al. (2021) provide evidence that universities integrating simulations and industry-driven projects into curricula consistently produce more adaptable, industry-ready graduates. Incorporating AI-powered tools into tourism education, therefore, simultaneously enhances the quality of experiential training, improves digital proficiency, and strengthens graduate employability, enabling future professionals to drive sustainable industry innovation rather than merely filling existing vacancies.

2. Research Methodology

A descriptive, mixed-methods design was employed to examine how tourism education outcomes align with post-pandemic industry needs. This approach is appropriate for providing a detailed view of current conditions and relationships (Coe et al., 2021). It allows the combination of quantitative data with qualitative insights from tourism business stakeholders.

The design used a convergent mixed-methods approach, facilitating the distinct analysis of survey metrics and qualitative feedback, followed by their integration to provide a more robust and validated interpretation of the data. The study was situated in the Midlands Meander, KwaZulu-Natal, a region of growing strategic importance to South Africa's inland tourism economy. A convenience sampling strategy was used due to logistical and geographical constraints (Mahmoudi-Hamidabad & Farrokhi, 2012). From a sampling frame of 117 registered tourism enterprises, 36 valid responses were collected (response rate: approximately 31%). Participant distribution included accommodation (80%), restaurants (11%), and attractions (8%).

Data were collected via structured questionnaires designed following a systematic review of the relevant literature, including Paydya (2019), McKercher & Tkaczynski (2024), and Böckelmann (2023). The instrument addressed three key constructs: (1) graduate preparedness, operationalised as the degree of alignment between academic curricula and industry skill requirements; (2) skill gaps, measuring deficiencies in digital literacy, crisis management capability, and adaptability; and (3) COVID-19 impact, assessing shifts in employment trends, industry expectations, and perceptions of learner readiness. Closed-ended Likert-scale items and open-ended questions were included, enabling both statistical analysis and thematic interpretation. Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28.0). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were calculated to summarise industry perceptions of graduate competencies. In addition, a ranking of key skill gaps identified by employers was conducted to prioritise competencies most urgently required by the tourism industry.

Qualitative responses were analysed using thematic analysis. Responses were coded inductively, grouped into categories, and synthesised into broader themes reflecting recurring employer concerns about digital competencies, crisis management capabilities, and adaptability. Data triangulation cross-validated statistical results with qualitative insights and benchmarked findings against existing literature. Several limitations of this study warrant explicit acknowledgement. These methodological constraints—specifically the use of convenience sampling and a 31% response rate—necessitate caution regarding the representativeness of the data and the presence of selection bias. The dominance of accommodation-sector respondents (80%) constrains the generalisability of findings across tourism sub-sectors. The localised focus on the Midlands Meander, while providing contextual depth and regional specificity, limits direct extrapolation to other geographic or institutional contexts.

3. Findings

3.1 Alignment of Skills with Industry Needs

The study revealed significant gaps in tourism education, particularly in digital and AI-driven skill domains, with direct and material consequences for graduate employability and industry performance.

Table 1 presents industry partner assessments of graduate readiness across four dimensions relevant to the study objectives.

Table 1: Industry partners' satisfaction with tourism graduate preparedness (n = 36)

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Satisfied / Yes / Agree (%)</i>	<i>Dissatisfied / No / Disagree (%)</i>
Industry satisfaction with the skills graduates bring to the tourism industry	Skills–industry alignment	25.0	75.0
Readiness of learners during COVID-19 to join the tourism industry	Post-pandemic learner readiness	27.8	72.2
Impact of COVID-19 on learners taking on careers in tourism	Tourism as a career choice	81.0	19.0
Impact of COVID-19 on employment rates in the tourism industry	Employment rate impact	100.0	—

Note. Percentage figures reflect proportions of respondents selecting each response category. The employment rate impact item used a binary (yes/ no) response format.

Table 1 summarises industry partners' assessments of tourism graduate preparedness across key areas. An impressive 75% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the overall skills that graduates bring to the tourism industry, while only 25.0% reported satisfaction. This significant level of dissatisfaction highlights the failure of current tourism education to achieve congruence with the evolving needs of the post-pandemic sector, particularly regarding the integration of digital fluency and adaptive skill sets. Similarly, 72.2% viewed graduates as insufficiently prepared to enter the workforce in the post-COVID era, emphasising widespread gaps in crisis management, AI skills, and technology integration. These results suggest that academic institutions have yet to achieve comprehensive curricular alignment with the digital and operational transformations accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In contrast, 81% reported a negative impact of COVID-19 on tourism as a career option, while 100% confirmed widespread job disruptions during the pandemic's peak. These patterns align closely with themes from open-ended responses, where employers repeatedly mentioned deficiencies in 'digital booking management,' 'contactless service technologies,' and 'AI-assisted problem-solving.' Combining these

quantitative dissatisfaction rates with persistent qualitative concerns highlights the imperative for AI-integrated pedagogy to mitigate employability deficits and bolster workforce resilience within emerging-market locales like the Midlands Meander.

3.2 Post-Pandemic Workforce Readiness

A significant majority of industry partners (72.2%) believe that tourism graduates lack the essential skills and knowledge needed to participate effectively in the post-pandemic industry. Only 27.8% think graduates are adequately prepared (Table 1). Thematic analysis of qualitative responses identified specific areas of deficiency: AI-powered problem-solving, digital booking management, virtual customer service platforms, and contactless service technologies, all of which have become operational standards in modern tourism businesses.

These findings expand on Mínguez et al.'s (2021) focus on resilience and technological readiness by identifying specific skill gaps: AI-assisted decision-making, virtual engagement, and adaptive responses to changing market conditions. While institutions seem to recognise the importance of digital transformation in theory, curricula remain largely theoretical and do not provide students with practical experience with AI-driven tools. Evidence-based solutions such as industry-simulation environments, hands-on AI training modules, and formal industry-partnership programmes can help bridge this skills gap. The results of this study support the use of such approaches in South African tourism education, indicating that AI integration is not only beneficial for teaching but also essential for graduate employability.

3.3 Post-Pandemic Employment Impacts and Digital Recovery

The empirical data shown in Figure 1 highlight several significant changes within the tourism sector, which are fundamental for students of the discipline to comprehend in the post- COVID-19 pandemic context.

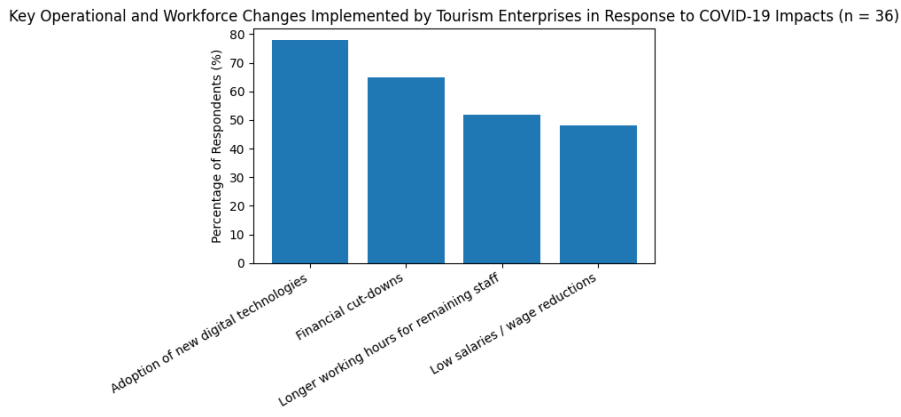


Figure 1: Changes made in the industry to deal with learners impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (researcher’s own)

Figure 1 shows the main adaptive strategies used by Midlands Meander tourism businesses to handle COVID-19 disruptions and support workforce and graduate integration. Notably, 78% of respondents adopted new digital technologies, such as contactless systems, online booking platforms, and simple AI tools, making digitalisation the most common recovery approach. This high adoption rate indicates a rapid shift toward technology-enabled operations, aligning with national recovery trends in which digitally savvy businesses rebounded faster (South African Tourism, 2025; WTTC, 2025). Financial actions remained common (65% made cutbacks, often reducing wages by 20–30%), while 52% worked longer hours and 48% cut salaries, showing short-term cost pressures during recovery. These patterns, especially the focus on digital adoption, align with insights from open-ended responses (e.g., employers describing 'contactless check-in as now standard') and highlight that investing in technology not only supported resilience but also increased demand for graduates skilled in digital tools. These findings further underscore the necessity of equipping tourism graduates with digital and AI-related competencies, as industry stakeholders increasingly demand personnel capable of navigating technology-driven operational systems.

3.4 Essential Competencies for Contemporary Tourism Professionals

Industry partners identified a multi-dimensional competency profile as essential for the post-pandemic tourism workforce.

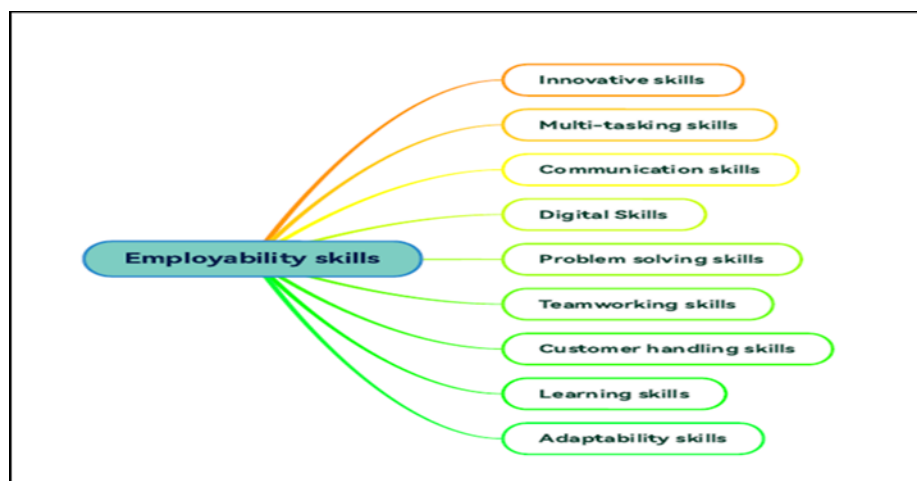


Figure 2: Learner/employability skills (Researcher's own)

Figure 2 shows the multiple skills considered essential by industry partners for post-pandemic tourism roles. Technical skills, including digital proficiency, AI-tool literacy, data analysis abilities, and familiarity with contactless technologies, were most often mentioned. Alongside these, interpersonal skills such as clear communication, excellent customer service, and adaptable problem-solving were also highlighted. Employers highlighted the absence of an entrepreneurial mindset, innovative focus, and agility in responding to market fluctuations as critical lacunae in the professional preparation of recent graduates.

Qualitative data provided a clear example of the operational realities that graduates need to be prepared for: one accommodation establishment described implementing a fully contactless digital check-in system as now a standard operational feature. This system requires staff to be proficient with digital platforms, capable of troubleshooting, and possess the interpersonal skills to handle guest inquiries related to the technology. Such examples demonstrate how digital competency has shifted from a differentiating skill to a basic employment requirement across the tourism sector. These findings closely align with emerging literature on AI's role in tourism operations. Çınar et al. (2024) noted that AI tools, including intelligent chatbots, virtual reality training simulations, and data-driven decision support systems, are now central to the management of competitive tourism enterprises. Curricula lacking these specific

proficiencies result in a workforce that is ill-equipped to meet professional standards, thereby diminishing the marketability of graduates. Therefore, the evidence supports a need to rethink program design in tourism education.

4. Discussion

While this study is based on the specific context of the Midlands Meander, its findings have implications that go far beyond this regional setting. The disconnect between curriculum design and the realities of digitally transformed industries is not unique to South Africa; it reflects a systemic lag between technological innovation and educational adaptation that characterises tourism education systems across emerging economies and beyond. The following subsections explore the theoretical, policy, and global dimensions of these implications.

4.1 Theoretical Implications: AI as Structural Reform

The study's findings reframe AI integration in tourism education from merely an additional feature to a fundamental part of curriculum reform. Instead of viewing AI as an optional technological upgrade to current programmes, the evidence indicates that AI is a transformative force that deeply redefines the pedagogical structure of tourism education, including competency frameworks, learning approaches, assessment methods, and career pathways.

This reconceptualisation has significant theoretical implications for the tourism education literature. It challenges incremental models of curriculum development in favour of systemic transformation. It positions the tourism education institution as an adaptive, technology-responsive ecosystem that undergoes continuous renewal in line with industry evolution. The findings thus contribute to an emerging theoretical discourse that places AI at the centre of pedagogical innovation rather than at its margins.

4.2 Policy Implications: Investment and Institutional Coordination

At the policy level, the study highlights coordinated institutional effort as essential for real curriculum change. Governments and higher education authorities need to prioritise sustained investment in digital infrastructure to ensure equitable access to AI-powered learning environments, especially in resource-limited regional areas. The dimension of equity

remains paramount; in the absence of deliberate intervention, AI-integrated tourism education may exacerbate existing socioeconomic disparities regarding access to high-quality vocational training.

Faculty development is equally vital. The findings support Ndibalema's (2025) argument that limited educator competence in AI applications is a major barrier to curriculum reform. National and institutional policies should require structured AI competency training for tourism educators, supported by collaborations with technology providers and industry associations. Curriculum development should include real-time employer feedback and workforce analytics to ensure continual adaptation to emerging skill needs, thus preventing the cyclical misalignment noted in this study.

4.3 Global Educational Reform and Transferable Models

The study's findings are directly relevant to tourism education systems worldwide. The Midlands Meander case study provides a conceptual framework for assessing how regional tourism economies within emerging markets may utilise AI-enhanced education to bolster workforce resilience. The entrepreneurship-focused approach outlined in New Zealand's curriculum reform (Yedla & Ajoon, 2022) and the experiential dual-system model used in Germany (Life in Germany, 2024) represent best practices from around the world that can be adapted to the South African and broader sub-Saharan African contexts.

More broadly, the shift from occasional curriculum updates to ongoing curriculum renewal must become a standard practice across all tourism education systems. This approach is crucial for tackling the interconnected issues of youth unemployment, automation-related displacement, and sector resilience amid economic volatility. The evidence from this study, drawn from a less-studied regional context, provides a more geographically diverse and empirically robust foundation for these global reform efforts.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Curriculum Integration of AI and Digital Competencies

Tourism education programs must urgently integrate training in AI-powered booking systems, contactless service technologies, virtual reality applications, predictive analytics, and digital marketing platforms. These should be included as core components of degree and diploma programs rather than optional extras. Institutionalising annual curriculum review

processes in partnership with industry advisory boards ensures that pedagogical frameworks remain responsive to rapid technological advancements. Hands-on workshops, industry-sponsored certifications, and AI-simulation labs should complement formal coursework to give graduates practical experience with the technologies they will encounter in their careers.

5.2 Strengthening Industry-Education Collaboration

This study confirms that curriculum reform requires more than institutional action alone. Strong, formal partnerships between tourism education institutions and industry stakeholders are crucial. Suggested methods include institutionalised internship programs, apprenticeship systems, and co-designed experiential modules that give students real industry experience. Guest lecture series, industry-led projects, and site visits should be part of the program requirements. Advisory boards composed of active tourism practitioners should be integrated into programme governance, with clear responsibility for signalling emerging skill needs. Public-private partnerships can help students from resource-limited backgrounds access industry-standard AI software and platforms. Facilitating international exchange programmes with institutions within advanced tourism education systems would significantly enhance curriculum development and expedite the cross-border transfer of institutional knowledge.

5.3 Entrepreneurial Skill Development and Crisis Preparedness

Given the volatility the pandemic uncovered in the tourism labour market, entrepreneurial skills should be a central part of tourism education. Programmes should include courses in innovation, self-employment, sustainable business model development, and AI-driven venture creation. These skills prepare graduates for both conventional employment and entrepreneurial initiatives, thereby stimulating economic growth and sectoral diversification within under-resourced regional economies. Including AI-based crisis management simulation tools will also equip students to respond effectively to future disruptions, thereby improving the workforce's ability to adapt.

5.4 Policy and Infrastructure Investment

Policymakers must prioritise investment in digital infrastructure and in developing faculty AI skills in education. Without sufficient infrastructure and skilled educators, curriculum reform remains aspirational rather than actionable. To ensure effective technological advancement, national and provincial authorities should develop bespoke funding mechanisms for artificial intelligence in tourism education, aligned with established international standards. Performance metrics for tourism education institutions should include graduate digital employability outcomes to encourage ongoing curriculum modernisation.

6. Conclusion

By employing empirical evidence from the Midlands Meander, South Africa, this study illustrates that the incongruity between tourism education and industry expectations is both persistent and systemic. A large majority of industry partners expressed dissatisfaction with the digital readiness of tourism graduates, identified specific skill gaps in AI proficiency, crisis management, and adaptability, and confirmed that digitally capable businesses showed better post-pandemic recovery. These findings directly address this study's three research objectives and create a solid evidence base for curriculum reform.

The study's main contribution is its redefinition of AI integration as a form of structural change rather than just an added benefit. AI is not simply a tool to be included in existing curricula; it is a fundamental pedagogical force that requires a thorough rethinking of how tourism education is designed, delivered, and assessed. This redefinition impacts not only South African tourism education but also the global effort to develop tourism workforces that are resilient, adaptable, and ready for innovation. The recommendations presented in this study, including curriculum reform, industry-education collaboration, entrepreneurial skill development, and policy investment, are both locally rooted and globally applicable. As the tourism sector continues to face the challenges of post-pandemic recovery, technological advancements, and economic uncertainty, the need to reform tourism education is not only an institutional duty but also a strategic investment in the long-term resilience and competitiveness of one of the world's key economic sectors. Ultimately, strengthening tourism education through AI integration, industry collaboration, and experiential learning will be critical to preparing graduates to navigate the technological and operational transformations reshaping the global tourism industry.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research relied on a relatively small sample of 36 tourism enterprises within the Midlands Meander region. While the study offers valuable insight into industry perspectives, the limited sample size restricts the generalisability of the findings to the broader tourism sector. The results, therefore, reflect the experiences and perceptions of businesses in this specific regional context rather than the entire tourism industry. Future research should broaden its scope by conducting larger, multi-regional studies across various tourism destinations. Such studies would enable a rigorous evaluation of the alignment between tourism education curricula and national industry competency requirements. Additionally, future research should include perspectives from multiple stakeholders, such as tourism students, educators, and policymakers. Incorporating these stakeholders facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the structural impediments and opportunities inherent in curriculum reform and the adoption of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, into tourism education.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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Availability of Data

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the author upon reasonable request. Due to ethical considerations and participant confidentiality, the data are not publicly accessible.

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