Digitalization readiness in the tourism and hospitality industry

Innovation and Learning Practice

Bridging Innovation and Learning in TVET (BILT) Project

Submitted by CiMSO Business Solutions, Africa

The hospitality industry is rapidly evolving across Africa and Asia and there is high demand for skilled professionals who can seamlessly blend theoretical knowledge with practical expertise. The '*Digitalization readiness in the tourism and hospitality industry*' initiative was set up by international software solutions provider, CiMSO, to help bridge the digital divide between classroom learning and the demands of the hospitality industry. The initiative aims to empower the next generation of hospitality professionals by equipping them with essential digital skills to enhance their employability and enable a smooth onboarding process with new employers.

Start date: January 2016
Type of implementing institution: Private sector in collaboration with government-accredited educational institutions (government and/or private)
Funding programme: CiMSO Educational Donation Programme
Target group: Schools, TVET centres, colleges and universities

CiMSO Business Solutions

Established in 1993, CiMSO develops client-centric, fully integrated software solutions for global hospitality markets across Africa and Asia including in hotels, resorts, golf clubs and restaurants. The software is used by a wide spectrum of hospitality staff including for managing receptions/offices, personnel, accounting, stock-taking and procurement.

Description of activities

Identifying a gap between the digital skills of graduates and hospitality industry needs, CiMSO set up the '*Digitalization readiness in the tourism and hospitality industry*' initiative. CiMSO supplies management software to hospitality providers and, since 2016, they also provide the same software free of charge to government-accredited training institutions including colleges, universities and TVET centres across southern Africa, including those in remote areas. Trainees are then taught how to use the software, enabling them to graduate with hands-on digital expertise. CiMSO also provides training to teachers and ongoing support if needed.

Relevance

What issues was the initiative designed to address?

CiMSO identified three issues facing the hospitality industry:

The rapidly expanding and evolving hospitality and tourism industry. CiMSO observed the increasing need for digitally skilled personnel to meet the demands of a sector that has become ever more reliant on digital services. From front-of-house to stock-taking, to reservations and enquiries, having staff that are proficient with technology is now essential.

Graduates lack of first-hand digital training. Graduates starting work in the hospitality industry struggle with the transition from theoretical classroom learning to the dynamic realities of the hospitality sector. They have little practical, tangible and measurable knowledge of the digital aspects of the hospitality industry and consequently the burden of training falls to the employer.

Limited engagement and social responsibility between hospitality establishments and local communities. CiMSO observed that this absence of community engagement is especially conspicuous in remote regions where access to specialized training centres is scarce, compelling employers to recruit from outside the local communities.

What strategies has CiMSO employed to address these challenges?

Enhancing education through digitalization. CiMSO offers educational institutions the opportunity to integrate its software tools into their curricula. This incorporation of practical digital experiences into the learning journey bridges the divide between TVET programmes (or more specifically, hospitality training programmes) and industry demands. Target groups for this initiative are educational institutions, including TVET centres, universities, and high schools offering hospitality subjects.

Empowering future hospitality professionals. The initiative aims to equip aspiring hospitality-focused students with the tools they need to excel. This innovative approach involves providing access to cutting-edge digital tools that replicate real-world scenarios. Moreover, institutions have the flexibility to offer certification for proficiency in the software, ensuring students possess a tangible advantage when entering the job market.

Community engagement and responsibility. This initiative aims to contribute positively to the communities it provides services in and ultimately contribute to a stronger, sustainable and thriving hospitality industry. By providing the software free of charge, beneficiaries include students and TVET organizations from lower-income areas such as the African Hospitality and Tourism School in Windhoek (Namibia) where the software is also used by the school to sell and trade local products, and the Bulembu Orphanage (Eswatini) which operates a lodge for school leavers to gain experience and skills training.

Added value

What is new about your initiative and how does it differ from similar initiatives?

What makes this initiative innovative is that it allows learners access and training on real, industry-utilized software rather than just theoretical or simulated teaching. The emphasis on software proficiency and industry knowledge both increases the range of employment opportunities for students and enhances their employability.

For employers, the advantage lies in simplified onboarding, even if the establishment does not employ identical software systems. CiMSO provides the software free of charge to make it accessible to all institutions and offers discounted support services to help run the training.

What stage of implementation is the initiative currently at?

The initiative has been implemented in three institutions - **Namibia University of Science and Technology** (NUST), the **Bulembu Lodge Orphanage** (Eswatini) and the **African Hospitality and Tourism School** in Windhoek (Namibia), the latter of which has trained 12 trainers and 82 students on CiMSO software.

Going forward, CiMSO will introduce competency measurements in the following areas: customer relations management, reservation systems, property management, point of sales, stock management, membership digital solutions and accounting systems. This will be done through an online certification test that can be run by educational institutions. The goal is to get all students that participate from TVET and educational institutions to undertake and pass the user certification. This will provide them with an official User Competency Certificate that will become available on the official CiMSO website for any employer to verify a student's competency level as a certified user.

What positive social outcomes have occurred as a result of this initiative?

By providing the software free of charge, the initiative helps to reduce disparities in the quality and relevance of training between institutions in higher- and lower-income regions. This is particularly important in areas where the absence of digital infrastructure can hinder high-quality teaching.

The initiative is also helping to tackle unemployment in rural areas by enhancing remote learning opportunities via cloud access to its software.

Transferability

To what extent is this initiative transferrable and can it be scaled-up?

This is an international initiative available across Africa and Asia and, as the software can be accessed remotely via the cloud and is available to all government-affiliated TVET centres and educational institutions free of charge, it could easily be scaled-up to a much wider user-base. In terms of expanding the existing programme, adding online certification of qualifications should enhance its reputation and prestige amongst graduates and future employers.

CiMSO's initiative on 'Digitalization readiness in the tourism and hospitality industry' is one of the BILT project's Innovation and Learning Practices that address systemic challenges within the five work streams of the project.

Specifically, the CiMSO initiative addresses Digitalization in TVET.

Digitalization in TVET

Providing response to new skills demands, as technology has permeated the world of work and is changing the profile of jobs

Additional Innovation and Learning Practices cover the following areas:

New Qualifications and Competencies

Entrepreneurship in TVET

Greening TVET

Migration and TVET

About the BILT Project

UNESCO-UNEVOC's Bridging Innovation and Learning in TVET (BILT) project is a reference point for innovation and learning in TVET. It utilizes the international UNEVOC Network to create opportunities for collaboration and a platform for bridging innovation and learning between Europe, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region. BILT complements developments at the national level in supporting innovative, market-oriented and attractive modes of learning and cooperation in TVET.

The BILT project explores the process of identifying, integrating and implementing new qualifications and competencies in TVET. This is known as the 'three I's process'. In addition to the broad focus on new qualifications and competencies, BILT addresses four complementary themes: Digitalization in TVET, Greening TVET, Entrepreneurship in TVET, and Migration and TVET.

For more information, please visit
www.unevoc.unesco.org/bilt

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New Qualifications and Competencies in TVET

- **Identifying** new qualifications and competencies in a timely manner;
- **Integrating** them into appealing and flexible curricula and training regulations; and
- **Implementing** them in innovative training approaches.

Entrepreneurship in TVET
Unlocking the potential of innovative entrepreneurial activities and fostering entrepreneurial culture

Greening TVET
Responding to new development paradigms for sustainability and reduced environmental impact

Digitalization in TVET
Providing response to new skills demands, as technology has permeated the world of work and is changing the profile of jobs

Migration and TVET
Accelerating the integration of migrants into their host communities, and allowing them to become productive members of the workforce

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