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Abstract

This study determined the effect of continuous learning on employee retention in star-rated hotels in Nairobi County, Kenya. A pragmatic philosophy and sequential explanatory mixed-methods design were used. The population comprised 1,291 employees and eight human resource managers in eight selected four- and five-star hotels. From 295 questionnaires distributed to employees, 281 were returned and 268 usable responses were analysed; all eight human resource managers participated in follow-up interviews. Employee survey data were examined using descriptive statistics, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, and covariance-based structural equation modelling. Directed content analysis was applied to the interviews. The study found that direct path of SEM from continuous learning to employee retention was negative and statistically non-significant (estimate = -0.500, SE = 0.874, CR = -0.572, $p = 0.567$). Continuous learning, considered in isolation, did not explain employee retention in the sampled hotels. Managers should connect learning opportunities to visible career pathways, recognition, supportive leadership and opportunities to apply new skills. This alignment is more likely to turn learning into organizational fit, links and perceived sacrifice, the mechanisms through which employees become embedded.

Keywords: *Continuous Learning; Employee Retention; Organizational Learning; Star-Rated Hotels; Job Embeddedness; Nairobi County*

1.0 Introduction

Employee retention is a continuing management concern in hospitality because service quality depends heavily on employees' knowledge, relationships and consistent interactions with guests. Hotels operate around the clock, face fluctuating demand and rely on coordinated work across accommodation, food and beverage, front office, housekeeping and support departments. When experienced employees leave, hotels incur recruitment and induction costs, lose tacit operational knowledge and may experience interruptions in service delivery. Retention is therefore more than

the absence of turnover; it reflects employees' attachment to the organization, their intention to remain and their willingness to recommend the workplace to others (Aman-Ullah et al., 2021; Ghani et al., 2022).

The retention challenge is particularly important in star-rated hotels, where guests expect standardized service together with personalized attention. These expectations require employees to update technical, interpersonal and digital skills as service systems, consumer preferences and health and safety requirements change. The disruption experienced by hospitality organizations during and after the COVID-19 pandemic also intensified the need for adaptable employees and more resilient employment relationships (Baum et al., 2020). In Kenya, sector reports and empirical studies have continued to identify employee mobility, constrained career opportunities and the loss of trained workers as concerns for service organizations and hotels (Kenya Institute of Human Resource Management [IHRM], 2022; Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2023; Wambugu & Kimani, 2023).

Continuous learning is commonly proposed as one response to these pressures. It refers to the ongoing acquisition, sharing and application of knowledge through formal training, coaching, mentoring, reflection, problem solving, peer support and self-directed development. A learning-oriented hotel treats errors, customer feedback and daily operational challenges as opportunities to improve rather than as isolated incidents. It also gives employees time, resources and psychological space to learn. Such practices can signal organizational investment, strengthen competence and expand employees' internal career options (Noe et al., 2023; Watkins & Kim, 2021). From this perspective, employees who are supported to learn may develop stronger fit with the organization and may be less willing to leave.

The expected relationship is nevertheless not automatic. Learning can raise an employee's employability in the external labour market as well as their value to the current organization. Generic training that is not connected to promotion, recognition or meaningful job application may increase skill without increasing attachment. Similarly, learning systems designed and controlled entirely by management may be visible to employees but may not address their individual aspirations. The effect on retention may consequently depend on whether learning creates credible internal opportunities, supportive relationships and benefits that employees would sacrifice by leaving.

Existing hospitality evidence generally associates human-capital development and career development with favourable employee outcomes, but several limitations remain. Kenyan studies have often combined training with broader human-resource practices, examined turnover intention rather than multidimensional retention, or used cross-sectional quantitative designs that offer limited explanation of why a relationship emerges (Ochieng et al., 2023; Wanjohi et al., 2022). Research from other hospitality settings indicates that reskilling, upskilling and a learning culture can improve adaptability, yet context-specific employment conditions influence whether that adaptability produces commitment to the same employer (Ummi Kalsum et al., 2025). It was therefore necessary to test continuous learning as a distinct organizational-learning dimension and to supplement employees' numerical responses with managers' explanations of actual hotel practices. This study addressed that need in four- and five-star hotels in Nairobi County. Its specific objective was to determine the effect of continuous learning on employee retention in star-rated hotels.

2.1 Theoretical Review

Job Embeddedness Theory provided the principal retention lens for the study. Mitchell et al. (2001) explain staying through three related dimensions: fit, links and sacrifice. Fit concerns the compatibility between an employee's abilities, values and career goals and the organization or community. Links refer to formal and informal connections with colleagues, teams, customers and the wider social environment. Sacrifice represents valued material or psychological benefits that would be lost if the employee left. The theory shifts attention from dissatisfaction and reasons for leaving to the forces that keep an employee connected to a workplace. Continuous learning can theoretically influence all three dimensions. Skill development and opportunities to apply new knowledge can improve person-job and person-organization fit. Mentoring, peer assistance and shared reflection can create links, while access to distinctive learning resources, certifications or internal career pathways can increase the sacrifice associated with departure. However, the theory also clarifies why learning may fail to retain employees. If new skills are transferable, learning may improve external mobility without strengthening organizational fit. If learning is individual and episodic, it may not create durable workplace links. If participation does not lead to recognition or advancement, employees may perceive little learning-related sacrifice in leaving. The effect of learning depends not only on its frequency but also on its organizational meaning (Aman-Ullah et al., 2021).

The Self-Regulated Learning model complemented this retention perspective by explaining how individuals engage in learning. Self-regulated learning involves forethought, goal setting and planning; performance through strategy use, monitoring and help seeking; and self-reflection through evaluation and adaptation (Panadero, 2021). Hotel employees use these processes when they identify service gaps, practise a new procedure, seek feedback and adjust their performance. Organizational conditions can support the cycle by providing time, resources, coaching and opportunities to learn from mistakes. Technology and blended learning may further extend access to training and feedback (Broadbent et al., 2020).

The two perspectives serve different but compatible purposes. Self-regulated learning explains how continuous learning is enacted, whereas Job Embeddedness Theory explains why a learning experience may or may not translate into staying. Together they suggest that learning is most likely to strengthen retention when employees can direct and apply it and when the resulting capability is connected to relationships, internal opportunities and valued organizational benefits. This combined logic guided the formulation and interpretation of the hypothesis.

2.2 Review of Literature and Hypothesis Development

Organizational learning converts individual and collective experience into knowledge that can improve future action. In service organizations, the process occurs through formal courses but also through observation, feedback, experimentation, after-action review and day-to-day problem solving (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2021). Continuous learning is the recurring individual-level element of this process. It is reflected when employees can acknowledge mistakes, seek alternative perspectives, identify skills needed for future work, help one another learn and receive sufficient time and resources to practise. Leadership matters because managers establish whether questioning and experimentation are safe and whether learning is rewarded or treated as an additional burden.

Hotels have strong operational reasons to cultivate this orientation. Many service failures are resolved in real time, and customer complaints provide information that may not appear in formal performance reports. Employees who can analyse these incidents and share solutions can improve

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consistency and innovation. Learning organizations also preserve knowledge when staff rotate between departments or assume new roles (Torres et al., 2021). At the employee level, development can support mastery, confidence and perceptions that the employer is concerned with long-term capability rather than only immediate output. These experiences may encourage attachment and intention to remain.

Human-resource research supports several elements of this mechanism. Practices that develop employees, provide supportive supervision and create credible advancement opportunities are commonly associated with lower turnover intentions and stronger retention (Aman-Ullah et al., 2020; Weng et al., 2023). In Kenya's star-rated hotels, Ochieng et al. (2023) linked human-capital development and empowerment to retention, while Wanjohi et al. (2022) reported that career development influenced employees' willingness to stay in three- to five-star hotels in Nairobi. Munene (2025) similarly found that retention strategies related to career development and employment stability were relevant to employee performance in Nairobi hotels. These studies support the expectation that learning can matter, but their broader constructs do not establish whether continuous learning by itself predicts retention.

Evidence from West Java further suggests that reskilling, upskilling and a continuous-learning culture improve the adaptability of hospitality employees (Umami Kalsum et al., 2025). Adaptability is important in dynamic service settings, yet it is not identical to retention. A more capable employee may remain because the organization offers a future, or may leave because the same capability increases access to attractive alternatives. This distinction is especially important in labour markets where hotels recruit from the same pool of trained employees.

The literature therefore presents two competing possibilities. Continuous learning can embed employees when it improves fit, develops workplace links and creates valuable internal opportunities. Conversely, it can have little or even an adverse association with retention if development is generic, detached from recognition and promotion, or primarily increases external employability. Methodologically, much prior work relies on a single questionnaire collected at one time, making it difficult to distinguish the formal availability of training from employees' experience of participation and managerial support. The present mixed-methods design addressed this limitation by pairing a structural test with explanations from human resource managers. Consistent with the study's null-hypothesis testing approach, the following hypothesis was evaluated:

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant effect of continuous learning on employee retention in star-rated hotels

3.0 Methodology

The study was grounded in the positivism paradigm because the research question required both an estimate of the relationship and an explanation of how learning operated in the hotels. A sequential explanatory design was adopted. Quantitative employee data were collected. This sequence allowed the two forms of evidence to address the same objective while retaining their different analytical roles (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021). The research was conducted in Nairobi County, Kenya, among selected four- and five-star hotels. These establishments were appropriate because their complex service operations, departmental specialization and formal quality expectations create a substantial need for ongoing employee learning. The unit of analysis for the quantitative phase was the employee.

Sampling

The target population comprised 1,291 employees from eight selected four- and five-star hotels. A sample of 295 employees was distributed proportionately across the participating hotels. Employees were stratified by department and selected using simple random procedures so that major operational and support functions were represented. A total of 295 employee questionnaires were distributed and 281 were returned, giving a response rate of 95.3%. Thirteen questionnaires were excluded because they were incomplete or otherwise unusable, leaving 268 valid responses for analysis, equivalent to 90.8% of the distributed sample. The high usable response and complete manager participation supplied adequate information for the planned measurement and structural analyses.

Measurement of Variables

A structured employee questionnaire was adapted from the Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire and aligned with the operational definitions in the study (Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Continuous learning was initially measured with 11 items covering learning from mistakes, explanation of managerial decisions, expression of different viewpoints, identification of future skills, peer assistance, learning programmes and resources, time to learn and practise, learning from workplace challenges and customer feedback, and rewards for continuous learning.

Employee retention was measured using five indicators: attachment to the hotel, the perceived difficulty of leaving a positive employment experience, intention to remain for a long time, enjoyment or personal meaning attached to the work, and willingness to recommend the hotel to potential employees. These indicators captured affective attachment and intention to stay rather than using turnover intention as the sole proxy for retention. The interview schedule asked human resource managers how continuous learning was delivered, supported and connected to employee careers and retention.

The questionnaire was assessed for content alignment and pilot-tested before the main survey. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Exploratory factor analysis assessed the suitability and preliminary structure of the items, while confirmatory factor analysis tested the measurement model before the structural hypothesis was evaluated.

Data Analysis

Questionnaires were checked, coded and screened before analysis. Means and standard deviations summarized employee retention and continuous learning. Sampling adequacy for factor analysis was evaluated using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Confirmatory factor analysis and covariance-based structural equation modelling were conducted in IBM SPSS AMOS. Measurement quality and overall model fit were considered before interpreting the hypothesized path. Following established guidance, fit was evaluated using absolute, incremental and parsimonious indices rather than relying on a single statistic (Hair et al., 2022; Kline, 2023). The direct hypothesis was tested at the 5% significance level.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

The findings are presented in the same order as the study objective: the level of employee retention, the prevalence of continuous-learning practices, the quality of the measures and the direct

structural effect. Quantitative evidence is followed by the manager accounts that help interpret the observed pattern. Employee retention was high overall ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.13$). As shown in Table 1, willingness to recommend the hotel as a workplace received the highest mean ($M = 4.21$), followed by the view that the employment experience made leaving difficult ($M = 4.16$) and attachment to the hotel ($M = 4.10$). Intention to remain for a long time and the personal meaning of the work were positive but comparatively lower (both $M = 3.86$). This combination suggests favourable advocacy and attachment alongside some uncertainty about long-term tenure.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Employee Retention

	Mean	SD
I feel attached to this hotel.	4.10	1.18
My experience in this hotel has been wonderful, making it difficult to leave.	4.16	1.09
I want to remain working in this hotel for a long time.	3.86	1.17
Working in this hotel is a labour of love.	3.86	1.19
I would recommend this hotel to others as a place to work.	4.21	1.02
Overall employee retention	4.04	1.13

Continuous learning was moderately established ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.85$). Table 2 shows that the strongest items concerned managers initiating programmes and policies for the acquisition and use of learning resources ($M = 3.87$), treating customer complaints and suggestions as learning opportunities ($M = 3.81$), and giving employees time to learn and practise ($M = 3.76$). The lowest means concerned the expression of different points of view by all employee cadres ($M = 3.24$), encouragement to identify skills required for future tasks ($M = 3.34$), and rewards for continuous learning ($M = 3.44$). Thus, infrastructure and managerial provision were more visible than employee participation, future-oriented development and recognition.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Learning

	Mean	SD
Employees learn from mistakes.	3.45	1.27
Managers explain the reasons behind their decisions.	3.50	1.29
Different points of view are expressed by employees at all levels.	3.24	1.19
Employees are encouraged to identify skills needed for future tasks.	3.34	1.23
Employees assist one another in learning.	3.57	1.25
Managers initiate programmes and policies for acquiring and using learning resources.	3.87	1.30
Employees are provided with money or other resources for learning.	3.71	1.09
Employees are given time to learn and practise.	3.76	1.06
Workplace challenges are treated as opportunities for learning.	3.66	1.03
Customer complaints and suggestions are treated as learning opportunities.	3.81	1.03
Employees are rewarded for continuous learning.	3.44	1.05
Overall continuous learning	3.59	0.85

Reliability and Measurement Assessment

The continuous-learning scale achieved high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.906$), while employee retention achieved acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.786$). Factorability was also supported. Continuous learning recorded a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of 0.831 and a significant Bartlett's test, $\chi^2(55) = 2006.742$, $p < 0.001$. Employee retention recorded KMO = 0.809 and Bartlett's $\chi^2(10) = 367.787$, $p < 0.001$. These results indicated that the inter-item correlations were suitable for factor analysis (Shrestha, 2021).

In the final confirmatory measurement model, continuous learning was represented by four composite indicators leadership, support, development and participation with standardized loadings ranging from 0.479 to 0.846. Employee retention was represented by five indicators with loadings ranging from 0.567 to 0.812. Although the lowest continuous-learning loading was modest, the retained indicators captured conceptually important participation content and the construct demonstrated strong internal consistency. The reliability and loading evidence is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Reliability and Measurement Assessment

Construct	Items	Cronbach α	KMO	CFA loading range	Assessment
Continuous learning	11	0.906	0.831	0.479–0.846	High reliability; factorable
Employee retention	5	0.786	0.809	0.567–0.812	Acceptable reliability; factorable

Key: CFA = confirmatory factor analysis; KMO = Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Test

The final structural model showed acceptable overall fit: $\chi^2 = 243.154$, $df = 173$, $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2/df = 1.406$; RMR = 0.042; GFI = 0.924; AGFI = 0.888; NFI = 0.933; IFI = 0.980; TLI = 0.973; CFI = 0.979; RMSEA = 0.040 (90% CI = 0.027–0.051); and PCLOSE = 0.927. Hoelter's critical N was 214 at the 0.05 level and 229 at the 0.01 level. Considered together, the indices supported interpretation of the structural paths.

The path from continuous learning to employee retention was not statistically significant. As reported in Table 4, the estimate was -0.500 with SE = 0.874, CR = -0.572 and $p = 0.567$. Because p exceeded 0.05, H01 was not rejected. The estimate is reported as the unstandardized path estimate produced in the final AMOS regression output. Its negative sign should not be interpreted as evidence that learning reduced retention: the estimate was imprecise, the critical ratio was small and the result was statistically indistinguishable from zero.

Table 4: Direct Effect of Continuous Learning on Employee Retention

Path	Estimate	SE	CR	p	Decision
Continuous learning → Employee retention	-0.5	0.874	-0.572	0.567	Do not reject H01

The central finding is that moderately established continuous-learning practices coexisted with high employee retention, but continuous learning did not explain variation in retention within the

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structural model. The descriptive results show prevalence; the path test evaluates prediction. It would therefore be incorrect to infer an effect simply because employees rated both constructs positively. The non-significant path provides no evidence that differences in continuous learning produced corresponding differences in retention after the structure of the final model was taken into account.

This result qualifies the generally positive relationship suggested by human-capital and career-development research (Ochieng et al., 2023; Wanjohi et al., 2022). One explanation lies in the design of the learning practices. The highest-rated items reflected management-provided programmes, resources, practice time and the use of service feedback. The weakest items reflected participation, identification of future skills and rewards. Hotels therefore appeared stronger at supplying learning than at translating it into an employee-owned career proposition. Training designed mainly to uphold service standards can increase capability without changing how employees evaluate their future with the employer.

A second explanation is the portability of hospitality skills. Guest-service, culinary, supervisory and digital-service capabilities may be valued by competing hotels. Unless development is connected to an internal pathway, continuous learning can increase employability without increasing the perceived cost of leaving. This interpretation is consistent with Job Embeddedness Theory: learning strengthens retention only when it improves organizational fit, builds durable links or creates benefits that would be sacrificed on departure (Mitchell et al., 2001). A course or masterclass alone may not create any of these conditions.

The result does not mean continuous learning is unimportant. Learning remains valuable for competence, adaptability, innovation and service recovery (Noe et al., 2023; Torres et al., 2021). The finding is narrower: continuous learning did not have a statistically demonstrable direct effect on retention in this sample and model. Retention is likely to be shaped by a bundle of employment conditions, including career progression, leadership, fairness, work relationships, rewards, scheduling and well-being. Learning may contribute when embedded in this broader employment system rather than operating as a stand-alone programme. This the finding adds an important boundary condition to the assumption that organizational investment in learning automatically retains employees. It separates learning activity from embeddedness-producing learning.

5.0 Conclusion

The study sought to determine the effect of continuous learning on employee retention in star-rated hotels in Nairobi County. Employees reported a moderate level of continuous learning and a high level of retention. However, continuous learning had a statistically non-significant effect on employee retention. Therefore, the available evidence indicates that continuous learning alone did not significantly determine employee retention in the sampled hotels. Theoretically, the findings support a conditional application of Job Embeddedness Theory. Continuous learning does not automatically create employee fit, workplace links or perceived sacrifice. However, it may contribute to retention when it aligns employees' roles with their personal and career goals, strengthens workplace relationships, and creates valuable internal opportunities that employees would lose upon leaving the hotel. Similarly, the Self-Regulated Learning perspective suggests that employee participation, ownership, feedback and opportunities to apply acquired knowledge should be incorporated into learning programmes for such initiatives to extend beyond compliance and potentially strengthen retention.

6.0 Recommendations and Implications

Hotel managers should redesign continuous learning as part of an integrated retention architecture. Each major learning intervention should be linked to a visible capability framework showing how demonstrated skills qualify employees for broader responsibilities, cross-departmental mobility, promotion or specialist roles. Employees should be able to see the internal opportunity created by learning rather than only the service standard it supports.

Participation requires particular attention. Managers should involve employees in identifying future skill needs, selecting relevant development goals and evaluating whether training can be applied in their roles. Short learning plans, post-training application assignments, coaching conversations and employee-led knowledge sessions can strengthen ownership. Customer complaints and operational errors should continue to be used for learning, but the process should focus on improvement and reflection rather than blame.

Recognition should also be made explicit. Hotels can acknowledge the successful application of new skills through expanded responsibilities, internal credentials, public recognition, development points or eligibility for advancement. Recognition need not rely only on financial rewards, but it must be credible and consistent. Managers should protect time for learning and ensure that access to resources is equitable across departments and employment categories.

For human-resource policy, learning indicators should be evaluated alongside retention indicators. Hotels should track participation, completion, skill application, internal mobility and subsequent tenure rather than counting training hours alone. Exit and stay interviews can reveal whether employees regard development as relevant to their future in the hotel. Learning should be combined with supportive supervision, fair rewards, reasonable scheduling, well-being support and transparent promotion decisions because the present evidence indicates that a stand-alone learning programme is insufficient.

At the sector level, hotel associations, training institutions and regulators can encourage portable professional standards while helping employers develop internal progression pathways. The practical aim is not to make skills non-transferable but to ensure that capable employees can envision equally attractive growth within their current organizations. This approach respects employee development while strengthening the organizational conditions that make staying worthwhile.

Future studies should distinguish formal training, informal peer learning, self-directed learning and career-linked development, because these forms may have different retention consequences. Objective indicators such as internal promotion, training completion and verified turnover could complement perceptual measures. Research should also test mechanisms that may connect continuous learning to retention, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work engagement, perceived organizational support, career optimism and job embeddedness. Moderators such as employment status, department, hotel ownership, generation, labour-market opportunities and the perceived transferability of skills may reveal for whom learning strengthens or weakens attachment. Comparative studies across hotel categories, counties and other hospitality segments would help determine the extent to which the Nairobi four- and five-star context shaped the result.

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