

Students' Journey in Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management Program

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ABSTRACT

The field of hospitality management is rapidly evolving due to global tourism growth and technological advancements. This research delves into students' journeys in hospitality management programs, examining their motivations, experiences, challenges, and career aspirations. Researchers conducted interviews with fifteen BSHM students, employing a qualitative case study. The study reveals that students are primarily motivated by the program's activities, preparation, and the dynamic nature of the hospitality industry. Academic experiences are enriched by hands-on training, internships, and industry interactions, which are crucial for bridging theoretical knowledge and practical skills. However, students need help balancing work and study, meeting high expectations for practical proficiency, and navigating a competitive job market. Career aspirations among students are diverse, ranging from hotel management and event planning to entrepreneurship and consultancy. The research underscores the necessity for academic institutions to continually adapt their programs to meet industry standards and student needs, ensuring graduates are well-prepared for the evolving demands of the hospitality sector. This study provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders to enhance educational practices and support student success in this vibrant field.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Choosing the right course and considering future job options can be challenging for new college students. Some students know exactly what course to choose, while others still determine which will get them there. In reality, because of the enormous number of courses accessible to students, most switch majors (McKinney et al., 2019). Selecting a degree and the courses provided is critical for every student because it is the foundation of future success (Olivar & Naparan, 2023). Students should know their chosen path to prepare for future careers (Astorne-Figari & Speer, 2019). With the advancement of information technology and the post-industrial revolution, career selection, especially in hospitality management, has become more complicated as students are bombarded with different career options (Lee et al., 2019).

The tourism and hospitality sectors are known for their fast-paced and often demanding work environments, requiring employees to possess strong interpersonal skills, adaptability, and a customer-focused mindset (Rosyidi, 2021). Understanding these aspects early on can better prepare students for what to expect in their future careers. The importance of industry stakeholders clearly articulating their expectations for graduates entering the workforce. These expectations involve specifying the skills, knowledge, and competencies employers value and seek in potential hires. By aligning educational outcomes with industry expectations, universities can better equip students with the necessary skills and

attributes that make them attractive candidates in the job market (Gong & Jia, 2022). This approach ensures that graduates are academically prepared and have the practical skills and understanding of industry dynamics needed to succeed in their careers. Preparing students effectively for the realities of the tourism and hospitality industry is essential. By fostering a clear understanding of industry demands and aligning educational goals with industry expectations, universities can enhance graduates' employability and success in tourism and hospitality management careers.

The tourism industry in the Philippines has experienced remarkable expansion, generating many job prospects due to heightened foreign arrivals and substantial expenditures in tourism infrastructure and digital platforms (Gutierrez, 2022). Professionals in hospitality management are in greater demand due to these causes. The steady rise in foreign visitors has been attributed to increased marketing initiatives, better air connections, and the nation's varied tourism attractions. The hospitality sector offers students employment prospects across various industries, including hotels, resorts, airlines, event management, and tourism (Pestana et al., 2020). Showcase opportunities for students to work abroad that will allow them to experience various cultures and environments. The expansion of hotels, resorts, and airports, among other large-scale infrastructure projects, has enhanced tourism and generated employment opportunities in the building, operating, and management sectors (Libre et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the tourist sector has transformed thanks to the widespread use of digital platforms. Developments such as digital marketing, online booking systems, and travel apps have expanded the sector's efficiency and reach. Due to these advancements, the industry now has more IT, digital marketing, and customer service positions, which highlights the need for hospitality management experts versed in both new and traditional technologies (Xiang et al., 2021).

The hospitality sector offers students various job options in several industries, including hotels, resorts, airlines, event management, and tourism (Gelbman, 2021). The business is, by nature, international. People willing to operate in diverse cultural contexts and locales might find a wide range of career prospects due to its global nature. The demand for international travel is expected to expand at a rate consistent with the United Nations World Tourism Organization's long-term forecast of 3.8% annual growth for tourism in 2030. Specifically, the countries in the Asia-Pacific area are anticipated to have the fastest development rates (Moore & Pubantz, 2022).

The students undergo life-changing experiences while pursuing an education in tourism and hospitality. Wight's emphasis on student learning journeys highlights the multifaceted process through which students acquire the skills, knowledge, and mindset essential for success in the travel and hospitality sectors (Wight, 2019). Hospitality management programs emphasize the development of these essential skills in order to fully equip students for lucrative employment in the hospitality sector (Zhang & Buhalis, 2016). According to Airey & Johnson (2014), cultivating critical skills like customer service, operations management, and problem-solving, these hands-on experiences significantly improve students' learning results. Internships help students prepare for the hospitality sector's demands but also help them form their future goals by giving them practical experience and reaffirming their desire to work in hospitality management.

Several vital factors significantly influence the decision-making process of students pursuing degrees in hospitality management (Chan & Lin, 2017). Brako and Hagan (2024) declared that the complex dynamics of students' entrepreneurial goals in hotel management illuminate the perceived roadblocks they face when starting their careers after graduation. A strategy like this may be beneficial in assisting students in choosing the appropriate courses based on a complete comprehension of their career options and goals.

Students view jobs in hotel management, resorts, restaurants, and other hospitality-related fields as steady and promising (Felicen et al., 2022). Students studying hospitality management get essential insights and valuable lessons from studying The Woodford Hotel, which improves their comprehension of the operational and functional facets of the sector. Students understand how small hotels uphold high service standards and provide customized guest experiences by studying the operational framework of a small hotel, which includes essential departments, including front office, housekeeping, food and beverage, sales and marketing, and finance and administration (Uddin, 2024).

The internship experiences of hospitality management students highlighted the advantages and challenges associated with practical training in real-world settings. Internships are pivotal in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge gained in classrooms and the practical skills required in the hospitality industry (Trinidad, 2020). Students benefit from hands-on learning opportunities that allow them to apply their academic learning in natural hospitality environments, gaining valuable experience and developing crucial professional skills. Mohammed et al. (2019) identified several vital motivations that attract students to study hotel management. Chief among these motivations are the prospects of enhanced career opportunities and the field's attractiveness. Hotel management programs promise students the chance to develop skills directly applicable to the hospitality industry, a sector known for its global reach and diverse career paths.

Industrial training is indispensable for developing competent hotel management professionals. This hands-on experience is particularly vital in the hospitality industry, which is characterized by rapid changes and evolving consumer expectations (Tabbada et al., 2023). Through practical training, students can apply their theoretical knowledge, gain valuable insights into real-world operations, and develop the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of the dynamic hospitality landscape. By fostering a well-rounded educational experience that combines academic rigor with practical exposure, institutions can empower graduates to thrive in their chosen careers. However, these training programs' full potential is frequently hampered by disparities between academic curricula and industry demands (Doke & Sarode, 2023).

The literature focuses on the importance of the BS Hospitality program and students' experiences in their internships. It does not emphasize the journey of students in taking the program. Thus, this research explored the motivations, preparations, challenges, coping mechanisms, and realizations of students in taking the BS Hospitality Management program.

2. METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design, explicitly employing a case study approach to deeply examine and comprehend students' attitudes, experiences, behaviors, and beliefs in the Hospitality Management program. Jeffers (2022) noted that qualitative research provides a profound understanding of social processes in real-world settings by examining actual events. This study focused on a diverse group of students from various backgrounds and stages in the program to gain a comprehensive understanding of their journeys. Merriam's (1998) definition of a case study as an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system guided this research, allowing for a thorough analysis of the intricate features and contextual nuances within the selected group. This approach enabled the researchers to uncover how various complexities interact and affect outcomes, thereby facilitating a detailed understanding of the student's experiences in their educational environment.

Context and Participants

The study was conducted at a private institution in Pagadian City, Philippines. The study participants are the 4th-year college students of the hospitality management program enrolled in the Academic Year 2023 – 2024. There were fifteen participants chosen purposively in this study. They are those students who were about to graduate from the program. These participants also have undergone their on-the-job training.

Research Instruments

The researchers were the primary instruments of the study through the aid of the interview protocol. The interview protocol explored the students' motivations for the BS Hospitality Management program. It also explored the motivations, challenges, coping mechanisms, and realizations in taking the program.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers asked permission from the dean of the College of Business Education to which the BS Hospitality program belongs. As permission was given, the researchers approached each one of the participants and sought their consent to participate in the study. Once they consented, the researchers set the schedule for individual interviews. Each interview took one to two hours as the participants shared their BS Hospitality management program journey.

Data Analysis

This study used Merriam (1998), a case study examining a "bounded system," which could include people, groups, programs, or organizations. These boundaries define what is included in the study. After the interviews, the transcripts were analyzed using Merriam's (1998) method. The researchers employed open coding for each transcript, then went further to focused coding. After these processes, categories of the phenomenon emerged. These categories were then discussed in the findings section.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Each participant is given a code to maintain confidentiality. They are HM1, HM2, HM3, HM4, HM5, HM6, HM7, HM8, HM9, HM10, HM11, HM12, HM13, HM14, and HM15. The categories that emerged from the study are the activities that motivate the BSHM Students to enroll in the program, ways in which the HM program prepares students for their chosen career, the challenges encountered in the HM Program, ways in dealing with these challenges, and the realizations of BSHM Students in the program. Motivations of Hospitality Management Students in enrolling the program.

The students' motivations in enrolling in the Hospitality Management Program are their own decisions to develop their skills. The participants' responses below were presented to give the readers a glimpse of their motivations for enrolling in the H.M. program. The subcategories that emerged from this category are Enjoyment in Cooking and Enhancement Activities for Customer Service Skills.

Enjoyment in Cooking activities. Cooking is one of the primary motivations for HM students. Many HM students have a deep-seated passion for cooking and a love for food. This is evident in these statements:

"Dayun ang H.M. man gyud ga offer sad training like cooking so gusto nako na eskwelahan kay ang cooking man jud sa cruise ship dagkog sweldo. [The H.M. program also offers training in cooking, which I wanted to pursue because chefs on cruise ships to earn high salaries]" – HM1

"So since bata pako gusto jud kog luto luto and baking basta anything nga related ana gusto pa nako ma learn and improve. [Since I was a child, I've always loved cooking, baking and anything related to that. I wanted to learn and improve my skills]" –HM2

Ang naka motivate sa akoo nga nag enroll kog HM kay kanang sa Cooking kay passion man gyud nako mag luto luto. [What motivates me to enroll in the HM program was my passion for cooking.]” –HM4

One of the competencies in the Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management program is cooking. The research participants found enjoyment in performing cooking activities, as these will help them when they want to be employed on cruise ships (Luoh et al., 2020). In cooking activities, the student participants also learned food preparation and aesthetic presentation (Akyürek, 2021).

Customer Service Skills Enhancement. Enhancing Customer Service skills is a significant motivation to HM students where they want to develop more of their skills contributing to personal growth. In pursuing their course, they need to prepare themselves for their clients in the future. The participants shared:

“The activities that motivates me to choose HM Program is improving my skills in being a waiter or server of a restaurant especially Humana mi ug OJT nagustuhan nako ang pagiging waiter or server. [The activity that motivated me to choose the HM Program is about improving my skills in being a waiter or server in a restaurant.]” - HM5

“These experiences will help me to enhance my Customer service skills and expertise for my future career. [These experiences will help me enhance my Customer service skills and expertise for my future career.]” - HM10

Strong customer service skills enhance the ability of hospitality professionals to handle guest interactions and resolve issues promptly and efficiently (Ali et al., 2021). This focus ensures that graduates are well-equipped to meet and exceed guest expectations, fostering positive guest experiences and loyalty, which are critical for the success and reputation of hospitality businesses (Teng, 2019).

Preparations of BS Hospitality Management Students for their chosen career

When choosing the BS hospitality management program, the students need preparation for their work after graduation. Their preparation focuses on the training they received while enrolling in the program, which includes simulation activities.

Participating in Simulation Activities/Events. Training serves as a crucial preparation for Hospitality Management students. Equipping them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to excel in the hospitality industry. Through simulation activities, students had the taste of the actual world of hospitality management. The participants shared:

“Gi train mi nila from the various activities nga gi offer sa HM to test our skills para kabalo mi aha man gyud ni best in the field of Hospitality Management. [The HM program helps me prepare for my future career. It trains us through various activities to test our skills and determine where we excel in the field of hospitality management]”. HM1

“They expose us to some training, seminars and events. Gina train in nila sa laboratory how to cook, bake and cuts some fruit and vegetables, even thou di gyud sya intense training at least we have some experience to say. [We are exposed to training, seminars, and events. In the laboratory, we learn how to cook, bake, and cut fruits and vegetables. Although the training isn't intense, it gives us some experience.]” -HM3

These activities provide a realistic, hands-on learning environment, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring students are well-prepared for real-world challenges (Lee et al., 2019). Simulation activities enhance students' understanding and retention of complex concepts by allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge in a controlled, realistic setting.

Challenges of Hospitality Management Students

BS hospitality management students encountered challenges. The subcategories that emerged are: Financial Limitation and Lack of Hands-on Kitchen Training.

Financial Limitation. There are additional expenses incurred due HM activities. HM program requires additional fees for specialized courses, labs, and practical training sessions, which are essential for acquiring hands-on experience.

"My challenge gyud kay financial difficulties. [One of my main challenges was financial difficulties.]" - HM2

"The challenge nga akong na encounter kay financial like daghan jud ug mga gasto ani nga program. [The challenges I encountered were mostly financial, as there are many expenses associated with the program.]" - HM4

"Financial struggles, kay mahal ang mga ingredients during cooking classes. [Financial struggles, especially when ingredients were expensive during cooking classes.]" - HM15

Integrating hospitality management (HM) activities into hospitality management programs often leads to additional expenses. Understanding and managing these costs is crucial for the successful implementation and sustainability of such programs. Incorporating practical HM activities, such as internships, field trips, and hands-on training sessions, requires substantial financial investment. Students often encounter financial difficulties in finishing their courses as they have financial obligations in different activities they engage in while studying (Unrau et al., 2020).

Lack of Hands-on Kitchen Training. Some of the participants mentioned that the Hospitality Management program Lacked Trainings in cooking and baking. This training should prepare them for their chosen career. This is evident in the following:

"For now wala pakoy na develop kay dili man gud ta more on buhat sa atong mga major subject, kay more on discussion ra ang mga HM teachers kulang ug mga hands on training like cooking, baking and etc. [For now, I haven't developed many skills because we don't focus much on hands-on activities in our major subjects; the HM teachers mostly conduct discussions and lack of hands-on training like cooking, baking and others.]" - HM1

"Ang training sa HM program kay kulang pa gyud kay dili kaayo focus sa hands-on training" [The training in the HM program is still lacking because it does not focus much on hands-on training] - HM6

"For now wala pakoy na develop kay dili man ta gyud more on buhat sa atong mga major subject lack of hands on training kayo mi, kay more on discussion ra ang mga HM teachers. [For now, I haven't developed many skills because we don't focus much on hands-on activities in our major subjects' lack of training, the HM teachers mostly conduct discussions.]" - HM11

Lack of hands-on training affects various aspects of student learning, industry expectations, and overall career preparedness. A lack of hands-on kitchen training impairs the development of practical culinary skills essential for managing food service operations. Students who need to experience the realities of kitchen work may need help understanding basic cooking techniques, food preparation, and kitchen workflows. Hands-on training and industry exposure are necessary for students to be prepared for work (Bernardo et al., 2024).

Coping Mechanisms of the Hospitality Management Students to Overcome Challenges

Because of their encountered challenges, the HM students developed coping mechanisms. The subcategories that emerged from this category are: Handling Expenses well and Honing Skills.

Handling Expenses Well. Developing a detailed budget and tracking expenses meticulously can serve as an effective coping mechanism for hospitality management students, helping them manage financial stress and focus more on their studies. The participants shared:

"Ga budget ra ko sa akong kwarta kay kabalo man gyud ko nga daghan gasto sa HM samot na ang sa lab. [I am budgeting my money because I know there are many expenses in HM (Hotel Management), especially in the lab.]" - HM2

"Gi na prioritize nako akong gasto samot na if kabalo ko nga gasto kaayo sa atong program. [I prioritize my spending, especially since I know our program is very expensive.]" - HM8

Proper handling of financial resources ensures sustainability, enhances educational quality and prepares students for responsible financial management in their careers (Santoso et al., 2020). Effective expense management allows educational institutions to allocate resources strategically, maximizing the value delivered to students (Brau et al., 2019).

Honing Skills. Honing skills such as communication, problem-solving, and customer service can significantly enhance the career prospects of hospitality management students, preparing them for the diverse challenges of the industry.

"Galantaw kog video sa youtube to learn more sa mga luto luto and sa bartending. [I watch videos on YouTube to learn more about cooking and bartending.]" - HM1

"Akong ginabuhay kay ga self-practice ko and ga practice kog luto sa among balay. [What I do is self-practice, and I practice cooking at home.]" - HM5

"Naninkamot ko to learn on my own, mag tanaw ko sa youtube ug mga tricks sa flairtending. [I strive to learn on my own by watching YouTube videos and learning tricks in flair bartending.]" - HM7

"Sige ko tanaw ug baking videos sa tiktok, youtube, and facebook para maka learn pa ko." [I often watch baking videos on TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook to learn more.]" - HM13

This skill development process is essential for preparing graduates to excel in diverse roles within the hospitality sector and effectively meet the industry's evolving demands. Honing skills through targeted training and practical experiences enhance students' employability and career readiness (Elbyaly & Elfeky, 2023). Hospitality management programs prioritizing skill development in leadership, communication, and customer service equip graduates with a strong foundation for success in various hospitality roles (Trinidad et al., 2023).

Realizations of the Hospitality Management Students in the Program

Upon enrolling in the HM program, the students realized the work opportunities they would have in the future. HM students realize more work opportunities due to several key factors. The program's curriculum is designed to be comprehensive and industry-focused, providing students with a deep understanding of hospitality operations, customer service, and business management. Hospitality Management students find themselves well-prepared and highly competitive in the job market, with access to a broader array of career opportunities upon graduation. Realizing the wide opportunities available and actively developing relevant skills and experiences can significantly enhance the career prospects of Hospitality Management Students. The participants shared:

"So, I realize ngay ang HM program dili ra mag focus ug housekeeping, all around ngay siya. So daghan gyud ko'g na learn throughout my journey no. [I realized that the HM program doesn't just focus on one area like housekeeping; it covers a wide range of skills. I learned a lot throughout my journey.]" - HM1

"Abi nako it's all about lutoluto lang pero HM has much more to offer ngay. Dire sad nako na learn daghan klase sa plato ug kutsara. Daghan gyud ngay kag manglearn sa HM maybe that's why daghan syag job opportunities. [When I started this course, I thought it would be easy, but it wasn't. I thought there wouldn't be any math, but there was. I assumed it was all about cooking, but HM has much more to offer. I learned about different types of plates, utensils, and more. There is a lot to learn in HM, which is why there are many job opportunities.]" - HM2

"Akong realization sakong college journey sa HM program is nandot jud sya kay daghan jud kay mga big opportunity nga makuha nmo puhon after mo graduate ka. [My

realization during my college journey in the HM program is that it is indeed great because there are many big opportunities you can get after you graduate.]”- HM7

Offering work opportunities, such as internships, co-op placements, and part-time jobs, allows students to gain practical experience in real-world hospitality settings (Baum, 2019). This hands-on experience is crucial for bridging the gap between academic learning and industry requirements. Students learn firsthand about hotel operations, restaurant management, event planning, and customer service, among other essential skills. This practical knowledge not only enhances their resume but also prepares them for the challenges and expectations of entry-level positions upon graduation (Naparan et al., 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

Students in hospitality management programs undergo a transformative journey characterized by academic learning, practical skill development, and personal growth. The curriculum integrates theoretical foundations with hands-on experiences in hospitality operations, customer service, and event management, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills essential for real-world challenges. Experiential learning through internships and industry collaborations enables students to apply classroom knowledge, gain industry insights, and build professional networks. Interactions with industry professionals and exposure to diverse environments deepen their understanding of career paths in hospitality, shaping their aspirations. Beyond technical skills, students emphasize the importance of soft skills like communication and leadership, cultivated through teamwork and leadership roles in student organizations. This holistic approach prepares students for the complexities of the hospitality industry and instills confidence and resilience as they enter their careers, reflecting a profound personal and professional development journey. This study contributes significantly to hospitality management education by demonstrating how an integrated curriculum combining theoretical foundations with hands-on experiences enhances critical thinking and problem-solving skills crucial for navigating real-world challenges. By emphasizing the role of experiential learning through internships and industry collaborations, the research illustrates the importance of applying classroom knowledge in professional settings, gaining valuable industry insights, and building robust professional networks.

Recommendations

This study recommends including suggestions that the program collaborates with local hotels, restaurants, and tourism companies to provide students with hands-on experience through internships, guest lectures, and industry projects. Teachers should implement practical training sessions, simulations, and case studies that mirror real-world scenarios in hospitality management to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Additionally, it is recommended that teachers regularly gather feedback from students and industry partners to continuously improve the curriculum and teaching methods, stay updated with the latest industry trends, and adjust the program accordingly. Finally, teachers should encourage students to pursue certifications and professional development opportunities, such as the National Certificate (NCII) or the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) programs.

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