



Received: 27-02-2026
Accepted: 07-04-2026

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Navigating Industry Exposure: Experiences, Challenges, and Learning Outcomes of Hospitality Management Students in On-The-Job Training

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62225/2583049X.2026.6.2.6140>

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Abstract

On-the-job training (OJT) is a vital component of hospitality education, bridging classroom learning with real-world industry experience and preparing students for professional careers. This study explored the workplace experiences of Hospitality Management students during their OJT, focusing on daily tasks, challenges, learning outcomes, and coping strategies. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed, combining quantitative survey data and qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with 51 fourth-year students of Columban College, Inc. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis and integrated to provide a holistic understanding of the OJT experience. Findings revealed that most students were assigned to local hotels, primarily in housekeeping and food and beverage departments. Students expressed high

satisfaction with skill development and workplace exposure, showing improvements in technical competencies, communication, and adaptability. However, supervision, mentorship, and application of academic knowledge were moderately rated, indicating gaps between theory and practice. Challenges included heavy workloads, work-related stress, communication issues, limited support, and adjustment difficulties. Despite this, students demonstrated resilience through seeking guidance, maintaining positivity, and adapting to workplace demands. Overall, OJT positively influenced knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes. The study recommends enhancing supervision, aligning curricula with industry needs, and strengthening support systems to improve OJT effectiveness.

Keywords: Education, Hospitality Management, On-The-Job Training, Experiential Learning

Introduction

The hospitality industry is recognized as a labor-intensive and service-driven field that requires employees to possess strong technical skills and adaptability to changing customer demands. To meet these expectations, hospitality education institutions integrate experiential learning approaches, particularly on-the-job training (OJT) or internships, into their programs (Yiu & Law, 2012; Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013; Chen *et al.*, 2012; Marinakou, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2013; Hsu, 2012; Ruhanen *et al.*, 2013). These initiatives bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world application, enabling students to acquire practical competencies beyond theoretical learning (Yiu & Law, 2012; Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013; Chen *et al.*, 2012; Farmaki, 2018; Ferreras-Garcia *et al.*, 2019; Pusiran *et al.*, 2020). Supported by experiential learning theory, OJT emphasizes learning through direct experience and reflection, helping students develop communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills while enhancing employability (Kolb, 1984; Bandura, 1986; Croft & Wang, 2023; Ima & Kim, 2025; Nyanjom *et al.*, 2023).

OJT also exposes students to real workplace environments, allowing them to understand organizational culture, service standards, and operational systems, which contribute to professional identity formation and industry readiness (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013; Marinakou, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2013; Farmaki, 2018; Ferreras-Garcia *et al.*, 2019; Pusiran *et al.*, 2020). It fosters not only technical skills but also professional values such as discipline, responsibility, and confidence (Yiu & Law, 2012; Marinakou, 2013; Hsu, 2012; Croft & Wang, 2023). However, students often face challenges including heavy workloads, stress, limited supervision, communication barriers, and adjustment difficulties, which may affect their learning experiences (Farmaki, 2018; Pusiran *et al.*, 2020; Aujero-Blanza *et al.*, 2023). Personal concerns such as anxiety and balancing academic demands further highlight the need for stronger institutional and industry support (Crejado *et al.*, 2025; Alfaro, 2025).

Despite these challenges, students develop coping strategies such as seeking support, maintaining a positive outlook, and building resilience, which help them succeed in training (Croft & Wang, 2023; Ima & Kim, 2025). While existing studies often examine isolated aspects of OJT, there is limited research integrating experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and outcomes, particularly in the Philippine context. Addressing these gaps, this study investigates the workplace realities of Hospitality Management students at Columban College, Inc., aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of OJT experiences and inform improvements in training programs to better align academic preparation with industry demands.

Framework of the Study

On-the-job training (OJT) in hospitality education is primarily anchored in Experiential Learning Theory, which explains that learning develops through the transformation of experience into knowledge via reflection and application (Kolb, 2015; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Morris, 2020; Yardley *et al.*, 2012; Beard, 2018). Complementing this, Situated Learning Theory emphasizes that learning is most effective when it occurs in real-life contexts and through social interaction (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Farnsworth *et al.*, 2016; Choi & Jacobs, 2011; Trede *et al.*, 2012; Billett, 2016). Together, these theories highlight the importance of workplace immersion, where students actively participate in service operations and connect academic knowledge with practical application (Kolb, 2015; Billett, 2016; Morris, 2020).

This foundation is reinforced by Social Learning Theory, which underscores learning through observation and interaction with others (Bandura, 2012; Schunk, 2012; Illeris, 2018; Eraut, 2014; Tynjälä, 2013). In OJT settings, students learn not only through direct tasks but also by observing supervisors and colleagues. This aligns with the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model, which emphasizes guided learning through feedback, coaching, and scaffolding (Collins *et al.*, 2018; Dennen & Burner, 2017; Brown *et al.*, 2014; Lave, 2016). Additionally, Human Capital Theory and the Competency-Based Education Framework highlight how training enhances employability by developing measurable skills aligned with industry needs (Becker, 2013; Mulder, 2014; Gervais, 2016; Winterton *et al.*, 2015).

Further support is provided by the Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) Framework, which promotes the alignment of academic instruction with workplace practice (Jackson, 2015; Smith, 2017; Zegwaard & Rowe, 2019), and Reflective Practice Theory, which emphasizes learning through critical reflection on experiences (Schön, 2017; Ryan, 2015; Moon, 2013; Boud *et al.*, 2013). From a psychosocial perspective, Stress and Coping Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory explain how students manage workplace challenges and how confidence influences their performance and persistence (Lazarus & Folkman, 2013; Bandura, 2012; Maddux, 2016). These theories collectively explain how students navigate OJT demands and achieve learning outcomes.

At the policy level, OJT in the Philippines is guided by CHED Memorandum Order No. 62, s. 2017, along with Republic Act No. 7722 and CHED Memorandum Order No. 104, s. 2017, which establish standards for curriculum, internships, and student protection. Anchored in these frameworks, the study adopts an Input-Process-Output (IPO)

model to examine students' profiles, experiences, and outcomes (Jackson, 2015; Zegwaard & Rowe, 2019). Despite existing theories and policies, research gaps remain, particularly in integrating multiple variables and methods within the Philippine context, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive and context-specific investigation.

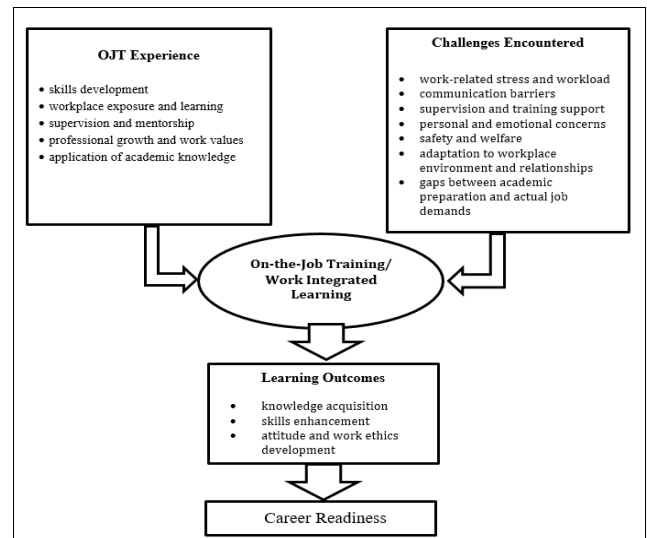


Fig 1: Paradigm showing the conceptual framework

Objective of the Study

This study aimed to examine the workplace realities experienced by Hospitality Management students of Columban College, Inc. during their on-the-job training (OJT), particularly in terms of their experiences, challenges, learning outcomes, and coping strategies, as a basis for proposing an OJT program enhancement.

Specifically, this study sought to:

1. Determine the experiences of Hospitality Management students during their OJT in terms of skills development, workplace exposure and learning, supervision and mentorship, professional growth and work values, and application of academic knowledge.
2. Identify the challenges encountered by Hospitality Management students during their OJT in terms of work-related stress and workload, communication barriers, supervision and training support, personal and emotional concerns, safety and welfare, adaptation to workplace environment and relationships, and gaps between academic preparation and actual job demands.
3. Assess the learning outcomes gained by the students from their OJT in terms of knowledge acquisition, skills enhancement, and attitude and work ethics development.
4. Examine the coping strategies employed by students in dealing with challenges during their OJT.
5. Identify the most significant learning outcomes perceived by students and analyze how these influence their career readiness.
6. Integrate the qualitative and quantitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' OJT experiences.
7. Propose an enhancement program to improve the implementation of the OJT program for Hospitality Management students.

Methodology

The study utilized a **convergent parallel mixed methods design**, where quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and later integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of students’ OJT experiences. This approach allowed comparison of numerical trends and personal narratives to determine whether findings converged, diverged, or complemented each other, strengthening the overall interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

The research was conducted at Columban College, Inc., particularly within the Hospitality Department of the College of Business and Accountancy. A total of 51 fourth-year International Hospitality Management students participated, representing both Hotel and Restaurant Administration and Meal Science and Culinary Arts specializations. For qualitative insights, 15 students were purposively selected for in-depth interviews to capture diverse experiences across training placements.

Data were gathered using a researcher-developed questionnaire aligned with CHED policies, consisting of sections on student profile, OJT experiences, challenges, learning outcomes, and coping strategies, alongside a structured interview guide. The instrument underwent expert validation and pilot testing, yielding acceptable reliability scores. Ethical standards were strictly observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and compliance with the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, Shapiro-Wilk test, and One-Way ANOVA to determine significant differences among variables. Qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis, involving coding, categorization, and theme development supported by verbatim responses. The integration of both datasets enabled the identification of patterns and insights that informed recommendations for enhancing the OJT program.

Results and Discussion

1. Quantitative Analysis

1.1 Experiences of Hospitality Management students during their OJT

The findings indicate that Hospitality Management students experienced strong development of practical competencies during their OJT, particularly in skills development and workplace exposure. Both areas were rated “Strongly Agree,” reflecting that students significantly improved their technical abilities, communication skills, and capacity to work under pressure (Jackson, 2015; Jackson *et al.*, 2017). High ratings in exposure to real industry standards and hands-on experience further confirm that OJT effectively immerses students in authentic work environments, enabling them to understand operations and align their competencies with industry expectations (Robinson, 2018; Succi & Canovi, 2020).

In contrast, supervision and mentorship and professional growth and work values were rated slightly lower at “Agree,” indicating moderate but positive experiences. While students benefited from initial orientation and basic guidance, consistent feedback, supervisor support, and mentoring relationships were not as strong across all placements (Billett, 2016; O’Connor, 2021). Similarly,

although OJT fostered teamwork and responsibility, aspects such as time management, professionalism, and positive work attitudes require further reinforcement through structured mentoring and reflective practices (Jackson, 2015).

Lastly, the application of academic knowledge also received a moderate rating, highlighting a gap between classroom learning and workplace practice. Although students were able to apply some theoretical concepts, difficulties in integrating theory into real-world tasks suggest the presence of a theory–practice gap (Hora *et al.*, 2017; O’Connor, 2021). Overall, while OJT effectively enhances practical skills and industry exposure, improvements in supervision, curriculum alignment, and experiential learning design are needed to ensure more comprehensive student development.

Table 1: Experiences of HM students

Items	Mean	Descriptive Rating
1. Skills development	3.29	Strongly Agree
2. Workplace exposure and learning	3.41	Strongly Agree
3. Supervision and mentorship	3.18	Agree
4. Professional growth and work values	3.21	Agree
5. Application of academic knowledge	3.12	Agree

1.2 Challenges encountered by Hospitality Management students during their OJT

The findings reveal that Hospitality Management students encounter significant challenges related to work-related stress and workload during their OJT, as reflected by an overall weighted mean of 3.43, interpreted as “Strongly Agree.” Students reported heavy workloads, physically exhausting tasks, long working hours, and difficulties managing multiple responsibilities, with “Tasks assigned were sometimes overwhelming” (WM = 3.52) rated the highest. These results underscore the labor-intensive nature of hospitality internships, which often require multitasking, emotional labor, and rapid adaptation to service-oriented environments, consistent with studies showing that workload and extended hours are major stressors affecting intern well-being and adjustment (Blanza *et al.*, 2023; Mensah *et al.*, 2020; Frontiers in Education, 2025).

Communication barriers were moderately experienced by students, with an overall weighted mean of 3.06 (“Agree”), highlighting challenges in language proficiency, interpersonal confidence, and comprehension of instructions. The highest-rated indicators, “I felt hesitant to ask questions” (WM = 3.41) and “Language barriers affected my performance” (WM = 3.30), suggest that psychological and linguistic factors impede effective communication. Such barriers can create role ambiguity, reduce service quality, and limit learning opportunities, as noted in studies emphasizing the critical role of language competence and communication confidence in hospitality training (Arun & Disilva, 2017; Lee & Madera, 2014; Cadiz-Gabijan, 2021).

Students also reported moderate challenges in supervision and training support (WM = 3.06, “Agree”), including insufficient guidance, limited feedback, and unclear instructions. The indicators “Training support was

insufficient” (WM = 3.13) and “I received limited supervision during training” (WM = 3.09) suggest gaps in structured mentoring and oversight, which can hinder skill acquisition, confidence, and professional development. Research highlights that consistent supervision, constructive feedback, and clear instructions are essential to maximize learning outcomes and competence during experiential training (Billett, 2016; Kim & Park, 2017; Carless & Boud, 2018; Salas *et al.*, 2015).

Adaptation to the workplace environment, relationships, and academic-job alignment also posed challenges, with adaptation to workplace culture, co-worker interactions, and workplace expectations rated highly (WM = 3.40, “Strongly Agree”), while gaps between academic preparation and actual job demands were moderate (WM = 2.96, “Agree”). Students struggled to build relationships, manage workplace expectations, and acquire new skills not taught in school, reflecting the need to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. These findings emphasize the importance of pre-deployment orientation, interpersonal skills training, and curriculum-industry alignment to enhance student adaptability, professional competence, and long-term success in hospitality careers (Jackson, 2015; Billett, 2016; Suarta *et al.*, 2017; Choi *et al.*, 2019).

Table 2: Challenges encountered by HM students

Items	Mean	Descriptive Rating
1. Work-related stress and workload	3.43	Strongly Agree
2. Communication barriers	3.06	Agree
3. Supervision and training support	3.02	Agree
4. Personal and emotional concerns	2.86	Agree
5. Safety and welfare	2.40	Disagree
6. Adaptation to workplace environment and relationships	3.40	Strongly Agree
7. Gaps between academic preparation and actual job demands	2.96	Agree

1.3 Learning outcomes gained by the students from their OJT

The findings indicate that Hospitality Management students achieved very high levels of knowledge acquisition during their OJT, with an overall rating of Strongly Agree (M = 3.50). Students demonstrated a deeper understanding of hospitality operations, industry standards, and workplace systems, suggesting that experiential learning effectively strengthens both technical and organizational knowledge. They also reported increased knowledge in customer service and field-specific concepts, highlighting the importance of direct guest interaction in developing service competence. These results support the view that work-integrated learning environments enable students to transform theoretical knowledge into practical understanding through real-world exposure (Billett, 2016; Kolb, 2015). Moreover, OJT enhances cognitive learning and industry awareness, making academic concepts more meaningful and applicable in professional contexts (Jackson, 2015; Ocampo *et al.*, 2023). In terms of skills enhancement, students likewise reported very high outcomes (M = 3.44, Strongly Agree), indicating that OJT plays a crucial role in developing both technical and soft skills. Significant improvements were observed in technical competencies, multitasking abilities, adaptability,

efficiency, and communication skills. These findings suggest that hands-on experience allows students to refine job-specific skills while also developing higher-order competencies required in dynamic hospitality environments. Prior research affirms that work-integrated learning enhances adaptability, problem-solving, and overall work readiness, which are essential for professional success (Jackson, 2015; Succi & Canovi, 2020). Additionally, continuous practice and workplace interaction contribute to improved productivity and interpersonal effectiveness, reinforcing the value of experiential learning (Billett, 2016; Robles, 2016).

The results also show strong outcomes in attitude and work ethics development (M = 3.34, Strongly Agree), indicating that OJT significantly shapes students’ professional values and behavior. Students reported becoming more disciplined, responsible, and professional, while also valuing teamwork and cooperation. These findings highlight that workplace immersion fosters not only skill development but also the internalization of essential work ethics and attitudes. Consistent with experiential and social learning theories, students develop professional behavior through observation, interaction, and participation in real work settings (Bandura, 1997; Billett, 2016). Furthermore, increased work ethic and career commitment suggest that OJT enhances students’ motivation and helps them develop a clearer sense of professional identity (Nguyen *et al.*, 2021; Jackson, 2015).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that OJT produces holistic learning outcomes, encompassing knowledge, skills, and professional values. The consistently high ratings across all dimensions confirm that OJT is highly effective in preparing students for the hospitality industry. By bridging academic learning and practical experience, OJT enhances competence, adaptability, and professionalism, ultimately improving students’ career readiness. These results underscore the importance of maintaining well-structured and supervised OJT programs, as well as strengthening collaboration between academic institutions and industry partners to sustain and further improve learning outcomes (Billett, 2016; Jackson, 2015).

Table 2: Learning outcomes by HM students

Items	Mean	Descriptive Rating
1. Knowledge acquisition	3.50	Strongly Agree
2. Skills enhancement	3.44	Strongly Agree
3. Attitude and work ethics development	3.34	Strongly Agree

1.4 Students’ coping strategies with the challenges they encounter during their OJT

The findings indicate that Hospitality Management students employed a variety of effective coping strategies to manage challenges during their OJT, as reflected by an overall weighted mean of 3.45 (“Strongly Agree”). Students primarily relied on social support, seeking assistance from peers (WM = 3.82) and supervisors (WM = 3.56), which aligns with research showing that workplace support enhances adjustment and learning for interns (Billett, 2016; Fong *et al.*, 2018). They also demonstrated strong personal coping mechanisms, including maintaining a positive attitude (WM = 3.35), practicing self-motivation and resilience (WM = 3.33), and employing time management

(WM = 3.17), reflecting the importance of psychological resources in high-pressure hospitality settings (Gonzalez-Morales *et al.*, 2016; Succi & Canovi, 2020; Jackson, 2015). These findings suggest that students integrate both social and individual strategies, consistent with the dual-process approach to stress management, which enhances adaptability, professional growth, and long-term career readiness (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Overall, the results highlight the value of structured mentoring, peer collaboration, and resilience-building initiatives in strengthening students' ability to navigate workplace challenges effectively (Billett, 2016; Jackson, 2015; Succi & Canovi, 2020).

2. Qualitative Analysis

2.1 Experiences of HM students during their OJT

The qualitative findings reveal that the OJT experiences of Hospitality Management students are shaped by multiple interconnected themes, with workplace exposure emerging as a key factor in learning. Students emphasized that immersion in real-world operations allowed them to experience actual hotel work and develop a more realistic understanding of the industry, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Verbatim responses highlighted how classroom knowledge became clearer when applied in authentic settings, supporting experiential learning theory, which posits that knowledge is constructed through direct experience and reflection (Kolb, 2015; Billett, 2016).

At the same time, students encountered significant workplace challenges, particularly in terms of workload and interpersonal relationships. Participants described feeling exhausted and pressured due to continuous tasks and demanding shifts, while others reported difficulties adjusting to co-workers and dealing with misunderstandings. These findings suggest that the fast-paced and service-oriented nature of the hospitality industry can create stress and social adjustment issues, which may affect performance but also foster resilience and adaptability among trainees (Gonzalez-Morales *et al.*, 2016; Jackson, 2015).

Despite these challenges, the theme of learning and development highlights substantial gains in both technical and soft skills. Students reported improvements in guest handling, communication, and multitasking, alongside the development of professional values such as responsibility and discipline. These outcomes indicate that OJT not only enhances operational competencies but also contributes to the formation of work ethics and employability skills, aligning with studies that emphasize the role of work-integrated learning in developing holistic professional competence (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Robles, 2016).

Furthermore, support systems and career realization played a crucial role in shaping students' experiences. Guidance from supervisors and assistance from peers helped students cope with challenges and facilitated learning, reinforcing the importance of mentoring and collaborative environments (Fong *et al.*, 2018). At the same time, OJT enabled students to gain clearer career insights and align their aspirations with industry realities, contributing to stronger career awareness and commitment (Nguyen *et al.*, 2021). Overall, the findings demonstrate that OJT serves as a comprehensive platform for experiential learning, professional growth, and career development, underscoring the need for structured and supportive training programs.

2.2 Challenges encountered by Hospitality Management students during their OJT

The qualitative findings reveal that Hospitality Management students encounter a range of **work-related challenges** during their OJT, with workload pressure and time demands being particularly prominent. Students reported difficulty prioritizing tasks and coping with continuous guest service, as exemplified by statements such as "*Sobrang dami ng tasks kaya minsan hindi ko na alam kung ano ang uunahin*" (There were so many tasks that sometimes I didn't know what to prioritize) (HMS3) and "*Nakakapagod ang duty lalo na kapag sunod-sunod ang guests*" (Duty is exhausting especially when guests come continuously) (HMS2). These experiences align with previous studies highlighting that hospitality internships are high-pressure environments that can induce fatigue and stress among trainees (Gonzalez-Morales *et al.*, 2016; Jackson, 2015). Communication barriers, interpersonal difficulties, and lack of supervisory support further compounded these challenges, with students reporting struggles in interacting with foreign guests, misunderstandings with supervisors, and limited guidance, consistent with research indicating that insufficient mentoring and communication gaps hinder effective learning and workplace adjustment in multicultural hospitality settings (Fong *et al.*, 2018; Succi & Canovi, 2020).

In addition to these operational and social challenges, students faced skills gaps, emotional stress, adaptation difficulties, and physical demands. Many reported struggling with tasks unfamiliar from their academic training, experiencing anxiety about making mistakes, and adjusting to a professional work culture different from school. Physical fatigue from long shifts and insufficient rest was also highlighted. These findings corroborate literature showing that hospitality internships often expose students to real-world complexities, emotional labor, and demanding schedules, which require resilience, adaptability, and continuous learning (Robles, 2016; Nguyen *et al.*, 2021). Overall, the study underscores the multifaceted nature of OJT challenges, emphasizing the need for enhanced institutional support, effective supervision, and alignment between academic preparation and workplace expectations to improve students' learning experiences, well-being, and professional readiness.

2.3 Learning outcomes gained by the students from their OJT

The qualitative findings reveal that OJT plays a crucial role in enhancing Hospitality Management (HM) students' knowledge acquisition and skill development through direct industry exposure. Students reported a deeper understanding of standard operating procedures (SOPs), guest handling, and overall hotel operations, emphasizing that experiential learning allowed them to connect theory with practice. This supports the idea that knowledge is more effectively constructed through real-world engagement rather than classroom instruction alone (Kolb, 2015; Billett, 2016). In addition, OJT significantly strengthened both technical and soft skills. Participants highlighted improvements in service delivery, system usage, communication, and teamwork, indicating that hands-on experience builds both competence and confidence in interacting with guests and colleagues. These results align with studies showing that internships are

instrumental in developing employability skills such as adaptability, collaboration, and customer service (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Robles, 2016).

Moreover, OJT contributes substantially to students' professional growth and career readiness by fostering discipline, resilience, and a clearer sense of career direction. Students demonstrated improved work ethics, professionalism, and the ability to manage stress and adapt to fast-paced environments, reflecting the influence of workplace immersion on behavioral development. This supports social learning theory, which emphasizes learning through observation and interaction in real settings (Bandura, 1997), as well as research linking workplace exposure to increased adaptability (Gonzalez-Morales *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, OJT enhanced students' confidence, self-efficacy, and preparedness for employment, with many expressing reduced anxiety about job applications and clearer career goals. The experience also provided realistic insights into professional work environments, strengthening independence and readiness for future roles. Overall, these findings confirm that OJT serves as a transformative learning experience that equips HM students with the competencies, mindset, and confidence necessary for successful entry into the hospitality industry (Nguyen *et al.*, 2021; Jackson, 2015; Billett, 2016).

2.4 Students' coping strategies with the challenges they encounter during their OJT

The qualitative findings indicate that Hospitality Management (HM) students employ a combination of social and personal coping strategies to manage challenges encountered during their OJT. A key theme is seeking support, where students rely on supervisors and peers for guidance, clarification, and collaborative problem-solving. For instance, students reported approaching supervisors for assistance and working closely with co-trainees to complete tasks and reduce uncertainty. These strategies highlight the importance of mentorship and teamwork in enhancing learning and alleviating stress, supporting research that emphasizes the role of workplace social support in improving intern performance and well-being (Fong *et al.*, 2018; Billett, 2016). Additionally, personal coping mechanisms such as effective time management and maintaining a positive mindset were evident. Students described prioritizing tasks and staying optimistic despite difficulties, reflecting self-regulation and proactive behavior in handling workload demands. These findings align with theories suggesting that goal-setting, emotional control, and optimism contribute to improved performance and resilience (Zimmerman, 2015; Luthans *et al.*, 2015).

Moreover, students demonstrated strong emotional regulation, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous self-improvement as part of their coping strategies. Techniques such as staying calm under pressure and managing stress through simple practices like deep breathing were commonly used to maintain composure in demanding situations, consistent with research highlighting the importance of emotional regulation in service-oriented industries (Gonzalez-Morales *et al.*, 2016). Adaptability also emerged as a critical skill, with students showing flexibility and openness to learning in dynamic work environments, reinforcing its significance in hospitality settings (Jackson, 2015). Furthermore, students engaged in self-directed learning and actively sought feedback to enhance their

competencies, demonstrating a growth-oriented mindset. This was complemented by resilience-building behaviors such as perseverance and determination, as students continued to fulfill responsibilities despite fatigue and challenges. Overall, these findings suggest that HM students utilize integrated coping strategies—spanning social support, self-regulation, emotional control, and resilience—that not only help them overcome immediate OJT difficulties but also contribute to their long-term professional growth and career readiness (Billett, 2016; Luthans *et al.*, 2015).

2.5 Learning outcomes students identified as most significant from their OJT experience, and how do these outcomes influence their career readiness

The qualitative findings indicate that the most significant learning outcomes identified by HM students during their OJT are centered on skill development, professional growth, and knowledge acquisition, all of which are critical in shaping career readiness. Students emphasized that hands-on experience enhanced their technical competence, particularly in performing real operational tasks in areas such as front office and kitchen operations, allowing them to move beyond theoretical learning. Additionally, communication and interpersonal skills improved through direct interaction with guests and collaboration with team members, increasing confidence and teamwork abilities. These outcomes support experiential learning theory, which posits that knowledge and skills are best developed through active engagement in real-world contexts (Kolb, 2015; Billett, 2016). Furthermore, students gained a deeper understanding of industry standards, procedures, and service protocols, reinforcing the role of OJT in bridging academic knowledge with workplace expectations.

These learning outcomes significantly influence students' career readiness by fostering confidence, clarity of career direction, and preparedness for professional work environments. Students reported increased self-efficacy and reduced anxiety in applying for jobs, indicating that OJT experience strengthens their belief in their capabilities, consistent with self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997). Moreover, the development of work ethics, discipline, adaptability, and resilience highlights how workplace immersion cultivates professionalism and the ability to handle real-world challenges, aligning with studies on employability and adaptability in dynamic industries (Jackson, 2015; Gonzalez-Morales *et al.*, 2016). OJT also contributed to clearer career goals and stronger motivation, as students became more certain about pursuing careers in the hospitality industry. Ultimately, workplace preparedness emerged as a key outcome, with students expressing readiness and independence in transitioning to employment. Overall, the findings demonstrate that OJT is a transformative experience that equips students with the competencies, mindset, and confidence necessary for successful entry into the workforce (Nguyen *et al.*, 2021; Billett, 2016).

3. Integration table of quantitative and qualitative findings

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings shows a strong convergence across most areas, indicating that Hospitality Management students' OJT experiences are largely positive and developmentally meaningful. Both data

sets consistently highlight that students gain valuable workplace exposure, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings while enhancing their technical, communication, and interpersonal skills. High levels of agreement in learning outcomes—particularly in knowledge acquisition, skill development, and professional attitudes—are supported by qualitative insights describing hands-on learning, improved confidence, and strengthened work ethics. Additionally, both findings confirm that students actively use coping strategies such as seeking support from supervisors and peers, as well as personal resilience, to manage challenges. At the same time, convergence is also evident in identifying common difficulties, including communication barriers, work-related stress, and adaptation to workplace culture, emphasizing that OJT is both a learning opportunity and a demanding experience.

However, the integration also reveals complementarity and divergence that provide deeper understanding of students' experiences. Complementarity is observed in areas like supervision and training support, where quantitative data identify limited guidance while qualitative findings explain how unclear instructions and insufficient feedback affect performance. Similarly, differences based on profile variables are clarified through qualitative context, showing how workplace environments shape individual experiences. A notable divergence appears in safety and welfare, where quantitative results suggest it is not a major concern, but qualitative responses reveal issues such as fatigue, long working hours, and insufficient rest. This gap suggests that some well-being concerns may be underrecognized in structured measures but are evident in lived experiences. Overall, the integration underscores the value of combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, as convergence strengthens the validity of findings while complementarity and divergence provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of OJT experiences, highlighting the need for improved supervision, workload management, and student support systems.

4. Implications for OJT Program Enhancement Plan for Hospitality Management students

The proposed OJT Program Enhancement Plan is grounded in the recognition that while Hospitality Management students achieve strong learning outcomes, their training experiences are often constrained by challenges such as communication barriers, limited supervision, workplace adjustment difficulties, and stress. These issues highlight gaps between academic preparation and actual industry demands, which may limit the full benefits of OJT despite students' ability to cope through support-seeking and self-regulation. Additionally, variations in experiences depending on sex and type of establishment, along with overlooked concerns related to safety and welfare, emphasize the need for a more structured, inclusive, and supportive training framework. Thus, the enhancement plan is designed to create a more holistic OJT experience that not only builds competence but also strengthens confidence, resilience, and overall career readiness.

To address these concerns, the program focuses on key developmental areas beginning with strengthened pre-OJT preparation. This includes intensive orientation, simulation training, and communication workshops to improve students' readiness before deployment. Communication

skills development is further reinforced through language training and role-playing activities to reduce hesitation and improve guest interaction. During the OJT, enhanced supervision and mentoring mechanisms—such as assigned workplace mentors and regular feedback sessions—ensure that students receive consistent guidance. At the same time, industry-academe alignment initiatives, including curriculum review and stronger partnerships with industry stakeholders, aim to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application, ensuring that students' tasks are aligned with expected competencies in the workplace.

Moreover, the plan emphasizes student well-being, continuous support, and long-term development. Support systems such as peer groups, counseling services, and stress management training are integrated to help students manage workload pressures and maintain emotional resilience. Safety and welfare monitoring through regular site visits and compliance checks ensures a secure training environment. Performance monitoring tools, including evaluations and reflective journals, are used to track progress and improve accountability. Finally, career development activities such as seminars and employability training enhance students' confidence and clarify career direction, while continuous program evaluation ensures that feedback from both students and industry partners informs ongoing improvements. Overall, this enhancement plan provides a comprehensive and responsive approach to optimizing OJT outcomes and preparing students for successful careers in the hospitality industry.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that on-the-job training is a vital and effective component of hospitality education. It plays a significant role in enhancing students' technical skills, communication abilities, and overall workplace readiness. The strong positive responses in skills development and workplace exposure confirm that experiential learning provides students with meaningful opportunities to apply their knowledge in real-world settings and develop competencies required by the industry.

However, the study also concludes that supervision and mentorship during OJT are not consistently strong across training establishments. While initial orientation is generally provided, ongoing guidance, feedback, and supervisory support appear to be limited in some cases. This inconsistency may hinder students' ability to fully maximize their learning experiences and develop higher-order skills such as problem-solving and decision-making.

Furthermore, the findings indicate the existence of a theory-practice gap, as students only moderately agreed that their academic knowledge was effectively applied during OJT. This suggests that while academic programs provide relevant foundational knowledge, there is still a need for better alignment between classroom instruction and actual industry practices. Bridging this gap is essential to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the complexities of the workplace.

Despite encountering various challenges such as workload stress, communication difficulties, and emotional concerns, students demonstrated resilience and adaptability in coping with these situations. These coping mechanisms contributed to their positive learning outcomes and professional growth. Overall, the study concludes that OJT is a transformative

experience that not only enhances students' competencies but also shapes their professional identity and career readiness, although improvements in program structure and support systems are necessary.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that academic institutions enhance their OJT preparation programs to better equip students for workplace realities. This may include providing pre-deployment training on communication skills, workplace expectations, stress management, and professional behavior. Additionally, incorporating more experiential and simulation-based learning activities in the curriculum can help bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Academic institutions should also strengthen their OJT monitoring and evaluation systems by establishing regular communication with students and industry partners. Assigning faculty coordinators to closely supervise students' progress and provide continuous support can improve the overall training experience. Furthermore, curriculum enhancement should focus on aligning academic content with industry standards to ensure that students acquire relevant and applicable knowledge and skills.

For industry partners, it is recommended to improve supervision and mentorship practices by providing structured training programs, clear instructions, and regular feedback to student trainees. Supervisors should be trained to adopt a more supportive and approachable mentoring style to facilitate better learning. Additionally, offering students a wider range of tasks, including opportunities for problem-solving and decision-making, can enhance their competencies and confidence.

Students are encouraged to take an active role in their own learning by seeking feedback, developing resilience, and maximizing opportunities during their OJT. They should also focus on improving their adaptability, communication skills, and time management to better cope with workplace challenges. Lastly, future researchers are recommended to conduct further studies involving larger samples, multiple institutions, and longitudinal designs to gain deeper insights into OJT effectiveness and its long-term impact on students' career development.

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