

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jhlste

Academic Papers

Developing and evaluating a hospitality skill module for enhancing performance of undergraduate hospitality students



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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Hospitality
Competency
Curriculum development
Course module
Performance assessment

ABSTRACT

This study develops and evaluates a 12-week hospitality skill module (HSM) for undergraduate hospitality programs in Taiwan to enhance student hospitality performance. A quasi-experimental design, with a sample of 101 students, was used to examine the effect of HSM intervention. The results show that students receiving the HSM intervention significantly enhance their hospitality performance and learning motivation. Student feedback also confirms that the HSM can increase their learning interest and experience. This study provides a useful template and implications for curriculum designers and instructors infusing core values and applications of commercial hospitality in an undergraduate hospitality curriculum.

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1. Introduction

The rise of globalized tourism and leisure activities has increased the attention paid to developing hospitality human resources, and stimulated demand for hospitality and tourism education. Given a fast-changing business environment, hospitality and tourism education institutes are undergoing reforms in response to changes in demand for hospitality skills and competencies critical to the success of the organization. Previous studies called for industry and academia focusing on the definition and importance of hospitality, and outlined the connotations and important elements of commercial hospitality to construct the professionalism of hospitality education (Morrison, 2002). In hospitality and tourism domain, the workforce is highly mobile and the industry involves frequent guest–host interactions catering to the needs of diverse customer groups (Teng, 2011). The attitudes and behavioral performance of hospitality employees are key influences on guest satisfaction and retention (Kim, Leong, & Lee, 2005). Therefore, enhancing hospitality skills and competencies is central to the education, training, and development of hospitality service employees.

From the human resource perspective, the hospitality industry requires future professional employees with cross-domain abilities, as well as knowledge and competence that match industrial trends and demands (Baum, 2007). Indeed, understanding how education can provide the human resources needed by the industry is an important foundation of management (Young, Corsun, Muller, & Inman, 1998). Numerous researchers have stressed the importance of the ability to identify skills, knowledge factors and competencies required by different levels of hospitality managers to prepare students for successful careers in the hospitality industry (Chung-Herrera, Enz, & Lankau, 2003; Kay & Russette, 2000; Suh, West, & Shin, 2012). However, there is a lack of investigation into the process of linking competencies to student learning outcomes or to assessment methods. Previous studies suggested that hospitality educators should seriously consider adopting a

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'competency-based' approach to curriculum development and evaluation to equip students with appropriate levels of competency that meet industry needs (Cecil & Krohn, 2012; Hu, 2010). To date, little research focuses on key elements of commercial hospitality for teaching hospitality skills across the curriculum to enhance student professional competency and benefit the industry. This reveals that a more robust approach to credentialing and training the future hospitality workforce is needed for competent service performance.

This study attempts to develop a hospitality skill module by integrating the core values of commercial hospitality to improve student hospitality performance, specifically within the context of restaurant service. Furthermore, this study also seeks to understand student learning motivation and feedback from the courses module to enhance student learning experience. Thus, this study has two objectives: (1) to develop an undergraduate hospitality skill module (HSM), teaching strategies, and assessment methods; and (2) to conduct and evaluate HSM intervention by assessing student hospitality performance, learning motivation, and experience. The findings of this study can help hospitality educators enhance student hospitality competency and learning experience by conducting HSM intervention with diversified teaching and learning strategies. The research results can also provide useful insights into training in customer service and value creation to help hospitality businesses achieve competitive advantages.

2. Literature review

2.1. Competency in commercial hospitality settings

Competency refers to individual knowledge, skills, attitudes, abilities, traits and characteristics which are not only related to work performed or position held but also reflect and influence individual behavior and performance (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Competency consists of multiple skills at multiple levels of complexity being undertaken simultaneously (Bridges, 1993). This implies that competency in the hospitality business context includes not only work-related skills at lower levels of proficiency but also more complex, higher levels of proficiency and mastery which may more aptly be described as the 'art' of hospitality. Chapman and Lovell (2006) indicated the hospitality industry faces particular challenges in credentialing their workforce and called for establishing appropriate competency training framework to enhance employee competency. Indeed, previous studies suggested that adopting a competency model can help an organization develop a talented workforce by identifying core skills according to specific job positions and providing subsequent training and education. For instance, Chung-Herrera et al. (2003) and Kay and Russette (2000) developed a competency model for evaluating and developing the future leadership of hospitality organizations through identifying core skills required by hospitality managers. Hu (2010) further adopted culinary competency as a course design approach and successfully developed an innovative industry-oriented curriculum for culinary students. Cecil and Krohn (2012) explored the process of creating a competency-based curriculum and suggested a structured procedure for assessing learning outcomes.

To enhance the understanding of competencies required by hospitality service employees, the core values of commercial hospitality must be identified to develop appropriate course content for education and training. Hemmington (2007) claimed that commercial hospitality is involved in providing a series of services, with an emphasis on service providers focusing on guest feelings and emotions, and a need to create memorable guest experiences. Prior research suggested that service employees should express more concern and go an extra mile for guests to evoke their positive feelings and pleasant interactions (Lugosi, 2008). Furthermore, employee service orientation and behaviors conveying commitment and delivering hospitality quality have been identified critical to customer satisfaction and repurchase intention (Winsted, 2000; Stock & Hoyer, 2005). As Lashley (2008) noted, employee hospitality requires not only technical skills, but also care and empathy, particularly in the context of interpersonal communications and social exchanges.

Teng (2011) examined guest restaurant dining and hotel accommodation experiences, and identified five key components of commercial hospitality, namely interpersonal interaction, psychological connection, openness to different cultures, sensation satisfaction, and perceived value. These elements can not only help service employees provide exceptional hospitality quality, but can also help hospitality organizations develop niche marketing strategies catering to different guest needs. Service providers seeking competitive advantages should understand commercial hospitality and focus on developing employee hospitality competency through comprehensive training programs or formal education. Given that hospitality students are the main potential workforce in the hospitality sector, educational institutions should develop appropriate content for hospitality courses and infuse it into student learning experiences to enhance student professional competency, thus benefiting both students and the industry.

2.2. Curriculum development

2.2.1. Curriculum development processes

Curriculum development refers to course selection and all the other processes or activities implemented to accomplish curriculum goals, and includes four key elements: objectives, contents, learning activities, and evaluation (Pratt, 1980). Cooper (2002) adopted a holistic approach and founded a university-level tourism curriculum for Jordan, which is learner-centered and incorporates important elements for curriculum development, including the context, aims and objectives, learning experiences, and evaluation. This approach, consistent with Cooper and Westlake (1998), stressed that curriculum designers should consider the backgrounds and learning experiences of students to develop a curriculum that meets learner

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