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**Industry-informed curriculum management in hospitality tertiary education:**

**The case study of Vietnam**

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**Statement of the use of Generative AI**

Generative AI technology was not used in the preparation of any part of this thesis.

### **Abstract**

In the landscape of hospitality education at university level, the persistent concern regarding the competencies of hospitality graduates remains a major issue for industry professionals (Marneros et al., 2021). Despite the increasing demand for well-prepared graduates, many hospitality education programs fall short of equipping students with the necessary skills to succeed in the dynamic and service-oriented hospitality sector. This deficiency primarily arises from limited collaboration between academia and the industry (Kwok, 2022; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006), resulting in a curriculum that does not align with employers' expectations. Academics in the field have been struggling with various issues, evolving mainly around the debate on the most appropriate educational approach to develop hospitality curriculum at universities (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017). Consequently, graduates struggle with employability, particularly in Vietnam, where the rapid growth of the hospitality industry underscores the urgent need for competent professionals. The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have further highlighted the importance of an adaptable and industry-informed curriculum. To address both of these theoretical and practical gaps, this thesis adopted Taba's (1974) grass-roots curriculum development model and Wiggins and McTighe's (2011) backward-design model as the backbone theoretical framework, offering a novel theoretical perspective tailored to the hospitality and tourism education context.

This research employs constructivist paradigm and a qualitative methodology to investigate the current quality of undergraduate hospitality education in Vietnam. Focusing on public, private, and international universities, the study explores curriculum design, competency development, and stakeholder perceptions. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews with educators, industry practitioners, alumni, and students (59 participants), as well as document analysis of programs' learning outcomes. This multi-faceted approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of current educational practices. By employing data triangulation, the study ensured the reliability and trustworthiness of its findings.

Employers interviewed in this study identified several gaps in graduate competencies, including insufficient preparation in high-level skills such as leadership, critical thinking, and decision-making, revealing significant deficiencies in critical areas such as strategic thinking, problem-solving, adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and English proficiency. While learning outcomes in hospitality programs often mention these competencies, the practical implementation and assessment of such skills remain inconsistent. Additionally, graduates are inadequately trained in contemporary industry-specific

competencies such as data analysis, digital marketing, and advanced IT applications. These gaps not only hinder graduates' ability to meet the technical demands of the industry but also limit their career advancement opportunities, particularly in multinational hospitality organizations. When theory-practice balance is considered, limited internship durations and inadequate practical exposure leave students unprepared for real-world scenarios.

Findings from this study also highlights the influence of Vietnam's centralized management practices, which adds another layer of complexity. While centralized decision-making ensures uniformity and consistency in service standards, it also restricts employee autonomy and innovation. This hierarchical structure often clashes with modern hospitality practices, which emphasize adaptability, creativity, and employee empowerment. Graduates entering the workforce struggle to navigate these conflicting expectations, underscoring the need for curriculum reforms that prepare students for both traditional and modern hospitality settings. The findings also highlight how these centralized practices hinder the development of soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and cultural competence, further complicating graduates' transition from academia to the workforce.

The theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in its innovative application of Taba's grass-roots curriculum development model and Wiggins and McTighe's backward-design model to the context of hospitality education. By integrating these frameworks, the study proposes a systematic approach to curriculum design that addresses the unique demands of the hospitality industry. This dual-model approach ensures that curricula are both contextually relevant and strategically aligned with industry needs, bridging the gap between academic training and professional expectations. The research also sheds light on the socio-political factors influencing curriculum design in Vietnam, particularly the impact of centralized governance on educational practices.

Recommendations derived from the study emphasize the importance of collaboration between academia, industry, and government. Enhancing the focus on critical competencies such as strategic thinking, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity is essential. Targeted curriculum modules should be developed to address these areas, ensuring that students acquire the skills needed to thrive in a globalized hospitality market. Extending the duration and quality of internships is also crucial, as it provides students with the practical exposure necessary for seamless workforce transitions. Strengthening industry-academic partnerships can facilitate knowledge exchange, ensuring that curricula remain up to date with industry trends and demands. To address the challenges posed by centralized management practices, the study advocates for incorporating training on innovation, adaptability, and creative problem-solving into hospitality programs. Such training can help graduates navigate the complexities of the industry while

fostering a culture of empowerment and autonomy. Additionally, government support is vital for fostering industry-academic collaboration and ensuring the sustainability of curriculum reforms. Policymakers should prioritize investments in education infrastructure and supporting systems to enhance the overall quality of hospitality higher education in Vietnam.

This research provides a foundation for future studies on industry-informed curriculum development and its impact on graduate outcomes. The proposed framework offers a scalable model for other emerging markets, demonstrating the potential of tailored curriculum development strategies to address global challenges in hospitality education. By bridging the gap between academic and professional spheres, this thesis contributes to the sustainable growth of the hospitality sector and the creation of a workforce equipped to meet the evolving demands of the industry.

In conclusion, this thesis highlights the urgent need for systematic and collaborative curriculum development in hospitality education. The integration of Taba's and Wiggins and McTighe's models offers a novel approach to addressing the challenges faced by hospitality graduates and employers. By aligning curriculum with industry expectations and fostering partnerships between academia, industry, and government, this research aims to enhance graduate employability, support the sustainable growth of the hospitality industry, and contribute to the broader field of curriculum development in higher education. The findings and recommendations of this study provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders, paving the way for a more effective and inclusive approach to hospitality education at university level.



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## **1 Chapter 1: Hospitality Undergraduate Programs – Alignment With Industry Requirements**

### **1.1 Hospitality Industry And The Curriculum For Tertiary Students**

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, the travel and tourism sector contributed 9.1% to the global GDP in 2023, only 4.1% lower than the number prior to the COVID pandemic as of 2019 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2024). Due to the sector's multiplier effects on poverty alleviation, employment generation, and increase in foreign exchange earnings, governments in developing countries continue to invest in resources to support tourism growth (Jenkins, 2020; Khan et al., 2020).

Under tourism sector, the hospitality industry has gained remarkable attention from numerous nations to become a key pillar of their respective economies. To meet the growing workforce demands, the form and scope of hospitality education has to be continuously reviewed (Kim & Jeong, 2018). It requires significant efforts and determination of both hospitality educators and industry professionals to converge in the training and academic programs designed to develop students' competencies (Marneros et al., 2021).

In the process of developing and improving a hospitality curriculum, there are various stakeholders who need to be involved. In an ideal scenario, a curriculum is usually developed by a committee, comprising of both internal party (who are top management personnels and faculty members from the higher education institutions) and external party (including industry professionals, alumni, government authorities and other related associations) (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017). Due to the applied nature of hospitality industry, inputs from industry leaders are critical to develop a meaningful curriculum (Millar et al., 2010). Even though industry practitioners are not official members of curriculum development committee, they are a major group of stakeholder whose commentary can have heavy impact on the hospitality curriculum in various ways, including how the programs' learning objectives are shaped, their expectations on hospitality graduates' competencies, as well as the subject material to increase students' employability (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017). Through the establishment of a strong industry and academia collaboration, hospitality educators can enjoy the benefits brought by industry practitioners, in order to create an industry-relevant hospitality curriculum that not only satisfies the need of employers, but is also engaging for students (Griffin, 2020).

Although the importance of this topic has been acknowledged by both the academic and non-academic community, industry professionals remain critical of educators for not preparing hospitality graduates with sufficient competencies before they enter the workforce (Marneros et al., 2021). The inadequate contribution of industry professionals in building the hospitality curriculum is a key factor leading to students' deficiencies in required competencies and affecting their employability upon graduation (Kwok, 2022; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006). To tackle this issue, having a thorough understanding of



employers' expectations and their perception on graduates' preparedness will help hospitality educators adjust the curriculum accordingly, ensuring that a promising labor pool is being produced through effective education programs (Jack et al., 2017; Kwok, 2022; Mahmoud, 2018; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006; Srisangkaew, 2022).

While the hospitality curriculum needs to frequently be reviewed and adjusted to accommodate the industry's current and future needs (Batra, 2016), graduates also need to be well aware of the competencies they should possess to pursue their dream career goals (Srisangkaew, 2022). Especially during these turbulent periods where customers' behaviors change rapidly, the effort of educators to adapt and develop a properly structured hospitality curriculum dedicated to nurture key competencies for students will lay the foundation for success (Marneros et al., 2021; Min et al., 2016; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005; Scott et al., 2008). In an attempt to develop an international standard for hospitality curriculums, Leung et al. (2018) strongly recommended hospitality educators to include five areas, which are hospitality, lodging, foodservice, tourism, and business. The authors also urged for the inclusion of 11 topical areas: overview of the industry, sales and marketing, laws, revenue and finance, human resources management, fundamentals of management, information technology, facility management, professional development, operations, and research capstone (Leung et al., 2018). Above all, the close collaborating relationship between industry leaders and university representatives in hospitality departments is fundamental to increase the likelihood of these important industry-perceived competencies being integrated and taught in hospitality education programs (Ricci, 2010).

In fact, skills problems are a critical issue in workforce development, encompassing various challenges in aligning the capabilities of workers with the needs of employers. A **skills gap** refers to the discrepancy between the skills demanded by employers and those available in the workforce, often resulting from rapid technological advancements or evolving industry needs (McGuinness et al., 2018). For example, as industries increasingly rely on advanced digital skills, education systems sometimes fail to adapt quickly, leaving roles unfilled and reducing productivity due to insufficient workforce training. In contrast, a **skills mismatch** arises when workers' qualifications or competencies do not align with their current job roles. This misalignment can manifest as overqualification, underqualification, or horizontal mismatch, where employees work in fields unrelated to their education or training (OECD, 2019). Together, these challenges form the broader category of **skills problems**, which hinder economic productivity and career progression. Skills problems frequently stem from rapid technological changes, structural economic shifts, and inadequate responses in education and training systems (Hanushek et al., 2017; McGuinness et al., 2018).

Joining the race to develop the tourism sector, Southeast Asian countries are exercising their competitive advantages within the region to attract travelers (Calderwood & Soshkin, 2019). Destinations are constantly making efforts to ensure that their competitive and comparative advantages are improved vis-à-vis neighboring countries. In 2023, the travel and tourism sector contributed 306.4 billion U.S. Dollar to the GDP of Southeast Asian countries, catching up with the previous number of 379.9 billion U.S. Dollar in 2019 (Statista, 2024). Pre-COVID, as recorded in 2019, there were 41.8 million people working in travel and tourism sector, equivalent to 13.2% of the region's total employment (OECD, 2023).

As a Southeast Asian country, despite the contribution of the tourism and hospitality industry to Vietnam's economy, management-level personnel in hotel businesses stress skills problems between hospitality education and the industry's current demands (Le et al., 2018b). Students from hospitality tertiary education are perceived to be lacking in multiple competencies, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and foreign language proficiency. In fact, the shortage of skilled employees across the industry is claimed to be the direct consequence of a higher education system that mainly focuses on the quantity rather than quality of graduates (Le et al., 2018b). Although hospitality educators have been trying to update their education programs to stay relevant and current to the ever-changing market, a majority of industry professionals believe that the outdated curriculum is unable to produce graduates who can keep up with the fast-paced changes (Millar et al., 2010). Given the fact that previous studies strongly supported the industry-university collaboration and suggested hospitality educators to review their curriculum, no research has taken the next step to construct a process for industry-academia collaboration that is applicable in hospitality tertiary institutions. The present study aims to address the skills problems between hospitality tertiary education and industry practitioners by the development of a model suitable for hospitality industry-informed curriculum management at university level.

## **1.2 Vietnam – An Emerging Destination With Young Hospitality Education System**

In recent years, Vietnam has gained popularity as one of the leading Southeast Asian tourist destinations. The heritage, culture, and cuisine along with breath-taking landscapes have helped the country gain a significant market share of tourists (Kuentak, 2021). The year 2023 marked a spotlight on the comeback of Vietnamese tourism sector after COVID-19, as the country welcomed 12.5 million international tourists (Vietnamnews, 2023).

Despite these improvements, hospitality higher education institutions in Vietnam face the challenge of creating education programs meeting the employers' needs (Nguyen, 2019). Although numerous hospitality education programs have been developed, the country faces tremendous challenges in producing a sufficient number of qualified tourism and hospitality staff (Le et al., 2018b). This human resource issue

is particularly detrimental for hotel employers, who have been struggling to recruit talents who are capable of catering to the ever-increasing number of foreign visitors coming to the country (Nguyen, 2019).

To deal with the lack of qualified hospitality staff, multinational hotel companies in Vietnam have implemented a policy of recruiting expatriates for high-level strategic positions, such as hotel general managers and heads of departments. According to the report by InterNations in 2019, Vietnam ranked first under the Working Abroad index category, due to favorable working conditions and diverse career opportunities for expatriates (InterNations, 2019). The country currently witnesses an accelerating demand for internationals to occupy expert and managerial positions in various sectors to support the fast-growing economy (Vietnam Insider, 2019). This recruitment strategy has undoubtedly limited opportunities for career advancement among Vietnamese hospitality graduates. To address this issue and enhance the competencies of hospitality students, previous study has strongly encouraged Vietnamese hospitality tertiary educators to review their curriculum and address any skills gaps identified (Le et al., 2018b). This effort will help hospitality graduates perform their job more effectively and meet the employers' expectations, thereby lowering the reliance on expatriates for high-level positions.

In Vietnam, there are three types of higher education institutions (Vietnam National Assembly, 2012), including:

- State-owned public higher education institutions, which are invested and established by the State.
- Private higher education institutions are owned by social organizations, socio-professional organizations, private economic organizations or individuals; with invested interests in its growth.
- Foreign-invested higher education institutions include:
  - Higher education institutions with 100% capital by foreign investors;
  - A higher education institution that is a joint venture between a foreign investor and a domestic investor.

Amongst universities offering hospitality programs for undergraduate students in the country, almost all hospitality and tourism departments are operated under the business schools of larger universities, partly due to the young education history of the country in this service-focused sector.

Previous research has revealed that the hospitality curriculum development can be heavily influenced by the management model of hospitality and tourism departments in universities (Scott et al., 2008). In fact, the hospitality and tourism department operating as a subset of a business school inevitably results in numerous challenges to improve the education program provided for hospitality tertiary students.

Whilst hospitality programs under a separate independent school of hospitality and tourism may find it easier to push forward new initiatives thanks to their allocated budget; for those programs under a business school, hospitality and tourism faculty members are obliged to navigate through a much more complex environment (Scott et al., 2008). Consequently, despite the prevalence of bachelor's degrees in hospitality management in Vietnam, there is an ongoing debate about the curriculum content provided to students pursuing such programs (Le et al., 2018b).

In regard to theoretical gap, there is an evident lack of research on how universities teaching hospitality management may benefit from adopting industry-informed curriculum development framework (Kwok, 2022). While universities have been putting efforts on aligning their education programs with employers' expectation, these practices have been solely developed at institutional level, revealing an evident lack of consistency and challenges in quality control. Especially with the practical nature of hospitality industry, an insufficient understanding of industry's requirements and an ineffective incorporation of industry's input can result in detrimental effect on graduates' employability and their career success. To address this lack of a systematic framework to develop industry-informed hospitality curriculum at university-level, this thesis adopted the Taba's (1974) grass-root curriculum development model and Wiggins and McTighe's (2011) curriculum backward-design model as the underpinning theories, providing evolution of these two models with unique adaptation to the Hospitality and Tourism context. Together, the integration of these models generates a novel theoretical perspective in hospitality education as this dual approach ensures that curricula are both contextually relevant and strategically aligned, addressing the needs of students, educators, and industry stakeholders.

To fill these gaps, this study used semi-structured in-depth interview method with hospitality educators, industry professionals, graduates, and alumni to understand the perspectives of various parties. Additionally, document analysis is also adopted to explore the current program offerings in hospitality universities in Vietnam to obtain more concrete understandings. It is evident that more research needs to be conducted at nationwide level. Therefore, to enhance the quality of hospitality graduates who will be the future of hospitality workforce in Vietnam, this study seeks to help hospitality educators understand the gap between what their programs are offering and what the industry perceives to be valuable; hence, narrowing the misalignment between Vietnamese hospitality tertiary education and the industry demands through an industry-informed curriculum.

In the case of Vietnam, universities are found to focus on managerial skills but lacking the basic skills that hoteliers seek in a graduate (Nguyen, 2019). To align with the study's aim of enhancing Vietnamese hospitality tertiary education to meet industry demands and achieve international standards, this research focuses on hospitality education at university level by examining undergraduate hospitality

programs offered by three types of universities in Vietnam: public state-owned universities, private universities, and international universities operating within the country. Firstly, graduates from this level of education constitutes the most potential pool of talents that the industry may take advantage of in the future. Secondly, due to the educational focus of universities that often focus on managerial competencies, the likelihood of their education programs being too academic and over-theoretical can be significantly higher than vocational colleges or polytechnics, making them more suitable for the development of industry-informed hospitality curriculum – the topic of the thesis.

### **1.3 Purpose – Construct A Process For Industry-Informed Hospitality Curriculum**

At this early stage of tourism development, for the sustainable growth of an emerging destination such as Vietnam, it is critical that research is conducted to review the quality of human capital deployed in the industry nexus to the education institutions that produce graduates as a resource. It is also important to explore the extent to which the industry's needs are integrated into the hospitality curriculum at tertiary institutions. The primary aim of this thesis is to identify skills and competency levels of the hospitality graduates through interviews of both the industry and academics in the field in Vietnam. The findings from the qualitative interviews will also provide quintessential information that will enable the construction of a graduate employability skills framework as a reference point for industry and academic professionals.

### **1.4 Questions To Be Answered**

To achieve this aim, the following research questions are investigated:

Research question 1: What are the subjects offered in hospitality education programs at universities in Vietnam and reputable Asian-Pacific universities?

Research question 2: How do industry professionals perceive the current education programs in Vietnamese hospitality universities in terms of preparing graduates with necessary competencies?

Research question 3: How can universities in Vietnam improve their hospitality management curriculums for undergraduate students?

Research question 4: What is the theoretical model that educators can utilize to develop an industry-informed curriculum at education institutions teaching hospitality at university-level?

### **1.5 Significance Of The Study**

In the annual report of the World Economic Forum on Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index released in 2019, Vietnam ranked 63rd out of the 140 economies covered, improving from 67th in 2017 (VNAT, 2019b). The travel and tourism sector created more than 4.9 million jobs for locals, contributing 9% to the country's total employment in 2019 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2021). Despite this

improvement, one of the most concerning barriers to the development of Vietnamese hospitality industry lies in the human resources factor. Harmonious collaboration among different stakeholders is a critical factor in improving the learning outcomes of tertiary education. However, there is little research, especially in emerging destinations, on the continuous alignment between the hospitality industry's competencies and the education programs offered in tertiary institutions.

Previous research has strongly encouraged Vietnamese hospitality tertiary education to review their curriculum and address any skills gaps identified between graduates' skills and employers' requirements (Le et al., 2018b). This effort will help reduce the number of hospitality students who have to undergo retraining sessions so that they can perform the job effectively. Given the national interest in creating tourism as a key pillar of the economy, this study seeks to contribute to the gap in the literature and practice by reviewing the human resources of Vietnam's hospitality industry and its tertiary education system.

Going through the unprecedented crisis of COVID-19, tourism and hospitality are the most vulnerable sectors in the economy (Constantin et al., 2021). Hospitality operators face high pressure due to the significant changes in travelers' behaviors and expectations, resulting in the demand for new competencies (Shamshiripour et al., 2020). Given the COVID-19 situation, hospitality organizations reported issues about uncertainty and financial impacts to be dominant concerns, requiring them to adjust their day-to-day operations while preparing for an effective post-pandemic operational recovery plan (Alonso et al., 2020). Additionally, as a consequence of the unprecedented crisis, interviews with industry professionals revealed several new competencies that hospitality employees should pay more attention to, such as health and hygiene, multi-skilling, crisis preparedness, and optimistic mindset (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). Considering that one of the biggest challenges of hospitality education is offering an up-to-date curriculum with a constantly changing business environment and industry needs (Testa & Sipe, 2012), this study is conducted to help hospitality educators understand current gaps between what their programs are offering and what industry professionals perceive as valuable in the future.

## **1.6 Research Road Map**

Firstly, this research endeavors to understand the existing hospitality curriculum offered in Vietnamese tertiary education institutions. As globalization continues to put pressure on the hospitality industry to evolve, the ability to adapt and respond to multicultural circumstances will be a detrimental factor to success. In the context of Vietnamese tourism education, research has indicated positive outcomes of establishing and maintaining partnerships with international institutions to improve students' multicultural sensitivity (Khuong & Thi Tran, 2018). Previous study has confirmed the benefits gained

from hospitality universities collaborating and learning from foreign education institutions (Jauhari, 2013). This partnership not only provides lessons on improving education-industry linkage, but also helps enhance students' employability by facilitating the development of a more comprehensive curriculum (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2015; Tran et al., 2018). In this study, in order to identify areas for improving an industry-informed curriculum, the investigation is also conducted to explore Asian-Pacific 'best practice' curriculum for hospitality undergraduates.

Secondly, to assist students' transition to work, the industry and academia need to cooperate more closely in students' training processes and address the industry's expectations of hospitality graduates (Jauhari, 2013). In recent decades, researchers in the hospitality field have demonstrated an interest in constructing competency models that are critical for hospitality students to succeed in their future careers (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019; Bharwani & Talib, 2017; Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Gibbs & Slevitch, 2018; Horng & Wang, 2003; Kay & Russette, 2000; Lin, 2008; Marneros et al., 2021; Suh et al., 2012; Talawanich & Wattanacharoensil, 2021). However, it is important to note that the majority of previous research focus on the industry's perspective in developed tourist destinations. No research has been conducted in Vietnam to discover the lessons that local universities may learn to develop an industry-informed curriculum through better industry-university linkages. Consequently, this study explores the perceptions of hospitality industry professionals and other stakeholders on the current hospitality curriculum in Vietnamese universities, as well as to convert their insights into effective strategies to elevate the quality of hospitality graduates in the country.

The continuous engagement of hotel partners in the short-and long-term development of the university curriculum undoubtedly brings substantial benefits to prospective labor markets (Clark et al., 2017). Finally, with lessons from successful 'best practices' hospitality education programs in the region, this study considers the viewpoints of the employers, hospitality graduates, alumni and the academia, seeking to develop a process for industry-informed curriculum, which is applicable to not only Vietnam but also other emerging destinations, to implement in their hospitality tertiary education systems at university level.

## **1.7 Thesis Structure**

This thesis comprises of nine chapters. The first chapter, which is this chapter, provides a general overview of the thesis, the research background and context, as well as the research problem and key research questions.

As previous studies have revealed the unsatisfactory attitude of hospitality industry professionals on an over-academic curriculum, to achieve the aim of constructing a model that channels tertiary

institutions' responses to a changing and growing hospitality environment, the researcher needs to obtain a comprehensive understanding of research on hospitality education at university level and industry-university collaboration. Chapter 2 reviews critically existing literature on hospitality higher education, expected competencies of hospitality graduates, and issues related to hospitality industry and university partnership, from there, constructing the conceptual framework of this study.

To answer the research questions effectively, chapter 3 describes the research methods utilized in this study, with justification on the rationale for choosing those methods to answer the research questions. Different details on research design were also discussed, including population sampling, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations for conducting this research.

The landscape of hospitality higher education in hospitality in recent decades is changing drastically due to multiple forces, such as: aging population, globalization, technological advancement, requiring constant review for adjustment. In order to elevate the quality of hospitality curriculum and identify rooms for improvement, chapter 4 presents the research analysis from the examination of current learning outcomes and the combination of subjects offered to Vietnamese students in their undergraduate hospitality-management degrees, using document analysis method.

In fact, the quality of industry and academia partnership is perceived to remain only at the surface. Most of these partnerships are hindered by little commitment from both parties and lack the true spirit of knowledge-based economy. To mitigate this issue, the next three chapters (Chapter 5, 6 and 7) present data analysis from interviews conducted with hospitality employers and other relevant stakeholders to understand their opinions on the quality of hospitality curriculum, the competence of hospitality graduates, as well as underlying factors that impact the collaborating relationship between hospitality educators and industry professionals. These findings will help educators adjust the curriculum accordingly, ensuring that a promising labor pool is being produced through effective education programs.

This misalignment and lack of collaboration mechanism between university and the industry partners had resulted in undefined responsibilities of both parties, affecting negatively on hospitality curriculum and internship planning. The challenge is to establish the most effective way that industry professionals can communicate the industry needs with educators, therefore, having a strong influence on the learning outcomes of hospitality curriculum. Aiming to tackle this problem, chapter 8 discusses the findings from document analysis and interviews with various stakeholders, introduces the procedure to develop industry-informed hospitality curriculum, with additional suggestions for curriculum and internship improvement.



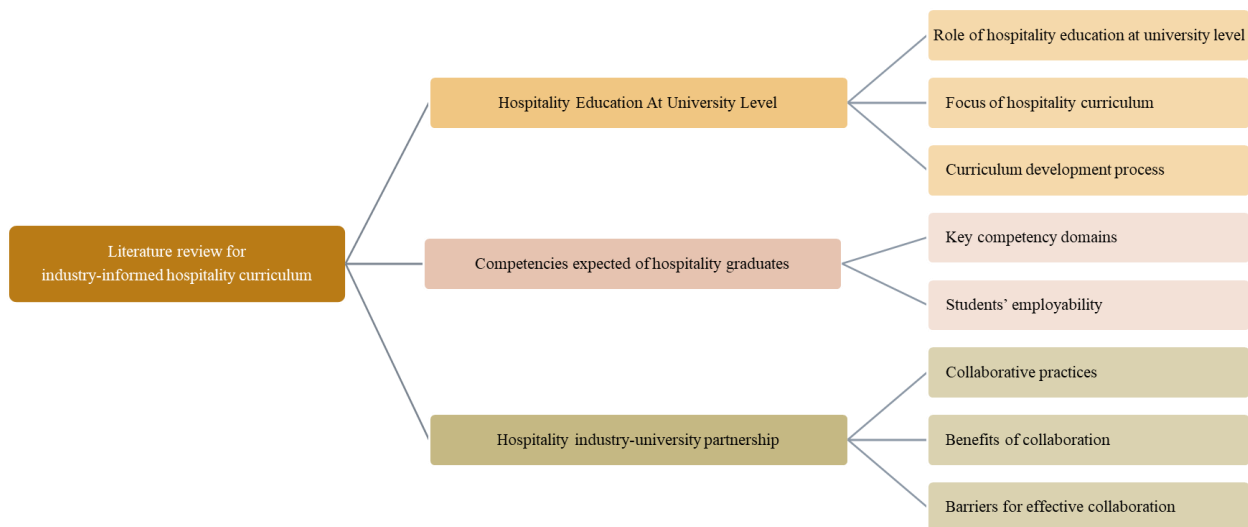
As the inadequate contribution of industry professionals in building the hospitality curriculum is one major factor affecting graduates' employability, this thesis addresses the complexity of hospitality industry-university partnership, finding the answer for how effectively the university and industry relationship can be managed. Chapter 9 presents the research conclusion, implications from this study's findings for different stakeholders who are involved in hospitality higher education, as well as the thesis's limitation and directions for future research.

## 2 Chapter 2: Literature Review On Hospitality Education At University Level And Industry-University Collaboration

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of existing literature on the effective partnership between the educators and industry practitioners. Previous research findings are synthesized to explore the trends and emerging themes, providing a rich understanding and direction on the topic. This chapter comprises of three key components influencing the production of an industry-informed hospitality curriculum, which are: the hospitality higher education landscape, the employers' expectations on hospitality graduates, and lastly, the collaborative relationship between industry professionals and hospitality educators. This literature review not only helps identify new gaps in existing knowledge, but it also highlights the role of hospitality educators and industry professionals to optimize the potential benefits from their collaborative relationships to enhance students' employability. Figure 1 presents the detailed structure of the sub-sections in this literature review chapter.

*Figure 1: Structure of literature review chapter*



### 2.2 Hospitality Education At University Level

#### 2.2.1 Role Of Hospitality Education At University Level

When it comes to develop a hospitality curriculum, the discussion about the responsibilities of hospitality higher education remains controversial (Min et al., 2016). Some academics argued that higher education should not purely serve the industry's demands (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). They believed the

integration of more disciplinary knowledge and intellectualization of the field could expand the curriculum's scope of hospitality programs offered at universities, and hence, recognize their rightful place in higher education. Lashley (2000) opposed the exclusive focus on industry needs when developing hospitality tertiary programs. Students enrolled in these high-level programs should be nurtured in critical thinking abilities, which can be optimized by incorporating studies rooted from social sciences (Lashley, 2000). Higher education establishments should stimulate students' power to create the future of hospitality industry through independent thinking and innovative ideas (Lyu et al., 2016).

Holding similar arguments, Jiang and Alexakis (2017) criticized the overemphasis on practical skills in hospitality tertiary education just to satisfy the industry's preference to have graduates ready to work right after graduation (Jiang & Alexakis, 2017). A good hospitality education should aim to equip graduates for success in various life aspects, even if they do not choose hospitality career (Harkison et al., 2011). Higher education institutions should help students achieve philosophical and sociological knowledge as an effective tool for their life-long learning journey (Lyu et al., 2016). In a recent study, Szende et al. (2019) encouraged hospitality schools to play more active roles in creating knowledge and shaping the industry future, instead of simply waiting for signals from industry practitioners. Findings from these research efforts of hospitality educators in the academic settings ought to be translated innovatively into cutting-edge courses for hospitality students (Szende et al., 2019). Educators should stimulate students' development, empowering them to be adaptive and innovative in their long-term hospitality career (Mahmoud, 2018). This educational strategy is essential to cope with the intense competition in the hospitality industry, in which customers are continuously raising their demands.

On the contrary side, numerous scholars believed that hospitality and tourism education institutions are the ones responsible for providing well-trained graduates, who are ready to become the future managers to lead the industry (Jack et al., 2017; Kasa et al., 2020; Marneros et al., 2021). In addition to imparting formal training, research has confirmed the pivotal role of hospitality education in preparing a good-quality workforce (Mohamed et al., 2021; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006), who possess management competencies aligned with the demands of the industry (Çizel et al., 2007). Instead of merely providing workforce at entry-level, hospitality educators at universities should aim to produce talents, who can serve in management positions (Jauhari, 2006; Kim & Jeong, 2018; Teng, 2013). To achieve this aim, students need to be sufficiently equipped with management competencies favored by industry employers (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019), including planning and developing, business ethics, coordination, decision making, and problem solving (Trinidad, 2020). While the vocational aspect of the program increases the likelihood of hospitality graduates being promoted, employers also recognize the value of academic learning that can equip them to occupy higher level position when graduates enter the industry (Ladkin, 2000).

### **2.2.2 *Focus Of Hospitality Curriculum***

For educators to produce a promising pool of talents, the role of a well-developed hospitality curriculum is fundamental. A curriculum refers to a series of courses, including core and elective courses, that hospitality students are required to attend in order to obtain an academic degree (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019). The foundation of the curriculum reflects the university's educational plans, allowing educators to organize their teaching materials logically, hence, helping students to achieve future goals (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017).

The surge in hospitality management programs offered worldwide has led to different standards for hospitality tertiary education across countries (Qu et al., 2021). There appears to be a lack of consensus on the ideal curriculum for hospitality and tourism education programs, mainly due to the field's complexity and the varying teaching methods and programs available (Bouck, 2008). For accreditation purpose, hospitality curriculums in one nation often show some similarities. However, comparing between nations, the curriculum differences can be significant, depending on the development history of hospitality education in that country and their respective educational system (Leung et al., 2018). In a study investigating hospitality programs in South Korea and China, it was found that while the Chinese hospitality education focused on general economic and business courses, South Korean hospitality educators paid more attention on offering industry-specific and language courses for students (Wang & Abukhalifeh, 2020). Despite the pivotal role of curriculum in shaping the competence of future workforce (Jauhari, 2006; Le et al., 2018b), the lack of standardized curriculum structure and course content is evident (Ricci, 2010; Scott et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2010).

In an effort to create a comprehensive and standardized hospitality curriculum, academics in the field have been struggling with various issues (Cooper, 2002). The main challenge evolves around the debate on the appropriate educational approach to be adopted in this field (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017). Academics raised controversial debates on the balance between theoretical and vocational components of hospitality curriculum in higher education institutions. Following the philosophic practitioner education approach, hospitality curriculum should cover knowledge and skills in four aspects: professional, vocational, humanities and social science (Dredge et al., 2012). However, it is critical that educators can find a balance in these aspects as an over-theoretical or over-vocational curriculum will put substantial risks on the employability of hospitality students, as well as the future development landscape of the industry (Lyu et al., 2016).

Regarding the content of the curriculum, from one perspective, academics believe that hospitality programs should be industry-specific and not lose their unique identity. The industry-focused curriculum will prepare students with sufficient industry knowledge and help them gain competitive advantages,

especially when competing with general-business graduates for entry-level jobs after graduation (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019; Huang et al., 2016). Contradicting this argument, from another perspective, researchers pled for the hospitality curriculum to remain generic and focus on developing soft competencies for students. An overemphasis on industry specialization not only puts strains on the limited faculty resources, but is also unnecessary for graduates' career success because hospitality employers are not looking for hard competencies (Sisson & Adams, 2013).

As a consequence of the ongoing debates about the ideal hospitality curriculums, employers in the field have expressed their frustration about the inconsistency of hospitality students' skills and knowledge (Jack et al., 2017; Nolan et al., 2010; Tesone & Ricci, 2009). The vast difference in curriculum content and educational objective of each university created confusion amongst industry recruiters, as they are not sure of which competencies to be expected from hospitality graduates (Ricci, 2010; Scott et al., 2008). Despite the variety in curriculum structures, most hospitality programs tend to provide students business foundation courses, such as laws, accounting/ finance, human resources, marketing, and management (Chang, 2013). For industry-specific knowledge, educators often include: introductory to hospitality and tourism, lodging management, food and beverage management, finance, hospitality law, service operations, sales and marketing, as well as internships (Scott et al., 2008). To optimize employability, hospitality graduates should nurture their competence in three domains: business/management, industry-specific and internship (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017). Nevertheless, there remain major concerns on identifying the most necessary competencies of hospitality graduates (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019). An enhanced role of industry partners in curriculum design can be an effective strategy to improve hospitality curriculum fit, as well as to bridge the gap between the current education programs and the industry's priorities (Nolan et al., 2010).

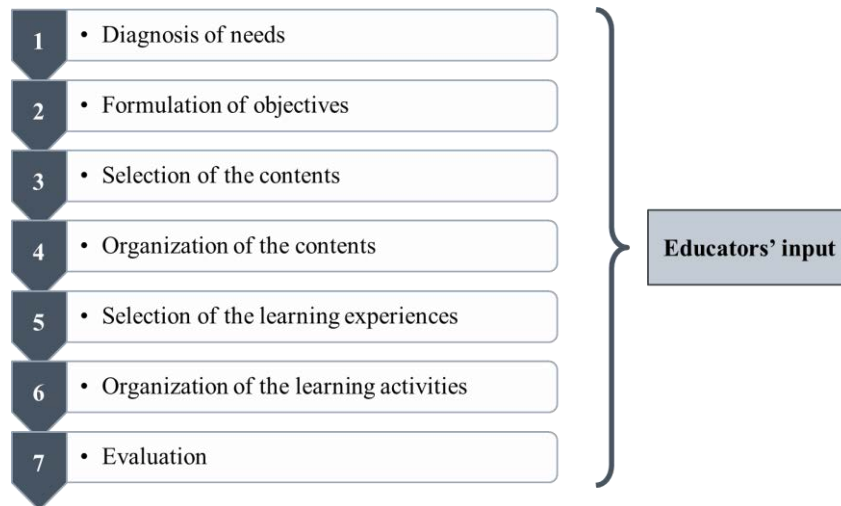
### **2.2.3 Curriculum Development Process**

Curriculum development is an expansive and complex process, encompassing a wide range of theories and perspectives (Soto, 2015). To formulate a cohesive curriculum plan, the curriculum development process requires meticulous efforts of planning, executing, and evaluating (Lunenburg, 2011). While some scholars defined curriculum as a sequence of experiences designed for skill development, others viewed it as a structured set of educational experiences aimed at achieving specific educational objectives (Soto, 2015). For Taba (1974), curriculum is a comprehensive learning plan that includes several elements, which are establishing goals and objectives, selecting and organizing content, choosing instructional methods, and implementing evaluation strategies (Soto, 2015). Eisner (1985) further categorized curriculum into three types: explicit, implicit, and null curriculum - emphasizing on the diverse ways in which educational experiences can shape learning outcomes (Eisner, 1985).

To develop curriculum, there are several well-known models, which are Tyler's Four Basic Principles, Taba's Grass-roots Rationale, as well as Hunkins' Decision-Making Model and the Backward Design Model. Being marked as a pioneer in curriculum techniques and engineering, Tyler proposed four fundamental stages to be included in curriculum development process, detailing four primary curriculum components, which are: purposes, experiences, methods, and evaluation (Lau, 2001). Considered as one of the most renowned modernist curriculum development models, this model are derived from four questions posed by Tyler in 1949, outlining an effective way to design a curriculum that is aligned with an education institution's goals and mission (Bhuttah et al., 2019). Tyler's model is deductive, prescriptive, linear, progressing from general to specific, following a specific sequence of steps, highlighting what needs to be done by curriculum developers. Tyler put great emphasis on the knowledge's nature and structure, the needs of learners and society, which made his model "society-centered" because the school curriculum is positioned as a strategic tool to enhance community life (Bhuttah et al., 2019).

### **Taba's (1974) grass-root curriculum development model**

Amongst the most dominant curriculum development theories, besides Tyler's Four Basic Principles, Taba's innovative approach, departing from traditional deductive methods, is also one of the most frequently used and easily adaptable curriculum designs for diverse educational contexts (Lunenburg, 2011). Unlike Tyler's deductive approach, Taba advocated for a grass-roots methodology, emphasizing a step-by-step behavioral approach to design curriculum based on specific educational aims and objectives (Costa & Loveall, 2002). Following this model, broad learning objectives need to be organized in a systematic way for students to grasp fundamental principles effectively (Middaugh & Perlstein, 2005). Hilda Taba's influence on curriculum development underscored the essential role of educators in shaping educational plans (Taba, 1962). Enhancing the model beyond Tyler's framework, Taba innovatively clarified what students need to learn, placing significant emphasis on educators as central figures and advocating for their continuous involvement throughout the curriculum development process (Taba, 1962). By shifting the main responsibility to educators, rather than program administrators, the curriculum development model introduced by Taba is perceived to be more realistic and responsive to educational needs. Even today, various elements of Taba's curriculum development model continue to have remarkable influence on the curriculum design in many education institutions (Bhuttah et al., 2019). In Taba's model, there are seven essential steps in curriculum development (Taba, 1967). Refer to Figure 2 for the list of seven steps included.

*Figure 2: Taba's model of curriculum development*

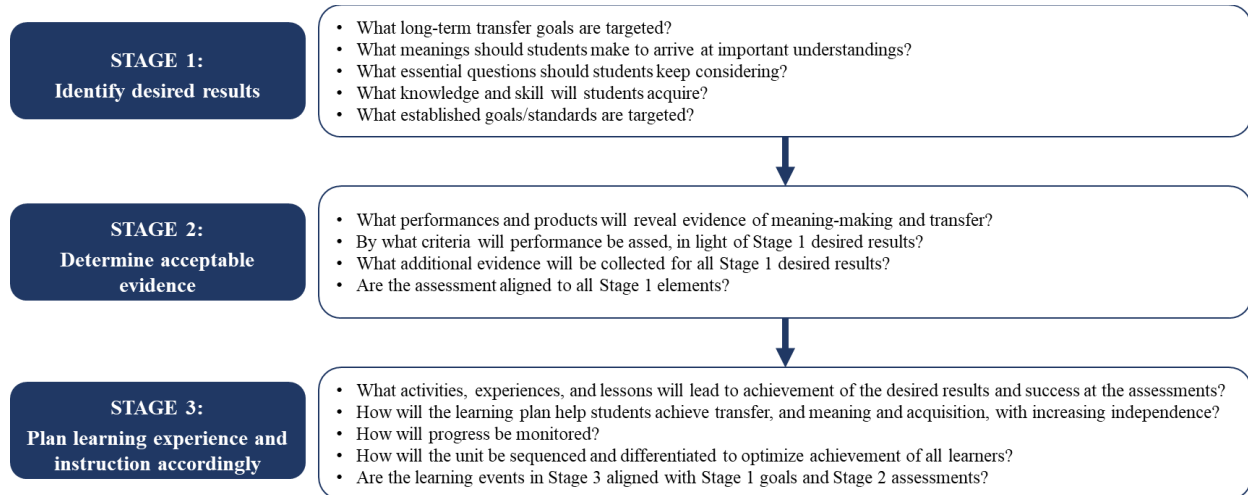
Taba's grass-roots curriculum development model offers a participatory and inductive approach that is particularly relevant in hospitality higher education by emphasizing the involvement of educators, industry stakeholders, and students in curriculum design. This model advocates starting with specific teaching-learning units, allowing faculty to directly engage in the identification of skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for hospitality professionals. Through a step-by-step process—diagnosing needs, formulating objectives, selecting content, organizing content, selecting learning experiences, and evaluating outcomes—the Taba model ensures that the curriculum is both context-specific and responsive to the dynamic needs of the hospitality industry (Taba, 1962). While the grass-roots model is time-intensive and may face challenges in achieving consensus among diverse stakeholders, its collaborative nature fosters a sense of ownership and ensures the curriculum remains relevant, practical, and innovative. By involving educators, industry professionals, and students in the development process, the model creates a curriculum that reflects real-world challenges and promotes stakeholder ownership, increasing the relevance and engagement of hospitality programs (Taba, 1962).

### **Wiggins and McTighe's (2011) curriculum backward-design model**

While Taba supported the grass-roots methodology for curriculum development (Taba, 1962), the Backward Design Model, which was proposed by Wiggins and McTighe, is a remarkable curriculum development framework, starting with the desired goals and working backward to plan the methods for instructions and assessments. This approach is particularly useful if educators acknowledge that the

education's fundamental goal is to ensure effective learning transfer (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Figure 3 illustrates the three stages of curriculum backward-design model introduced by Wiggins and McTighe.

*Figure 3: Wiggins & McTighe's three stages of curriculum backward-design model*



The first step of this model - Identifying desired results, focuses on the establishment of industry-relevant goals and standards. Informed by the industry's specific needs and expectations, these learning objectives need to specify what knowledge and skills that students should know, understand, and be able to perform by the end of each course (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Proactive collaboration with industry practitioners in this stage is essential to ensure these goals are aligned with the industry's current trends and demands.

In the next step - Determining acceptable evidence, Wiggins and McTighe (2010) referred to the development of assessments that can measure accurately if students have successfully achieved the desired learning outcomes in the first step. For these assessments, educators need to incorporate various performance tasks that allow students to demonstrate their understanding, as well as relevant skills and knowledge obtained from the courses in a meaningful way (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

The last step of this model - Planning learning experiences and instruction, involves the planning of effective instructional activities to help students achieve the desired results. In this step, it is important that students receive their training based on the latest technologies and tools currently used in the industry. A purposive integration of these real-world applications into the curriculum will not only encourage students to bridge the gap between in-class learning and industry realities, but it will also significantly increase the practical relevance of an education program (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).



The model is particularly relevant in competency-based education and professional training, as it aligns with modern standards-based frameworks and integrates effectively with interdisciplinary and project-based learning approaches (Alsubaie, 2016). By determining acceptable evidence, educators can create assessments like capstone projects, internships, or case studies that reflect real-world challenges and measure students' readiness for professional roles (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Its adaptability and structured focus on understanding make it a valuable tool for educators designing curricula in diverse contexts, from K-12 to higher education and professional development. While the model's emphasis on structured outcomes may require significant initial effort, it provides a framework that bridges the gap between academic learning and industry expectations, preparing students for successful careers in the competitive and rapidly evolving hospitality sector (Alsubaie, 2016).

Reflecting the adaptable nature of curriculum, the process of curriculum development also involves the improvement, modification or alteration of existing education programs (Primrose & Alexander, 2013). Characterized as a dynamic and complex process, curriculum developers are strongly recommended to follow a series of systematic step in order to create an effective curriculum for any subject. Although the sequence of these steps may differ depending on which curriculum model is selected, they form a fundamental cycle that demands comprehensive analysis from curriculum developers (Soto, 2015). Curriculum development models, such as those proposed by Tyler, Taba, and others, can serve as structured frameworks guiding educators through the various stages of designing a curriculum (Lunenburg, 2011). Regardless of the deductive or inductive approach of these models, all of them focus on addressing the demands of society, the educational needs of students, as well as the nuances of subject matter (Soto, 2015). The utility of these models in curriculum development process is critical to enhance productivity and efficiency as they provide a roadmap for essential phases (Lunenburg, 2011).

To yield the most desirable outcomes, it is essential that educators, who can also be curriculum developers designing their own lessons, are fully aware of the key stakeholders and their level of influence in the curriculum development process (Soto, 2015). In the curriculum development process, appropriate learning outcomes need to be well defined for each course, specifying the expected competencies to be obtained by students. Scholars have advocated for the adoption of competency-based approach to design and evaluate hospitality curriculum at tertiary level (Gibbs & Slevitch, 2018; Jauhari, 2013; Teng, 2013). The competency-based education approach focuses on teaching necessary competencies (comprise of knowledge, skills, behaviors) to ensure students can perform well in the workplace. This approach allows educators to link and benchmark what they teach students with industry standards, hence, narrowing the gap between classroom and industry settings (Gibbs & Slevitch, 2018). Through the list of competencies that hospitality companies use to optimize their human resources system; educators can consider these listed

competencies as industry handbooks, guiding them to develop an industry-relevant curriculum (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003).

During this process, the PESTEL analysis framework can be a fundamental tool. PESTEL - an acronym for political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors, has been a widely recognized tool for analyzing external business environments and assessing how emerging trends might influence industries (Vidani, 2015). This framework is particularly effective for environmental scanning, as it enables managers to evaluate multiple external forces impacting business operations (Ramely et al., 2023), aiding professionals in understanding current conditions, identifying potential threats (Wang et al., 2022), clarifying business objectives, and creating development strategies that align with market demands (Gregoric, 2014). Beyond these applications, PESTEL is also instrumental in diagnosing and addressing market challenges, streamlining the problem-solving process for businesses (Ramely et al., 2023). By serving as a macroeconomic tool, it not only measures business performance but also uncovers opportunities for growth and innovation (Ramely et al., 2023). Consequently, PESTEL analysis remains an essential resource for organizations aiming to enhance their strategic planning and adapt to complex market dynamics.

Especially for the hospitality industry, to achieve a sustainable measure of employability, bridging the gap between industry and academia is imperative of which the teaching pedagogies and learning methods are key components. This attempt necessitates a fundamental shift from the traditional pedagogical curriculum design towards the inclusive incorporation of industry-relevant curriculum content (Ekpo, 2020). A strategic implementation of taking the pedagogical approach that focuses on active learning methods (such as work-based learning and problem-based learning) can bring substantial benefits to many relevant stakeholders. Firstly, it creates more opportunities to attract industry leaders to contribute and share their expertise as visiting professors, enriching the educational experiences provided to students through co-delivery of specialist content, as well as enhanced career opportunities upon graduation. Secondly, thanks to the greater involvement of industry professionals in the education programs at universities, it will be easier for hospitality lectures to navigate and stay up to date with the contemporary industry trends, through various practices, such as industry input in curriculum design, establishment of industry advisory board, guest lectures, mentorship, seminars and workshops, industrial visits, along with curriculum assessment and review (Ekpo, 2020).

In fact, numerous manufacturing and service enterprises have been facing challenges in integrating seamlessly graduate engineers into their workforce in order to replace retiring personnel. The rationale for this issue primarily stems from graduates' lack of practical experience to handle complex technologies that

are critical for business operations (Kamp, 2020). The scarcity of readily employable graduate engineers revealed the inadequacies of outdated pedagogies that fail to align with contemporary industry demands (Ekpo, 2020). Responding to this pervasive global employability challenge, an innovative approach of developing an industry-linked, research-informed, and enriched pedagogy have been implemented (Ekpo, 2020). Research findings have indicated that an effective integration of industry-linked, research-informed curriculum can significantly enhance student development, their professionalism and entrepreneurial skills, as well as their academic progression, and ultimately, their employability upon graduation (Ekpo, 2020).

The process of designing a curriculum is intricate and contributing significantly to the quality of programs at universities (Dehghani & Pakmehr, 2011; Oktadiana & Chon, 2017). Educators are strongly encouraged to reinforce their partnership with the industry practitioners, aggressively engage with the industry partner to co-create industry-linked curriculum for students, so that they are prepared sufficiently with practical and industry-specific experience that are required for their future roles (Kamp, 2020). The key questions to be discussed amongst educators and industry professionals when developing a curriculum is about the competencies to be taught and why (Morris & Adamson, 2010). Industry employers and the education sector need to agree on the content of training sessions and academic programs that are designed to develop these competencies (Marneros et al., 2021). It is the responsibility of both parties to define an ideal and standardized hospitality curriculum that can balance all aspects and satisfy relevant stakeholders (Marneros & Gibbs, 2015).

### **2.3 Competencies Expected Of Hospitality Graduates**

A strong cooperative relationship between industry employers, hospitality educators and students will set the solid foundation to ensure hospitality graduates possess the necessary competencies for their career growth (Jack et al., 2017; Sisson & Adams, 2013). Stakeholders who involve in the curriculum design process need to take a balanced approach and consider various factors to produce a hospitality education program that can satisfy the needs of the industry and local society (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2015). Oktadiana & Chon (2017) emphasized on the difference in hospitality and tourism curriculum between developing and developed countries, as each education program should reflect the distinctive characteristics of the respective country and align with the society's demands (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017).

In this regard, previous research has revealed the significant difference in hospitality competency requirement between countries, mainly due to the hospitality companies' distinctive development strategy and vision in each country, as well as the varying competitive advantages of each destination (Velo & Mittaz, 2006). The geographic location reflects certain difference in core competency requirements,

representing the cultural and socioeconomic identities of that destination (Marneros et al., 2021). Although previous studies showed similarities in certain core competencies, they also highlighted differences – refer to Table 1. The research context is found to be a vital factor when it comes to defining the core competencies that are needed in a country (Marneros et al., 2021).

*Table 1: Summary of the key studies on hospitality competencies*

| Authors                                       | Competencies                                                                                                                                                                       | Data collection              | Population                                                     | Country           |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Alexakis &amp; Jiang (2019)</b>            | relational, technical, reflective, erudition                                                                                                                                       | Survey and document analysis | 206 hospitality managers, the 20 top U.S. hospitality programs | The United States |
| <b>Bharwani &amp; Talib (2017)</b>            | knowledge/cognitive, skills/functional, attitudes and behaviors/social, motives and traits /meta                                                                                   | Literature review            |                                                                |                   |
| <b>Chung-Herrera, Enz &amp; Lankau (2003)</b> | self-management, strategic positioning, implementation, critical thinking                                                                                                          | Survey                       | 137 industry leaders                                           | The United States |
| <b>Gibbs &amp; Slevitch (2019)</b>            | technical, emotional                                                                                                                                                               | Survey                       | 168 hospitality students                                       | The United States |
| <b>Horng &amp; Wang (2003)</b>                | leadership, interpersonal, budget execution, financial management, decisions making, sales and marketing, human resource and training management, administrative management, field | Interviews and survey        | 144 Food and Beverage managers in international hotels         | Taiwan            |

|                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                      |                                                   |                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
|                                                                     | management, material<br>management, and crisis<br>prevention and<br>management                                                                                                                                                    |                      |                                                   |                         |
| <b>Kay &amp;<br/>Russette<br/>(2000)</b>                            | leadership, technical,<br>interpersonal, revenue,<br>finance-based, change<br>management                                                                                                                                          | Interview and survey | 56 industry<br>managers                           | The<br>United<br>States |
| <b>Lin (2008)</b>                                                   | leadership,<br>communication,<br>adaptability, finance,<br>account, marketing,<br>interpersonal                                                                                                                                   | Survey               | 200 industry<br>professionals                     | Taiwan                  |
| <b>Marneros,<br/>Papageorgiou<br/>&amp; Efstathiades<br/>(2021)</b> | leadership, critical<br>thinking, operational<br>knowledge, information<br>technology, financial<br>analysis, human<br>relations,<br>communication,<br>cultural diversity,<br>human resource<br>management,<br>professional image | Survey               | 222 educators and<br>hospitality<br>professionals | Cyprus                  |
| <b>Marneros,<br/>Papageorgiou<br/>&amp; Efstathiades<br/>(2020)</b> | communication,<br>teamwork, safety and<br>hygiene, professional<br>appearance                                                                                                                                                     | Survey               | 186 hotel<br>professionals                        | Cyprus                  |
| <b>Shariff &amp;<br/>Zainol Abidin<br/>(2015)</b>                   | management,<br>technology, leadership,<br>organizational, personal<br>effectiveness, business-<br>oriented, self-oriented,                                                                                                        | Survey               | 30 industry experts                               | Malaysia                |

|                                                  |                                                                                                              |                                     |                                                  |                         |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
|                                                  | customer related,<br>innovative                                                                              |                                     |                                                  |                         |
| <b>Shum, Gatling &amp; Shoemaker (2018)</b>      | business leadership,<br>personal leadership,<br>people leadership                                            | Survey                              | 98 director-level<br>managers                    | The<br>United<br>States |
| <b>Suh, West &amp; Shin (2012)</b>               | hospitality, leadership,<br>interpersonal,<br>communication,<br>supervisory, food and<br>beverage management | Case study                          | South China<br>University of<br>Technology       | China                   |
| <b>Talawanich &amp; Wattanacharoenkil (2020)</b> | leadership, adaptability,<br>listening to feedback                                                           | Document analysis<br>and interviews | 10 management<br>trainees and 10<br>educators    | Thailand                |
| <b>Wang &amp; Tsai (2012)</b>                    | career planning and<br>development, core<br>employability                                                    | Survey                              | 11 industry experts<br>and 7 academic<br>experts | Taiwan                  |

Amongst these research, context-wise, the majority of studies were conducted in the United States, followed by Asian countries, of which the most prevalent are in Taiwan (3), China (1), Malaysia (1) and Thailand (1). The most dominant research method was survey (by 11 studies), whilst only one study has adopted both document analysis and interviews as their key research methods. Regarding data population, hospitality industry professionals are the most prevalent research participants (in 10 articles), highlighting the fundamental role of industry practitioners in defining the set of competencies requirement expected from hospitality graduates. Only three studies investigated the issue from academics' perspective and one study included hospitality students. Noticeably, none of previous studies have attempted to include various stakeholders related to hospitality higher education in one research project (including academics, industry professionals, university alumni and current students) to explore their in-depth insights through qualitative method. This gap presents itself as a potential direction requiring further research.

### 2.3.1 *Key Competency Domains*

Synthesizing previous research on hospitality competencies, it can be summarized that hospitality graduates should be educated on six competency domains, which are: generic management competencies, industry-specific competencies, soft competencies, self-management competencies, contemporary competencies, and employability competencies.

*Generic management competencies*

Numerous studies in recent decades have emphasized the need for hospitality educators to incorporate in their curriculum subjects such as human resources management (Martin-Rios et al., 2017; Szende et al., 2019), financial and accounting (Jauhari, 2006; Jiang & Alexakis, 2017; Kay & Russette, 2000; Lin, 2008; Marneros et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2008; Zopiatis et al., 2019), economic-financial management, computing, and languages (Agut et al., 2003). Besides preparing students with technical competencies for entry-level positions, hospitality universities need to incorporate courses on management functions to widen the career opportunities for hospitality graduates in their long-term career (Trinidad, 2020). Managers reported greater knowledge deficit than skill deficit in the areas of marketing and market analysis, customer profiles, and behaviors (Agut et al., 2003).

*Industry-specific competencies*

Analyzing competencies that are particularly important in hospitality industry, in addition to industry-specific technical competencies (Marneros & Gibbs, 2015; Ruetzler et al., 2014), Bharwani and Jauhari (2013) suggested the competence of Hospitality Intelligence as an effective way to create memorable hospitality guests' experiences. This competency comprises of three key dimensions: emotional intelligence (interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence), cultural intelligence and hospitality experiential intelligence (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013). To elevate guest experience to the next level, hospitality employees need to be exposed to up-to-date knowledge and skills on service management and consumer behaviors (Srisangkaew, 2022). They should have a solid understanding on how to deliver outstanding services to customers, as well as the positive effect of exceptional service quality on both the growth of their career and the company's success (Jauhari, 2006). Noticeably, industry employers are not yet satisfied with the professionalism demonstrated by graduates in this service-centric hospitality industry (Kitterlin-Lynch et al., 2015). Hospitality educators are expected to put more effort on developing students' professionalism, as this is one of the most important competency dimension required of hospitality employees (Lolli, 2013; Marneros et al., 2021).

*Soft competencies*

Findings from previous studies on the core hospitality competencies have highlighted the ever-increasing importance of soft skills (Horng & Wang, 2003; Talawanich & Wattanacharoensil, 2021). Industry employers rate human-relation skills and attitudes as the most important requirements from hospitality candidates (Huang et al., 2016). Employers believe that they can train entry-level employees in technical competencies to meet the company's standards. Therefore, they put priority on recruiting graduates who possess the necessary soft skills to thrive in a hospitality environment (Marneros et al., 2020;

Trinidad, 2020; Weber et al., 2009). Amongst the required soft competencies, communication is a major area (Marneros et al., 2021; Ruetzler et al., 2014; Shariff & Abidin, 2015), of which listening skills was rated as the most important (Suh et al., 2012; Talawanich & Wattanacharoensil, 2021). Listening with understanding was the most sought-after type of listening (Lolli, 2013).

Unfortunately, hospitality educators have been facing the challenge of equipping students sufficiently with both hard and soft skills within the limited duration of the education program. A portion of educators argued that soft skills can only be enhanced by each person's professional and personal experience. From their perspective, the classroom setting is not an appropriate place to improve students' competence on this aspect (Kitterlin-Lynch et al., 2015). Consequently, hospitality students are perceived to be lacking in their level of preparedness for the required soft competencies, including teamwork (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013; Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Singh & Jaykumar, 2019; Tesone & Ricci, 2005; Velo & Mittaz, 2006; Wang & Tsai, 2012), leadership (Cheung et al., 2010; Kay & Russette, 2000; Suh et al., 2012), conflict management (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013), adaptability (Suh et al., 2012; Talawanich & Wattanacharoensil, 2021; Wang & Tsai, 2012), cultural sensitivity (Brookes & Becket, 2011; Jauhari, 2006; Velo & Mittaz, 2006), foreign language (Brookes & Becket, 2011; Suh et al., 2012), and emotional intelligence (Jauhari, 2013; Weber et al., 2009).

Besides human-relation competencies (Marneros et al., 2020; Sisson & Adams, 2013; Srisangkaew, 2022), at higher level, hospitality educators are also responsible for producing critical thinkers to survive and lead the volatile hospitality working environment (Dredge et al., 2012). To produce future industry managers, higher learning competencies need to have a deserving place within the hospitality curriculum (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019). These competencies include but not limited to: decision-making (Tesone & Ricci, 2005; Zapalska et al., 2006), critical thinking (Jauhari, 2013; Marneros et al., 2021; Singh & Jaykumar, 2019), strategic planning (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Okumus & Wong, 2007), analytical (Jauhari, 2013; Ogbeide et al., 2021; Szende et al., 2019), project management (Jara et al., 2019), problem-solving (Velo & Mittaz, 2006; Weber et al., 2009), as well as the ability to innovate (Jauhari, 2006).

### *Self-management competencies*

Although students may rank knowledge and skills to be the most important criteria for new employees, industry employers consider self-management competencies and attitude at workplace as the key to success in hospitality career (Harkison et al., 2011; Srisangkaew, 2022; Trinidad, 2020; Wang & Tsai, 2012). Hospitality graduates are expected to demonstrate good time management (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Ruetzler et al., 2014), willingness to learn (Huang et al., 2016), service attitude (Singh &



Jaykumar, 2019; Velo & Mittaz, 2006), commitment to work (Jauhari, 2006), job enthusiasm (Huang et al., 2016; Tesone & Ricci, 2009), and proper work ethics (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019; Wang & Tsai, 2012).

To ensure high quality service level, the industry looks for candidates with exceptional intrinsic characteristics and pleasing personality over technical competencies (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013; Cheung et al., 2010; Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Huang et al., 2016). Students should possess proactive and open mindset (Velo & Mittaz, 2006; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007), values of integrity and honesty (Jauhari, 2013; Weber et al., 2009), self-discipline (Huang et al., 2016), self-confidence (Spowart, 2011), self-learning skills (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019; Sheldon et al., 2008). These personal attributes are the foundation for students' confidence at work, helping them to overcome work hurdles in the beginning of their career (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013).

#### *Contemporary competencies*

To thrive in the evolving hospitality industry, the efforts of educators to stay ahead of the industry practices and prepare students with in-demand competencies is critical to reduce the time lag between graduates' outcome and industry requirements (Bilgihan et al., 2014; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006; Suh et al., 2012). Some of the competencies that are becoming more important in recent decades are information technology (Sisson & Adams, 2013; Trinidad, 2020), sustainability (Ali et al., 2016; Szende et al., 2019), social media (Ruetzler et al., 2014), big data (Martin-Rios et al., 2017), health and safety (Wang & Tsai, 2012), and revenue management (Cetin et al., 2016; Dopson, 2005; Mayo & Thomas-Haysbert, 2005). Considering competencies as knowledge, skills, and qualities required to successfully perform a job (Jeou-Shyan et al., 2011), the need to include more contemporary competencies has been pressing than ever, especially after the tremendous impact of the global COVID pandemic on the hospitality industry and customers' behaviors. Researchers found raising demand to nurture hospitality workforce on some particular competencies after the pandemic, such as crisis management (Zopiatis et al., 2021), health and safety (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021; Trinidad, 2020), cost management, multi-skilling and positive thinking (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021).

The required hospitality competencies and their importance are likely to change over time due to market conditions and new operating procedures and practices (Gursoy et al., 2012). To ensure that hospitality graduates are well equipped to cope with the changing demands of the industry, finding the answer for core hospitality competencies continues to be a pressing issue among industry professionals and educators (Marneros et al., 2021).

#### *Employability competencies*

In today's changing and globalized working environment, the need to enhance employability competencies have become of utmost priority for both hospitality educators and students (Chen et al., 2018; Srisangkaew, 2022). Hertzman et al (2015) defined employability competencies as career management skills that are necessary to meet the employers' demands, such as self-efficacy and self-appraisal, work advancement ability, industry-specific skills, transferrable generic skills, personal traits and attitudes (Hertzman et al., 2015). According to Singh & Jaykumar (2019), employability comprises of soft skills facilitating students' ability to gain jobs and sustain their career success (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019).

Although the development of such competencies for students requires significant contribution from both employers and hospitality education providers, the long-term benefits will undoubtedly outweigh the costs (Tan & Morgan, 2001). As the percentage of students' job landing after graduation is a key criteria to assess the quality of hospitality education programs (Kitterlin-Lynch et al., 2015), educators are expected to equip students sufficiently on their employability competencies, helping them to secure employment opportunities (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019), leaving a positive impact on their future retention in the industry (Chen et al., 2021).

### **2.3.2 *Students' Employability - Internship And Career Support***

Due to the vocational focus of hospitality jobs, educators and industry professionals greatly value students' practical experience. Previous study by Chi and Gursoy (2009) found that industry employers consider internship as the most important factor influencing students' education at universities, followed by the industry working experience of lecturers and how students prepare for job interviews (Chi & Gursoy, 2009). Within curriculum design, as well-planned and engaging learning experiences play a pivotal role for effective student learning, curriculum developers need to align the educational content with the diverse demands and interests of students (Tyler, 2013). Especially in modern educational paradigms, a notable shift has been witnessed from the traditional teacher-centered approaches to collaborative learning community where students' interests and contributions are highly valued (Soto, 2015). The concept of self-regulated learning underscores the proactive engagement of students in their own education journey. Self-regulated learners are not only responsible for their learning processes, but they also actively seek and utilize given feedback to enrich their understanding on the subject, hence, achieve the desired learning outcomes (Ekpo, 2020). Educators are entrusted with the responsibility of creating stimulating and positive learning environment, inspiring students to participate actively (Soto, 2015). A work-integrated learning model is beneficial for hospitality students to enrich their knowledge learnt from their on- and off-campus learning environments (Kasa et al., 2020). Researchers strongly recommended hospitality educators to

incorporate internship as part of experiential learning strategies into the curriculum for students (Crawford, 2013; Lee, 2008; Spowart, 2011; Yang & Cheung, 2014).

In the effort to enhance graduates' employability to compete in the hospitality labor market, the internship component can bring substantial benefits to key stakeholders (Chen et al., 2018). While industry employers can have access to higher-quality pool of potential talents (Lee et al., 2015; Yang & Cheung, 2014), hospitality educators may teach students who are more enthusiastic about future career and have boosted learning spirit (Lyu et al., 2016; Yang & Cheung, 2014). For students, the internship programs present valuable opportunities to apply theory to practice (Chen et al., 2018; Crawford, 2013; Huang et al., 2016; Kim & Jeong, 2018; Lee et al., 2015; Marneros & Gibbs, 2015; Marneros et al., 2021; Spowart, 2011; Tesone & Ricci, 2005), witness realistic industry picture (Crawford, 2013; Huang et al., 2016; Jack et al., 2017; Yang & Cheung, 2014; Zopiatis et al., 2021), understand work culture (Crawford, 2013; Jack et al., 2017; Lee, 2008), enhance employment skill (Crawford, 2013; Jack et al., 2017; Marneros & Gibbs, 2015), reassess career goals (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007), strengthen employers and educators connection (Yang & Cheung, 2014), and therefore, widen post-graduation career opportunities (Chen et al., 2018; Crawford, 2013; Huang et al., 2016; Jack et al., 2017).

Despite the widely acknowledged benefits of hospitality internship programs, research has found various issues with the current internship offerings at universities. Due to the disparate responsibilities and needs amongst hospitality educators, students and industry employers, there exists discrepancies concerning the most effective way to formulate the internship programs (Jack et al., 2017). Therefore, even after decades, it remains a challenge to define an appropriate internship model for hospitality students, given the unique characteristics of each higher education institution in term of curriculum design, program structure, resources, industry networks, administration procedure and overall mission (Jack et al., 2017; Le et al., 2018b; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007; Zopiatis et al., 2021). The industry employers are dissatisfied with: how students are prepared prior internship (Le et al., 2018b; Trinidad, 2020; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007), the expectation misalignment between employers and interns (Chen et al., 2018; Qu et al., 2021; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007), short internship duration (Jack et al., 2017; Jauhari, 2006; Tesone & Ricci, 2005) and lack of standardization in internship design (Jack et al., 2017; Le et al., 2018b; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007; Zopiatis et al., 2021).

Especially in regard to internship duration, hospitality educators and industry professionals face significant disagreement on the ideal number of internship hours that hospitality students should undertake before officially entering the workforce. While faculties consider 750 hours for internship components as sufficient, industry employers advocate for higher number, at around 991 hours (Jack et al., 2017). Although

an increase in the duration of these experiential learning activities does not always bring immediate benefit to the hospitality employer, such enhancement in practical training opportunities can significantly elevate the employability of future graduates (Tesone & Ricci, 2005).

From the academic side, hospitality educators express their concern for low-level of internship work assigned for students (Beesley & Davidson, 2013; Chen et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2016; Jack et al., 2017; Le et al., 2018b), as well as financial benefits that hospitality employers provide for interns (Chen & Shen, 2012; Lee et al., 2015). A prevalent issue has been witnessed as hospitality companies are reluctant to assign student interns with positions that demand advanced training (Le et al., 2018b). Unfortunately, numerous industry practitioners in the hospitality industry still consider student interns simply as a promising cheap labor source, hence, the minimum compensation is offered (Chen & Shen, 2012). Compared to full-time employees who have access to benefits such as paid leaves and shared service charge, such discriminate policies on financial rewards and compensation against student interns undoubtedly lead to negative influence on the overall performance of these young workers (Lee et al., 2015).

For students, they complain on poorly-structured internship, internship timing, on-the-job training quality (Le et al., 2018b; Lyu et al., 2016; Zopiatitis & Constanti, 2007), unsupportive working environment, excessive assigned work (Le et al., 2018b), and theory-practice difference between what they have learnt at school and realities at workplace (Le et al., 2018b; Zopiatitis & Constanti, 2007).

To address these concerns, the educators' efforts on designing the learning experiences meticulously with innovative teaching methods are essential to impart valuable and meaningful knowledge to students (Soto, 2015). Moreover, to create a progressive and cohesive learning journey for students, educators need to pay sufficient attention on the continuity of learning experiences, ensuring current strategies are built upon learners' educational experiences in the past (Seaman & Nelsen, 2011; Tyler, 2013).

To ensure students are well aware of their future working environment before undertaking their first internship, in addition to providing students with career services (Chi & Gursay, 2009; Kitterlin-Lynch et al., 2015; Spowart, 2011), previous research emphasized the need to include employability course as a key component of hospitality university's curriculum (Hertzman et al., 2015; Kitterlin-Lynch et al., 2015; Singh & Jaykumar, 2019). Prior to providing career advising to students, faculty members have to identify and assess students' perceptions about the industry's entry barriers and obstacles, while encouraging students to evaluate their confidence in all relevant professional experiences (Chuang, 2011). Faculty coordinators ought to be the ones helping students recognize the significance and benefits of personal attributes and soft skills in the workplace (Tesone & Ricci, 2005). An effective assistance for career

planning can minimize many psychological issues amongst students, consequently, improve the industry's turnover rate (Hertzman et al., 2015).

Some of the suggested topics for employability course are: educational and occupational exploration (Chuang, 2011), career planning strategies, job realities (Hertzman et al., 2015; Le et al., 2018b; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007), impression management (Kitterlin-Lynch et al., 2015; Nickson et al., 2005; Ruetzler et al., 2014), soft skill enhancement (Chen et al., 2021; Kitterlin-Lynch et al., 2015; Ruetzler et al., 2014), self-knowledge (Chen et al., 2018; Chuang, 2011), confidence to enter workforce (Chen et al., 2021; Chuang, 2011), and employers' expectation (Kitterlin-Lynch et al., 2015; Le et al., 2018b; Ruetzler et al., 2014; Spowart, 2011).

For the most desirable outcomes, hospitality educators are strongly encouraged to introduce employability course early in the curriculum (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019), and to make in-school employability activities mandatory for all students to attend (Hertzman et al., 2015). Students need to proactively engage in career-related initiatives organized by the school, such as career fairs, career orientation class, career workshops, industry trade shows, industry speaker events, and industry mentoring programs (Chuang, 2011; Kitterlin-Lynch et al., 2015). Educators can also consider building this aspect into the course assessment. For all these activities, besides the high-quality interaction between faculties and students (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007), professionals from the industry should also be invited to participate and contribute their insights to enrich students' enthusiasm and career prospects (Hertzman et al., 2015).

## **2.4 Hospitality Industry – University Partnership**

Previous research has highlighted the critical role of industry-academia collaboration to survive and thrive in the knowledge-based economy today (Beesley & Davidson, 2013; Elnasr Sobaih & Jones, 2015; Kasa et al., 2020). For the interest of key stakeholders in the hospitality industry, educators and industry practitioners need to continue enhancing their cooperative efforts to produce the next generation of hospitality workforce (Hertzman et al., 2015). It was acknowledged that standalone efforts from any parties are not sufficient to prepare the required resources to facilitate hospitality students' transition from academic to real industry environment (Solnet et al., 2009).

### **2.4.1 Collaborative Practices**

Studies on the partnership between tertiary institutions and hospitality industry professionals have revealed various partnership approaches. To enhance students' industry exposure, one of the most common practices is to invite guest speakers from the industry to share their work experience, as well as current industry practices and contemporary trends. During the recruitment season, representatives from hospitality

companies need to be invited to participate in career fair hosted in the university campus to connect with students, share the company's career opportunities and recruit potential employees (Batra, 2016). The presence of these industry professionals ought to be arranged throughout students' study period, boosting students' learning spirit and enriching their awareness on industry realities (Jauhari, 2013; Srisangkaew, 2022).

For students to confidently enter the workforce and tackle potential career barriers, the implementation of mentoring programs, provided by mentors who are industry professionals, can be an effective approach to guide students building their career development strategies (Lyu et al., 2016; Nolan et al., 2010). Especially after the COVID pandemic, it is critical that both educators and industry professionals reinforce their collaboration to promote the industry potential and regain students' interest in pursuing hospitality industry (Kwok, 2022; Sigala, 2021). The continuous interaction between hospitality students and industry recruiters not only helps employers access good talents, but it will also enhance students' confidence and awareness on different career possibilities (Hertzman et al., 2015).

To narrow the skills gap between academia and industry realities, the practice of sending students to hospitality enterprises to undertake internship has been a common approach adopted in hospitality education (Hertzman et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2016). This work-integrated learning model allows students to apply what they have learnt in classroom into practices, while nurturing valuable competencies which can only be developed in the workplace settings (Kwok, 2022). In this regard, field trips is also a documented approach to give students insights of the hospitality working environment in real life (Srisangkaew, 2022).

Besides providing industry exposure opportunities for students, hospitality enterprises are strongly encouraged to launch internship programs for lecturers and invite these academics to attend industry conferences (Elnasr Sobaih & Jones, 2015; Lyu et al., 2016). These initiatives will ensure educators are well equipped with up-to-date industry knowledge and practices, in turn, providing better industry-informed education to hospitality students at universities (Jauhari, 2013; Kwok, 2022).

For research purpose, a good platform with various knowledge-dissemination activities will be beneficial for involved stakeholders (Gardini, 2018). While hospitality educators can utilize their research capacity to provide solutions for industry problems and conduct skill enhancement class for industry practitioners (Kwok, 2022); from the industry side, they can support educators with research fundings and financial sponsorship (Crawford, 2013; Elnasr Sobaih & Jones, 2015; Jara et al., 2019). The financial support from hospitality enterprises not only can encourage deserving students to pursue their career (Batra,

2016), but it also supports hospitality academics to elevate their teaching quality to reach international standards (Brookes & Becket, 2011).

Due to the practical nature of the hospitality industry, consistent and constructive inputs from the industry practitioners into the hospitality curriculum are the foundation to have high-quality employable hospitality graduates (Batra, 2016; Griffin, 2020; Jack et al., 2017; Kwok, 2022; Mahmoud, 2018; Millar et al., 2010; Nolan et al., 2010; Oktadiana & Chon, 2017; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006; Ricci, 2010; Srisangkaew, 2022). To achieve this aim, the constitution of advisory boards, comprising of senior industry practitioners, is a key strategy (Anderson & Sanga, 2019). From their insights, the board members can inform educators of interesting industry case studies, provide guidance, assist universities to identify necessary competencies that are required of hospitality graduates, develop and revise curriculum, as well as recommend new potential electives (Batra, 2016). As board members are usually passionate about sharing their experiences to enrich students' learning, universities should take advantage of this and view the advisory board as a valuable resource (Zahra et al., 2011). Moreover, universities should reinforce the involvement of alumni associations to assist educators in assessing education programs and making recommendations for improvements, as alumni typically have more loyalty, understanding, and willingness to help (Penrose, 2002).

In regard to the collaboration level, researchers strongly support the formalization of industry-academia relationship at institutional (organizational) level, rather than at individual (personal) level (Gardini, 2018; Sundbo et al., 2007). The partnership at institutional level is believed to be more sustainable, enabling the systematic development of various collaborative activities, such as: sponsorship for research and scientific institutes, funding of research projects, industry professionals conducting lectures, and industry input in curriculum development (Gardini, 2018). Before entering the agreement, hospitality educators and industry professionals need to clarify the benefits of both parties (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). The communication between the industry and universities should remain open so that new trends or any anticipated change can be promptly incorporated into the curriculum (Batra, 2016).

#### **2.4.2 *Benefits Of Collaboration***

The positive impact of industry-university collaboration on various stakeholders in the hospitality industry has been widely acknowledged. As industry professionals are the ones determining the necessary competencies of their employees, competency alignment with the industry requirements is one of the key benefits of an effective industry-academia partnership (Shariff & Abidin, 2015). An education program that is relevant to the industry is essential for graduates to enhance their employability (Batra, 2016; Mahmoud, 2018; Nolan et al., 2010), and gain competitive advantages in the current era of uncertainty (Marneros et al., 2021; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020).

The active involvement of industry professionals during their four-year study can provide students with realistic job expectations, bridging the skills gap between academic and professional settings (Huang et al., 2016). If educators solely focus on teaching competencies that they find important, the risks of students not being equipped sufficiently and being disappointed when they enter the workforce is unavoidable (Ruetzler et al., 2014). Both academics and industry recruiters need to reach an agreement on the expected graduates' competencies and curriculum content (Harkison et al., 2011). Hospitality educators should more proactively engage and respond to the industry requirements as students not only are required to possess practical and technical skills, but they also need to be aware of the constantly changing hospitality environment (Beesley & Davidson, 2013).

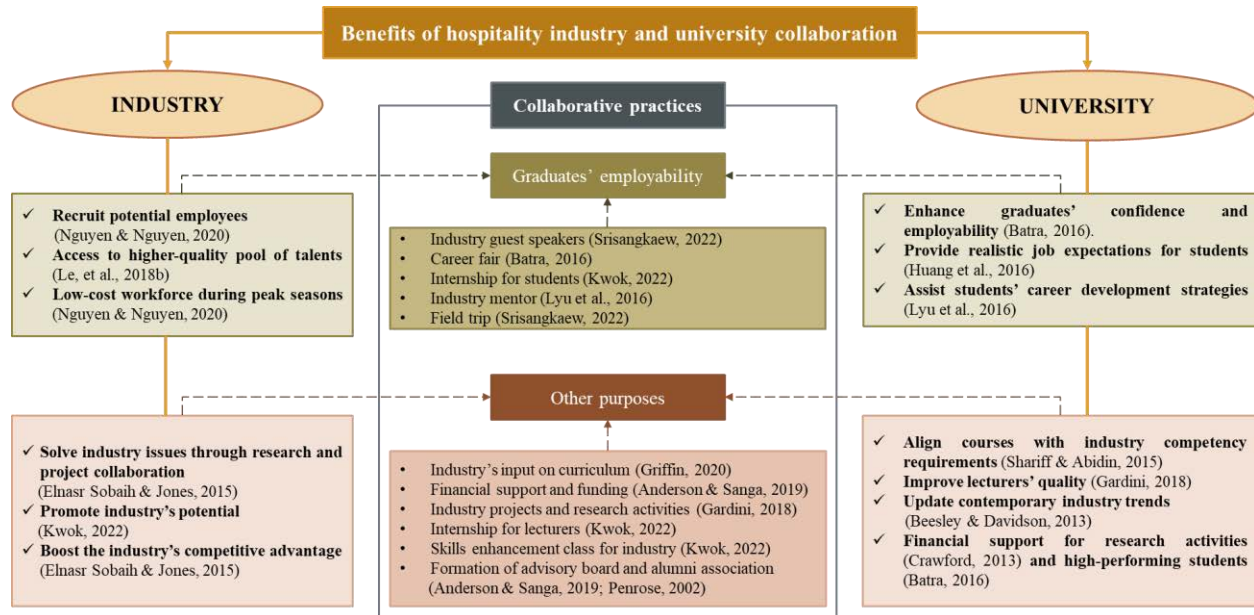
For the industry, the continuous efforts to interact with hospitality educators and students can help the company enjoy significant advantages when they want to recruit promising employees (Le et al., 2018b; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020): Research has found that employers who are regularly present in university's career fairs leave better impression and appear more attractive to hospitality students (Huang et al., 2016).

For hospitality educators, the improvement in lecturers' quality is a significant benefit that education institutions can gain from industry collaboration (Elnasr Sobaih & Jones, 2015; Gardini, 2018). Educators in the hospitality industry have been perceived to be lacking in industry working experience. Through an effective collaboration with industry partners, hospitality lecturers can enhance their professional competencies (Elnasr Sobaih & Jones, 2015), be informed of the current industry practices and case studies (Gardini, 2018), leading to the development of better-quality hospitality graduates. Additionally, a cooperative university– industry partnership can provide more opportunities for research activities and fundings at hospitality universities, especially in developing countries where financial resources are limited (Elnasr Sobaih & Jones, 2015; Kwok, 2022).

For the society, a dynamic industry and academia partnership improves the industry's workforce, hence, solving the country's labor issue (Kwok, 2022; Lee et al., 2015). Nevertheless, to achieve a nationwide positive effect, the role of government bodies is crucial to support the industry, the academia, and students (Beesley & Davidson, 2013; Mahmoud, 2018).

Based on the existing literature, current hospitality industry-academia collaborative practices and benefits can be summarized as in Figure 4.



*Figure 4: Theoretical framework on hospitality-industry collaboration*

### 2.4.3 Collaborative Barriers

Given the nature of the hospitality industry and its dependence on employees' performance and their interactions with guests (Belias et al., 2020), the recruitment of competent employees is a matter of utmost concern for both the long- and short-term growth of hospitality businesses (Nguyen, 2019). Theoretically, to help graduates develop sufficient competencies and skills for career success, the relationship between university and industry should be constructed based on common objectives (Griffin, 2020). However, in developing countries, this complex partnership is hindered by various issues, such as poor management practices, lack of shared visions and trust (Mahmoud, 2018).

Scholars have argued for the complexity of this partnership (Khan, 2019; Marneros et al., 2021; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007). Zopiatis and Constanti (2007) produced a five-GAP model illustrating various mismatches between hospitality students, educators and industry professionals. These five relationships evolve around the expectations of hospitality students and their university, students' actual internship experience versus their expectations, the students – employers relationship, the industry-university relationship, as well as the universities' control over the students' internship (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007). In another study, Khan (2019) highlighted the gaps in six aspects of the academia and industry relationship, concerning: application, communication, experience, research quality, trust, and return on investment (Khan, 2019).

It has been witnessed that the quality of industry and academia partnership is only at the surface (Lyu et al., 2016). Most of these partnerships are hindered by little commitment from both parties and lack

the knowledge-based economy's true spirit (Beesley & Davidson, 2013; Gardini, 2018; Lyu et al., 2016). Despite the benefits of hospitality industry and university collaboration, there are several challenges to its implementation, which require greater acceptance, support, and participation from both sides (Mohd Yusof et al., 2020). The key question to tackle issues of hospitality workforce is geared towards how effectively the university and industry relationship can be managed (Beesley & Davidson, 2013; Zopiatitis & Constanti, 2007). Both academia and the industry practitioners can reinforce this relationship to reach the desired quality only if they understand the existing collaboration barriers (Anderson & Sanga, 2019; Griffin, 2020).

Research has found that the misalignment in perception and expectation between industry and academia is the underlying reason preventing an effective partnership. Industry employers do not have accurate understanding on the difference in academic contents and career directions provided for vocational and higher education graduates (Harkison et al., 2011; Pizam et al., 2013). This misperception has resulted in the critical view of industry professionals about university graduates on their practical skill preparation (Le et al., 2018b).

In the aspect of hospitality curriculum, industry professionals expressed their dissatisfaction with the current state of hospitality programs at higher education institutions, revealing difference in perceptions between industry practitioners and hospitality educators on the extent of industry involvement in curriculum development. While employers prefer to have a more dominant influence on the curriculum content, hospitality academics are satisfied with the current level of industry's input into the curriculum at their education institutions (Griffin, 2020).

Another reported barrier hindering the establishment of effective industry-academia collaboration is about the perception from a portion of industry practitioners who underestimate the value of an academic degree and research collaborations. These industry professionals tend to expect instant response when collaborating with the education partner on research projects (Elnasr Sobaih & Jones, 2015). They lack understanding of the time and procedures required to conduct research activities at higher education institutions. This unrealistic expectation could be derived from the low entrance barrier for hospitality employees, leading to the fact that many industry leaders have climbed the career ladder through experience but did not receive official high-level education in university settings (Elnasr Sobaih & Jones, 2015).

This issue is even more challenging in developing countries, where hospitality higher education is still in the early development stage (Le et al., 2018a; Mahmoud, 2018). There is an evident lack of trust and transparency between both parties in this relationship. On one hand, hospitality educators blame industry professionals for hiding information, making it difficult for the education sector to complete their research. On the other hand, industry practitioners revealed the fear of their business secrets being exposed to

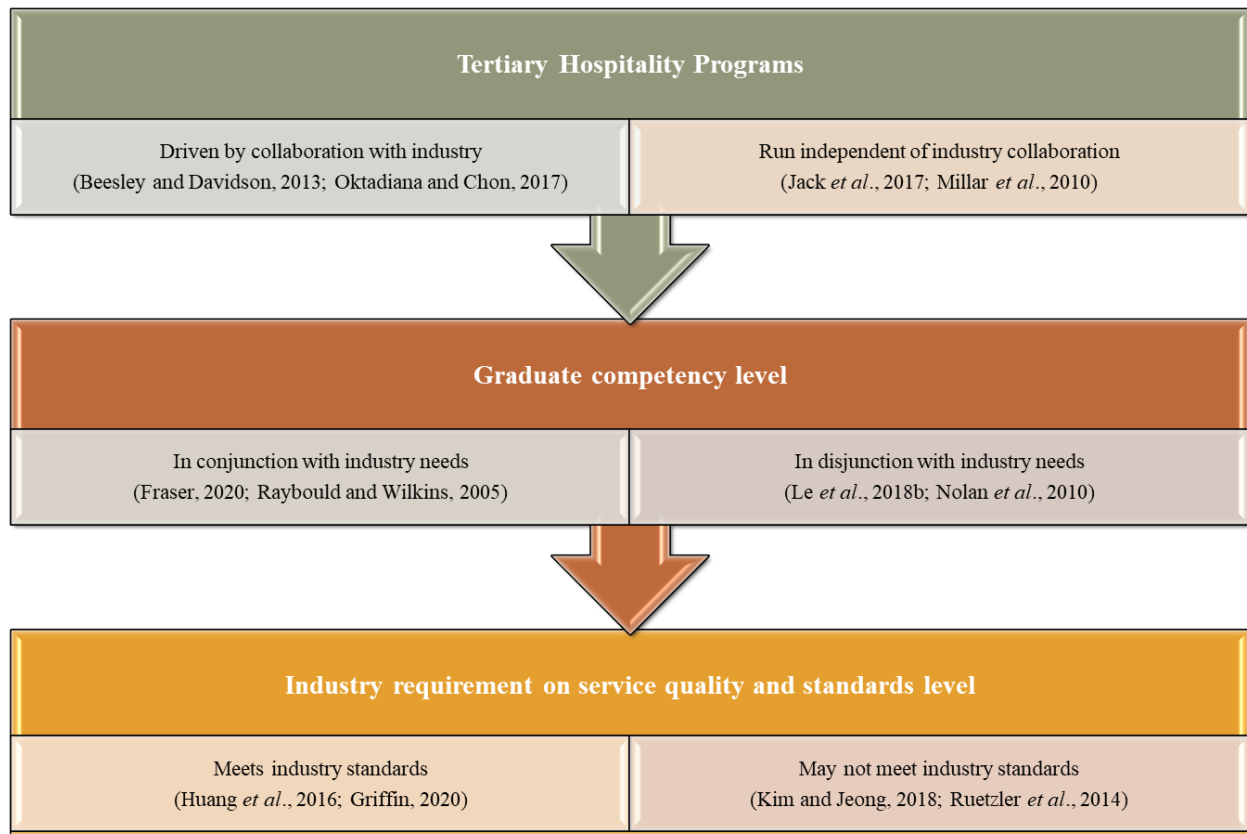
competitors, as academics may use the industry's innovative solutions as material for research publications (Elnasr Sobaih & Jones, 2015). The underlying factor leading to this absence of trust and understanding is due to other external responsibilities that each party need to engage in (Beesley & Davidson, 2013), as the education-focus of university is placed against the profit-focus of hospitality enterprises (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007).

This misalignment and lack of collaboration mechanism between university and the industry partners had resulted in undefined responsibilities of both parties, affecting negatively hospitality curriculum and internship planning (Le et al., 2018b). Consequently, despite the prevalence of internship component in hospitality education programs, research revealed the perceived low-quality of this practical element for students as industry professionals are disappointed with the low effort from hospitality educators to follow up with the progress of their students during the internship program at the enterprises (Milman, 2001). All involved stakeholders hope for better internship design, as well as enhanced control and support from educators during students' internship period (Le et al., 2018b; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007).

To improve this issue, the active engagement of hospitality education institutions with industry partners to develop a relevant curriculum would enable students to be better equipped with the competencies currently required by the industry (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019). Nevertheless, existing literature indicates a lack of systematic solutions for an effective hospitality industry and university collaboration.

## **2.5 Summary**

A successful industry-academia partnership can help hospitality education institutions enhance training quality and improve their reputation with the industry employers (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). Hospitality businesses that collaborate with higher education institutions can enjoy the benefits of having low-cost interns for peak seasons, who may become their future employees upon graduation (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). For the government, this collaboration supports the national economy through the generation of more employment opportunities and boosting the country's competitive advantage in hospitality and tourism (Elnasr Sobaih & Jones, 2015). Figure 5 summarizes key outcomes of this literature review.

*Figure 5: Key Outcomes of the Literature Review*

Apart from meeting the immediate needs of the industry, hospitality higher education institutions have two main responsibilities: to produce graduates who possess management competencies aligned with the industry demands, as well as to stimulate professional motivation of the future workforce, empowering them to take on new career challenges through independent thinking and innovative ideas (Nguyen *et al.*, 2023). The literature review highlighted six competency domains that hospitality graduates need to excel in, including generic management, industry-specific, soft, self-management, contemporary, and employability competencies.

Studies have confirmed the positive impact of industry-university collaboration to ensure students successfully nurture necessary competencies at universities. This strategic partnership can be adopted via multiple approaches, such as internships, graduate employment opportunities, practical trainings, financial contributions, research collaboration, participating in teaching and providing feedback on the quality of graduates, as well as curriculum design. Regarding external factors contributing to the success of the education-industry partnership, a well-praised, documented strategy is to seek inputs from advisory boards comprising highly experienced and esteemed industry professionals and alumni associations – who are valuable resources for hospitality universities to improve their students' employability.

## 2.6 Research Framework And Research Questions

The modern landscape of higher education in hospitality in recent decades is changing drastically due to multiple forces, such as: aging population, globalization and technological advancement. All these forces have a heavy impact on the hospitality enterprises, requiring them to look for employees who have great adaptability. Consequently, to address the demand of the industry practitioners on the workforce, hospitality educators need to review and creatively restructure their curriculum for students (Kim & Jeong, 2018).

The demand for effective curriculum management has become even more pressing after the hospitality industry has been hit by the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, leading to political and economic instabilities worldwide (Huang & Baker, 2021; Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021; Marneros et al., 2021). To align with current industry situation, it is logical for the academics to foresee those changes, project the necessary competencies arose from the crisis and proactively embed it into the hospitality curriculum to nurture students' ability to cope with similar events in the future (Marneros & Gibbs, 2015; Szende et al., 2019; Zopiatis et al., 2021).

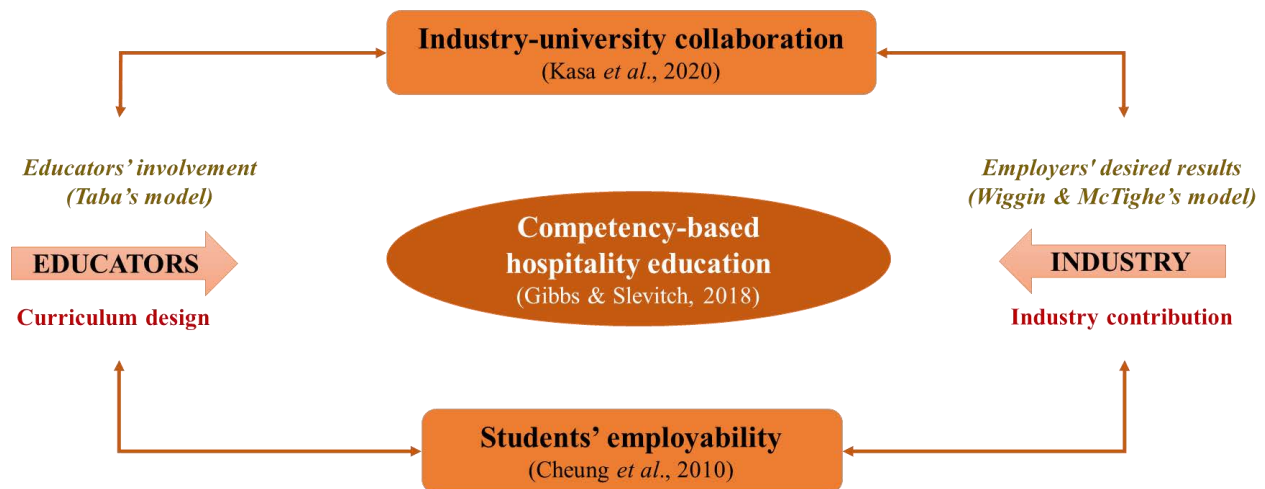
Ultimately, the process of developing a curriculum is a collaborative endeavor that requires input from various stakeholders, including subject specialist, students, school administrators, community members, as well as society at large (Soto, 2015). There is a need for greater partnership with hoteliers to prepare graduates to meet the demands of the hotel industry (Nolan et al., 2010). An effective implementation of this collaborative approach will ensure the curriculum can satisfy the needs of learners, whilst aligning with the broader educational goals and societal expectations (Soto, 2015). The reported success of the industry-informed learning and teaching model suggests its applicability to different disciplines within universities, with appropriate adjustment where necessary (Ekpo, 2020). The approach of implementing industry-informed curriculum resonates particularly well with the practical demands and dynamic nature of the hospitality industry. Through a comprehensive incorporation of a competency-based framework, industry input and practical experiences, this education approach ensures the development of a relevant and up-to-date hospitality curriculum that can satisfy the industry's needs.

Reflecting from theoretical standpoints, an effective adoption of the Backward Design Model and Taba's grassroot curriculum development methodology in designing the hospitality curriculum can bring substantial benefits. Given the nature of hospitality curriculum that involves the contribution of various stakeholders (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017), the adoption of these two approaches not only enables educators to create a student-centric and industry-informed hospitality curriculum, but it also helps ensuring the preset education outcomes are in alignment with the competencies required from hospitality employers for

students' employability. For students, they can have a comprehensive understanding of their learning objectives, as well as the fundamental steps to achieve them. Through the creation of meaningful assessments to reflect real-world practices, hospitality students can also enjoy the benefits of diverse practical learning experiences that are particularly beneficial for their employability and future careers.

Based on Taba's curriculum development model and Wiggins and McTighe's three stages of curriculum backward-design model, as well as key themes and concepts from the literature, this study proposes the following research framework as the foundation to investigate and analyze the research problem, as depicted in Figure 6. By embedding these two theoretical models into the hospitality and tourism context, the thesis can innovate by advocating for curriculum that are context-specific and industry-informed, fostering responsiveness to global hospitality trends, hence minimizing the skills gaps existing between industry and academia. These models can build a framework to empower relevant stakeholders contributing to a curriculum that mirrors the real-world complexities of hospitality, positioning hospitality university education as a vanguard of adaptive and experiential education.

*Figure 6: Research framework*



While collaboration between universities offering hospitality degrees and the industry has undeniably gained more research attention, as evidenced by the total number of peer-reviewed articles published in reputable hospitality-focused journals (Jauhari & Thomas, 2013; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020), research on effective industry-education partnership remains nascent, with context on many emerging destinations yet to be analyzed. This is particularly true for new destinations and young education systems where the hospitality industry has just recently been categorized as a major driver of national economic growth (i.e., Vietnam, India, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka).

In Vietnam, despite the critical role of hospitality education to the development of quality workforce, this topic remains an under-researched area in the tourism and hospitality research. Comparing with other nations, the Vietnamese hospitality education system is at an early stage of development (Le et al., 2018b). The literature search has found only five journal articles on the topic of hospitality higher education in Vietnam. Table 2 summarizes the existing literature on hospitality higher education in Vietnam.

*Table 2: Literature on hospitality higher education in Vietnam*

| <b>Authors</b>                 | <b>Aim</b>                                                                                                                                             | <b>Data collection</b>           | <b>Population</b>                                                                                                                 | <b>Location</b>                    |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Nguyen & Chaisawat (2011)      | to investigate the current situation, obstacles and future development of hospitality and tourism higher education in Vietnam.                         | Survey                           | 55 institutions offering hospitality and tourism programs (including public and private universities/ junior colleges and others) | Whole country of Vietnam           |
| Le, Klieve & McDonald (2018)   | to explore factors determining career perceptions of hospitality tertiary students in Vietnam.                                                         | Survey                           | 234 hospitality students from higher education institutes and vocational education and training colleges                          | South central of Vietnam           |
| Le, McDonald & Klieve (2018)   | to identify factors influencing the effective delivery of Vietnamese tertiary hospitality education.                                                   | Interviews                       | 26 industry professionals, hospitality academics and hospitality undergraduate students                                           | South central of Vietnam           |
| Tran, Phan & Marginson (2018). | To explore the extent to which the tourism education programs in Vietnam has implemented internationalization elements at their education institutions | Document analysis and interviews | 6 tourism education institutions (including public vocational colleges, public/private universities)                              | No detailed information on regions |

|                        |                                                                                                                                        |                              |                                                                                                   |                                     |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Nguyen & Nguyen (2020) | to study factors influencing the collaboration between university and industry in hospitality education from the industry perspective. | Document analysis and survey | 307 industry professionals from four or five-star hotels, luxury restaurants and travel companies | Ho Chi Minh City (South of Vietnam) |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|

The first study was published in 2011, conducted by Hanh Nguyen and Manat Chaisawat, to understand the current situation of hospitality and tourism higher education in Vietnam, as well as the obstacles and opportunities for the future growth of this education sector (Nguyen & Chaisawat, 2011). Through surveys with hospitality and tourism institutions in Vietnam, the study revealed three main findings. Firstly, the faculties teaching hospitality and tourism subjects need significant improvement in their teaching methods, research works and qualifications. Secondly, there is a need for the hospitality and tourism curriculum to be re-evaluated and adjusted to meet the changing demands of the industry. Thirdly, the authors strongly encouraged hospitality institutions to incorporate the internship component into the existing curriculum and be more pro-active in seeking the industry's involvement in their education programs (Nguyen & Chaisawat, 2011).

It was not until 2018 that there is a second study on hospitality higher education in Vietnam. Using in-depth interviews, Le et al., (2018) explored the perceptions of hospitality industry professionals, academics and undergraduate students in Vietnam about hospitality tertiary education, as well as different factors influencing the effectiveness of this education system (Le et al., 2018b). The study highlighted three questions for further research: What is the current employment demand in hospitality industry in Vietnam? How are hospitality programs suitable for preparing students with hospitality careers? What is the reality for Vietnamese hospitality tertiary graduates when they enter the workplaces? (Le et al., 2018b).

Lastly, the most recent study on the topic of Vietnamese hospitality education was conducted to investigate factors affecting the collaboration between the university education and the hospitality industry in Vietnam, from companies' perspective (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). Through the research with the industry professionals working in hotels, restaurants and travel companies in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, the study revealed a positive relationship between the context factors and the benefit linking of collaboration, implying that both universities and hospitality enterprises should be clarified about the mutual benefits gained from this partnership. Moreover, both parties should carefully consider the size, reputation, and geographical distance of their partner to maximize efficacy and optimize students' learning experience from this collaboration. Leaders from both the industry and the university should leave enough



room for flexibility to solve any possible problems arising during the collaborative process (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020).

Taking Vietnam as the research context for an emerging destination, this study aims to address the following four questions:

Research question 1: What are the subjects offered in hospitality education programs at universities in Vietnam and reputable Asian universities?

Research question 2: How do industry professionals perceive the current education programs in Vietnamese hospitality universities in terms of preparing graduates with necessary competencies?

Research question 3: How can universities in Vietnam improve their hospitality management curriculum for undergraduate students?

Research question 4: What is the theoretical model that educators can utilize to develop an industry-informed curriculum at education institutions teaching hospitality at university-level?

The quality of employees contributes significantly to the overall profitability and customer satisfaction of hospitality organizations (Le et al., 2018b). Further research is needed to determine what the industry can do to help students acquire the necessary competencies, broadening their career opportunities after graduation and building the foundation for their long-term career growth (Batra, 2016). The findings from this study may sufficiently assist hospitality education providers to align their curriculum with industry requirements, hence, contribute significantly to the improvement of future hospitality graduates.

### **3 Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This study aims to construct a process for effective industry-academia collaboration that is applicable in hospitality tertiary education institutions in Vietnam. To achieve this aim, the researcher needs to have deep understanding on the perceptions and expectations of various stakeholders on two aspects: the quality of Vietnamese hospitality graduates; and collaborating practices between hospitality educators and their industry partners in Vietnam. Therefore, this study adopted a qualitative approach, with semi-structured interviews and document analysis as the key research methods. In addition to interviews with different stakeholders, document analysis on hospitality education programs' learning outcomes and competencies development was conducted to provide a more comprehensive picture of the current education landscape in Vietnam. The following chapter provides details of every methodological step involved in this study, including research approach, research paradigm, research design, data sample, data collection and analysis, goodness and trustworthiness, researcher positionality and ethical considerations.

#### **3.2 Research Approach And Paradigm**

##### **3.2.1 Research Approach**

Given the research questions in this study and its multi-disciplinary nature, a qualitative approach is considered to be more effective. This approach is appropriate to investigate a research problem that has been well studied quantitatively but lacks in-depth novel perspective (Kamble, 2022). Especially for the relationship between hospitality educators and industry professionals, whose educational focus is placed against monetary focus (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007), the qualitative research approach will allow more sensitive insights to be shared.

Even though qualitative methods tend to require more time, interpretation, and logical inference, this method offers a richer and more holistic picture of the issue investigated (Creswell, 2003). The primary benefit of conducting qualitative research is to achieve thick description, going beyond merely the surface of understanding, and exploring the behaviors' contextual meanings. While quantitative research methods focus on transforming data into numbers and answering the questions of scale, such as "how much" and "how often," qualitative research methods are usually preferred to understand in-depth relationships and meanings (Tracy et al., 2014). Therefore, a qualitative approach is the most appropriate approach to discover the research problems in this study.

##### **3.2.2 Research Paradigm**

Regarding the epistemological aspect of social science research in general, the most common norm is the researcher's assumption that knowledge in this world is socially constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This constructivist paradigm is strongly supported by qualitative research approach, wherein the

participants and the researcher co-create understandings, and results generalization is simply impossible due to specific context and time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Instead of starting the study with a theory such as post positivism, constructivism generates a theory inductively from the collected data. Constructivists believe in the assumption that individuals develop and seek understanding of their experiences in the world they live in, which are subjective and varied (Creswell, 2003). Under this research paradigm, people interpret results differently despite having gone through similar experience. Adopting this worldview, the research problem is assumed to have multiple realities that can be explored or reconstructed.

Given the multidisciplinary nature of hospitality industry, the researcher's goal is to construct meanings through the views of participants and specific contexts and backgrounds that shape their interpretations. This study draws the conclusions from the investigator's thinking and cognitive process by constructing meanings from the data collected via interviews with research participants and relevant documents. Thus, through the constructivism paradigm, researchers can position themselves in the shoes of participants and make sense of their understanding of the world (Creswell, 2003). Considering the exploratory nature of this study, investigating the research problems from the viewpoint of constructivists is an appropriate option. Following the constructivism paradigm, this study assumes a subjective epistemology, relativist ontology, and naturalist methodology (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), meaning that there are multiple realities existing in the natural settings where interviewer and interviewee both participate in the creation of understandings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

In social science research, various qualitative approaches have been developed: ethnography, narrative research, ground theory, case study research, and phenomenology (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For the purpose of this research, the implementation of multiple-case study approach appears to be the most suitable strategy to effectively answer the research questions. As a qualitative method, multiple-case study approach allows the researcher to explore multiple cases over a period of time by collecting in-depth information from multiple sources, including but not limited to documents, reports, interviews and observations. Researchers then create their themes and case descriptions report based on these cases (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this particular study, the researcher focused on hospitality undergraduate programs provided by tertiary institutions in Vietnam. Hence, the multiple-case study approach allowed the researcher to dig deeply into six hospitality undergraduate programs in the country. Not only does this approach help the researcher distinguish the differences and similarities between these programs, but it also provides more comprehensive understanding of the current hospitality tertiary education landscape in Vietnam.

To conduct an effective multiple-case study, the researcher included five key components as suggested by Yin (Yin, 2009). The following illustrates how these five components were incorporated in this study.

- The first component - Research questions (aim to address how/why questions): The key research question of this study is: How can hospitality tertiary education collaborate effectively with industry partners to construct an industry-informed curriculum?
- The second component - Clear research purpose: This study seeks to understand the extent to which industry's requirements are integrated into hospitality undergraduate programs in the context of an emerging destination as Vietnam.
- The third component – The unit analysis (which can also be understood as the focus area to be analyzed in the research): This study's unit analysis is hospitality undergraduate programs provided in public-owned, private-owned and international universities in two main cities of Vietnam.
- The fourth component - The link between research purpose and collected data: The researcher conducted data collection from various sources and analyzed them with consideration to the theoretical background and intended research questions.
- The fifth component – Criteria to interpret research findings: In this study, results were assessed via different criteria proposed in the conceptual framework produced after literature review.

Considering that the researcher is Vietnamese and a hospitality-tourism graduate, this study adopts an emic perspective to maximize the benefits gained from reflecting insiders' insights. Especially in qualitative approach, the active participation of the researcher in the whole data collection and interpreting process has been widely recognized for its significant benefits to the research (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The researcher, as a Vietnamese graduated from top hospitality universities in the world, with diverse working experience in both local and international environment, can bring substantial contributions from an "emic" perspective to enrich the research.

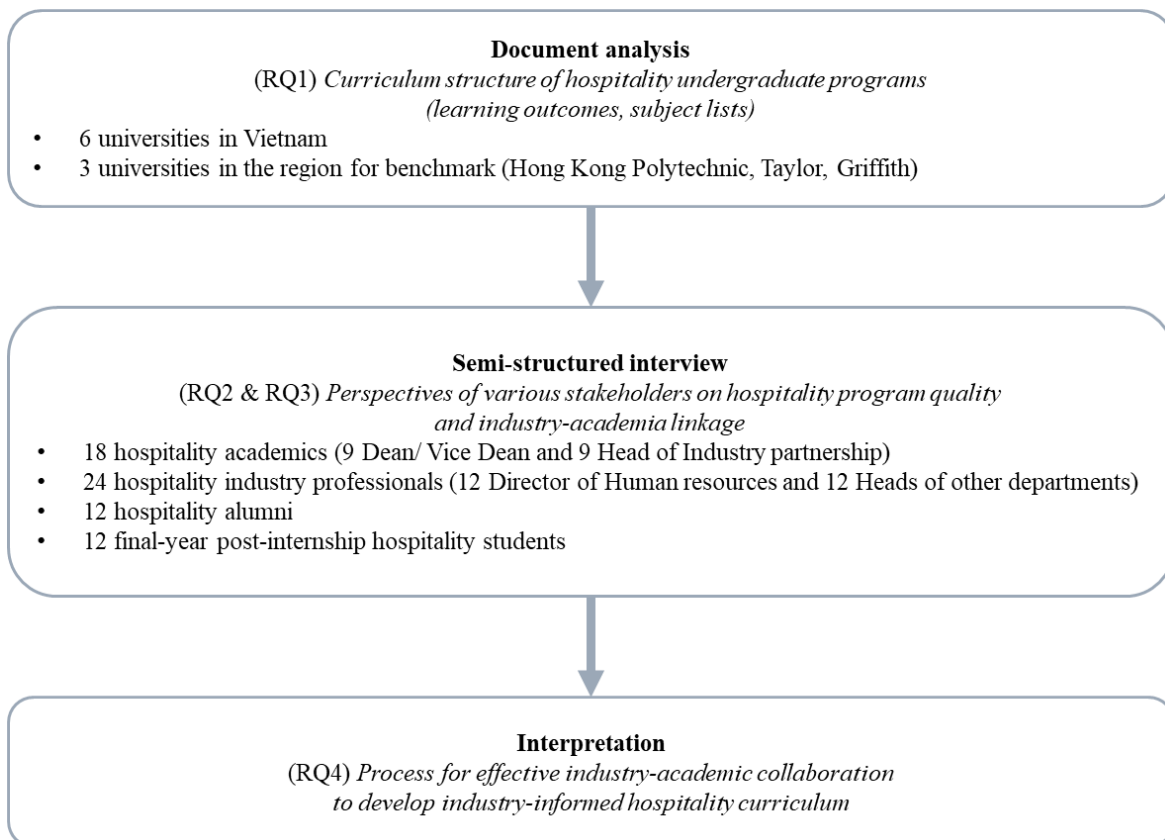
### **3.3 Research Design**

Under the qualitative research approach, data can be collected in various ways, such as interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis (Creswell, 2003). In this study, data collection is conducted by two methods. Firstly, document analysis method is used to analyze hospitality undergraduate programs in Vietnamese universities and top hospitality universities in the region for benchmarking purpose. This investigation seeks to understand the learning objectives and the combination of subjects offered to Vietnamese students in their undergraduate hospitality-management degrees. After that, to identify rooms for improvement, education programs from existing successful Asia-Pacific hospitality universities are examined to determine if these institutions also adopt similar strategies in their curriculum.

In addition to document analysis, the second data collection method used in this study is semi-structured interviews. This method is conducted with key groups of participants to understand the perception of the academia and the industry on the current undergraduate hospitality curriculum, as well as the quality of partnering relationship between these parties. Moreover, opinions from the alumni and hospitality final-year students are collected to provide a more comprehensive picture of the research problem.

Finally, with document analysis and the inputs collected from interviews with industry professionals, hospitality educators, and other stakeholders, this study analyzes the extent to which Vietnamese hospitality universities can adopt “best practice” strategies, as well as the obstacles faced by this industry in preparing a future pool of hospitality graduates that possess the skills required by the industry practitioners. An process for effective industry-academia collaboration is proposed at the end of the thesis. Figure 7 illustrates the research process of this study.

*Figure 7: Research process of this study*



### **3.4 Part 1 – Document Analysis (Hospitality Curriculum)**

#### **3.4.1 *Data Sampling And Collection***

##### ***Universities in Vietnam***

To enhance the representativeness of data sampling, this research aimed to investigate Vietnamese hospitality tertiary education at a nationwide level, by analyzing hospitality undergraduate programs provided by three different types of education institutions in Vietnam, including those offered by public state-owned, private-owned, and international universities operating in the country.

Due to the study's objective of improving Vietnamese hospitality tertiary education to satisfy industry's needs and reach international education standard, the selection of the country's most prestigious universities are considered to be the most appropriate population of the study sample. Firstly, these top universities are the ones most closely connected with established five-star hotels in the country. Secondly, they have substantial understanding and willingness to collaborate with international universities to improve their education programs. Many of these universities have shown efforts through partnerships with foreign education institutions to widen international network and enhance global recognition of their institutions (Tran & Marginson, 2019). However, Vietnam does not have an official reporting system for university rankings. As the difficulty in getting admitted to university is usually interpreted as higher quality, undergraduate students often use two main indicators: local intelligence and entry score, to evaluate the most appropriate higher education institutions to pursue their bachelor degree (Hazelkorn, 2009). Therefore, this study used admission requirements from universities' entrance exams as the main selection criteria because this data source is the only official trustworthy and comparable information available in Vietnam.

The selected hospitality tertiary institutions were decided based on three main criteria. Firstly, they are universities offering hospitality bachelor's degree with a focus on hotel management. Secondly, these universities need to consistently rank in top 3 in terms of their admission requirements in each category (VnExpress, 2022). Thirdly, they need to make available on their website detailed documents about the programs' learning outcome and subject lists for the public to access. Refer to table 3 for the list of top 10 universities offering hospitality undergraduate degrees for students in Vietnam.

*Table 3: Top 10 universities in Vietnam offering undergraduate degree in hospitality management*

|    | University                                           | Location | Ownership          | Entry points requirement |
|----|------------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| 1  | VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities     | Hanoi    | Public state-owned | 27.25                    |
| 2  | Hanoi University of Industry                         | Hanoi    | Public state-owned | 25.8                     |
| 3  | Thuongmai University                                 | Hanoi    | Public state-owned | 25.5                     |
| 4  | National Economics University                        | Hanoi    | Public state-owned | 25.25                    |
| 5  | University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City             | HCMC     | Public state-owned | 24                       |
| 6  | University of Finance - Marketing                    | HCMC     | Public state-owned | 23.75                    |
| 7  | Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City            | HCMC     | Public state-owned | 22                       |
| 8  | HUTECH University of Technology                      | HCMC     | Private-owned      | 21                       |
| 9  | Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance | HCMC     | Private-owned      | 18                       |
| 10 | Hoa Sen University                                   | HCMC     | Private-owned      | 16                       |

Due to the time, scale and accessibility constraints of this project, not every university offering this major in Vietnam can be included. Hence, the researcher optimized the representative aspect of this research by intentionally choose universities that are located in the two biggest cities in Vietnam (50% in Hanoi capital in the North and 50% in Ho Chi Minh City – HCMC in the South). Following Table 3 (not include international universities), the researcher contacted these education institutions and received approval from four of them. For international education programs, the consent to conduct research was obtained from two programs that originate from France and the United Kingdom, which belong to the Vatel Hotel & Tourism Business School (Vatel) and the British University Vietnam (BUV), respectively. Consequently, six reputable universities offering hospitality and tourism bachelor's degree were investigated (Table 4).

*Table 4: Universities offering undergraduate degree in hospitality management included in this research*

|   | University                                              | Operating model    | Location | Program name                                        |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | National Economics University (NEU)                     | Public state-owned | Hanoi    | Bachelor of Hospitality management                  |
| 2 | VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH) | Public state-owned | Hanoi    | The Degree of Bachelor in Hotel Management          |
| 3 | HUTECH University of Technology (HUTECH)                | Private-owned      | HCMC     | Bachelor of Hotel management                        |
| 4 | Hoa Sen University (Hoa Sen)                            | Private-owned      | HCMC     | Bachelor of Hotel management                        |
| 5 | British University Vietnam (BUV)                        | International      | Hanoi    | Bachelor in International Hospitality Management    |
| 6 | Vatel Hotel & Tourism Business School (Vatel)           | International      | HCMC     | Bachelor's degree in International Hotel Management |

For each investigated university, there is a bachelor program pathway offered to undergraduates who are interested in the hospitality industry. Among these programs, four of them have “Hotel management” nomenclature and two have “Hospitality management” nomenclature in their education program. Noticeably, both undergraduate hospitality programs provided by the international universities have the term “international” in their program name, emphasizing on the international aspect of their curriculum.

As can be seen in Table 4, the two international universities selected in this paper are the British University Vietnam (BUV) and the Vatel Hotel & Tourism Business School (Vatel). On one side, BUV is one of the pioneers in Vietnam who provide hospitality tertiary education at the global standard to Vietnamese young students. Originated from the United Kingdom, all education programs at BUV are developed and taught by international lecturers who meet the required credentials. On the other side, the Vatel program in Vietnam is a franchised education program from the Vatel Hotel and Tourism Business



School in France. Not only do they inherit the curriculum from Vatel France, but they also guarantee students having 70% of their study time focusing on practical experience and internship at upper-level hospitality properties.

To collect more comprehensive data, Alexakis and Jiang (2019) recommended the evaluation of learning outcomes of the education program. They argued that this approach overcomes the fact that the analysis of course descriptions may not be representative of all competencies gained by students because some soft skills (such as communication skill, critical and interpersonal skills) could have been integrated in other experiential learning sessions and potentially captured in the learning outcomes (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019). Whilst the analysis of learning outcomes provides a substantial understanding of expected academic results from educators' perspectives, the list of subjects offered to students helps determine if these existing programs are sufficient to equip students with necessary competencies to achieve the learning outcomes. Considering this factor, this study identified, categorized, and analyzed the learning outcomes and subjects lists that are currently offered in these hospitality programs. Materials to analyze were extracted from two separate document sources available on the universities' websites.

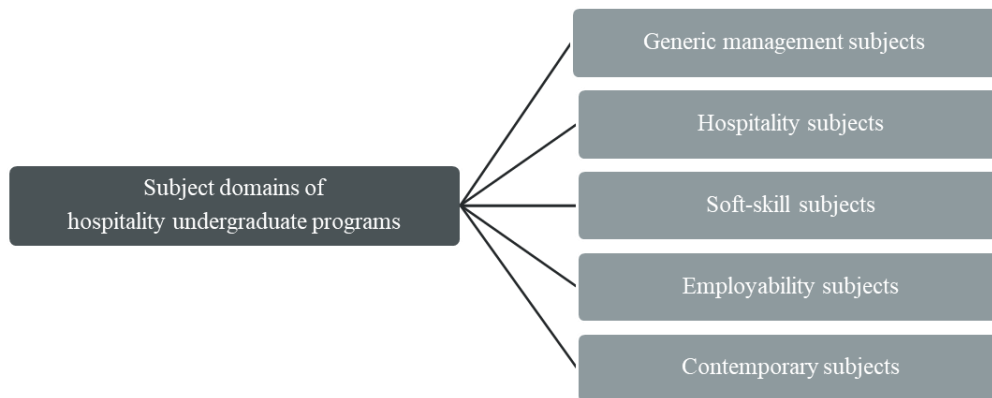
### ***Benchmark universities in the region***

Regarding the selection of “best practice” hospitality education programs in this study, top hospitality management universities in the Asia-Pacific region were chosen based on the QS ranking. This is a global education ranking system that assesses each university based on three criteria – academic reputation, employer reputation, and research impact (Top Universities, 2021) – which are factors that are critically relevant to this study. To minimize cultural differences, this thesis examined the subject lists of hospitality undergraduate programs provided by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (China), Taylor's University (Malaysia), and Griffith University (Australia). These universities have consistently ranked the highest in reports from 2018 to 2021 (Top Universities, 2021). Data on the undergraduate courses for hospitality students were provided to the researcher on the website of these universities.

#### **3.4.2 Data Analysis**

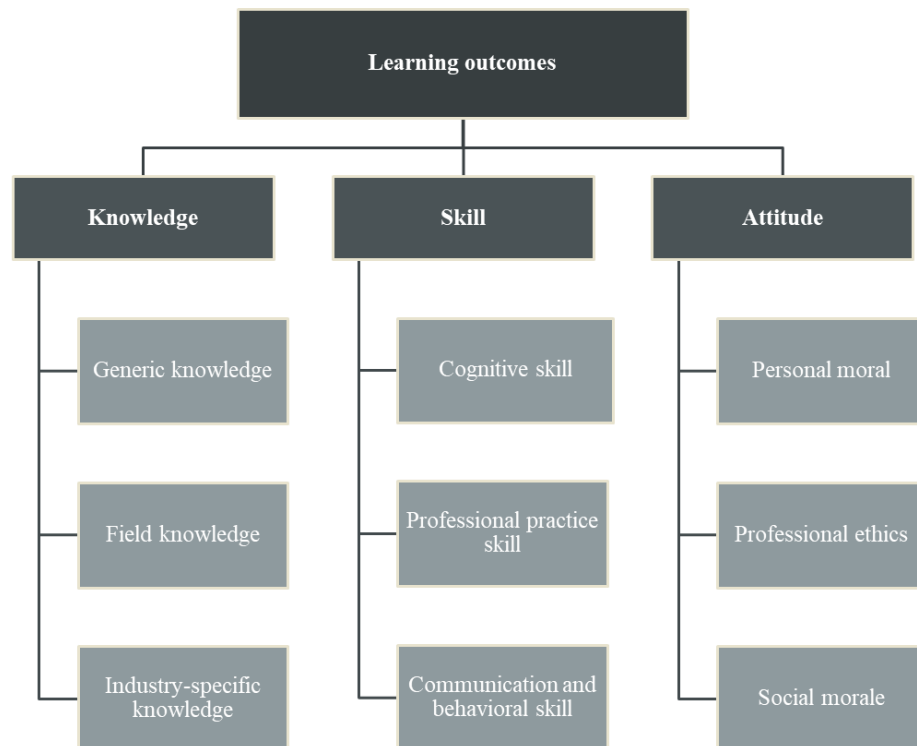
To investigate the competencies that hospitality undergraduate programs seek to develop for students, a list of subjects from the curriculum of all six universities was retrieved. After that, each subject was categorized under one key equivalent subject domain. Based on the subject lists, it was ascertained that hospitality tertiary students in Vietnam are educated on five domains: generic management subjects, hospitality subjects, soft-skill subjects, employability subjects, and contemporary subjects. Figure 8 illustrates the framework used to analyze subject lists of hospitality undergraduate programs for universities in Vietnam.

*Figure 8: Subject domains of hospitality undergraduate programs in Vietnam*



To analyze the program's learning outcomes, according to the Vietnamese Qualification Framework (VQF), there are three areas in learning outcomes that higher education needs to provide for students, including: knowledge, skills, and attitude (Vietnam Prime Minister, 2016). Hence, the structure used to analyze programs' learning outcomes in this study is presented in Figure 9.

*Figure 9: Learning outcomes structure of hospitality undergraduate programs in Vietnam*



Thematic analysis method was used to analyze the collected document from the nine selected universities.

### **3.5 Part 2 – Interviews (Hospitality Stakeholders)**

#### **3.5.1 Data Sampling And Collection**

Amongst the existing literature on hospitality and tourism higher education in Vietnam, there is one previous study that was conducted in Ho Chi Minh City to identify factors influencing the collaboration between the industry and the education sector, solely from the industry's perspective (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). In this study, to investigate the research problem more comprehensively, interviews were conducted with four major contributors: industry practitioners across the country, hospitality graduates, alumni, as well as hospitality educators who directly participate in designing and implementing the curriculum.

#### ***For academics***

In addition to the careful analysis of hospitality education programs in Vietnamese universities, the interview method can provide opportunities to dig deeper into the under-studied area of industry-informed curriculum management in Vietnamese hospitality tertiary education. Through interviews, the researcher can gain better understanding of respondents' experiences, motivation, and opinions, as well as the rationales and justification behind those answers, which are particularly valuable for acquiring information that is not presented in formal documents (Tracy et al., 2014).

To collect data, this study used semi-structured interviews, which are more organic and flexible in nature than their structured counterparts. Requiring less-structured questions and interview guide, this data collection approach may encourage more discussion about the issue, rather than dictate it (Creswell, 2003). While this spontaneous interview procedure allows more emergent and unexpected answers to blossom from respondents, the researcher is required to compare and analyze the conversations, which is an essential component of a complex research project (Tracy et al., 2014).

From an academic perspective, interviews were conducted with academics working in six selected universities in Vietnam from the document analysis stage (Table 4). These academics are the ones actively engaging in the development and implementation of hospitality education programs at their higher institutions. The aim of these interviews is to further explore the universities' collaborative relationships with industry partners, thereby determining whether their current practices are building an effective platform for the education-industry interface. This investigation focuses on checking whether investigated universities adopt all the key criteria extracted from the existing literature for a successful industry-university collaboration. The research participants from these universities are Course Developers and Heads of Industry Partnerships. While Course Developers are responsible for the overall quality of the education programs, the Heads of Industry Partnerships are experts who can provide insights on what universities are

doing to achieve a successful partnership with industry practitioners. Specifically, a purposive sampling method was conducted to reach the targeted participants, fitting the objectives of this study.

Regarding the three benchmark best-practice hospitality universities, preliminary research has found that these three universities have established strong collaborative relationships with their industry partners, hence, the inclusion of these three universities in the interview stage. Each of these universities have adopted its own distinctive strategies to hone the practical skills of their students, including but not limited to: seek industry inputs to develop and design courses, guest lectures, industry mentors, and practical placement (Griffith University, 2022; Taylor's University, 2022a; The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 2022b). While Taylor's University allows hospitality students to take over a real hotel to operate (Taylor's University, 2022b), the Hong Kong Polytechnic University has a unique teaching and research Hotel ICON, where students can participate in daily hotel operations in a fully integrated curriculum (The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 2022a). To balance out the mix of selected universities, this study also investigated the hospitality education program of Griffith University, which follows a more standardized method of integrating practical training into the curriculum and has consistently gained positive industry feedback on graduates' outcomes (Griffith University, 2022).

The researcher invited the academics to participate by contacting them through the contact details provided on the university's website (email address and phone number). Refer to Appendix A for the letter of invitation to hospitality academics (including Course Developers and Industry Partnership personnels).

### ***For industry professionals***

Besides the educators, to create an effective industry-academia interface, hospitality industry professionals are also major players. Due to the human-resources focus of this study, interviews were conducted with Directors of Human Resources of five-star hospitality establishments in Vietnam, where most hospitality graduates want to be recruited. This group of professionals can provide valuable insights as they are not only the ones most involved in cooperating with local universities, but also the first contact point of fresh graduates when entering the workforce. Moreover, with their responsibility to recruit new employees, the human resources department is well aware of all the job descriptions and competency requirements from every department in the hotel, which are crucial components of this study.

According to various methodological researchers, even though there are numerous factors influencing the exact number required for qualitative research (time and resources constraints, accessibility), twelve interviews are observed to be adequate to reach saturation for most research projects (Baker & Edwards, 2012), with core elements for meta-themes to be

identified in the first six interviews (Guest et al., 2016); hence, the inclusion of 12 respondents for this group of participants.

To gain a more thorough understanding of the industry's expectations, interviews were also conducted with 12 Department Heads with other expertise in hospitality industry, in addition to the 12 Director of Human Resources. These professionals are supervisors and the ones who directly interact with fresh graduates and interns during their internship program.

The chosen properties where these two groups work are diverse in management style and ownership model: local/international, and independent/chained properties.

To recruit industry professionals for this study, the researcher used a purposive sampling method to reach the respondents. For Human Resources Director/Manager, the researcher sent recruitment email to the email address of the Human Resources department of that property, asking the departmental representative to forward the email to their Human resources manager for further actions. The email addresses of the Human Resources department were those that were currently made public on each hotel's recruitment page on Facebook. For industry professionals, the researcher recruited directly through personal connection on LinkedIn and Facebook. The target sample was 12 Directors of Human Resources and/or training managers; and 12 Department Heads in five-star hospitality properties in Vietnam.

Refer to Appendix B for the letter of invitation to hospitality industry professionals (including Directors of Human Resources and Department Heads).

### ***For alumni and final-year students***

Finally, to examine the relevance of education programs from hospitality tertiary institutions in preparing work-ready graduates, the researcher conducted quick interviews with 12 hospitality final-year students and 12 university alumni, who have received their hospitality-management undergraduate degrees from the investigated universities in Vietnam. They are the ones who actually have the chance to put what they have learned from their hospitality universities into real-life practices in the industry.

The students participating in this study are graduating students in their last year who have undertaken their compulsory internships. For existing students, there might be a risk of dependent relationship if the academics directly recommend existing students to the researcher. To mitigate this risk, the researcher asked the academics to let the researcher join one of their sessions with final-year students. In that session, the researcher provided the research's details and seeks students' consent for participation directly.

For the alumni group in this research, participants are those who graduated within ten years, have extensive working experience in the industry, and can offer objective evaluations of the relevance of the hospitality curriculum. To recruit this group of participants, the researcher asked the academics to recommend those who have successfully graduated within ten years and have significant working experience in the industry. Snowball and purposive sampling allow the investigator to choose data that fit the objectives (Creswell, 2003). Refer to Appendix C for the letter of invitation to hospitality university alumni.

All interviews took place at a mutually agreed time and location between the interviewer and interviewees. However, as the interviews were conducted during the peak of COVID-19 in Vietnam, in case the participants preferred online interviews, the researcher provided the option for Zoom interview or email interview. This option was implemented to align with the Vietnamese government's resolution on COVID-19 prevention and control, which allowed COVID-19 patients to self-monitor at home. In fact, emergent media technology innovations, such as email interviews, enrich the collection of research tools available, instead of diminishing traditional research methods (Burns, 2010). Despite the fact that this data collection method will not replace face-to-face interviews, email interviews can establish its own position as an acceptable method in qualitative studies due to its unique advantages (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014). Not only does this method encourage more reflexivity by providing more time for respondents to reflect on their answers (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015; James, 2007), but it also gives the researcher more time to interpret collected data prior to asking more follow-up questions (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014). Consequently, scholars have confirmed that the data quality obtained via email interviews is of high-quality and essentially at the same level with face-to-face interviews (Meho, 2006), suggesting future research to optimize the great potentials of this data collection method (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015; Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014; Stacey & Vincent, 2011).

The consent to conduct interviews were obtained from all six universities in Vietnam. All participants, who agreed to participate in the research, signed the consent form before the interviews officially started. Refer to Appendix D for the sample consent form.

However, amongst the three benchmark universities, the willingness to participate in the interview was not received from any academics in Hong Kong Polytechnic University, despite the researcher's effort. Consequently, information regarding the university's collaborative practices with industry partners could only be collected from interviews with Taylor's University and Griffith University.

Compared to the targeted number of participants, the researcher was able to reach the targeted number and conducted interviews with all groups, except for two academics from Hong Kong Polytechnic

University and five university alumni. While 12 alumni from six universities in Vietnam were the initial target for this research, actual interviews could only be conducted with seven participants. Refer to Table 5 for summary of data samples collected for interviews.

*Table 5: Research participants for interviews*

|                    | Hospitality academics                                                         |                              | Hospitality industry professionals              |                     | Hospitality learners                               |                     |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Position           | Program Dean/ Vice Dean                                                       | Head of Industry partnership | Human Resources Director                        | Head of Departments | University Alumni                                  | Final-year students |
| No. of participant | 8                                                                             | 8                            | 12                                              | 12                  | 7                                                  | 12                  |
| Sources            | Selected universities from Phase 1 (6 universities in VN, Taylor’s, Griffith) |                              | Five-star hotels/resorts located across Vietnam |                     | Selected universities in Phase 1 (Vietnamese only) |                     |
| Method             | 40-60-minute interview                                                        |                              |                                                 |                     | 15-30-minute interview                             |                     |

To ensure the interview questions were not misleading, different interview guides were developed for each group of participants. Depending on the stakeholders' expertise, experiences and their involvement in hospitality higher education, a set of questions were separately designed to gain as much from participants' insights as possible. Please refer to Appendix E for the Categories of analysis and their theoretical references to develop interview guide for each group of participants (Sample is provided for Course Developers – Program Dean/Vice Dean).

Corresponding to the six groups of research participants as presented in Table 5, there were six interview guides developed for each group of stakeholders. Please refer to Appendix F for the details of interview questions for each group. For these interviews, the researcher maximized the use of open-ended questions to give respondents appropriate space to freely express their opinions. Before asking the interview questions, a brief introduction about the researcher, the topic and the purpose of the interview was

mentioned to help the interviewees be more prepared and comfortable. In total, the interviews with 59 participants were conducted during a period of nine months in 2022 and 2023. Amongst 59 respondents, 48 interviews were conducted via Zoom, 7 interviews were conducted face-to-face and 4 were conducted via email interviews. Included hospitality enterprises in this study are city hotels, beach resorts and hospitality companies across Vietnam. Refer to Table 6 for the details of hospitality enterprises identified for sampling in this study.

*Table 6: Summary of hospitality enterprises identified for sampling*

| Industry sector     | Location     | Enterprise feature                                                                      | # of enterprises |
|---------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| City hotel          | Hanoi        | 5-star international/chain                                                              | 4                |
|                     | Da Nang      | 5-star international/chain                                                              | 1                |
|                     | Ho Chi Minh  | 5-star international/chain                                                              | 4                |
|                     |              | 5-star local/ independent                                                               | 1                |
|                     | Can Tho      | 5-star international/chain                                                              | 1                |
| Beach resort        | Da Nang      | 5-star international/chain                                                              | 1                |
|                     | Nha Trang    | 5-star international/chain                                                              | 1                |
|                     | Phu Quoc     | 5-star international/chain                                                              | 1                |
|                     | Con Dao      | 5-star local/ chain                                                                     | 1                |
| Hospitality company | Hanoi        | Local owner companies (sign management contract with 5-star international hotel chains) | 1                |
|                     | Ho Chi Minh  | Local company providing hospitality-related services                                    | 3                |
|                     | <b>Total</b> |                                                                                         | <b>19</b>        |

For transcription's accuracy, all face-to-face and Zoom interviews were audio recorded with prior consent from the respondents. Each respondent's audio recording was manually transcribed by the



researcher. After that, the researcher listened again to all the audio recordings to review transcriptions' accuracy and double-check with respondents for any unclarified meanings.

### **3.5.2 Data Analysis**

Considering the research questions of this study, thematic analysis method has been utilized to analyze the collected data. This data analysis method is one of the most commonly used methods for analyzing and interpreting the meaning of qualitative data (Creswell, 2003) - a widely used approach in qualitative analysis that focuses on identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is highly adaptable and can be applied across various disciplines, providing an accessible yet powerful tool for uncovering rich insights from qualitative data, aligning with the author's aim of distilling complex information into coherent themes that can inform meaningful conclusions. Its capacity for capturing depth and complexity allows the researcher to move beyond surface-level observations to identify recurring patterns and deeper narratives, enhancing the interpretive quality of the analysis (Creswell, 2003).

Thematic coding involves systematically coding data to capture recurring ideas or narratives that are relevant to the research question. Unlike more rigid coding frameworks such as those used in grounded theory, thematic coding offers flexibility in its application and can be either inductive (letting themes emerge from the data) or deductive (guided by pre-existing theories or frameworks).

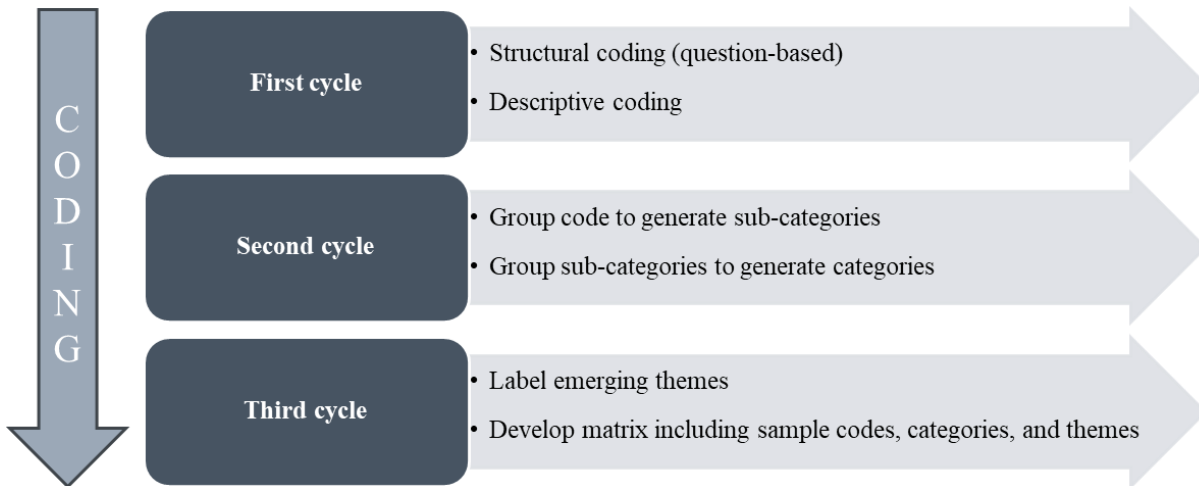
For this study, in addition to thematic coding, the researcher used the combination of deductive and inductive coding approaches. After conducting the data reduction stage of the qualitative analysis, the research objectives can be addressed through the creation of categories and themes. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to conduct an objective and systematic process of describing the research problems because the study has to follow a sequence of steps to ensure that all relevant materials are evaluated and consistently coded.

The systematic nature of thematic coding, particularly when supported by software like NVivo, allows researchers to document their analytical process clearly. This enhances transparency and replicability, ensuring that the findings can withstand scrutiny (Nowell et al., 2017). To effectively manage data during the entire course of the study, the researcher uses NVivo software to facilitate the process. This software was used to extract and reduce qualitative data (interview transcripts), as well as the analyzing tool to achieve the final results.

The researcher analyzed the data carefully, reading the transcript line by line in order to identify all emerging themes. This strategy is in accordance with Esterberg's recommendation to work closely with collected data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Predefined themes based on the research framework are used

to analyze the data obtained from participants. To effectively manage data during the entire course of the study, the researcher uses NVivo software to facilitate the process. This study used the combination of deductive and inductive coding approaches. Initially, the researcher started with the set of codes as in the research framework. Concurrently, new codes emerging from the collected data are also inductively included during the coding process. Refer to Figure 10 for the coding process in this study.

*Figure 10: Coding process of this study*



Firstly, the researcher started the coding process with structural coding method, in which the collected data is organized in a question-based data set. This coding method is particularly useful for research using semi-structured interviews that involve multiple participants (Hedlund-de Witt, 2013). After that, a descriptive coding method was utilized to assign appropriate labels to the data set. This process was conducted with each transcript separately. In the second coding cycle, similar codes were grouped together to form sub-categories and then, categories. In the last cycle, to identify common features amongst these categories, the researcher grouped categories amongst different groups of participants to generate themes. To illustrate the results and interpret effectively, various matrix of sample codes, categories and themes were developed, as will be presented in Chapter 6,7,8 of the thesis.

### ***Data triangulation***

To produce reliable qualitative research, data triangulation has been implemented in this study (Bowen, 2009). Using semi-structured interview with various stakeholders as the primary data, the researcher also compares the findings with official documents for further interpretation. The results from interviews were either challenged or confirmed by other data sources, which in this study, are official

documents from the government on higher education and documents on hospitality education programs from investigated universities.

### **3.6 Goodness And Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, due to the individual perception and background of each researcher, every research has an unavoidable extent of personal bias (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this study, the constructivism paradigm was adopted, enforcing the assumption that the world has multiple realities. Despite this acknowledgement, qualitative researchers are required to prevent themselves from imposing personal assumption. They need to demonstrate the credibility and trustworthiness in the research process, as they are the ones actively involved in making meanings from participants' perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Following Creswell's recommendation to include at least two strategies for qualitative research's trustworthiness, three key strategies were implemented to enhance the goodness and trustworthiness of this study. Firstly, data triangulation from multiple data sources was analyzed for results' credibility (Yin, 2009). Secondly, to maximize the representative aspect of collected data, this research included various stakeholders who come from different backgrounds and play different roles in the hospitality education environment. For the academics, interviews were conducted with those coming from three types of higher education institutions in Vietnam. For the employers, the researcher made sure to include the most dominant accommodation concepts in Vietnam, including city hotels, beach resorts and hospitality companies located across the country. Participated enterprises are diverse in target market, management style and ownership model. Thirdly, to enhance transferability and present "rich thick description" (Creswell, 2003), the researcher's stance as a Vietnamese, who have lived in Vietnam for a long time and have prolonged familiarity with the local language and culture, can significantly reduce misinterpretation arising from the research process.

#### ***Researcher positionality***

Under qualitative approach, the researcher's role as an ongoing active interpreter is prominent (Creswell & Poth, 2016). For this study, the researcher is a hospitality graduate, who has experienced as a student from reputable hospitality higher education programs from various countries. Besides academic knowledge, the researcher also has diverse working experience with the industry, particularly in multinational hotels, resorts and hospitality companies. During these years, the researcher has undertaken various roles - as an intern, a management trainee, a casual employee, and a full-time employee. Consequently, through an emic perspective, the researcher's previous working experience and educational background can enrich and contribute positively to the research process of this study. Research has

highlighted that the unique configuration and subjectivity of an individual can actually be virtuous, enabling the researcher to emerge in the data and make remarkable contribution (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Nevertheless, the researcher remains flexible and self-aware in order to limit personal bias whilst interpreting results. For any discussion in this thesis where the arguments are from an emic perspective, the researcher uses “I” to distinguish clearly between the researcher’s subjective perspective and other realities. This use of first-person pronoun in thesis writing will ensure readers can see the difference in research positionality, avoiding unintentional misinterpretation on research findings (Kamble, 2022).

### ***Ethics***

This study has received the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee of James Cook University (ID: H8671) and follows the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

Prior to conducting the data collection process, the researcher sent an invitation email to each targeted research participant. This email was attached with an information sheet about the study (Appendix G), a consent form and an interview protocol. The consent form includes information about confidentiality and privacy of data so that participants can make an informed decision before they consent to participate. As participants are people working in environments requiring sufficient use of English to communicate, their literacy level in English to understand the informed consent form is not a concern for this research. In the consent form, there are statements to make sure that participants are fully informed about their right to withdraw from the research at any time, as well as their right to withdraw any unprocessed data that was previously supplied to the study. There is no dependent or unequal relationship between any participant and the researcher.

Consent forms to participate were obtained from research participants before starting the interviews. The data was collected and stored in the form of audio-recordings (for interviews) and electronic copy (for curriculum-related documents and interview transcripts). The researcher is the one responsible for the security and access to confidential data and records, including consent forms, collected in the course of the research. Data and records are coded and non-identifiable.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter presents the qualitative research design and justifications for this approach in the study. The research comprises of two methods, document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Various components under each method were discussed, including data sampling, data collection, data analysis, goodness and trustworthiness, researcher positivity and ethics. The first part – analysis of learning outcomes and subjects provided in hospitality undergraduate programs – was conducted to answer Research question 1. In the second part, interviews to investigate expectations and perceptions of different stakeholders in hospitality tertiary education landscape in Vietnam was conducted to address Research question 2 and 3.

The interview method was conducted with key stakeholders in hospitality tertiary education, who are hospitality educators, industry professionals, hospitality alumni and students. The collected data from this study was analyzed using thematic analysis. Data triangulation was adopted to enhance the credibility of this research.

## 4 Chapter 4: Hospitality Education Programs In Vietnam – Subject Offerings And Learning Outcomes

### 4.1 Introduction

To produce an industry-informed hospitality curriculum, it is crucial that the current education landscape is well understood. To achieve this goal, the study investigated hospitality undergraduates' subjects and the education programs' learning outcomes in hospitality tertiary education institutions. Refer to Table 7 for the sources of documents collected for analysis in this study.

*Table 7: Sources of document collected for analysis*

| No. | Document about program information | Data extracted                              | Year produced  | Document extract date | Data sources   | University type  |
|-----|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1   | NEU                                | Program's learning outcomes<br>Subject list | 2021           | 4-May-23              | Website        | Public           |
| 2   | USSH                               | Program's learning outcomes<br>Subject list | 2019           | 4-May-23              | Website        | Public           |
| 3   | Hoa Sen                            | Program's learning outcomes                 | No information | 4-May-23              | Academic       | Private          |
| 4   | Hoa Sen                            | Subject list                                | 2020           | 4-May-23              | Academic       | Private          |
| 5   | HUTECH                             | Program's learning outcomes                 | 2022           | 4-May-23              | Academic       | Private          |
| 6   | HUTECH                             | Subject list                                | 2022           | 4-May-23              | Website        | Private          |
| 7   | Vatel                              | Program's learning outcomes<br>Subject list | 2023           | 11-Apr-23             | Website        | International    |
| 8   | BUV                                | Program's learning outcomes<br>Subject list | 2023           | 11-Apr-23             | Website        | International    |
| 9   | <i>Taylor</i>                      | <i>Subject list</i>                         | <i>2023</i>    | <i>11-Apr-23</i>      | <i>Website</i> | <i>Benchmark</i> |
| 10  | <i>Griffith</i>                    | <i>Subject list</i>                         | <i>2023</i>    | <i>11-Apr-23</i>      | <i>Website</i> | <i>Benchmark</i> |
| 11  | <i>Hong Kong Polytechnic</i>       | <i>Subject list</i>                         | <i>2023</i>    | <i>11-Apr-23</i>      | <i>Website</i> | <i>Benchmark</i> |

As two data collection methods were conducted for this research, this chapter provides findings from analysis on documents about the subject lists and learning outcomes of hospitality undergraduate programs provided in Vietnam. The chapter starts by providing key information of these selected programs

in Vietnam and the popularity of subjects listed in their curriculum. A comparison was also conducted with reputable programs in the region for benchmarking purposes. After having a good understanding of the subject offerings, research was conducted to analyze the learning outcomes of these education programs. All these findings lay the foundation for data triangulation with the results analyzed from interviews with various hospitality stakeholders, which will then be presented in subsequent chapters. Results from document analysis are presented below.

## 4.2 Program Information

This section provides key information about six hospitality undergraduate programs in Vietnam that were selected for this research (Table 8).

*Table 8: Hospitality undergraduate program information of universities in Vietnam*

|                                                  | NEU                                                                                                                                                                                                        | USSH       | HUTECH     | Hoa Sen | BUV            | Vatel          |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|---------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>Duration (year)</b>                           | 4                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 4          | 4          | 3.5     | 4              | 3              |
| <b>Language</b>                                  | Vietnamese                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Vietnamese | Vietnamese | English | English        | English        |
| <b>Accumulated Credits</b>                       | 129                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 133        | 137        | 123     | No information | No information |
| <b>Compulsory non-accumulated credit subject</b> | Marxist-Leninist Philosophy<br>Political Economics of Marxism and Leninism<br>Ho Chi Minh Ideology<br>Viet Nam Communist Party History<br>Scientific Socialism<br>Military Education<br>Physical Education |            |            |         |                | No             |

Regarding the duration of the program, there are four universities requiring students to complete their degree in four years. This four-year program duration belongs to the two public universities (NEU and USSH), one private (HUTECH) and one international (BUV) university. The shortest degree is provided by Vatel, equivalent to three-year full-time study.

Investigating the language of delivery, 50% of the programs are taught in English and 50% are taught in Vietnamese. Interestingly, with Hoa Sen University, although they are not international education institution, their hotel management degree is delivered in English, with a shorter duration (only 3 years and

6 months). This is six months shorter compared with undergraduate programs offered in other universities following the standard education program framework in Vietnam.

With regard to the number of credits required for students to graduate, HUTECH university has the highest number of credits requirements (137 credits). These selected universities, when compared, were found to have an insignificant difference in the number of credits students are required to accumulate during their undergraduate study. This is to note that the comparison is only applicable for public and private-owned universities, as no information was available about the credit requirements in programs offered by international universities.

While investigating the subject lists, in addition to the credit requirements, all public and private universities in Vietnam have to provide compulsory non-accumulative credit subjects as required by the VQF for higher education level. This list includes seven subjects, aiming to build the foundational understanding for Vietnamese students on political philosophies and perspectives, military, and physical education (Table 8). For BUUV, despite being an international university, they require students to complete these subjects. However, the school outsources the teaching of these subjects to external education providers. For the Vatel program, students are allowed to complete their undergraduate degree in the shortest duration (three years) because they are exempted from these compulsory subjects as stated by the VQF. This exemption does not seem to impact the employability of hospitality graduates upon graduation, as evidenced by the preference of hospitality employers in Vietnam to recruit students who were educated in an international environment, which are discussed in more details in the following chapters through interviews with industry practitioners.

### **4.3 Subjects' Popularity In Hospitality Undergraduate Programs**

#### **4.3.1 *Subjects In Vietnam***

To produce a future-ready workforce, hospitality students in Vietnam are educated on five subject domains: generic management subjects, hospitality industry-specific subjects, soft-skill subjects, employability subjects, and contemporary subjects (Table 9).



Table 9: Subject domains of hospitality undergraduate programs in Vietnam

| Generic management subjects | Industry-specific subjects      | Soft-skill subjects       | Employability subjects | Contemporary subjects |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Accounting                  | Consumer behavior               | Communication             | Career development     | Contemporary events   |
| Economics                   | Cruise management               | Creativity and innovation | Internship             | E-commerce            |
| Entrepreneurship            | Facility management             | Culture                   |                        | E-tourism             |
| Finance                     | Food & beverage                 | Ethics                    |                        | Globalization         |
| General business management | Hospitality business management | Language                  |                        | Informatics           |
| Geography                   | Hospitality sales               | Leadership                |                        | Sustainability        |
| Human resources management  | Hotel planning and development  | Negotiation               |                        |                       |
| Law                         | Hygiene, safety and security    | Project management        |                        |                       |
| Logics                      | Introduction to hospitality     | Strategic management      |                        |                       |
| Marketing                   | MICE                            | Writing                   |                        |                       |
| Psychology                  | Quality management              |                           |                        |                       |
| Research                    | Residential management          |                           |                        |                       |
| Research methods            | Resort management               |                           |                        |                       |
| Sociology                   | Revenue management              |                           |                        |                       |
|                             | Rooms                           |                           |                        |                       |
|                             | Service management              |                           |                        |                       |
|                             | Tourism                         |                           |                        |                       |

Under the generic management subjects, hospitality students are equipped with foundational knowledge on various aspects of the business world. In addition to the fundamental subjects in the business domain (economics, entrepreneurship, general business management, marketing), students also are provided various subjects to gain a substantial understanding of accounting/finance, sociology, psychology. Education in research methods and the ability to demonstrate independent research project work are also considered as important components of hospitality higher education.

After ensuring students have sufficient base knowledge about the business environment, hospitality educators place priority on nurturing essential hospitality industry-specific competencies for students. The list of subjects in this domain covers numerous sub-sections of the hospitality industry, where students not only develop their competencies in key areas (food & beverage, hospitality business management, rooms management); but are also educated on other supportive competencies in the hospitality industry (service management, resort management, hygiene and sanitation, safety, and security). Considering that hospitality is an industry within the tourism sector, students pursuing their higher education degrees majoring in hospitality are equipped with relevant knowledge in tourism management to obtain a comprehensive perspective.

To nurture students' competence in soft competencies, hospitality universities in Vietnam focus on the development of students' competence related to communication, cultural and ethical understandings, foreign language, leadership, and project management. Universities also design curriculum, in which students have to undertake their formal practice and compulsory internship successfully prior to graduation. Given the nature of the hospitality industry, students are required to possess hands-on experience on top of theoretical knowledge. Remarkably, to boost students' confidence to pursue their dream job and ensure they are well-aware of future career opportunities, hospitality students are taught subjects on career orientation and development. Lastly, universities integrate subjects such as e-tourism, e-commerce, and informatics in their curriculum, giving students the necessary initial exposure to the contemporary digital hospitality world.

In term of foreign language, the majority of universities consider English as the most important language that students need to be proficient in, as evidenced by the fact that all selected universities provide English subjects in various aspects as part of their hospitality education programs (Table 10).

*Table 10: Subjects provided to develop foreign language proficiency of hospitality students in Vietnam*

| Subject domain  | Subjects                                    | NEU | USSH | HUTECH | Hoa Sen | BUV | Vatel |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------|-----|------|--------|---------|-----|-------|
| <b>Language</b> | English 1,2,3,4                             |     |      | x      |         |     | x     |
|                 | English B1                                  |     | x    |        |         |     |       |
|                 | English for Academic Purposes               |     |      |        |         | x   |       |
|                 | English for Higher Education                |     |      |        |         | x   |       |
|                 | English for Hospitality 1, 2                |     |      |        |         | x   |       |
|                 | English for hospitality industry            |     | x    |        |         |     |       |
|                 | English for Tourism and Hospitality         | x   |      |        |         |     |       |
|                 | English Language Subject                    |     |      |        |         |     |       |
|                 | English Tourism                             |     | x    |        |         |     |       |
|                 | Foreign Language – English                  | x   |      |        |         |     |       |
|                 | Professional communication 1,2              |     |      |        | x       |     |       |
|                 | Foreign Language 2 (French/Chinese/Russian) | x   |      |        |         |     |       |
|                 | French 1,2,3                                |     |      |        |         |     | x     |

For Hoa Sen university, although the subject title does not contain “English” (named as “Professional Communication”), it is important to note that the medium of instruction in their program is English. Therefore, students pursuing this hospitality education program are still provided subjects to develop their competence in English.

After English, only hospitality students at two out of six universities are given the option to choose their second foreign language (Table 10). While NEU allows students to choose between French, Chinese and Russian, the Vatel hospitality program requires students to undertake French subjects. The rationale for the obligation to study French can be due to two main reasons. Firstly, many common culinary terms and hospitality jargons are in French, for example, entrée or a-la-carte. Secondly, this education program is influenced by the origin of the Vatel program, which has been franchised from the Vatel Hotel & Tourism Business School in France.

Besides French, explaining the selection of Chinese and Russian as recommended foreign languages for hospitality students, it can be seen that tourists from these two countries are the leading market in their respective continent who come to Vietnam. According to data reported by Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, prior to the global pandemic, in 2019, the Chinese market (around 5.8 million

tourists) was the most dominant group of international travelers from Asia visiting Vietnam, whilst the Russian market (around 646 thousand tourists) was ranked at the top amongst European countries (VNAT, 2019a).

Analyzing the focus of hospitality curriculum in Vietnam, the most common subject domains are accounting, food and beverage, human resources management, foreign language, law, marketing, and research (Table 11). All selected universities place great value on the importance of these competencies for the preparedness of future hospitality graduates. Interestingly, despite the practical nature of the hospitality industry, there is one university (BUV) that does not include internship as a compulsory component for undergraduates. In their program, internship is solely an optional activity that the school encourages students to do during their semester break.

*Table 11: Subjects provided in hospitality undergraduate programs in Vietnam*

| No. of universities                                                       | 6/6 universities           | 5/6 universities                | 4/6 universities            | 3/6 universities            | 2/6 universities               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Subjects provided in hospitality undergraduate programs in Vietnam</b> | Accounting                 | Hospitality business management | Communication               | Career development          | Consumer behavior              |
|                                                                           | Food & beverage            | Hygiene, safety and security    | Culture                     | Entrepreneurship            | Ethics                         |
|                                                                           | Human resources management | Informatics                     | Economics                   | Finance                     | Hotel planning and development |
|                                                                           | Language                   | Internship                      | General business management | Introduction to hospitality | Leadership                     |
|                                                                           | Law                        | Research methods                | MICE                        | Service management          | Politics                       |
|                                                                           | Marketing                  | Rooms management                | Psychology                  |                             | Project management             |
|                                                                           | Research                   |                                 | Tourism                     |                             | Revenue management             |
|                                                                           |                            |                                 |                             |                             | Sales                          |
|                                                                           |                            |                                 |                             |                             | Sociology                      |

|  |  |  |  |  |                      |
|--|--|--|--|--|----------------------|
|  |  |  |  |  | Strategic management |
|  |  |  |  |  | Sustainability       |

#### 4.3.2 Comparison With Benchmark Universities

In this section, hospitality undergraduate programs provided by universities in Vietnam are benchmarked with reputable programs belonging to well-recognized education institutions in the region, which are Taylor's University (Malaysia), Hong Kong Polytechnic (China) and Griffith University (Australia). Key information on the program details of benchmarking universities can be found in Table 12.

*Table 12: Hospitality undergraduate program information of benchmark universities*

|                                                                         | Taylor's (Malaysia)                                        | Hong Kong Polytechnic (China)                         | Griffith (Australia)                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Degree name</b>                                                      | Bachelor of International Hospitality Management (Honours) | The Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Hotel Management | Bachelor of Advanced International Tourism and Hotel Management (Honours) |
| <b>Duration (year)</b>                                                  | 3                                                          | 4                                                     | 4                                                                         |
| <b>Language</b>                                                         | English                                                    | English                                               | English                                                                   |
| <b>Accumulated credits</b>                                              | 120                                                        | 121-124                                               | 320                                                                       |
| <b>Compulsory subjects by Ministry of Education and Training (MOET)</b> | 5 subjects                                                 | 5 subjects                                            | No compulsory subjects                                                    |

For each benchmark university, there is one degree provided for students who are interested in hospitality and/or hotel management (Table 12). Noticeably, the Griffith University in Australia does not have a degree solely dedicated to hospitality management. The only undergraduate program emphasizing hotel management in this university has also been combined with tourism major.

To note, these three universities do offer the option for students to pursue the standard degree without “honour” component. However, for the purpose of this research, benchmark hospitality programs need to comprise of degrees having “honour” component, which represents the research components required for graduation in hospitality education programs. The rationale for this purposive selection is to ensure consistency for reasonable comparison with hospitality programs in Vietnam, of which all students are required to undertake the research project to successfully complete the program, as shown previously in Table 11. Especially for hospitality university graduates, employers expect these students to possess a range of high-level competencies, of which research competence and project management are key requirements (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019; Dredge et al., 2012). Those students who are capable of showing their ability to work independently and manage their own projects to reach completion can gain significant advantage from industry employers upon graduation (Huang et al., 2016).

Despite the various locations of benchmark universities where English may not be the mother tongue language, all hospitality programs are delivered in English. This finding highlights the globalization nature of hospitality industry, in which English is acknowledged as the universal language. To work in a multi-cultural environment, hospitality employers consider English as a determinant factor for graduates’ employability and look for students who are capable of using this language fluently (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019). Consequently, priority is usually given to hospitality students who undertook their bachelor degree using English as the medium of instruction, which is an assurance for students’ proficiency in this foreign language competence.

Regarding degree duration, similar as the Vatel program provided in Vietnam, Taylor’s University requires only 3 years, which is also the shortest studying duration. This is one year shorter than the other two programs from Hong Kong Polytechnic and Griffith Universities, as well as the majority of hospitality undergraduate programs in Vietnam.

Comparing the accumulating credits required for students to graduate, significant difference can be found between Griffith’s hospitality program (320 credits) and the other two programs (from 120 to 124 credits). However, comparison on this aspect can be invalid because each program is operated under the education system of different countries.

Lastly, investigating whether these benchmark programs have to include compulsory subjects mandated by the national MOET, it can be seen that the programs of Taylor’s University and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University also have to follow the national education framework, requiring students to undertake compulsory subjects, which is similar to the Vietnamese MOET’s requirement. Only the Griffith University, operated under Australian MOET, is not required to include any compulsory subjects in their

hospitality undergraduate program. Refer to Table 13 for the lists of compulsory subjects required by national MOET that benchmark universities need to follow.

*Table 13: Compulsory subjects by national MOET (of benchmark universities)*

|                                         | Compulsory subjects by national MOET                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Taylor's University</b>              | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social Innovation Project</li> <li>2. Hubungan Etnik/ Malaysian Studies</li> <li>3. Life Skills for Success and Well-Being</li> <li>4. Millennials in Malaysia: Team Dynamics and Relationship Management</li> <li>5. Tamadun Islam dan Tamadun Asia/Bahasa Melayu Komunikasi 2</li> </ol> |
| <b>Hong Kong Polytechnic University</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Human Nature, Relations and Development Subject</li> <li>2. Community, Organisation and Globalisation Subject</li> <li>3. Chinese History and Cultures</li> <li>4. Culture, Organizations, Societies and Globalization Subject</li> <li>5. Healthy Lifestyle</li> </ol>                    |
| <b>Griffith University</b>              | No compulsory subjects                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

As can be seen from Table 13, the lists of compulsory subjects of Taylor's University and Hong Kong Polytechnic University have certain similarities. Firstly, both countries (Malaysia and China) aim to equip students with a good understanding of the national culture and distinctive characteristics, as evidenced by subject "Malaysian Studies" (for Taylor's University) and subject "Chinese History and Cultures" (for Hong Kong Polytechnic University). Secondly, both countries require students to undertake subjects to upkeep their well-being and embed healthy lifestyle for sustainable career success, with subject "Life Skills for Success and Well-Being" and "Healthy Lifestyle". To enhance students' employability, the rest of the compulsory subjects mandated by the Malaysian and Chinese government focus on helping students obtain various generic soft skills that students may find useful, regardless of the career path they decide to pursue.

Compared to the lists of compulsory subjects mandated by Vietnamese MOET that mainly emphasize on building students' understanding on political philosophies and civic responsibility with the country (Table 8), this is a critical area that Vietnamese MOET need to reconsider and adjust to elevate the quality of the national workforce and increase students' employability after graduation.

#### 4.3.2.1 Core Subjects.

Analyzing the key learning outcomes of each subject offered by three benchmark universities, there appears some supplementary competencies that students may gain by studying these subjects, in addition to the core competency that each subject purposively aims to develop for students. For example, students who study subject “International Food and Beverage Management” will not only enhance their competence in Food and Beverage Management, but they will also have the opportunity to improve their abilities related to innovation, business, sustainability, quality management, service management, finance and marketing. To ensure students can catch up with the current practices, educators also provide knowledge about remarkable trends in the global Food and Beverage market.

Table 14 summarizes examples of subjects provided in three benchmark universities that cover contemporary trends happening in that specific area of hospitality industry.

*Table 14: Subjects provided by benchmark universities that covers contemporary industry trends*

| Subjects                                                           | Key competency                  | Supplementary competencies                                                                                         | Include contemporary trends |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Career Development                                                 | Career development              |                                                                                                                    | x                           |
| Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Hospitality, Tourism and Events | Entrepreneurship                | IT, innovation                                                                                                     | x                           |
| Financial Management in Hospitality Tourism and Events             | Finance                         | business, decision-making                                                                                          | x                           |
| International Food and Beverage Management                         | Food & beverage                 | innovation, business, sustainability, quality management, service management, finance, marketing                   | x                           |
| Managerial Concepts in Food and Beverage Operations                | Food & beverage                 | operation, safety and sanitation, quality management, creativity, strategic thinking, service management, teamwork | x                           |
| Business of Hospitality, Food and Leisure Management               | Hospitality business management | tourism                                                                                                            | x                           |
| Hospitality Asset Management                                       | Hotel planning and development  | real estate, asset management, ownership, operation, business, finance, economics                                  | x                           |
| Managing Human Resources in Hospitality Tourism and Events         | Human resources management      | entrepreneurship, creativity, teamwork, conflict management, psychology                                            | x                           |
| Managing Organizations in Hospitality, Tourism and Events          | Human resources management      | entrepreneurship, psychology, conflict management, teamwork                                                        | x                           |
| Technology Strategy in Hospitality Tourism and Events              | Informatics                     | data analysis                                                                                                      | x                           |
| Introduction to Hospitality, Tourism and Events                    | Introduction to hospitality     | tourism, events, entrepreneurship, psychology                                                                      | x                           |
| Hospitality Management & Leadership                                | Leadership                      | human relation, management, diversity, teamwork                                                                    | x                           |
| Hospitality Project Management                                     | Project management              | relationship management, conflict management, emotion regulation, business, culture                                | x                           |
| Resort management                                                  | Resort management               | customer behavior, service management, recreational facilities, design and development, teamwork                   | x                           |



|                                                        |                      |                                                                                                   |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Revenue Management                                     | Revenue              | data analysis, strategic management, teamwork                                                     | x |
| Hotel Distribution and Sales                           | Sales                | business, marketing, customer behavior, sales, human resources                                    | x |
| Delivering Service Quality                             | Service management   | entrepreneurship, innovation, feasibility, teamwork, conflict management, psychology, culture     | x |
| Strategic Management in Hospitality Tourism and Events | Strategic management | independent thinking, teamwork, culture                                                           | x |
| Social and Environmental Responsibility and the Law    | Sustainability       | law, independent thinking, tourism, events, customer behavior, service management, psychology     | x |
| Global Tourism Systems                                 | Tourism              | sustainability, culture, economic, sociology, politics                                            | x |
| Tourism, Travel and Technology                         | Tourism              | IT, hospitality                                                                                   | x |
| Tourism: China and the World                           | Tourism              | accommodation, food and beverage, entertainment, theme park, MICE, politics, economics, sociology | x |

Besides equipping students with fundamental knowledge in specific areas, as demonstrated in subjects' learning outcomes, graduates from hospitality education programs are given opportunities to improve their soft skills and attitude, of which some of the most common are critical thinking, innovative problem-solving, communication, life-long learning, ethics-leadership and sustainability mindset. Table 15 summarizes subjects provided by benchmark universities whose learning outcomes highlight various soft skills to be developed for students studying these subjects.

*Table 15: Subjects provided by benchmark universities that also nurture students' competence in soft skills*

| Subjects                                                                                                | Key competency              | Soft competencies<br>(Critical thinking, Innovative problem solving, communication, life-long learning, ethics-leadership, sustainability) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Hospitality, Tourism and Events                                      | Entrepreneurship            | x                                                                                                                                          |
| Introduction to Food and Beverage Operations                                                            | Food & beverage             | x                                                                                                                                          |
| Managerial Concepts in Food and Beverage Operations                                                     | Food & beverage             | x                                                                                                                                          |
| Managing Human Resources in Hospitality Tourism and Events                                              | Human resources management  | x                                                                                                                                          |
| Managing Organizations in Hospitality, Tourism and Events                                               | Human resources management  | x                                                                                                                                          |
| Technology Strategy in Hospitality Tourism and Events                                                   | Informatics                 | x                                                                                                                                          |
| Introduction to Hospitality, Tourism and Events                                                         | Introduction to hospitality | x                                                                                                                                          |
| Weddings, Festivals and Exhibitions: Organizing, Planning and Understanding Economic and Social Impacts | MICE                        | x                                                                                                                                          |

|                                                        |                      |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Hospitality Project Management                         | Project management   | x |
| Resort management                                      | Resort management    | x |
| Revenue Management                                     | Revenue              | x |
| Delivering Service Quality                             | Service management   | x |
| Strategic Management in Hospitality Tourism and Events | Strategic management | x |
| Ecotourism in Rural and Developing Regions             | Sustainability       | x |
| Ecotourism in the Community                            | Sustainability       | x |
| Social and Environmental Responsibility and the Law    | Sustainability       | x |

However, with hospitality education programs in Vietnam, there is no public information to be found about the learning outcomes of each subject included in the curriculum. Therefore, for consistent comparison, the data was analyzed based on the subjects' titles, which are representative of the core competency that students can obtain.

Comparing subjects provided for hospitality undergraduate students, both benchmark universities and universities in Vietnam emphasized the fundamental role of subjects related to: Food and Beverage; and Research (Table 16). These two subject domains are provided by all selected universities.

*Table 16: Subjects provided by all benchmark universities (versus universities in Vietnam)*

| Subjects provided by 3/3 benchmark universities | Currently provided in Vietnam |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Food & beverage management                      | 6/6 universities              |
| Research                                        |                               |
| Internship                                      | 5/6 universities              |
| Research methods                                |                               |
| Rooms management                                |                               |
| Service management                              | 3/6 universities              |
| Entrepreneurship                                |                               |
| Revenue management                              | 2/6 universities              |

To nurture research competency for students, subjects on Research methods are also included in the curriculum. Besides Food and Beverage, subjects on Rooms management are offered in hospitality undergraduate programs. Given the practical nature of hospitality industry, all benchmark universities value the importance of internship components. This educational strategy is also applied at five out of six universities in Vietnam.

Noticeably, while all benchmark universities recognize the value of subjects related to service management, entrepreneurship and revenue management in the hospitality industry, only two or three out of six universities in Vietnam provide these subjects to students (Table 16). This can be the key area that universities in Vietnam need to pay more attention to help the education programs reach international standard.

Investigating hospitality undergraduate programs, there are certain subjects that have been highly valued by educators, such as Human resources management, language, marketing, and hospitality business management (Table 17). However, to improve the hospitality curriculum, educators in Vietnam should consider the inclusion of certain subjects, which have been provided by two out of three benchmark universities. These subjects are related to culture, MICE, tourism, finance, introduction to hospitality, hotel planning and development, customer behavior, as well as operations.

*Table 17: Subjects provided by majority of benchmark universities (versus universities in Vietnam)*

| Subjects provided by 2/3 benchmark universities | Currently provided in Vietnam |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Human resources management                      | 6/6 universities              |
| Language                                        |                               |
| Marketing                                       |                               |
| Hospitality business management                 | 5/6 universities              |
| Culture                                         | 4/6 universities              |
| MICE                                            |                               |
| Tourism                                         |                               |
| Finance                                         | 3/6 universities              |
| Introduction to hospitality                     |                               |
| Hotel planning and development                  | 2/6 universities              |
| Consumer behavior                               |                               |
| Operations                                      | 1/6 universities              |
| Crisis management                               | 0/6 universities              |

## Data analytics

Interestingly, despite the vulnerability of hospitality industry and the prevalence of information technology nowadays, none of the selected universities in Vietnam have provided subjects on crisis management and data analytics for hospitality students. This result echoes the need for academics in Vietnam to review their education programs and update where necessary.

To summarize, the subjects' lists have revealed certain subjects that have been highly recognized by academics from both groups (Table 18). In addition to internship, subjects on key sub-areas of hospitality industry such as Food and Beverage and Rooms management are also included in hospitality undergraduate programs.

*Table 18: Core subjects of hospitality undergraduate programs*

| Core subjects developed by both groups<br>(provided by more than 50% universities) | Benchmark<br>universities | Vietnam |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| Food & beverage                                                                    | 3                         | 6       |
| Internship                                                                         | 3                         | 5       |
| Rooms management                                                                   | 3                         | 5       |
| Human resources management                                                         | 2                         | 6       |
| Language                                                                           | 2                         | 6       |
| Marketing                                                                          | 2                         | 6       |
| Research                                                                           | 2                         | 6       |
| Hospitality business management                                                    | 2                         | 5       |
| Research methods                                                                   | 2                         | 5       |
| Tourism                                                                            | 2                         | 4       |
| Culture                                                                            | 2                         | 4       |
| MICE                                                                               | 2                         | 4       |

Noticeably, the majority of universities from both groups value the importance of foreign language proficiency, research capabilities and competencies on Human Resources Management and Marketing. Proficiency in foreign languages and effective marketing strategies not only will attract customers around the globe, but it can also act as the connecting bridge between local staff with international travelers. These

interactions represent the inseparable characteristic of service as a product, in which services cannot be separated from the service providers. Given the labor-intensive nature of the hospitality industry, sufficient Human Resources Management competency is a necessity to control the quality of services delivered, leading to the successful co-creation of memorable hospitality experience.

Under the industry-specific subject domain, focus has been placed on Hospitality Business Management, Tourism, Culture and MICE. Taking into consideration the diversity of hospitality products and the potential career paths that hospitality graduates may pursue, a good preparation for students' knowledge in the business environment of hospitality industry, as well as related industries such as Tourism and MICE, can pave the way for sustainable professional growth of hospitality graduates.

Unsurprisingly, all selected universities aim to prepare sufficient research skills for students studying at higher education level. This finding reflects back to one of the key responsibilities of hospitality higher education institutions: to equip graduates with independent thinking abilities to sustain in their life-long learning journey (Lyu et al., 2016). Table 19 presents the subjects provided in both groups of universities in order to develop students' research competence and facilitating methods to conduct research.

*Table 19: Subjects about research and research methods (provided by both groups of universities)*

| Subject domains         | Subjects listed in hospitality curriculum |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| <b>Research</b>         | Capstone                                  |
|                         | Career Project                            |
|                         | Industry Research                         |
|                         | Graduation report                         |
|                         | Graduation thesis                         |
|                         | Honours Dissertation Part 1,2,3,4         |
|                         | Honours Thesis                            |
|                         | Research Design                           |
|                         | Research Project                          |
| <b>Research methods</b> | Analyzing and Interpreting Research       |
|                         | Economic statistics principles            |
|                         | Introduction to research methods          |
|                         | Introduction to Statistics                |
|                         | Introduction to Statistics for Business   |
|                         | Linear Algebra and Calculus               |
|                         | Qualitative Methods                       |
|                         | Quantitative Methods                      |
|                         | Research methods                          |
|                         | Research methods in tourism               |

|  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
|  | Socio-Economic research Methods    |
|  | Statistics for the social sciences |
|  | Systematic Literature Review       |
|  | Tourism Statistics                 |

#### 4.3.2.2 Low-Focus Subjects.

Comparing the subject lists of benchmark universities and universities in Vietnam, there are certain subject domains that are only provided by one or even none of the benchmark universities yet are provided by the majority of universities in Vietnam (Table 20). Interestingly, subjects dedicatedly developed to nurture students' competence in Law aspects are not provided by any benchmark university but are present in all selected hospitality programs in Vietnam. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that law aspects can still be covered as small topic within each specific context subject, just not as a separate subject.

*Table 20: Subjects provided by none or one benchmark universities (versus Vietnam)*

| Subjects provided by none or 1 benchmark university | Currently provided by majority of universities in Vietnam |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Law (0)                                             | 6                                                         |
| Accounting (1)                                      | 6                                                         |
| Hygiene, safety and security (1)                    | 5                                                         |
| Informatics (1)                                     | 5                                                         |
| Communication (1)                                   | 4                                                         |
| Economics (1)                                       | 4                                                         |
| General business management (1)                     | 4                                                         |
| Psychology (1)                                      | 4                                                         |

Reflecting from the analysis of benchmark hospitality programs, there are a few subject domains that are currently present in all programs in Vietnam but may consider to be excluded, which are subjects on Accounting, Hygiene, Safety and Security, Informatics, Communication, Economics, General business management, and Psychology (Table 20). These subjects are only offered by one out of three benchmark universities, which raises the question about the necessity to develop separate subjects for these competencies. Learning from current practices at benchmark universities, hospitality educators in Vietnam may consider taking the approach of integrating these subjects as small topics under hospitality-related

subjects, which may free up some curriculum space to include subjects that are more relevant for Vietnamese hospitality undergraduates.

Comparing the curriculum for hospitality undergraduates in Vietnam, it is noticeable that certain subjects are valued to be more significant in some universities than others (Table 21).

*Table 21: Subjects provided by only one hospitality undergraduate program in Vietnam*

| Subject provided by only one university in Vietnam | University |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Quality management                                 | BUV        |
| Facility management                                | Hoa Sen    |
| Contemporary events                                | Vatel      |
| Negotiation                                        |            |
| E-commerce                                         | HUTECH     |
| Resort management                                  |            |
| Cruise management                                  | NEU        |
| E-tourism                                          |            |
| Operations                                         |            |
| Residential management                             |            |
| Creativity and innovation                          | USSH       |
| Logics                                             |            |
| Geography                                          |            |
| Globalization                                      |            |
| Writing                                            |            |

The rationale behind the distinct subject offerings of each university can be due to the educational philosophy of the education institutions, the academic team's capabilities, as well as the home base in which hospitality departments are located within larger universities. Previous research has also confirmed that depending on the major of the school that hospitality department operates in (economics, recreation, business or geography), the curriculum content offered to hospitality students can be significantly different (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017; Scott et al., 2008; Sisson & Adams, 2013).

From the perspective of public-owned universities, NEU places their emphasis on some less-popular areas such as cruise management and all-suite buildings management, in addition to subjects on tourism in the digital age and effective operation skills. For USSH, with their historic background in social sciences and humanities education, the school provides subjects to develop students' competencies in knowledge management, geography, globalization, and academic writing skills. For BUW, competency about quality management is considered to be essential; hence, the development of the subject 'Quality Standard Management'. On the other hand, at Hoa Sen university (the Vietnamese privately-owned education institution), academics recognize the role of 'Facilities Management' as an important area in hospitality curriculum. For Vatel, the French education program, more focus is placed on keeping up with industry trends and nurturing students' negotiation skills. With private university HUTECH, the faculties value competencies related to e-commerce and resort management.

For benchmark universities, given their international reputation, each university provides a distinct focus, which can also be regarded as the unique selling point of each program. Table 22 presents elective subjects that are provided exclusively in each benchmark university.

*Table 22: Subjects provided by only one benchmark hospitality undergraduate program*

| Subject provided by only one benchmark university | University                       |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Luxury brand management                           | Taylor's University              |
| Airline management                                | Hong Kong Polytechnic University |
| Attraction management                             |                                  |
| Sports management                                 | Griffith University              |
| Supply chain management                           |                                  |
| Decision-making                                   |                                  |

Whilst the Taylor's University gives students exposure to Luxury brand management in hospitality industry, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University provides opportunities to study Airline management and Attraction management. For the Griffith University in Australia, their academics develop subjects on Sports management, in addition to other more generic domains of Supply chain management and Decision making. These unique offerings from each benchmark university can potentially catch the attention of high school graduates, therefore, effectively enhance the students' enrollment to these programs. Moreover, for students who decide to pursue other sectors that are out of the scope of the traditional hospitality industry, these subjects can create various opportunities to widen students' career prospects, leading to a significant



improvement in the employability rate of hospitality students upon graduation. These distinctive subject offerings is a significant plus point for these hospitality and tourism schools to impress not only prospective learners but also industry employers. This can be perceived as a remarkable advantage that hospitality curriculum belonging to a separate school (such as Taylor's and Hong Kong Polytechnic) can have over those programs operated under a broader business school.

To summarize, combining the hospitality education programs from all selected universities, each university does provide some distinct subject domains, which fall under three main categories. Refer to Table 23.

*Table 23: Unique subjects of hospitality undergraduate programs*

| Unique subjects offered by both groups<br>(provided by 0-1 university) | Benchmark<br>universities | Vietnam |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| Geography                                                              | 0                         | 1       |
| Globalization                                                          | 0                         | 1       |
| Logics                                                                 | 0                         | 1       |
| Negotiation                                                            | 0                         | 1       |
| Quality management                                                     | 0                         | 1       |
| Residential management                                                 | 0                         | 1       |
| Writing                                                                | 0                         | 1       |
| Contemporary events                                                    | 0                         | 1       |
| E-commerce                                                             | 0                         | 1       |
| E-tourism                                                              | 0                         | 1       |
| Decision-making                                                        | 1                         | 0       |
| Luxury brand management                                                | 1                         | 0       |
| Sports management                                                      | 1                         | 0       |
| Supply chain management                                                | 1                         | 0       |
| Airline management                                                     | 1                         | 0       |
| Attraction management                                                  | 1                         | 0       |
| Creativity and innovation                                              | 1                         | 1       |
| Cruise management                                                      | 1                         | 1       |
| Facility management                                                    | 1                         | 1       |

|                   |   |   |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Resort management | 1 | 1 |
|-------------------|---|---|

The first category comprises subjects providing supplementary knowledge that may be useful in the hospitality industry. Subject domains in this category are Geography, Logics, Negotiation, Quality management, Writing, Decision-making, Supply Chain Management, Creativity and innovation, and Facility management. These subjects prepare students with some distinctive competencies, which then can be used as their competitive advantage to compete with graduates from other majors and win favors from future hospitality employers.

The second category represents contemporary competencies to thrive in hospitality market nowadays, which include Globalization, Contemporary events, E-commerce, and E-tourism. Subjects in this category aim to equip students with a more comprehensive understanding of the current landscape and business environment that hospitality practitioners are operating in. These are the necessary subjects to ensure hospitality graduates are equipped with up-to-date knowledge and competencies to succeed in their future career.

The third category nurtures students' competence in sectors that are closely related to the hospitality industry, such as: Residential management, Luxury brand management, Sports management, Airline management, Sports management, Cruise management, and Resort management. These subject offerings open wider career opportunities for students pursuing hospitality undergraduate degrees, but may be interested in other career paths, potentially enhancing their employability and leading to higher job landing rates after graduation.

#### 4.4 Learning Outcomes Of Hospitality Undergraduate Programs In Vietnam

##### 4.4.1 Knowledge

Investigating hospitality tertiary education programs in Vietnam, it has been highlighted that the ‘knowledge’ learning outcome can be divided into three sub-categories: generic knowledge, business management foundation knowledge and hospitality industry-specific knowledge. To note, the generic knowledge domain does not apply to international universities because this knowledge is obtained by studying compulsory subjects by the VQF, focusing mainly on two areas: political principles, as well as social science and humanities.

Regarding the business management foundation knowledge, hospitality undergraduate programs have their foundation mostly in the business field, as demonstrated by learning outcomes related to business administration, entrepreneurship, and management science (Table 24). Noticeably, students are also equipped with knowledge about research methods and technology.

*Table 24: Learning outcomes (generic and business management foundation knowledge) of hospitality undergraduate programs*

| Learning outcomes | Generic knowledge                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Apply political principles into professional activities and research</li> <li>✓ Apply basic social sciences &amp; humanities knowledge in learning practice and research</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                   | Business management foundation knowledge                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Understand applied law in economics</li> <li>✓ Have business administration knowledge</li> <li>✓ Develop ideas and actions for business profitability</li> <li>✓ Attain knowledge of economic system</li> <li>✓ Have knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship</li> <li>✓ Analyze and evaluate management science knowledge</li> <li>✓ Apply research methods in learning and research</li> </ul> |

Under the hospitality industry-specific knowledge (Table 25), there is no dominant learning outcome amongst these education programs. However, certain learning outcomes are found to be more common than others, which are shared by two out of six selected universities. These learning outcomes

relate to knowledge about food and nutrition, hotel management, hotel marketing, hotel products, service control, sustainability tourism practices and tourism knowledge. While hotel management and hotel operations are more generic study areas, universities in Vietnam also pay significant attention to the importance of other sub-areas in the hospitality industry.

*Table 25: Learning outcomes (hospitality industry-specific knowledge) of hospitality undergraduate programs*

| No. of universities     | Learning outcomes (Hospitality industry-specific knowledge)      |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>2/6 universities</b> | ✓ Have knowledge about food, nutrition and organize food service |
|                         | ✓ Attain hotel management knowledge                              |
|                         | ✓ Have basic knowledge about marketing for hotels                |
|                         | ✓ Develop and determine target market for hotel products         |
|                         | ✓ Apply, control services quality control and management         |
|                         | ✓ Analyze, evaluate and apply sustainability tourism practices   |
|                         | ✓ Apply tourism knowledge in research and business activities    |
| <b>1/6 universities</b> | ✓ Have knowledge about different cultures                        |
|                         | ✓ Organize and manage events                                     |
|                         | ✓ Understand organizational structure of hotels                  |
|                         | ✓ Keep updated about hospitality trends                          |
|                         | ✓ Have knowledge about human resources management in hotels      |
|                         | ✓ Understand interdisciplinary knowledge in hotel business       |

The other less-mentioned learning outcomes, which are not commonly found amongst the selected universities are culture awareness, events management, organizational structure, and human resources management. Additionally, only one university emphasized ensuring students understand the interdisciplinary nature of hospitality industry, whilst informing them of significant contemporary trends in the industry.

#### 4.4.2 Skills

After students have been equipped with fundamental knowledge, the next step is to help them nurture necessary skills to thrive in their future hospitality career. Analyzing the ‘skill’ learning outcomes, two domains are investigated: cognitive and professional skills; and communication and behavioral skills.

In term of cognitive and professional skill (Table 26), students’ ability to think critically is deemed to be the most dominant learning outcome, of which five out of six universities aim to develop for students. The only university that does not mention this skill in their program learning outcome is Vatel program – the international program franchised from France.

*Table 26: Learning outcomes (cognitive and professional skill) of hospitality undergraduate programs*

| No. of universities | Learning outcomes (Cognitive and Professional skill)                      |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5/6 universities    | ✓ Think logically and critically                                          |
| 4/6 universities    | ✓ Apply theoretical knowledge in professional practice                    |
|                     | ✓ Ability to plan, organize, operate and control work activities          |
| 3/6 universities    | ✓ Develop, manage, operate and supervise business activities and services |
|                     | ✓ Use proficiently information technology applications                    |
|                     | ✓ Identify, analyze and solve problems                                    |
| 2/6 universities    | ✓ Analyze business performance indicators                                 |
|                     | ✓ Perform professional operations                                         |
| 1/6 universities    | ✓ Develop entrepreneurship ideas                                          |

After making sure that future graduates are able to think logically and critically, hospitality educators put the next priority on developing student’s ability to apply theoretical knowledge in professional working environment and to manage work efficiently. To help students catch up with the rapid growth and prevalence of technological advancement nowadays, information technology is a key area that educators are trying to prepare for their students.

Under the communication and behavioral competencies category (Table 27), the most important soft skill that is strongly emphasized by all selected universities is communication skill, followed by teamwork and presentation skill. This finding makes sense in the context of the hospitality industry, where service is the centerpiece, and travelers’ satisfaction can only be achieved through positive interactions with

service providers during the whole travelling cycle. The learning skills that promote integrated teamwork and effective communication between colleagues will not only enhance the guests' experience, but also ensure that any unexpected problem can be solved in a timely manner.

*Table 27: Learning outcomes (communication and behavioural skill) of hospitality undergraduate programs*

| No. of universities | Learning outcomes (Communication and behavioral skill)             |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5/6 universities    | ✓ Communicate effectively and professionally                       |
| 4/6 universities    | ✓ Ability to present students themselves and career-related issues |
|                     | ✓ Build and maintain effective teamwork                            |
| 3/6 universities    | ✓ Adapt and modify actions where necessary                         |
|                     | ✓ Able to use foreign language fluently                            |
|                     | ✓ Lead and coordinate individuals                                  |
| 2/6 universities    | ✓ Respect for diversity and cultures                               |
| 1/6 universities    | ✓ Create, develop and lead change                                  |
|                     | ✓ Handle and resolve conflicts                                     |
|                     | ✓ Write professional documents                                     |
|                     | ✓ Nurture teaching skills                                          |

Following communication, teamwork, and presentation skill, the fourth most essential soft skills for hospitality undergraduate students, as mentioned by three out of six universities, are students' ability to adapt, their foreign language proficiency and leadership skills. This finding is not surprising due to the nature of the hospitality industry, where employees interact regularly with international travelers coming from different countries in the world.

On the same note, to ensure effective communication, hospitality educators in Vietnam put effort on improving cultural understandings for their students to keep up with the rapid pace of globalization and the ever-increasing number of international tourists' arrivals into Vietnam. This finding reveals a fascinating context to continuously address the increasing cultural diversity in customers' profiles nowadays, highlighting the significance of enhancing these competencies in hospitality education programs. Along with cultural sensitivity, it is crucial that hospitality graduates possess the ability to use a

foreign language fluently in addition to their mother tongue. In this case, English is found to be the most commonly taught foreign language in universities in Vietnam. Noticeably, given the fast-changing nature of the hospitality industry, a small number of universities pay attention to other areas of soft skills, such as change management, conflict management, and professional writing.

#### 4.4.3 *Attitude*

Analyzing aspects of ‘attitude’ in the programs’ learning outcomes for hospitality undergraduate tertiary education, three categories are highlighted, including: personal moral qualities, professional ethical quality and lastly, social moral quality. This is to note that the ‘Attitude’ domain excludes international universities (BUV and Vatel), which do not follow the Vietnamese VQF.

As an independent individual, under personal moral qualities, each student is guided to nurture their learning spirit and eagerness for knowledge, both considered to be the foundation of a successful learning journey (Table 28). Future hospitality graduates also need to keep their integrity, remain honest and have confidence to perform professional activities. For long-term career success, educators also place great value on students’ hard-working attitude, healthy lifestyle, as well as other self-management virtues. These are necessary learning outcomes to ensure hospitality graduates are capable of behaving properly and growing sustainably in their life-long learning journey.

*Table 28: Learning outcomes (personal moral qualities) of hospitality undergraduate programs*

| NEU, USSH, HUTECH, Hoa Sen | Personal moral qualities         |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 4/4 universities           | ✓ Possess self-study spirit      |
| 3/4 universities           | ✓ Eager to learn                 |
| 2/4 universities           | ✓ Stay honest                    |
|                            | ✓ Have confidence at work        |
| 1/4 universities           | ✓ Have hardworking attitude      |
|                            | ✓ Practice healthy lifestyle     |
|                            | ✓ Overcome pressure at work      |
|                            | ✓ Form self-assessment skill     |
|                            | ✓ Maintain self-control          |
|                            | ✓ Plan and set goals for oneself |

Amongst the four universities that mentioned ethical qualities in the professional setting (NEU, USSH, HUTECH, Hoa Sen), the most fundamental virtues expected from graduates are found to be: work enthusiasm and work professionalism (Table 29). Additionally, to thrive in the globalized hospitality environment, hospitality graduates need to open their mindset to keep acquiring new knowledge, whilst demonstrating independence at work and presenting the spirit of service. These are essential qualities required by global hotel chains to upkeep the international standards of service quality consistently across countries. Noticeably, to help students quickly adapt with the working environment after graduation, hospitality universities also put effort on developing other positive traits for students, such as cooperation spirit, creativity, proactiveness, as well as their high-discipline and tolerant attitude towards others in professional setting.

*Table 29: Learning outcomes (professional ethical qualities) of hospitality undergraduate programs*

| NEU, USSH, HUTECH, Hoa Sen | Professional ethical qualities                          |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>4/4 universities</b>    | ✓ Enthusiastic about work and profession                |
|                            | ✓ Comply with professional manner, behavior and conduct |
| <b>3/4 universities</b>    | ✓ Update professional knowledge regularly               |
|                            | ✓ Have service spirit                                   |
|                            | ✓ Work independently in scientific and effective manner |
| <b>2/4 universities</b>    | ✓ Collaborate and negotiate effectively                 |
|                            | ✓ Be creative at work                                   |
| <b>1/4 universities</b>    | ✓ Maintain high discipline at work                      |
|                            | ✓ Show initiative in performing works                   |
|                            | ✓ Have sense of responsibility at work                  |
|                            | ✓ Have tolerant attitude towards others                 |

Under the social moral qualities (Table 30), universities in Vietnam are obliged to educate students on their ethical mindset and legal compliance, conservation practices for the country's natural and cultural resources, and civic responsibility for the nation.



*Table 30: Learning outcomes (social moral qualities) of hospitality undergraduate programs*

| NEU, USSH, HUTECH, Hoa Sen | Social moral qualities                             |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| 3/4 universities           | ✓ Obey the government's law and policies           |
|                            | ✓ Protect and conserve natural and cultural values |
| 2/4 universities           | ✓ Perform civic responsibility                     |

#### 4.5 Chapter Conclusion

Overall, the hospitality education programs provided by universities in Vietnam reflect a strong focus on equipping students with theoretical and practical knowledge to perform in the hospitality industry. This approach is consistent with the findings of Oktadiana and Chon (2017), suggesting the curriculum content of tourism and hospitality education includes a mix of managerial, practical, and conceptual subjects that are based on interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary epistemology ideas (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017). The results also show that there are opportunities for the curriculum in tourism and hospitality programs to be enhanced and improved.

This section begins by reviewing the results for the curriculum structure. The literature notes that whilst there has not been a consensus on the ideal hospitality and tourism curriculum, many educational institutions value subjects such as business, economics, marketing, finance, accounting, law, human resources management, information technology, foreign language, and behavioral studies (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017). Reflecting on these findings, the hospitality curriculum in Vietnam does offer business foundation subjects (Table 9). However, comparing with the reputable benchmark programs, hospitality programs in Vietnam offer more subjects on general business management and economics, which may not be that useful for hospitality graduates when they enter the workforce. Instead of providing students with general business knowledge, educators in Vietnam should consider enhancing for students the fundamental management knowledge specifically applicable in hospitality business environment, which will significantly improve students' confidence to pursue their future career in this service sector.

Regarding industry-specific subject domains, the hospitality curriculum implemented in the Vietnamese universities and benchmark universities in the region reveal certain similarities with programs in the United States (Chang, 2013), in which focus has been placed on Food and Beverage and Rooms management (Table 18).

Investigating the university's effort to equip accounting and finance competencies for hospitality undergraduates, while all programs in Vietnam include subjects on accounting for students, benchmark programs emphasize more on nurturing students' competency in finance, with only one university includes accounting subject in their program (Table 20). There seems to be a shift from educating hospitality students on specific accounting knowledge to more generic finance. This shift of focus is in accordance with Marneros's recommendation to consider finance analysis and management as a key competency that each hospitality graduate should possess (Marneros et al., 2021). On the other hand, in spite of the employers' acknowledgment on the benefits of accounting knowledge, hospitality students are not capable of performing well in accounting due to various factors, including repetitive teaching content that lacks practical relevance, poor quantitative skills, and biased attitudes amongst students (Goh & Scerri, 2016). These two reasons echo the need for Vietnamese hospitality educators to review this subject domain, enhance their teaching quality in these essential subjects, and to think of ways to deliver the subject that allow students to engage and perform well. Indeed, a recent study has promoted the effectiveness of learner-centered approach to the teaching of accounting (Pereira & Sithole, 2020). This approach can be suitable for hospitality students, given the nature of the hospitality work and characteristics of students pursuing these programs.

Research on another quantitative skill, a critical gap was highlighted between the level of revenue management knowledge and skills that academics are equipping for students versus the practices currently utilized in the field (Demirciftci et al., 2017). Recognized the increasing role of revenue management in hotel operations worldwide, all benchmark universities include subjects in this domain for hospitality undergraduates (Table 16). However, in Vietnam, hospitality educators in the country do not seem to pay enough attention to nurture this competency for students. This limitation could be partly due to the early developing stage of Vietnamese hospitality education, which do not have enough educators qualified to create teaching content and deliver this subject. This is where there is a great opportunity for universities to integrate hospitality practitioners into the design, development, and delivery of the curriculum.

Besides revenue optimization, hospitality graduates should consider information technology as key general transferable competency (Marneros et al., 2021). In Vietnam, hospitality higher education has also recognized the critical role of information technology nowadays. Noticeably, with benchmark universities, their hospitality programs have moved to data analysis, instead of the traditional information technology subjects (Table 17). Unfortunately, the development of analytical courses in Vietnam seems to not yet reach the position they deserve, as only courses related to research methods are to be seen in the curriculum at the moment. This finding again stresses the demand for hospitality educators to provide more in-depth and up-to-date courses on data analysis and information technology that are geared toward the industry's needs.

Along with soft competencies and vocational trainings, the hospitality tertiary education in Vietnam has recognized ‘critical thinking’ and ‘problem-solving’ as major learning outcomes that hospitality students should develop to thrive sustainably in their professional career. In fact, to improve high-learning skills, the key decisive factor is the motivation of each student to acquire knowledge, in addition to the efforts required from both the industry and the academics to establish a collaborative environment (Fraser, 2020). Consequently, hospitality universities in Vietnam place ‘possess self-study spirit’ as the most important personal moral quality that each student should nurture during their higher education journey. Hospitality tertiary institutions should help students achieve these skills as an effective tool for their life-long learning journey.

Given the vulnerability of hospitality industry and the recent COVID pandemic, students should be adequately equipped with crisis management competency. While two out of three benchmark universities have offered this subject, no subjects in this domain can be seen in the hospitality curriculum in Vietnam. Educators in the country are strongly encouraged to conduct research and develop an effective course to address this unneglectable competency nowadays.

Last but not least, an ongoing concern that has been prevalent in hospitality higher education is to equip future graduates with the industry’s realities. This is to ensure students are accurately informed when it comes to their career decisions (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019). Hospitality students are generally not confident about the career factors that are important to them, including various issues affecting their pay, working hours, job security, and promotion prospects (Richardson, 2009). This fact also seems to be true for hospitality tertiary students in Vietnam. Results show that only 50% of universities offer career development courses for hospitality students during their study (Table 11). By enhancing timely career-focused skills, educators can prevent the undesirable issue of students leaving the hospitality career when they graduate due to their serious disappointment with the industry’s realities.

To conclude, results reveal variations in hospitality education programs in Vietnam, with certain competencies found to dominate the curriculum content. Selected universities demonstrate their priority in developing students’ competence in three aspects (knowledge, skill, and attitude). Findings highlight an emphasis on hotel management and operation knowledge; ability to perform professional operation and think critically; communication and teamwork; learning spirit, adaptability. Six competency categories were found to be important: generic management competencies, industry-specific competencies, soft competencies, employability competencies, contemporary competencies and self-management competencies.

International benchmark universities emphasize equipping students with competencies that are highly relevant to the hospitality industry and its business environment. Therefore, to reach parity with international tertiary standards in hospitality education, consideration needs to be given to several subject domains. As core components, hospitality educators should include subjects such as Introduction to Hospitality, Hotel Planning and Development, Operations, Service Management, Consumer Behavior, Revenue Management and Crisis Management. The inclusion of these subjects in the hospitality education program will not only ensure graduates understand the distinct characteristics of the hospitality industry, but also help them obtain the necessary knowledge and skills to manage and thrive in their future career. For elective components, hospitality educators may introduce students with supplementary subjects to widen their career options after graduation. Depending on the resources and vision of each university, some of the suggested subjects to be included in the hospitality curriculum can be Luxury Brand Management, Airline Management, Attraction Management, Sports Management, Supply Chain Management, Entrepreneurship And Data Analytics.

## **5 Chapter 5: Evaluation On Current Hospitality Education Programs And Graduates**

This study aims to improve the hospitality industry- university linkage in emerging countries. To achieve this aim, the study investigated the opinions of major stakeholders on the quality of hospitality education programs at university level, as well as current collaborating practices between the industry employers and educators.

This chapter presents findings derived from Phase 2 of data collection (semi-structured in-depth interviews) to firstly, understand industry professionals' evaluation on the quality of fresh hospitality graduates in Vietnam, as well as the challenges employers witness university students were struggling with during their academia-industry transition. As graduates' quality are the outputs of an education program, in the next second section, this chapter analyzes the opinions of both industry employers and learners (including university alumni and final-year students) to understand the effectiveness of the current hospitality education programs at universities, laying the foundation for future improvement of hospitality curriculum.

### **5.1 Fresh Hospitality Graduates In Vietnam: Are They Ready To Work?**

Interviews were conducted with 24 hospitality industry professionals to understand their perception on the quality of hospitality graduates in Vietnam. Amongst this group of stakeholders, the participants are categorized into two sub-groups. The first group comprises of 12 key personnels responsible for hospitality Human Resources Management. The second group comprises of 12 people who are holding senior management position at hospitality enterprises. Demographic information of these two groups of participants are presented in Table 31 (Human Resources Personnels) and Table 32 (Hospitality Senior Managers).

These senior Human Resources professionals are from major five-star hotels and resorts located across the country, from tourism island, beach cities to major cities including Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (Table 31). Noticeably, all Human Resource personnel participated in this study, despite their high-ranking positions within the multinational hospitality establishment in Vietnam., Their training profile suggest that they spent all of their career working in Vietnam. Amongst Head of Departments positions in hotel, two other positions are usually occupied by Vietnamese. These positions are Director of Human Resources and Director of Finance as these positions are required to understand deeply the local laws and regulations. For this study, Human Resources Personnel were interviewed to share their insights about hospitality education programs, types of graduates that is required in the hospitality industry, as well as their contribution and expectation on the industry-university linkage.

*Table 31: Demographics of Human Resources Personnel participated in this study*

| Human Resources<br>Personnel ID | Hospitality<br>sector | Position                       | Trait                   | Location   | No. of<br>participants |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|------------|------------------------|
| H1                              | Hotel                 | Director of<br>Human Resources | 5-star<br>international | City       | 1                      |
| H2                              | Service               | Director of<br>Human Resources | Hotel owner<br>company  | Nationwide | 1                      |
| H3                              | Hotel                 | Director of<br>Human Resources | 5-star<br>international | City       | 1                      |
| H4                              | Hotel                 | Director of<br>Human Resources | 5-star<br>international | City       | 1                      |
| H5                              | Hotel                 | Training Director              | 5-star<br>international | City       | 1                      |
| H6                              | Hotel                 | Director of<br>Human Resources | 5-star<br>international | City       | 1                      |
| H7                              | Resort                | Director of<br>Human Resources | 5-star<br>international | Beach city | 1                      |
| H8                              | Resort                | Training Manager               | 5-star<br>international | Island     | 1                      |
| H9                              | Resort                | Director of<br>Human Resources | 5-star local            | Island     | 1                      |
| H10                             | Hotel                 | Director of<br>Human Resources | 5-star local            | City       | 1                      |
| H11                             | Hotel                 | Director of<br>Human Resources | 5-star<br>international | City       | 1                      |

|              |       |                                |                         |      |           |
|--------------|-------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|------|-----------|
| H12          | Hotel | Director of<br>Human Resources | 5-star<br>international | City | 1         |
| <b>Total</b> |       |                                |                         |      | <b>12</b> |

Besides Human Resources Directors, twelve senior hospitality professionals participating in this research are hospitality enterprises' founders, hotel/resort general managers and senior managers of other departments within hospitality operation, including Operations, Rooms, Food and Beverage, and Revenue departments (Table 32). The valuable insights and suggestions from industry professionals can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the employers' expectations on hospitality graduates, narrow the academic-industry gap, hence, pave the way to elevate the national hospitality workforce.

*Table 32: Demographics of senior Industry Professionals participated in this study*

| Senior<br>Manager<br>ID | Hospitality<br>sector | Position                                    | LOCAL/EXPATRIATE                        |                         | Location   | No. of<br>participants |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------|------------------------|
|                         |                       |                                             | International working<br>experience     | Trait                   |            |                        |
| I1                      | Hotel                 | Rooms<br>Division<br>Manager                | LOCAL                                   | 5-star<br>international | City       | 1                      |
|                         |                       |                                             | NO international<br>working experience  |                         |            |                        |
| I2                      | Hotel                 | Front Office<br>Manager                     | LOCAL                                   | 5-star<br>international | City       | 1                      |
|                         |                       |                                             | HAD international<br>working experience |                         |            |                        |
| I3                      | Service               | Assistant<br>Food &<br>Beverage<br>Director | LOCAL                                   | Hotel owner             | Nationwide | 1                      |
|                         |                       |                                             | HAD international<br>working experience |                         |            |                        |

|     |         |                          |                                                    |                      |            |   |
|-----|---------|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------|---|
| 14  | Service | Food & Beverage Director | LOCAL<br>HAD international working experience      | Hospitality service  | Nationwide | 1 |
| 15  | Service | Director of Operations   | LOCAL<br>NO international working experience       | Hotel owner          | Nationwide | 1 |
| 16  | Service | Founder                  | LOCAL<br>NO international working experience       | Hospitality service  | Nationwide | 1 |
| 17  | Service | Director of Revenue      | EXPATRIATE<br>HAD international working experience | Hotel owner          | Nationwide | 1 |
| 18  | Hotel   | General Manager          | EXPATRIATE<br>HAD international working experience | 5-star international | City       | 1 |
| 19  | Resort  | General Manager          | EXPATRIATE<br>HAD international working experience | 5-star international | Beach city | 1 |
| I10 | Hotel   | General Manager          | LOCAL<br>HAD international working experience      | 5-star international | City       | 1 |
| I11 | Service | Founder                  | EXPATRIATE<br>HAD international                    | Hospitality service  | Nationwide | 1 |



|                    |         |         |                                        |                        |            |           |
|--------------------|---------|---------|----------------------------------------|------------------------|------------|-----------|
| working experience |         |         |                                        |                        |            |           |
| LOCAL              |         |         |                                        |                        |            |           |
| I12                | Service | Founder | NO international<br>working experience | Hospitality<br>service | Nationwide | 1         |
| <b>Total</b>       |         |         |                                        |                        |            | <b>12</b> |

Amongst these 12 senior Industry Professionals, there are four expatriates who have had extensive working experience in different countries. For the eight local Vietnamese, four of them have had international working experience and four have not worked outside Vietnam. However, it is important to note that all these professionals have extensive working experience in multinational hotel chains based in Vietnam and have climbed the career ladder in these properties. Given the diverse demographics and training profile of this group of research respondents, the interview results with these senior industry professionals can provide a more objective and comprehensive evaluation of the local hospitality graduates and hospitality education programs in the country.

### 5.1.1 Employers' Assessment On The Quality Of Local Graduates

Industry professionals have mixed opinions on the quality of hospitality graduates from public, private and international universities in Vietnam (Table 33).

*Table 33: Industry professionals' opinions on graduates from 3 types of universities in Vietnam*

| University  | Public university                        | Private university | International university                                            |
|-------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
|             | Areas of students' competence evaluation |                    |                                                                     |
| <b>Pros</b> | good academic base                       | English            | English<br>industry-specific competencies<br>cultural understanding |
| <b>Cons</b> | English<br>(for majority universities)   |                    | discriminate operational position                                   |
|             | Graduates' attributes                    |                    |                                                                     |
| <b>Pros</b> | hard working                             | confidence         | confidence                                                          |

|             |                                                      |                                                |                                                                                         |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|             | patience<br>humble attitude<br>regulation compliance | open-minded<br>humble attitude                 | independence<br>logical thinking<br>open-minded<br>proactiveness<br>interpersonal skill |
| <b>Cons</b> | passive attitude<br>lack of confidence               |                                                | arrogance<br>impatience                                                                 |
|             | <b>Suitable future position upon graduation</b>      |                                                |                                                                                         |
|             | operational position                                 | administrative and management trainee position |                                                                                         |

According to the employers' evaluation, hospitality graduates from public universities in Vietnam have good academic knowledge. Based on the demanding admission requirement for high-school graduation exams, those enrolled in these public universities have clearly demonstrated their ability in academic learning. Noticeably, hospitality students from public universities are highly regarded in their attitude when entering the workplace. Employers recognize the efforts of these students to adapt, be hard-working and patient in the working environment.

For the public university, they get the good people first. [...] Most of the students are qualified because they need to have a good score to join the public one. (I1)

The attitude of the locals, the ones coming from public schools, is normally quite OK. (I8)

Students from public work harder (H6)

They have patience and their effort to improve their adaptability is quite good (H12)

On the other hand, students from international universities are widely acknowledged for their English proficiency, self-confidence, presentation, logical thinking and open mindset. Thanks to the international education background, employers also perceive these students to be more culturally sensitive. These positive traits allow them to actively approach employers for career opportunities and easily adapt to the multicultural working environment in five-star properties. It is revealed that international exposure and cultural understanding are two key competitive advantages of hospitality graduates coming from international universities.

They had a lot of time with the expat teacher, with the mindset from the West. (H8)

They also know and work well with their international people with different language or different English as well. That is a very positive thing about the International University. (H8)

With international students, we see that they are quite confident, and they can actively approach us by themselves. (H5)

Despite different positive attributes, students from international institutions show discriminative attitude against operational positions in hotels. Industry professionals criticized the arrogance of a portion of students coming from these universities. The impatient and over-confident attitude amongst this group of students and their parents lead to short career commitment when students actually enter the workforce.

I think the people who come from the international ones are a little bit overconfident. (H8)

International universities trainees prefer “administrative” over “operational” exposure. (H10)

The expensive university is full of parents who have a lot of money to send their kids to the expensive university, but they also don't want their kids to do the hands-on work. They expect their money goanna buy them straight into a director role when they come out of university without actually doing the work. (H9)

In the same aspect, employers witnessed different scenarios about career commitment amongst graduates from public universities. While some employers believed public university graduates tend to stay longer with the company, others criticized the low career commitment of these students, partly due to the insignificant tuition fees required from public universities, making students easily give up when facing any job difficulties.

Mostly, they stay longer with you. (H12)

When they study and they realize that it's not for me, it's so hard that I cannot go, I cannot wake up very early; they decide to quit this industry. It happens in the public university. (H8)

Comparing with private and international universities, the negative perception about public hospitality graduates is also dominant in regard to students' proactiveness, open mindedness, self-confidence and English proficiency. Only students graduating from top ranking public universities are deemed to have sufficient English skill to work in five-star international working environment.

For public university, student will stay quiet in the beginning. In the interview, you may not be impressed with the public university student. They are quiet and not proactive. (H12)

Talking about the quality of the students of the private and the foreign universities, their English levels and confidence is a little bit higher than the public. (H11)

Students coming from famous public universities like NEU, Hanoi Open Uni, FTU, they have good English skills. (H4)

For private universities, due to their young history and limited number of schools in the country at the moment, industry professionals expressed neutral opinions when asked to assess the quality of hospitality graduates from these universities.

To be fair, we don't have that many students from private schools yet. So, it's not totally objective to put them in the last position. (H5)

Private university in Vietnam is not much. Also, they haven't been there for quite a long time. (H2)

As a result of the above perceptions about hospitality graduates from three different types of universities in Vietnam, employers reveal their “secret” recruitment strategy for each of these groups. For graduates from public universities, employers tend to offer more manual-oriented positions, which requires the candidate's hard-working attitude and dedication to the work. On the other hand, positions in back office and management training will be prioritized for hospitality graduates from private and international universities. Based on the employers' evaluations, students from these institutions are sufficiently equipped with English and competencies in the administrative and managerial domains, which are crucial requirements for these types of positions.

If I'm looking for a management trainee, then the foreign or the private schools would be my choice. (H11)

For Back office, like sales and marketing, HR or finance, I think the international students to be better for those positions because of their languages and other skills. (H5)

### **5.1.2 *Graduates' Academia – Industry Transition***

From employers' perspective, regardless of the university students come from, fresh hospitality graduates generally face various difficulties when entering the workforce. Consolidating from insights gained through interviews with industry professionals in this study, Figure 11 presents the challenges that hospitality students often struggle with during their transition to the working environment. These challenges can be classified into six categories, including adaptability, soft skill, industry training, industry knowledge, working attitude and self-management.

*Figure 11: Challenges students encounter during academia-industry transition*

Firstly, employers witnessed students struggling to adapt to the working environment, which can be vastly different from the academic settings where they just spent the last four years. Specifically, hospitality graduates find it difficult to get along with colleagues and the corporate culture, rather than the job itself. Industry employers advise students to better understand the diversity of hospitality establishments that often comprise of various departments with different responsibilities. Moreover, the longer the hotel is on the market, the more diverse generations of workforce they have in the company. Therefore, finding a common voice and being able to communicate effectively with other colleagues is the first hurdle that fresh graduates should overcome.

We have a long culture which is 30 years on the market. The workforce in my company has different generation with the people. That is one of challenges for the communication between our generation to generation because of the way we coach. (14)

The first thing is the culture of the corporate environment. You've got different departments with different values. You've got different systems with lots of bureaucracy, complexity between people with different communication styles. [...] Finding your way around it is quite difficult. It's more about the people other than the actual system or the job tasks. (17)

In reality, each hospitality company has different policies and procedures that require fresh graduates to comply with while remaining flexible. Human resources seniors have noticed that the first two

weeks are often the most challenging time for hospitality students. If graduates can adapt and survive after the first two weeks, they gradually get used to the work and can feel enjoyment in their job. Therefore, in this initial yet crucial stage, the active role of educators and supervisors at the workplace are essential to help students overcome this adaptability challenge.

Normally within 2 weeks, or a month, depending on the quality of the graduate, they can match with the environment easily. But it's always the challenge from the first 2 weeks that they have to learn and adapt with the environments. (H11)

The challenge in the first two weeks and the mindset of I want to quit really happens a lot. If the student has somebody who is by their side, helping them and being their mentor or buddy, once they survive the first two weeks, then they can learn a lot and they can be really successful. (H1)

The second issue that hinders the development of hospitality students when entering the workplace is their improper working attitude and lack of self-management. Being at young age, a portion of fresh graduates in Vietnam underestimate the value of internship experience. Instead of taking this as a precious opportunity to expose themselves to reality and to make mistakes without being judged, some students do not take the internship time seriously. They choose the passive approach and decide to close themselves. Unfortunately for this group of students, proper working attitude is a decisive factor for employers to select the future talents that they want to invest time and efforts on developing.

The students who study in Vietnam University, they usually think that is not super important to take it seriously in their internship period. [...]. So that thinking prevents them from learning and developing. The most difficult thing is about the attitude. (H12)

Some take it seriously and do. Others drop out halfway through and stop doing. Some people you can help, some people you can't. (I9)

Under soft-skill competency category, employers perceive hospitality students in Vietnam to be not adequately prepared in skills such as communication, English, office skills and problem-solving. This finding is not surprising as the majority of these students were nurtured in a learning environment heavily focused on academic knowledge and lacking in-class practical modules.

I can see that the common one is communication. (I6)

Sometimes they are a little bit confused, they don't know what they should do. [...] So normally the trainees and fresh graduates don't know how to handle those cases. (I2)

Another challenge that employers have noticed in hospitality students during their first days at work is the shock about the physical demanding aspect of a hospitality job. Being in the service industry, students face unavoidable circumstances where they have to start their shift early, work overtime and stand on their feet for long hours. All these undesirable characteristics of hospitality job have really put strains on students' physical and mental capacity, testing their endurance and passion for the industry.

Long hours – in order for trainee and fresh graduates to get the max out of the hosting outlets, sometimes – long working hours required. (I10)

From small things like being able to wake up early for an early shift, it's really difficult for them. [...] And physically as well. With operational departments, they have to stand on their feet for 8 hours a day. So that put strains on their physics as well. They have to be really prepared both physically and mentally for the job. (H5)

To address this issue, industry professionals seek more support from educators to provide better career orientation for students in their lectures. Before entering the workplace, hospitality students should be well aware of the industry realities, career challenges and opportunities, as well as the industry's promotion ladders. A good understanding of these aspects will help students shape proper expectations, be more patient and consequently, enhance their career commitment.

They realize that the reality of hospitality is not as beautiful as they imagine, especially for students who take the internship in operation department. They have to stand long hours, face the workloads, handling guests' complaints. [...] Those are realities of hotel industry, not as beautiful as they image. That's something we need the support from the teachers and universities to fit the students with the expectation, not only jobs. (H4)

From the stance of a hosting company, employers admit to their insufficient on-the-job training for interns in certain circumstances. Although these industry professionals deeply understand the importance of initial proper training to help students adapt and maintain career passion, they blame the overcrowding seasons in hotel operation that prevent them from providing sufficient training. They also confessed that the quality of on-the-job training for interns is difficult to sustain, as it can be easily influenced by the different hosting outlets and training style of the assigned manager.

Sometimes the challenge is we're so busy that we cannot give those guys the support they need. Because the managers in the outlets or departments sometimes see those trainees more as a burden rather than a tool. (I8)

When the business is so busy and the interns arrive, we do not have the right person to help them with the first few days. They might feel disappointed or lose their confidence and their passion. The young people lose passion very easily, especially when this is their first intern environment. (H1)

Structured training approach (expected by trainee / interns) – though preferred in ideal situation, is hard to sustain consistently. [...] Quality / efficiency of training delivery varied based on hosting outlets / manager (depends on outlet operation, training style of hosting manager, etc.) (I10)

Despite several constraints that may hinder effective on-the-job training at hospitality enterprises, industry employers understand that they themselves need to try their best to mitigate this issue, as this is the crucial time for newcomers, who are also the future of the industry. If these trainings are not done properly, hospitality students will either choose another property to undertake their practical training, or worse, lose their career passion and leave the industry right after graduation.

I try to be very approachable. I asked my team to do the same. [...] If I cannot do it because I'm busy or have some other projects, I do assign a person that I know that will be take care and will train these people properly. I try not to leave anyone alone there in any department and try to avoid them feeling not care at all. That's the key point. (I11)

I have a lot of mentees from different university. Wherever they apply for internship, I normally recommend them to select the hotel with the proper training environment, rather than a famous brand. [...] Choosing the appropriate suitable environment is difficult. (I3)

To ease study-work transition, employers strongly encourage hospitality students to nurture certain competencies that will help them significantly after graduation (Table 34).

*Table 34: Competencies for students to overcome challenge when start working*

| Competencies help students overcome challenge when start working (industry professionals' opinions) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Generic competencies</b>                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General economic and business</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Industry-specific competencies</b>                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry knowledge</li> <li>• Service mindset</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Contemporary competencies</b>                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital e-commerce</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Soft competencies</b>                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptability</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Critical thinking</li> <li>• Decision making</li> <li>• English</li> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• Planning and organizing</li> <li>• Pressure handling</li> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Strategic thinking</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> </ul> |
| <b>Self-management competencies</b>                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional intelligence</li> <li>• Life-long learning</li> <li>• Patience</li> <li>• Resilience</li> <li>• Work-life balance</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Attitude</b>                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence</li> <li>• Humbleness</li> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Observing</li> <li>• Proactiveness</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                   |



|  |                                                                                               |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Result-driven</li> <li>• Willing to learn</li> </ul> |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Besides the general business knowledge, hospitality students should be equipped with industry-specific competencies. Especially in the contemporary market, industry professionals also highlighted the essential role of digital e-commerce competency, urging hospitality students to develop their competence in this domain prior to entering the workforce.

One of the key competencies these days is the ability to use digital tools. [...] If you already have basic knowledge about digital tools, then it's a good thing. (H5)

One more part is also the digital skill. Now, majority of the hotel are adapting to 4G digital [...] Our guests also love the technologies. So, for the students, they also have to adapt to the new technology. I call IT system savvy. (H11)

Despite students' efforts, employers understand that there will always be a gap between what hospitality students have learnt in school and what really happens in the industry. To minimize this difference, students are advised to stay adaptable and be open to change. Critical thinking skills and English proficiency are also two strengths that help hospitality graduates quickly understand the assigned jobs.

After graduation, it's always having the gap between the school when you study and the working environment. [...] Depend on each student, the gap is big or small. But adaptability will help you to close the gap between different environment. (H12)

I would say critical thinking. (I7)

Good English-speaking comprehension. (I9)

From the interviews, hospitality employers emphasize how interpersonal competency can make fresh graduates adapt to the service culture of this industry. However, Vietnamese hospitality students are perceived to be underdeveloped in this area. They demonstrate a serious lack of confidence when communicating in the professional working environment.

The most important competency is interpersonal skill. It's mostly about communication. But related a little bit to Vietnam, the communication skill of the student is lacking. Usually, they are too shy to ask the question, so it makes the communications process a little bit not successful enough for them. (H12)

In addition to self-confidence, hospitality graduates in Vietnam are also encouraged to develop their work independence at workplace. An independent working stance is particularly crucial for the hospitality industry, where each employee can have direct interaction with customers. Comparing to the Western culture, the problem of work independence is more alarming for hospitality students in Vietnam,

who have grown up with the traditional collectivism mindset, where individuals prefer to be followers in a group and are reluctant to stand up for themselves.

Another thing is dependability. It's quite critical for Vietnamese student. They will have a little bit concerned in the beginning. Mostly they are looking at their friends to do the same. But in a working environment, you have to have a dependability to make the decision for yourself. To deal with the guest is a very simple thing, but it needs dependability. (H12)

Noticeably, while hospitality employers encourage students to be independent and more confident, they also remind newcomers to keep a humble attitude at the workplace. This humble attitude will help students build good relationships with seniors, who can provide valuable guidance and support for students during their first working experience. Entry employees should bear in mind that each workplace has their own policies; hence, demonstrating a humble attitude and not being arrogant will be beneficial for their sustainable career development.

If the fresh graduates really want to become successful at first days, they need to be really humble and be the first one to start the conversation. [...] They should have the mindset of everything is a lesson for them to learn. (H1)

We have to be humble in order to obtain new knowledge from the senior people. We have to respect the rule, respect the company policy. (H10)

Especially for the younger generation, employers stressed the importance of being patient. Seniors in the industry raised concerns about the lack of career commitment and impatience amongst graduates belonging to Generation Z. Even though these industry professionals regard these attitudes as the undesirable social implications of the fast-changing world, they want fresh graduates to keep their pace and remain patient in their career development roadmap.

First, they need to be very patient with their colleagues, with their customer so that they can solve the problem, the relationship barrier they face. (H7)

Commitment and be patient. That will lead to the result. (H8)

Last but not least, to obtain valuable knowledge, fresh graduates should show their dedication and willingness to learn. Industry professionals highly value students who are hard-working and proactive, as this is how they can motivate their supervisors to provide better training at work.

As fresh graduate, they still learn a lot from the senior, so have to work hard. [...] They got the basis knowledge at the school, but theory and practical related is a big difference, especially if they choose to study to work in international five-star level. They have to show eagerness to learn. (H10)

To me, when they arrive on the first day, how they can be proactive in communication, or in the way that they ask their superior to dedicate their work or can train them how to get along with the job. So, it's more about proactiveness. (I6)

Especially for students who graduated from hospitality universities with limited practical facilities, but aim to work in five-star establishments, a strong demonstration of active learning willingness will effectively let them access the training they deserve, hence, minimize the theory-practice gap.

## **5.2 Hospitality Education Programs In Vietnam: Pros And Cons**

### **5.2.1 *Opinions Of Industry Employers***

Generally, industry professionals noticed the substantial improvement in the quality of hospitality education programs provided by universities in Vietnam. Compared to five or ten years ago, employers recognize and appreciate this positive movement in the higher education landscape. However, they also expressed their concerns in various aspects that hinder the advancement of these programs.

Firstly, the current curriculum offered to hospitality students is excessive on general academic knowledge. Especially for the limited duration of an education program, these subjects occupy precious time in the curriculum, which could be more effectively used to educate students on industry-specific competencies and practical components.

Secondly, industry professionals criticized the theory-practice imbalance and outdated curriculum provided in universities. This is blamed to be one of the reasons hospitality education programs in Vietnam cannot reach the international standards. Given the fast-changing pace of the hospitality industry, employers strongly encourage educators to increase the curriculum review frequencies, therefore, minimize the gap with industry realities.

Right now, the universities mainly offer academic knowledge. (I2)

There needs to be more focus on the key competencies needed. (H6)

The education system here is still based on the old system of many years ago. [...] That's a big problem. I think the educational system will need to improve more, up to the 21st century where we are at the moment. (I11)

The local hospitality programs here are not yet where they should be compared to the international markets. (I8)

Further into this aspect, industry professionals revealed their opinions on the difference in the quality of hospitality undergraduate programs provided in three types of higher education institutions in Vietnam. For public universities, although their efforts to diversify activities for students have been more noticeable, industry employers remain discontent with the way these universities respond to industry feedback, as well as the outdated teaching method they use to deliver knowledge. In regard to theory-practice balance, students from public universities are given less time to do internship during their study. This limitation resulted in insufficient mental preparedness amongst public hospitality students when they actually enter the workforce after graduation. Therefore, to free up the curriculum space, industry

professionals advocate for the exclusion of compulsory subjects required by the government, but not much relevant to the hospitality industry.

They do not have enough time for the internship. What they have been taught in schools are still a lot of mandatory programs from the government, which is not really relevant to this industry. (H1)

Given the fact that lecturers are the heart of any education programs, this is another area where significant differences can be seen between three types of universities. For public universities, lecturers from these universities are perceived to be lacking in industry experience and international exposure, which negatively affect their teaching quality, leading to unsatisfactory quality of graduates. However, industry professionals also expressed empathy for the difficulties that these educators face, requiring them to operate in a learning environment where resources are limited. The shortage of teaching faculties and their low income in public universities are detrimental factors contributing to the slow improvement of this education sector.

The teachers here in public universities never left Vietnam. So, their teaching point of view limits different knowledge and less data. That results in the quality of graduates in public universities. (I11)

In public universities, sometimes, teachers are teaching subjects that they have never studied before. That number of teachers is not enough and not very well paid. Sometimes they have to multitask to look at the different topics, resulting in poorer education for students sitting in those classes. (I11)

In contrast, for private and international universities, from the employers' perspective, thanks to their strong financial conditions, these groups of universities have sufficient resources to recruit more qualified lecturers. While private universities attract lecturers who have higher degrees (master and PhD), international universities get access to lecturers with international background. The diverse exposure and industry knowledge of these educators can bring powerful competitive advantages to hospitality graduates from these universities.

Private universities charge higher fees to the students and to the parents that they are paying for their studies there. They have access to more PhD and more master degree teachers. This brings more knowledge and better education like other universities where they can barely have teachers with a university degree. (I11)

International university has knowledge and expertise from other countries. They come here to show some samples. (I11)

Surprisingly, examining the official academic qualification of hospitality lecturers teaching in public, private and international universities in Vietnam, the perception of industry professionals is not precise. From the information about lectures' qualification collected on universities' websites, in term of academic formal qualification, it can be seen that hospitality faculties from public universities hold the highest academic degree (mostly PhD), followed by faculties from international universities, and lastly,

private universities. Refer to Table 35 for the details of hospitality faculties' academic qualification working in investigated universities of this study.

*Table 35: Academic qualification of faculties in hospitality and tourism department  
in investigated universities in Vietnam*

|                                                                      | NEU                 | USSH               | HUTECH             | Hoa Sen             | Vatel   | BUV                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------|--------------------|
| Number of faculties                                                  | 16                  | 6                  | 7                  | 18                  | No info | 6                  |
| Number of Master/<br>PhD degree holders                              | 3 Master/<br>13 PhD | 1 Master/<br>5 PhD | 3 Master/<br>4 PhD | 15 Master/<br>3 PhD | No info | 2 Master/<br>4 PhD |
| Formal education in Hospitality                                      | 8                   | 1                  |                    |                     |         | 4                  |
| Formal education in Tourism                                          | 5                   | 5                  |                    |                     |         | 1                  |
| No formal education in<br>tourism/hospitality                        | 2                   | 0                  |                    |                     |         | 1                  |
| <i>No info about specific major of<br/>formal education received</i> | 1                   | 0                  | No info            | No info             | No info | 0                  |

However, out of the six universities, the researcher could only find the detailed information from three universities (NEU, USSH, BUV) on the major that academics from these education institutions pursued ( $16+6+6=28$  academics). Noticeably, amongst these 28 academic staff from the three universities, only 13 staff ( $8+1+4=13$ ) are actually qualified in teaching hospitality. Even though some of the subjects included in hospitality degree can be taught by tourism faculty; for certain subjects related to hospitality operations, it remains a challenge for lectures who did not receive formal education in hospitality management to teach those subjects, especially if they also have no working experience in hospitality industry. Consequently, this phenomenon raises concerns about the quality of delivery and teaching of hospitality industry-specific subjects in these hospitality education programs.

Comparing the education provided for hospitality students from three types of universities, another noteworthy aspect is in-school facilities for practice. Especially for a practical industry as hospitality, an adequate investment in these facilities can provide an effective platform for students to implement what they have learnt in theory into practices. Not only does this instant practical experience allow students to engrave the theoretical knowledge deeper, but it also significantly boosts their excitement, therefore, enhancing their learning spirit in the program. While private and international universities have done their job on this aspect, public universities do not have the required funding to invest in these practical facilities.

Unfortunately, their students have to suffer the time lag, to wait until they can go for their allocated internship to apply learnt knowledge into practices.

They build the hotels in the university. (I3)

If compared between the public and the international one, the international ones are still a little bit higher than the public, because the training fee is very high, so they have more chance to invest in the facility. (H2)

Noticeably, employers express their recognition on international universities' efforts to enhance graduates' employability and industry networks. To support students land in their dream job, international universities provide various career consulting and supporting services, equipping students with career-related skills, such as how to do a job search, how to write a curriculum vitae and how to prepare for job interviews. These are all essential skills that will be beneficial for students' career development in the long term.

They have students support service or career consultants who can help their students to prepare for CV or interviews. [...] I think the good thing with international school is that they have extra support for students to prepare them in advance, CVs, interview skills. (H5)

The teachers are still following up with the students to help them. So, it's different. (H1)

Employers also appreciate how educators from international universities maintain communication with students even after graduation, when they already enter the workforce. This caring attitude is an extra yet critical factor contributing to students' smooth transition from university to the industry settings. The difference between the lessons students have learnt at school and the real industry practices is evident. Therefore, the continuous follow-up from hospitality educators will provide the emotional support that fresh graduates are desperate for, especially after they just graduated and start getting used to their first full-time job at the workplace.

### **5.2.2 *Opinions Of Learners (Alumni And Students)***

For a comprehensive understanding of hospitality education programs in Vietnam, interviews were conducted with 7 hospitality alumni and 12 final-year students to examine their evaluation on the quality of the programs they pursued, from learners' perspective.

Table 36 presents the demographic information of university alumni who participated in this study. From the perspective of learners who have graduated and gained a certain amount of industry working experience, the opinions of university alumni provide a more objective assessment on the effectiveness of hospitality education programs in Vietnam. They are an unneglectable group of stakeholders whose contributions can act as the bridge to connect hospitality educators and the industry practitioners, therefore, significantly improve the quality of the current curriculum offerings.

*Table 36: Demographics of Hospitality Alumni participated in this study*

| Alumni ID    | University for undergraduate study | Location         | No. of participants |
|--------------|------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| L1           | Public                             | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| L2           | Public                             | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| L3           | Public                             | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| L4           | Public                             | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| L5           | Private                            | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| L6           | International                      | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| L7           | International                      | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| <b>Total</b> |                                    |                  | <b>7</b>            |

In general, alumni from public universities acknowledge the improvement in the quality of hospitality education programs, as well as the opportunities provided by these universities if students want to pursue higher education. Nevertheless, they are unsatisfied with the lack of industry-focused subjects in these programs. The knowledge and skills provided to students pursuing hospitality undergraduate degrees from public universities are not enough if students choose hospitality career after graduation. An alumna from one public university complained about the overemphasis on tourism subjects despite the fact that she was undertaking a hospitality degree.

In-depth hospitality business knowledge can rarely meet. (L3)

We only took two to three subjects related to hospitality. [...] It's not enough for me if I want to focus on the hospitality career in my future. (L4)

Therefore, alumni and final-year students from public universities suggest the inclusion of more hospitality business subjects. The current offering at school is too generic, making it difficult for them to transfer knowledge acquired into the hospitality workplace. Students also hope for more subjects on soft-skills training, especially in regard to self-management, in order to nurture their mental and physical endurance in the future career.

There is a general law discipline, but it is not very effective. [...]. When I hear colleagues talk about taxes, things about stamping, the general law subject of the school does not provide knowledge about those issues. (S4)

The school should open up more options for softer skills because I feel that soft skills, especially self-managing emotions while working, are very helpful for students to go out confidently. (S2)

Table 37 presents the demographic information of final-year students who are pursuing their hospitality undergraduate degree and agreed to participate in this study.

*Table 37: Demographics of Hospitality Final-year students participated in this study*

| Final-year student ID | University for undergraduate study | Location         | No. of participants |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| S1                    | Public                             | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| S2                    | Public                             | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| S3                    | Public                             | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| S4                    | Public                             | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| S5                    | Private                            | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| S6                    | Private                            | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| S7                    | Private                            | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| S8                    | Private                            | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| S9                    | International                      | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| S10                   | International                      | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| S11                   | International                      | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| S12                   | International                      | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| <b>Total</b>          |                                    |                  | <b>12</b>           |



Compared with public universities, students who graduated from private and international universities are satisfied with how their degrees are focused on hospitality-specific knowledge, from foundational to advanced level. Graduates from these programs are confident with the hospitality knowledge they gained during their study. Students also appreciate the efforts of their lecturers to incorporate different practical activities into the curriculum. The industry-relevant subjects and practical exposure have equipped them with a realistic understanding of the industry.

Basically, it is very good. [...]. It's just focused on hospitality. They exclude what is not needed for the industry. (S9)

The program provided a lot of professional knowledge and skill about hospitality. There are a variety and realistic subjects and activities to improve my abilities. (L7)

On the other hand, students from international universities expressed their concern on the continuous expansion of universities. Although the university may invest more in practical facilities and infrastructure, a rapid increase in the number of students' enrollment can put detrimental pressures on the hospitality faculties. Not only does this expansion strategy force the academic team to teach over their capabilities, but it also affects the programs' training consistency. As lecturers are required to conduct more teaching hours with a larger number of students in each class, they are left with limited time to reflect on teaching improvement and enhance industry engagement, resulting in a significant drop in teaching quality.

The school keeps expanding, the lectures there are not that many to cover those many students. [...] That's why I hate what they're doing to us and to the teachers. Teachers don't want to teach things that they know they don't know how to teach. And students don't want to learn from people whose ability is not enough to teach us. (S11)

There is a lot of change in the three years I study there. (S10)

In this regard, hospitality graduates from public universities remain doubtful about their lecturers' ability to catch up with the industry knowledge. They are not content with the balance between theory and practice of the programs they pursued. Not only are in-class practical modules not exciting, but the allocation of three-month internship is also deemed insufficient for them to get a good grasp of the real working environment. In some public universities, educators provide the option to pay an additional fee to join industry-exposure sessions for some subjects. However, the cost of these activities is perceived to be too expensive.

The practice sessions weren't too exciting, either. It may be because practice facilities have not been invested. [...] I see the lack of balance between theory and practice. (S1)

We have one term for internship. However, I can say that one semester for internship is not enough for working in the hospitality industry. (L4)

Noticeably, graduates from public universities admit to their low level of English, which seriously impacts their confidence and career opportunities to join international five-star hotel establishments. They fully hope educators to enhance the teaching quality of English subjects in public universities, as the proficiency in this language is a fundamental requirement from hospitality employers across the country.

I believe teachers have to teach in English specialized terms because students haven't really equipped until now. (L1)

They are afraid to communicate with customers because they are not confident in their language ability. The quality of foreign language training at school is not effective enough to meet high-end working environments. (S2)

In term of the school's networking to provide exchange and employment opportunities, some graduates show positive feelings to the support they received. Nevertheless, students from international universities expect more support, as they are not satisfied with how the campus in Vietnam does not have such strong network, as compared to campuses in other locations.

The school also gives me the opportunity to go to many countries in China, Japan. [...] The school created maximum conditions, especially the relatively good connection network. [...] My community is open for sharing. (L1)

Vatel Vietnam's network isn't as strong as the foreign as well. (L6)

Unfortunately, career orientation aspects have been overlooked in some universities, calling for immediate attention. Educators need to understand the consequences of inadequate career orientation impacting students' long-term career development.

One thing I find very lacking is that when starting my major, there are no initial career orientations. At this university, people are self-taught, self-manage and then will have contact to apply for internships. (L1)

In fact, students reveal several negative perceptions about hospitality career after entering the workforce. The internship experience has made them recognize various difficulties in realities at work, as well as how physically demanding the hospitality job can be. Although the educators might have equipped students sufficiently with a service mindset, some students may not possess the suitable physical endurance. Unlike many other industries in which employees can sit at the desk, work with computers during the standard nine-to-five schedule, majority of working positions in hospitality industry require employees to work in shifts, with long standing hours and demanding customers' requests. These unfavorable working conditions motivate students to find an alternative career solution, such as to pursue different career goals, either in the back-of-house departments of hospitality industry or change to a different industry where physical strength is not a requirement.

I realized hospitality does have a lot of difficult things that are not suitable for me like: The environment is very dynamic, but it's also a very hard-working environment. You will not get to rest a lot. It's not good for my health. You got to meet lots of people. It's good to meet people, but I'm not really into meeting so many people. (S11)

At first, I also know that this industry will communicate with guests a lot, or generally serve guests, but when I enter, I feel it is very extreme and hard work, so if I do not try, it will be easy to get discouraged and give up. (S7)

For alumni who have been working in the industry for a few years, they conveyed their negative perceptions about the vulnerability of the hospitality industry, which can easily be affected by any change in society. The typical examples that happened recently are the COVID pandemic and the economic crisis resulting from this global health problem. They also complained about the low salary and slow income growth pathways in the hospitality industry. This factor is a key issue that leads to job dissatisfaction and demotivates workers to choose hospitality as their long-term career.

The income is low compared to my initial expectations. Low incomes and income growth pathways are also quite low. Compared to other service industry such as banking, finance, insurance, the income rate increases much faster. (L3)

On the positive side, one of the frequently mentioned benefits of undertaking real work experience is helping students identify their career goals and boost personal self-development. Graduates feel that they can conceptualize their dream career path more clearly when they actually enter the workforce, despite the previous career orientation provided by lecturers at university.

Help me realize what my current job is and what I need if I want to pursue it in the long term. [...] I felt fortunate because the last internship made me more aware of my current direction. (S1)

For students who have had their first experience as interns, they feel that internships provide an opportunity for them to understand better the workplace and professional culture. The internship time not only helps them adapt to the working culture, but also assists their process for self-assessment. Students express their gratitude to better realize their strengths and weaknesses through these practical experiences. They truly feel the urge to develop themselves to fit with the job requirement and the industry working environment. This increase in self-awareness will substantially facilitate students' professional development to climb their career ladder when they graduate. Students in this study witnessed their improvement in virtues such as communication, proactiveness, patience, endurance, professionalism, confidence, communication, and self-responsibility.

I'm growing up. Since I entered the profession, I was taught a lot of things, for example, patience and endurance. [...] my way of working must be professional, confident, no longer shy or afraid to communicate. (L5)

I changed from a closed mindset to be more active mindset, I do things more professionally, I take more responsibility and learn to have better communication with my colleagues, superiors and managers. (L7)

For alumni who are participating in the workforce as full-time employees, they imply a certain degree of regrets for not taking the lecturer's advices seriously during their school years. The real working

practices in the industry have made them realize the value of lecturers' advices, which could help them avoid unnecessary difficulties at the workplace.

At the university, I didn't care much about the words that lecturers say about the job. [...] However, when I start working in the hotel, I could say that everything the lecture said is very good. I wish that I paid more attention during class when I hear about their experiences. (L4)

Above all, regardless of where they study, almost all graduates from selected public, private and international universities appreciate how the universities' reputation has made it easier for them to get job opportunities from the industry. Many of these students have received job offers from hospitality employers even prior to graduation.

From the time I was a student, I was called by 1 company for internship and then part-time, then full time. It must also be mentioned that they know the reputation of their school, the prestige for them to trust. (L1)

During my second year, I have already been offered the job by the fashion brand, by H&M, or even GM of the Majestic hotel has offered me the job. I think that already speaks of the relevance and the effectiveness of this education program. (L6)

These statements from university alumni reconfirm the pivotal role of each university's reputation to students' employability, especially with industry partners who will be graduates' future employers.

### 5.3 Chapter Conclusion

Assessing the current hospitality curriculum, dissatisfaction with the excessive focus on general business knowledge has been pointed out by all relevant stakeholders, including hospitality employers, university alumni and final-year students. Observing students at the workplace, regardless of universities they are from, almost all hospitality graduates in Vietnam struggle in their academia-industry transition. Industry professionals are not content with graduates' ability to adapt to the working culture, especially to form good relationships with co-workers from different generations. This issue echoes the need for career orientation activities from educators to help student effectively emerge in the workforce.

Compared with vocational college graduates, hospitality employers in the country expect a higher level of strategic thinking, ownership judgment, and working independence in university graduates. Unfortunately, students' ability to work independently is an alarming issue for hospitality graduates in Vietnam. Educators should incorporate diverse activities and projects to enhance students' competence in this aspect. These are the competencies that can potentially help hospitality university students gain competitive advantage over vocational graduates in the interview process.

Amongst hospitality graduates in Vietnam, students from local universities are recognized for their effort to adapt to the working culture and to get along with senior colleagues. However, in a multicultural

five-star working environment, these efforts are not enough to compete with graduates from international universities. From employers' perspective, although some students from international universities can have an over-confident attitude, they adapt quicker to the working environment at global hotel properties. To compete with graduates from private and international universities, the active involvement of educators is irreplaceable to assist students in public universities to improve competencies in English proficiency, self-confidence, presentation, critical thinking, open-mindset, cultural sensitivity, and proactiveness. Students who can nurture these competencies during their university years will have better career opportunities, enabling them to work in administrative and management trainee positions if they prefer this career path.

Surprisingly, results revealed the underlying reason behind employers' preference to recruit hospitality graduates from private and international universities is due to the substandard of lecturers from public universities. Industry professionals critically emphasized the role of lecturers in producing quality education programs. For educators from public universities, despite their academic qualification, they lack industry working experience and international exposure. Employers blamed the quality and research capabilities of teaching faculties as the main cause for the current outdated content of hospitality education programs. To change these negative perceptions about hospitality lecturers, universities are suggested to implement three key strategies. Firstly, the academic requirement for lecturers at tertiary-level should be raised up to PhD degrees. Academics who only possess Master and/or Bachelor degree need to be disqualified from teaching undergraduate students. Secondly, to enrich the teaching contents in the academic settings, lecturers should undergo industry training/internship at hospitality establishments periodically to enhance their industry experience and stay up to date with current practices. Thirdly, universities should reinforce the exchange program with foreign education partners for Vietnamese lectures, therefore, increase their international exposure and broaden their educational mindset.

The analysis also highlighted that one of the key differentiators of international universities is the practice of professors following up with former students after they have completed their courses. This ongoing connection provides a dual benefit. Not only does it support students in their transition to professional roles, but it also helps establish a valuable channel for collecting feedback on the effectiveness and relevance of the curriculum. By maintaining these connections, university educators can gain insights into how well the curriculum prepares graduates for real-world challenges and identify areas where additional focus may be needed. Furthermore, this ongoing interaction fosters stronger alumni relationships, which can lead to other benefits, such as networking opportunities, mentorship programs, or even partnerships with industry.

For industry professionals, the improvement of their on-the-job training provided for students during internship period is critical. Even if employers may face difficulties training students in peak service

hours, it is their responsibility to rearrange the operation and allocate sufficient time to provide proper training for interns. They should not underestimate the consequences of negative internship experience that can be detrimental for students' long-term career selection.

## 6 Chapter 6: Current Landscape Of Vietnamese Hospitality Higher Education

To enhance the quality of hospitality education programs and the industry-academia linkage in emerging destinations, a thorough understanding of the difficulties that educators in this industry are facing is the basis for effective improvement strategies. This chapter presents the challenges that hospitality educators at university-level in Vietnam are struggling with. After that, an investigation on the current practices of key curriculum-related aspects is presented, including curriculum development, curriculum review and lastly, the internship component in hospitality education programs.

Interviews were conducted with 16 hospitality academics from eight different universities. For each university, the Program Dean and the personnel responsible for Industry Partnerships of hospitality departments were invited to participate. Demographic information of these two groups of participants are presented in Table 38 (Hospitality Program Dean) and Table 39 (Industry Partnership Personnel).

*Table 38: Demographics of Hospitality Program Deans participated in this study*

| Program Dean ID | Education sector     | Working title          | Location         | No. of participants |
|-----------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| A1              | Public               | Program Dean           | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| A2              | Public               | Program Dean           | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| A3              | Private              | Program Dean           | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| A4              | Private              | Assistant Program Dean | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| A5              | International        | Program Dean           | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| A6              | International        | Program Dean           | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| A7              | <i>For benchmark</i> | <i>Program Dean</i>    | <i>Malaysia</i>  | 1                   |
| A8              | <i>For benchmark</i> | <i>Program Dean</i>    | <i>Australia</i> | 1                   |
| <b>Total</b>    |                      |                        |                  | <b>8</b>            |

*Table 39: Demographics of Industry Partnership Personnel participated in this study*

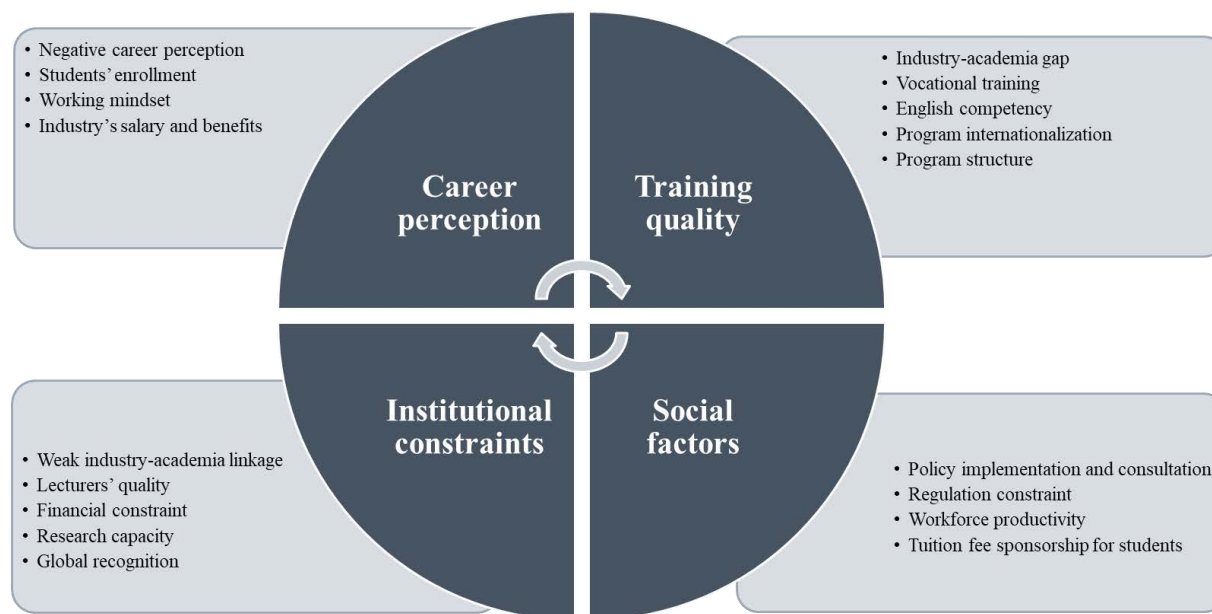
| Industry Partnership Personnel ID | Education sector     | Working title                       | Location         | No. of participants |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| P1                                | Public               | Assistant Program Dean              | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| P2                                | Public               | Lecturer/Industry partnership       | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| P3                                | Private              | Lecturer/Industry partnership       | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| P4                                | Private              | Lecturer/Industry partnership       | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| P5                                | International        | Head of Industry partnership        | Ho Chi Minh City | 1                   |
| P6                                | International        | Lecturer                            | Hanoi            | 1                   |
| <i>P7</i>                         | <i>For benchmark</i> | <i>Head of Hospitality School</i>   | <i>Malaysia</i>  | 1                   |
| <i>P8</i>                         | <i>For benchmark</i> | <i>Head of Industry partnership</i> | <i>Australia</i> | 1                   |
| <b>Total</b>                      |                      |                                     |                  | <b>8</b>            |

## 6.1 Challenges For Educators

In Vietnam where hospitality tertiary education is at an early stage, educators in the country are struggling with various challenges. Based on fieldwork findings, these challenges can be categorized into four major domains, which are career perception, training quality, institutional constraints and social factors (Figure 12).



*Figure 12: Challenges for hospitality higher education in Vietnam in general*



### 6.1.1 Career Perception

Similar to many other countries, hospitality education at university level in Vietnam suffers from the common negative perception about hospitality career, which significantly decreases the industry's attractiveness as a sustainable career. The unattractive salary and benefits in the hospitality industry are barriers demotivating students to commit with the industry for long time.

It's also about industry. Hospitality employees have traditionally been very neglected. They've overworked and underpaid and underappreciated. (P6)

Unfavorable perceptions such as low-skill job, high turnover, low salary and benefits have resulted in challenges to attract good students to enroll in hospitality education programs at university level. Industry professionals are worried about how hospitality educators can compete with other industries to get the most potential students to pursue this service sector.

There's a lot of competition from other industries. How do you get the brightest, the smartest, the most sensible and sensitive people. (I7)

It is more how to attract the young Vietnamese to go into hospitality because of the salary scheme, the work-life balance. [...] . This is probably the biggest challenge for hospitality education. How do I attract enough students to develop and put into this amazing hospitality field. (I8)

Under this issue, both industry professionals and academics raised the need for early and effective career orientation campaigns for secondary and high school students. The aim is to help students define their career preferences, gradually nurture their career passion, and then enroll in hospitality undergraduate programs when they finish high school. Although these activities may not show the result immediately, they are critical to shape proper perception about hospitality career.

The university should organize more career-orientation. [...] We should do more since they start their high school, grade 10. [...] we can create an experience for them in the hotel for them to actually see and decide whether they will follow our industry or not. (H10)

I find these orientation activities are not strong. The quality of the orientation. [...] Career orientation needs to be done earlier, the earlier learners perceive, the better the likelihood of success. (A2)

Another issue under this domain is ensuring students correctly understand the career promotion ladder in the industry. Even though some jobs in the hospitality industry may seem handy and simple, it takes time for an employee to develop sufficient competencies to move up the career ladder before they can lead others. Students should not overlook the importance of work experience.

During their studies, they have already been interned, so they often graduate from school to want to be at a certain level of management. Expectations are high. (A2)

Service attitude because this is an industry where attitude and service are very high demand. An industry where emotion is advantageous, the goal is to create a touchpoint. To create emotions, you must have a service mindset. That is important and takes time. (P1)

The hospitality industry, with its service products, requires employees to possess a personality trait that motivates them to find pleasant ways to treat customers, whether it is at a hotel, a restaurant or any other types of establishments. These opinions are in consensus with the majority of industry employers investigated in other studies, in which they believe it is the responsibility of hospitality educators to develop students' service attitude and enthusiastic spirit in their career (Huang et al., 2016; Singh & Jaykumar, 2019; Velo & Mittaz, 2006).

### **6.1.2 Training Quality**

To assess the quality of hospitality higher education, the extent to which programs can accommodate industry needs is fundamental. Surprisingly, even with reputable hospitality universities that have been receiving positive feedback from the industry practitioners, academics there admitted that the industry-academia gap will continue to exist. From their perspective, the responsibility of educators is to try their best to incorporate as many industry-involved activities as possible for students during their four-year study.

The gap is always a gap. It will be existing. [...] When it comes to the gap from the industry, as I told you when we invite people coming to the classes and discuss different topics, we do address and stress on what is required by what is expected of the students when they come to the industry for internship or even jobs. At least we are trying to emphasize what is required and what is expected from students when go for internships, and perhaps, jobs. (A7)

Although students may have been equipped with up-to-date hospitality knowledge, industry professionals feel more concerned about how students implement what they have learnt at school into practices. This is a major issue for Vietnamese students, who often excel in academic learning but are weak in practical skills. A reason leading to this problem is the lack of work-integrated training in hospitality education programs. Students are not given enough opportunities to practice under the lecturers' supervision at school. Hence, they lack confidence and make a lot of mistakes in their initial years on the job.

For some universities in VN, the curriculum is mostly theoretical, lacking practice components. They don't have equipment, tools, facilities for the students to practice. (H5)

There needs to be a lot more training at the level of chefs, electricians, plumbers, etcetera. Before they go on to do MBA's or anything else, the basic knowledge is quite often missing. They haven't got enough experience in the industry. (I9)

Employers remain a critical view on how hospitality university graduates are over-prepared for managerial competencies but lack sufficient training in technical and practical skills relating to hotel operations. There appears to be an evident misalignment in expectation amongst industry employers who do not understand accurately the difference in education programs and career paths for graduates from vocational colleges versus universities. This lack of alignment was also reported in previous studies as one of the key reasons that hinder the establishment of an effective hospitality industry-academia partnership (Harkison et al., 2011; Pizam et al., 2013).

The objectives of institutions providing hospitality education at the level of vocational colleges and universities can differ significantly in their scope, depth, and focus, reflecting the distinct roles these institutions play in preparing students for the hospitality industry. Hospitality vocational colleges typically emphasize skill-based, hands-on training designed to meet immediate industry demands. Their primary objective is to equip students with technical competencies, such as food preparation, housekeeping, or front-office operations, enabling them to enter the workforce quickly and perform specific roles effectively (Dredge et al., 2013). Vocational education often incorporates intensive practical experiences, such as internships or apprenticeships, that align closely with industry expectations and standards, fostering job readiness and employability (Baum, 2015).

In contrast, hospitality universities aim to provide a broader, more comprehensive education that combines practical training with theoretical knowledge and critical thinking skills. These institutions focus

on developing future managers and leaders capable of addressing complex challenges in the global hospitality industry. Objectives at the university level often include fostering strategic thinking, problem-solving, and research skills, alongside an understanding of sustainability, technology, and global trends (Lugosi et al., 2009). Hospitality universities also emphasize the importance of innovation and entrepreneurship, preparing graduates for higher-level roles and long-term career growth rather than immediate job placement (Airey & Tribe, 2010). While both institutions share the goal of preparing students for the hospitality sector, vocational colleges prioritize operational efficiency and technical skills, whereas universities aim to cultivate managerial expertise and leadership potential. These distinctions reflect a hierarchical differentiation in education.

Noticeably, despite the prevalence of learning English as a second language at schools across the country, hotel employers still consider English insufficiency as a hurdle to the career opportunity for Vietnamese hospitality graduates. This foreign language requirement has been preventing numerous potential local talents from entering the high-end international working environment.

Now is much better than before, but the language skill is like a hurdle with the hotel industry in Vietnam. If you want to work for international five-star hotel, you have to speak English. Without English, you cannot join, even though you can speak another language. (I1)

Local hospitality candidates do not possess enough confidence to freely express their opinions in English, a pivotal requirement to apply for a job in international hotel properties. Recognized as the global language, English proficiency is a primary condition to determine hospitality graduates' employability in an multi-cultural environment (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019). Although candidates' competence in other languages can be used as their competitive advantage in the hospitality job market, their proficiency in English is a foundational requirement.

Under training quality, an aspect that is frequently mentioned by both academics and industry professionals in Vietnam is the demand for program internationalization. To produce hospitality future workforce that can satisfy global customers, educators are required to review and benchmark their curriculum with other education programs to reach international standards. The coherence between what being taught in Vietnam and current trends around the world is a strategic approach to level up the country's hospitality higher education.

From my point of view, internationalization. If these emerging destinations would like to develop a holistic education sector, they need to develop their program in a truly international way. (A8)

I think the key challenge is to match the quality of the workforce with the expectation of international travelers. To solve that, the teachers need to understand and match the training programs. (H4)

Interviews with academics revealed that hospitality educators in Vietnam recognized both benefits and constraints from collaborating with foreign education institutions in various aspects. Not only does this partnership potentially enhance the school's network and visibility in the international higher education market, but universities in Vietnam can also gain access to more opportunities on research collaboration and financial sponsorship on new projects. Additionally, local universities can enjoy the benefits of exchange programs, for both students and lecturers. This international exposure is one of the key elements to enrich the teaching competencies of hospitality lecturers, hence, improve the quality of Vietnamese hospitality higher education in broad terms.

Collaborating with the international institution will bring us a lot of opportunities. We can increase our international network development for our school, the exchange programs of students and lecturers for international experiences. (A3)

### **6.1.3 Institutional Constraints**

While collaboration with foreign universities can undoubtedly bring substantial benefits, hospitality educators also face various challenges to build a successful partnership. This can be a common problem with universities in developing countries, whose reputation is not yet recognized in the global education market. Reported issues are constraints on different aspects, including but not limited to finance, legality, operational efficiency, and program match in term of curriculum and offering period.

Access to international partners is also a barrier. (A1)

We also face a lot of challenges: the student is going to have longer study time if they join the program in order to get both degrees from our university and our international partner university. The tuition fees are also another challenge when we come to the discussion. (A3)

From the academics' perspective, hospitality educators also need to evaluate the match between two programs. Before entering a partnership, a substantial amount of time is required from educators to review and compare all course outlines provided by both universities. This step is time consuming yet critical to ensure participating students will not suffer from any undesirable consequences when they graduate.

From the students' perspective, participating in exchange/dual-degree programs can potentially affect their graduation date, compared to their peers who enrolled in university at the same time. Additionally, as the majority of collaborating university partners are from more developed countries with higher living expenses, students in Vietnam have to be more conscious on the financial requirements if they choose this option.

Therefore, to form a successful collaborating relationship with foreign educational institutions, hospitality educators mentioned several criteria to evaluate an appropriate education partner. Besides the

university's networking history, hospitality faculties need to consider the ranking and education philosophy of the partnering institutions, as these factors can indirectly influence their collaborating strategies. From the departmental level, ensuring program match and cooperative willingness from both sides are essential.

The department's international relations history is in relation to the whole school. Each stage will have different implementation partners. [...] A criterion is consistent with the training objectives and philosophy of the institution, the motto, the way, the object of training. (A2)

As long as the partner university is willing to collaborate. (P7)

In addition to collaborate with other international institutions, hospitality educators in Vietnam also face difficulties in establishing an effective linkage with the industry partners. There remains unsolvable conflict of interest between key stakeholders in the hospitality industry. Hospitality academics expressed their confusion on the real expectations of employers on their graduates, whether they are looking for an individual with critical high-level thinking ability, or someone that has been well trained in vocational aspects to satisfy the company's immediate needs.

Lack of industry and education linkage in the field of hospitality in Vietnamese context. Other stakeholders' group and policy makers are still in conflicts of their interest. For example, the operation of the hospitality industry is dominated by preference for students from vocational education, not the university, because the vocational education can satisfy immediate needs of the employers. So, they don't take a lot of time to train the vocational education student as the university students. (A3)

From the industry perspective, employers hope to see more proactive collaborating efforts from hospitality higher education providers. Educators need to put more efforts into developing and enhancing the network with industry partners, rather than over-evaluating and relying on their history in educating hospitality students. A strong cooperative spirit from hospitality educators will ensure their students get sufficient industry exposure prior to graduation, hence, boosting students' confidence when entering the workforce.

It's not only about being in the field long enough but it's more about the network that they have built with the employer. Because if they have a better network with the employer, with the hotels, organizations in hospitality industry, they can send their students, or they sign MOU with the hotels, to send their students for work experience, or internship. (H5)

Noticeably, the quality of hospitality lecturers in Vietnam is another concern. Participants in this study revealed two dominant issues on lecturers' quality. First, academics teaching hospitality subjects in Vietnam are lacking real working experience. Especially for a practical-oriented industry as hospitality, this insufficient industry exposure amongst lecturers will result in various undesirable consequences for both students and the hospitality curriculum. This concern is alarming in public and private universities, whose financial capacity is not attractive enough for lecturers having industry experiences. The second challenge

is lecturers' ability to catch up with current industry knowledge in Vietnamese universities. Employers are concerned that many lecturers are often quite old in age, are reluctant to learn and keep open-minded with ongoing changes in the industry.

Lacking the qualification lecturers. They're very good at academic, but not at practical, because most of them don't have experience of working in the hotel. (H12)

They don't have enough experience to teach the student, especially right now, when the industry is a lot of change. So maybe the knowledge is already old and does not match the after-COVID situation. This will be a challenge for them. Mostly all professors in the universities are quite old. (I2)

#### **6.1.4 Social Factors**

Despite various constraints at institutional level, hospitality educators in Vietnam are aware of their responsibility in advising policies for government, as part of their contribution to society at higher-level. Reflecting upon current practices, educators admitted to the low quality of consultation at the moment. They also hope for more support from the government to implement those policies more effectively.

The school is also one of the places that advises the government on policy. The quality of consultation needs to improve. Change from their educators' own side. [...] Government does listen, they know, but how to integrate effectively is problematic. (A2)

From the employers' perspective, industry professionals considered government regulation as a barrier to the development of higher education for the hospitality industry. They express their empathy for public universities because of their limited autonomous power to change the curriculum. Although the current MOET compulsory subjects can equip students with knowledge on political philosophies and the country's ideology in this aspect, these obligatory subject offerings are not highly effective to enhance students' employability. Therefore, while hospitality educators can review and implement value-added subjects to improve the work readiness of hospitality graduates; at higher level, Vietnamese MOET should consider learning from more developed educational system (such as Malaysia and China, where benchmark universities of this study are located) to adjust the composition of national compulsory subjects, consequently, optimize the value that graduates and wider society can gain from university education.

The public curriculum still has to stick to our government. Some of the subjects cannot change. (H2)

As a public university, they cannot just change their education program as they want, they need the approval from The Ministry of Education. (I3)

Last but not least, the factor that has tremendous impact on the growth of hospitality industry in Vietnam is the nation's workforce productivity. At this stage, the hospitality labor resources are limited in

both quality and quantity, resulting in a hospitality industry that has not yet reached the development stage it deserves.

The main challenge is the workforce. And something that relates to productivity. (P7)

We have to be fast because the development of tourism is very huge at the moment. [...] But the manpower is not ready yet. So, we lack both quality and quantity. (H10)

In a survey conducted with Vietnamese youngsters, the most attractive career paths are to become entrepreneurs (at 43%), jobs related to media and communication (at 37%), followed by working in education and technology sectors (ASEAN, 2022). From 2019 to 2025, the hospitality and tourism sector in Vietnam aimed to employ 40,000 more employees every year, expected to contribute around 10 percent to the national GDP in 2025. However, in reality, only around 15,000 tourism and hospitality graduates enter the workforce each year. Given the number of hospitality staff at 1.3 million employees in 2019, only 42 percent of them were formally trained in tourism (Hang, 2019). Although Vietnam is under the transformation to become an efficiency-driven economy to replace manual jobs with high-productivity jobs, these results echo for the need from educators to provide work-integrated learning opportunities to upskill the national workforce in order to meet the requirements from employers (ASEAN, 2022).

The challenges highlighted in Figure 11 (Focus on students' difficulties during the academia-industry transition) and Figure 12 (Examine broader challenges for hospitality higher education in Vietnam), reveal significant overlaps that point to priority areas for university action plans. Both figures emphasize the need to improve students' working mindset, cultural sensitivity, and English competency as foundational steps. A lack of a professional working mindset, including poor time management, discipline, and adaptability, emerges as a critical barrier in the transition to industry. Students face difficulties in adapting to cultural differences, a vital skill in the globalized hospitality environment. Furthermore, limited English proficiency hampers students' ability to engage with international travelers as the current language training focusing more on academic than industry-specific needs. Addressing these overlapping challenges requires an integrated approach, such as introducing modules on intercultural communication and designing English-for-specific-purposes courses tailored to hospitality contexts. By prioritizing these areas and fostering partnerships with industry leaders, Vietnamese universities can align their academic programs with industry expectations, equipping students with the skills necessary for seamless transitions and long-term success.

## 6.2 Towards A Better Hospitality Curriculum: Investigation On Current Procedures

To effectively produce an industry-informed curriculum, it is critical to have a comprehensive understanding of the current procedures on curriculum management. This section presents the two major



tasks in hospitality curriculum management, which are curriculum development and curriculum review. An investigation on the internship – a key practical component of hospitality education program is also provided in the last section.

### 6.2.1 Curriculum Development

From the interviews with hospitality educators, the curriculum development process comprises of eight phases in total (Table 40).

*Table 40: Hospitality curriculum development process*

| Phase                                                | Main task                                                   | Involved stakeholders                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Phase 1:</b><br>Training capacity assessment      | Assess training facilities and lecturers' qualification     | Department Dean<br>Department Lecturers                                                                                         |
| <b>Phase 2:</b><br>School direction approval         | Seek initial approval at school-level to proceed next steps | School research council<br>Curriculum design team<br>Quality assurance team<br>School program committee<br>Senate of university |
| <b>Phase 3:</b><br>External program benchmark        | Benchmark with international and same-level university      | Department Dean<br>Department Lecturers<br>Other universities                                                                   |
| <b>Phase 4:</b><br>Market assessment                 | Conduct market study to evaluate demands for program        | Current students<br>Prospective students<br>Experienced academics<br>Industry professionals<br>Hotel associations<br>Alumni     |
| <b>Phase 5:</b><br>Document preparation              | Prepare relevant documents to seek stakeholders' feedback   | Department Dean<br>Department Lecturers                                                                                         |
| <b>Phase 6:</b><br>Stakeholders' feedback collection | Collect feedback on prepared documents from stakeholders    | Alumni<br>Industry professionals<br>Hotel associations<br>State agencies<br>Other universities                                  |
| <b>Phase 7:</b><br>Program details finalization      | Review collected feedback and amend where necessary         | Department Dean<br>Department Lecturers                                                                                         |

|                                                     |                                                                         |                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Phase 8:</b><br>Program accreditation & approval | Seek approval and accreditation from Ministry of Education and Training | Academic board<br>Approval council<br>Curriculum design team<br>Qualification Agency<br>School program committee<br>Senate of university |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

In the first step, hospitality academics are required to assess the training capacity of their department, whether they have enough human and technical resources to teach a new program. The assessment criteria are based on the number of doctors and masters' lecturers, as well as the technical facilities, libraries, computers and campus infrastructure. After hospitality academics have proved the sufficiency of their department to provide new programs for students, the next step is to seek approval for program formation from the university-level.

As soon as the hospitality department receives approval from the university, hospitality educators are required to draft key program information, with references to benchmarking universities to justify their proposal. To maximize the representativeness of benchmark universities, hospitality educators select both international universities and local universities to capture a more comprehensive picture of the hospitality education landscape. The document developed in this stage will then be delivered to various stakeholders to determine the demand and relevancy of this new program, which is also known as market study. The main purpose is to examine if the proposed program will be highly valued by society. To consolidate the most valid information, the selection of stakeholders who will provide feedback on the program demand is critical. Educators need to ensure participating respondents are those who can provide relevant and valuable feedback.

We have to be relevant in what we do. If we take 2-year alumni, they may not have sufficient industry exposure. So, we need someone around 3-5 years. I think they can give good feedback. So, this is how there is no criteria for selection, but we do it internally to provide a certain level of quality and relevancy. (P7)

After the market study has been conducted and educators can determine the need for the new program, the next step is to prepare all required documents to submit to higher authorities. These documents include managing facilities, lecturers' scientific background, curriculum framework, course outline, program objectives, learning outcomes, and subject syllabus. This is to note that these documents will have to go through another feedback submission process to relevant stakeholders, before being finalized and submitted to higher authority for program accreditation.

There would be a couple of pieces of information to incorporate into the request for the new program. Once we have this structure plus study, we have all the official documents, the syllabus form, the program form. Once this program has been created, this is when we get feedback internally from different stakeholders before it goes for the school program committee. (P7)

We work with the industry experts, the students, in order to build the course outline. (A3)

With all feedback collected from various stakeholders on the program information, hospitality educators start finalizing all documents for the last phase of approval. In this step, documents are submitted to the school program committee, and finally, to MOET for program approval and accreditation.

### **6.2.2 Curriculum Review**

After curriculum development, the curriculum review procedure is a quintessential component to ensure long-term success of any hospitality education programs. The following discusses the review components, review frequency and influencing factors on the review process of hospitality education programs in Vietnam.

Prior to starting the curriculum review process, hospitality academics are required to re-evaluate all components of the current program to determine areas that require adjustment. Amongst all aspects of curriculum, the program's learning outcomes are considered as long-term mission, therefore, often require less frequent change.

The learning outcome is more stable, with review but less change because usually in 1 cycle, it takes about 4 years to change the learning outcome because it is equivalent to one graduation batch. (A2)

It's not something we change very often because when we talk about education, we talk about long-term priorities. (P7)

Regarding the curriculum review frequency, the most frequently reviewed component is at module-level (every six months). At the program level, academics conduct small-scale annual review on the curriculum. This is to comply with the Vietnamese MOET's regulation that require educators at university-level to make new adjustment on their curriculum every year.

The principle is that every year, 20% of the total program framework is revised. For example, having 136 credits is 20%. (A1)

Every year, we have to publish a new course outline or a syllabus for example. (P3)

In a larger scale, every university is required to conduct a curriculum review every two years to update any necessary changes, which is also a requirement from Vietnamese MOET for all universities operating in Vietnam. However, academics from public universities and international universities in Vietnam do not express favorable opinions on this frequency. While academics from public universities prefer longer time to adjust curriculum (at least after one learning cycle of four years), those from

international universities complain of the time-wasting bureaucracy to implement any curriculum adjustment.

In terms of practicality, to correct program errors, it is best to go through a whole training cycle. It took one cycle of 4 years for us to judge whether the program we taught was good or not good and what needs to be changed. [...] Our resources are limited. (A1)

One of the things BUV is trying to do is to be able to certify itself or go to an accrediting agency that doesn't have to go through MOET. So, courses could change faster. [...] changing courses is tough only because of the bureaucracy. (A6)

For universities in Vietnam, the most comprehensive review on all curriculum aspects is conducted every three to five years. During this process, universities invite all related stakeholders, especially industry professionals, to comment and advise on program improvement. The frequency of this major review is also applied to benchmark universities of this study, which operate in the education system of Malaysia and Australia.

We have a comprehensive report to do with a lot of data. This report, we send to the alumni, the industry partners, to collect feedback. (P7)

We have a regular review of the program once every three years. That is a major review. (A8)

Regarding influencing factors on the curriculum review process, in Vietnamese education system, the most decisive factor is the autonomous power of each university. At the moment, this autonomous power is only given to top-ranking universities in the country. Although these higher education institutions are not required to seek MOET's approval on every adjustment of the program, they are still closely monitored by the government.

Autonomous schools have the right to make decisions to put into training, for example, national universities have the right to take the initiative. Small local schools are not enacted with opening new programs by themselves. (A1)

The ministry is the governing body, they can inspect at any time the programs of autonomous schools. They see if schools follow the correct procedures. They post-check and evaluate later. (A2)

While local Vietnamese universities are influenced by autonomous power, international universities in Vietnam have to operate under the supervision of their parent university in the original country. In these programs, the majority of course contents are inherited from the parent university. Despite the fact that educators of these franchised programs can make some small adjustments, lecturers from these universities are not comfortable with how parent universities make them teach new subjects that they have never been trained on.

Basically, we need to keep everything. But we put the extras on that to align with our Vietnam situation because for the franchise program, you cannot change or do something. (A5)

I get new courses to teach and have not been taught before, There's no information from Staffordshire. [...] When a new course comes out, now sometimes when we'll get information, sometimes we won't. (A6)

Examining the role of industry' feedback on hospitality curriculum, on one hand, educators appreciate the contribution of employers who are also the university's alumni, because they act as the connecting bridge between the academia and the industry.

Especially from alumni employers. They understand the training institution, and at the same time they understand the market. (A1)

On the other hand, academics reveal mixed opinions on the value of industry feedback on curriculum improvement, ranging from little influence, to reasonable, to too demanding requests. Some academics criticized how hospitality employers come to recruit tertiary graduates but require them to have strong vocational backgrounds. This request is deemed to be unreasonable for a four-year education framework, making it difficult for educators to design an effective hospitality education program. There appears to be a misperception from industry employers on the role of different types of education institutions, which negatively affects the career prospects of hospitality students graduating at university-level.

I also sometimes find recruiters asking a little too much. [...] The school's goal is to train liberal thinking, or creative thinking. It takes students time to start slower than vocational graduates, but after a few months they catch up, then they go above and beyond because they have a managerial mindset and an innovator. Business feedback also makes the school sometimes confused. (A1)

### **6.2.3 Internship Program**

To ensure hospitality graduates are exposed sufficiently to industry practices prior to graduation, the inclusion of internship component in the education program is irreplaceable. However, from the industry perspective, various hotel employers perceive the current internship duration in Vietnam is not enough for students to understand industry work and be prepared to tackle future challenges.

At the moment, hospitality students are given two opportunities for industry exposure during their study. The first opportunity is conducted in the first year, allowing students to come and observe hotel practices in one month. The aim of this initial visit is to get students familiar with the hospitality environment, boosting their motivation to start their four-year program at university. After that, the second opportunity students are exposed to real industry practices is during their graduating internship in year four. This internship often lasts 15 weeks, allowing students to actually immerse themselves in the work environment before officially starting their career.

Usually, in four-year university, they have two times to visit our hotel. The first is around one month, mainly for the fresh students. They will have one month to observe the hospitality operation. (H12)

There is 1 graduate internship of about 15 weeks. (A2)

Table 41 summarize different aspects of the current internship programs provided in hospitality undergraduate programs in Vietnam.

*Table 41: Current internship structure of hospitality undergraduate programs*

| Internship for hospitality undergraduates |                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Duration</b>                           | • First-time industry exposure and observation (one month in year 1)                                             |
|                                           | • Graduation internship (15 weeks in year 4)                                                                     |
| <b>Department</b>                         | • Operation departments (for 2-3 months interns)                                                                 |
|                                           | • Back of house department (for 6-month interns)                                                                 |
|                                           | • Do not accept interns for executive office, security, payroll (positions requiring protection of data privacy) |
| <b>Compensation and benefits</b>          | • Staff house, meal plan                                                                                         |
|                                           | • Small monthly financial allowance                                                                              |
|                                           | • Accidental insurance                                                                                           |
|                                           | • Staff bus                                                                                                      |
| <b>University support</b>                 | • Arrange suitable internship departments                                                                        |
|                                           | • Provide orientation workshop prior to internship                                                               |

Nevertheless, many industry professionals expressed their preference to have students undertake longer internship, preferably in a six-month period. They can see the significant difference between a two-month and six-month intern. The longer the students stay at the company, the more opportunities they are given to practice high-level tasks. Industry professionals advocate for a three-month internship duration, which they believe is the minimum time requirement for students to have sufficient time for practice.

Due to the efficiency of the internship, we require the minimum period must be 3 months because we see that if the intern comes in one or two months, the time is not enough for them to learn anything, especially if it's the first time of internship. (H1)

If students have a chance to join us for internship from six months or above, we try two months for observation, and then the following month we try to give the username and password to access our system. (I1)

Although employers are willing to accept interns in almost all hotel departments, students that undertake their internship in less than three months are only given positions in operating department, such as Food and Beverage, Front office, Housekeeping. Only those who can commit to a six-month internship are perceived to be suitable for back-office departments.

We offer internship in every department. However, for the department that we have a smaller number of associates, we take fewer interns like finance, HR, S&M, reservation. Normally, we take only a few 1-2 interns per year and the time requirement for those internships will be 6 months, not 2 months. (H4)

In addition to longer internship duration, industry professionals urged educators to incorporate this practical component as early as possible. They also raised the need for an agreement with educators on the appropriate time for internship, as too many interns can negatively impact the hotel's service quality.

We try to balance it throughout the years, because we don't want to have so many interns at once because it's going to affect our service quality. (I3)

However, from the academic perspective, educators are skeptical about the benefits of this strategy. Firstly, educators believe young students do not yet have the required maturity to conduct internships in a serious manner. Secondly, the risk of having an unsatisfactory internship experience can drive away a significant number of hospitality students, leading them to quit the industry right after graduation. Lastly, the academic modules taught at university are not components to be neglected, because these lectures shape the foundation for a high-quality workforce.

The internship is very risky because a lot of students are not mature enough to take the time to put into the internship. (A6)

Some literature proves that a lot of students, during their internship, have a bad experience, pushing them to quit the industry. So, putting more internships will not solve the problem, that may create more frustration and damages to the students. More internship will either extend the duration of your program or reduce the number of modules in your program. The modules are also required to develop the capabilities. (A7)

Despite these perceptions, academics from benchmark universities in this research have changed their program structure to accommodate the industry's requirements on this aspect, although the total duration for internship component are kept at six months.

We have six months, I think, is sufficient already. We used to have two internships, one internship of 11 weeks and another internship of 15 weeks. The students and the industry were complaining that it's too short. [...]. So, we have combined and have one internship towards the end. (A7)

Investigating the current practices, interviews also identified contrasting opinions on internship department selection, whether students should freely choose their internship department/properties, or the school should decide based on the programs' pathways. On one hand, some educators emphasized the

importance of working with hotel partner to arrange appropriate internship department for students, although they understand the equal importance of all department in hotels. In their opinions, students should be able to conduct internship in departments that they have learnt in-depth at school, such as Front Office, Food and Beverage or Rooms. These lecturers prefer to communicate clearly with industry partners in this aspect and avoid any disambiguating scenarios.

It is important to contact the hotel so that they can arrange their important positions. Of course, I have grounds for this demand. It is important to be disambiguating, such as not being placed in the kitchen and security departments. [...] Try to arrange for them to practice in school subjects, related to FO, FB, rooms. (P1)

For the first internship, we make sure students have to do the same position as we request, in the F&B department. Second year: front office, housekeeping. Other: they can do whatever they want. (P5)

In contrast, a number of academics advocate for an open-option internship, allowing students to choose the department and company they are interested in. The rationale for this approach is to respect learners' personal preferences, as they are the ones responsible for their long-term career.

What I would hope is an open type of internship, is what we do here, is allowing students to do internship where they think is good for them in the future. (A7)

Surprisingly, from the employers' perspective, some of them revealed their negative perception on the competence of hospitality students on finance management. Despite the prevalence of finance-related subjects in the curriculum, industry employers perceive the competence of hospitality graduates on this quantitative skill is not sufficient to give them finance position at the property. They prioritized offering finance intern position for students who graduate from university majoring in finance. This perception amongst industry professionals raises concerns about the teaching quality of hospitality educators on finance-related subjects at their institutions, pointing out the need for curriculum adjustment. Educators should not only go deeper into industry-specific subjects, but they should also elevate their teaching quality in finance-related subjects if they do not want hospitality students to give up these opportunities for graduates from other majors. This finding is expected as students pursuing hospitality degree are often not obliged to go deeper than the finance introductory course, which only provide them with the basic knowledge (Zopiatis et al., 2019).

Apart from finance, because that is very special, and people studying hospitality may not have a talent in figure like student in the financial university. [...] . So that's why we do not recruit students for internship in that department. (H10)

In term of university's support and preparation for students before internship, the most common practices are helping students find internship, preparing relevant documents required for internship application and providing orientation workshops. Noticeably, in Vietnam, only international universities



have a separate department dedicated to support students in this aspect. For public and private universities, lecturers are the ones in charge of these activities, on top of their teaching responsibilities.

It's run by our student experience department who run career fairs. They connect employers with students and vice versa. They help to prepare students for placements, so doing interviews, skimming CV, mocking interview and preparation. (P6)

Before internship, I will have orientation day to talk about: the required documents, what they need to do to start the internship (P5)

Regarding the benefits students can receive during their internship, hotels in Vietnam have just started to provide monthly allowance for hospitality students recently. This financial benefit was included to conquer the issue of students changing to another profession after their internship due to lack of monetary compensations. Other than that, most hotels have been providing common benefits such as meal plan, staff bus, accidental insurance, and staff house for students if the hotel is in remote location.

Starting from this year, the training starts to have allowance because after the internship, everyone changes to banking and finance and real estate. [...] So, the hotel starts to give allowance to attract trainee now. (I3)

This recent financial allowance given to hospitality interns has once again highlighted how undervalued hospitality jobs have been. Although the COVID pandemic had detrimental effects on the hospitality industry, it also served as a catalyst for ensuring that student interns receive financial compensation for their work.

### **6.3 Chapter Conclusion**

Investigating the governmental influence on hospitality higher education, educators in Vietnam express their discontent with the MOET's requirement to include compulsory subjects, leading to the limited curriculum space available for other industry-specific subjects and practical components that are necessary for undergraduates. They stressed how the autonomous power of each university is hindering the development of high-quality hospitality education program. However, when compared with reputable programs in Malaysia and Hong Kong included in this study, this statement does not seem to be valid. For these two benchmark universities, even though they also need to follow their national MOET's requirement to include compulsory subjects (similar to Vietnamese MOET's requirement), these universities still gain world-wide recognition for the quality of their hospitality programs and graduates. This finding has reconfirmed the potential room for improvement that hospitality educators in Vietnam should work on to elevate the quality of education programs for undergraduates.

However, regarding challenges that are specific to Vietnam, there are some barriers stemming from traditional Asian cultural values and organizational mindsets extending beyond curriculum reforms that can

limit local graduates to ascend to top multinational hotels. Asian cultures, including Vietnam's, often emphasize seniority, hierarchical structures, and collective decision-making, which can be at odds with the assertive and individualistic leadership styles valued in multinational corporations. From the employers' perspective, local graduates encounter biases favoring expatriates due to perceptions about their global expertise or suitability for leadership. These perceptions discourage local talent and create a self-perpetuating cycle of underrepresentation in leadership. To overcome this, multinational hotels must actively promote diversity and inclusion, offering mentorship programs to nurture local talent. Furthermore, shifting cultural attitudes within organizations and empowering graduates to challenge traditional hierarchies are critical. Cultivating a meritocratic environment alongside robust skill-building initiatives can provide a sustainable pathway for local graduates to succeed in top positions.

Additionally, from the students' standpoint, the traditional Asian mindsets also play a role in shaping local graduates' confidence and aspirations. Values such as modesty, respect for authority, and a preference for harmony may limit their willingness to assert themselves in competitive environments or seek leadership roles. Addressing this requires not only structural changes within organizations but also individual-level interventions. For instance, graduates need to be encouraged to embrace self-advocacy and recognize the value of their unique perspectives in diverse workplaces, especially through initiatives to foster self-confidence, challenging international cultural barriers.

In an attempt to balance out the theory and practical components, academics in Vietnam should consider learning from worldwide-recognized universities to modify the internship allocation and structure within the program. Instead of letting students undertake their graduating internship in 15 weeks, educators need to allocate a longer duration for this industry experience, preferably lasting around six months. Not only does this extension allow students to access more internship opportunities in administrative departments, but this duration also satisfies industry employers, who have been advocating for longer practical exposure.

Although many stakeholders have reached consensus on the six-month internship duration, educators are under ongoing debates on the ideal time for students to undergo internship training during their four-year study at university. Academics are particularly concerned about students' maturity and quality of internship experience that may negatively influence students' career prospects if internships are included in the early year. Interviews from this study also revealed contrasting opinions on students' internship department selection. This is another question demanding more attention, whether students should choose based on their dream career path or it should be directed by educators based on the programs' study plan.

To optimize students' employability after graduation, it is critical that students fully understand the purpose and benefits of the internship activities. Only when educators conduct the prior-internship orientation carefully that students can take this opportunity seriously and prepare themselves ready before actually embarking on the journey. In fact, hospitality employers have revealed the most decisive factor helping them select potential talents is based on students' attitude and their willingness to learn when doing the internship. While educators may look for employers that can provide proper training for students, industry professionals pay great attention to the attitude and professionalism that educators and their students put on the internship activities. Interestingly, during this first industry exposure, human resources personnels noticed the first two weeks to be the most challenging time at the workplace for hospitality students. Therefore, to reduce students' shock at work, hospitality educators are advised to inform students of this difficult time before they start their internship periods.

To yield the most desirable outcomes, hospitality career orientation campaigns should be conducted in four stages: for high schoolers before their university examinations, for fresh hospitality students in their first year at university, for students before their internship training, and lastly, for final-year students before they officially graduate from university to enter the workforce. The successful implementation of these orientation activities will bring substantial benefits to all key stakeholders in the industry.

For high school students who are contemplating their career paths, an early hospitality career orientation will shape good career perception about the industry, motivating potential students to enroll in hospitality undergraduate programs. From there, hospitality educators will have a pool of students who are not only bright, but also passionate about their future career in the industry.

In the next stage, for fresh students in their first year at university, more detailed career orientation will help students self-evaluate their personalities, allow them to define their preliminary career goals, leading to proactive learning approach during university years. An effective career orientation at this stage will produce a talented future workforce, who have emerged deeply into hospitality education at a high level.

After students have completed their internship and had a taste of the industry reality, when they come back to school, it is the time for educators to provide students full knowledge about the career challenges and opportunities, as well as prospective promotion ladders. A good understanding of these aspects will limit students' negative emotions after graduation, therefore enhancing their career resilience and commitment. At this stage, the educators' effort to follow up and assist fresh graduates during their initial days at work are also greatly appreciated by both students and the industry employers.

Last but not least, aiming to leverage on the economic benefits, lectures at international universities are facing challenges to keep up with the rapid expansion strategy of the university, forcing them to teach over their capacities. This pressing issue requires intervention at governmental level to protect educators and ensure consistency in teaching quality at these institutions. Local government should reinforce the policy to control the expansion of international universities operating in the country. Moreover, to increase the attractiveness of hospitality industry as a career, industry professionals and academics hope for more support from the government on various practices, including but not limited to increase industry salary range, provide scholarship for promising hospitality students, as well as to enhance media coverage to shape career perceptions of the society.

An improvement in the appreciation of hospitality workers is essential for motivating students to view the industry as a desirable career path, encouraging them to develop into valuable human resources for firms. Worker appreciation—encompassing recognition, fair compensation, supportive working conditions, and clear career progression—serves as a key signal to students about the industry's commitment to their well-being and professional growth. When students perceive that their future contributions will be valued and rewarded, they are more likely to engage fully in their education and align their aspirations with industry needs. Conversely, a lack of appreciation diminishes the sector's attractiveness, deterring high-quality students and exacerbating workforce challenges. This issue is particularly acute in developing countries, where the undervaluation of workers is often more pronounced, making it harder for the industry to retain talent and compete globally.

To address this workforce challenge, a dual-purpose model aimed at enhancing both educational outcomes and industry practice can hold significant promise for addressing these challenges. Given the interconnect nature of the relationship between academia, students, and the industry, the effort to foster a collaborative approach can have a vital contribution to meeting the needs of both universities and the industry, particularly in developing countries. On one hand, universities play a key role in providing students with the skills and knowledge required for success in the hospitality sector. On the other hand, if the industry can offer attractive benefits, career growth opportunities, and fair working conditions, it will significantly influence how students perceive the value of a career in hospitality. The initiative to simultaneously strengthen educational programs and elevate industry standards of worker appreciation will not only create a more appealing and sustainable pathway for students entering the hospitality workforce, but it can also drive societal progress, especially in developing countries, where hospitality industry often faces resource constraints.

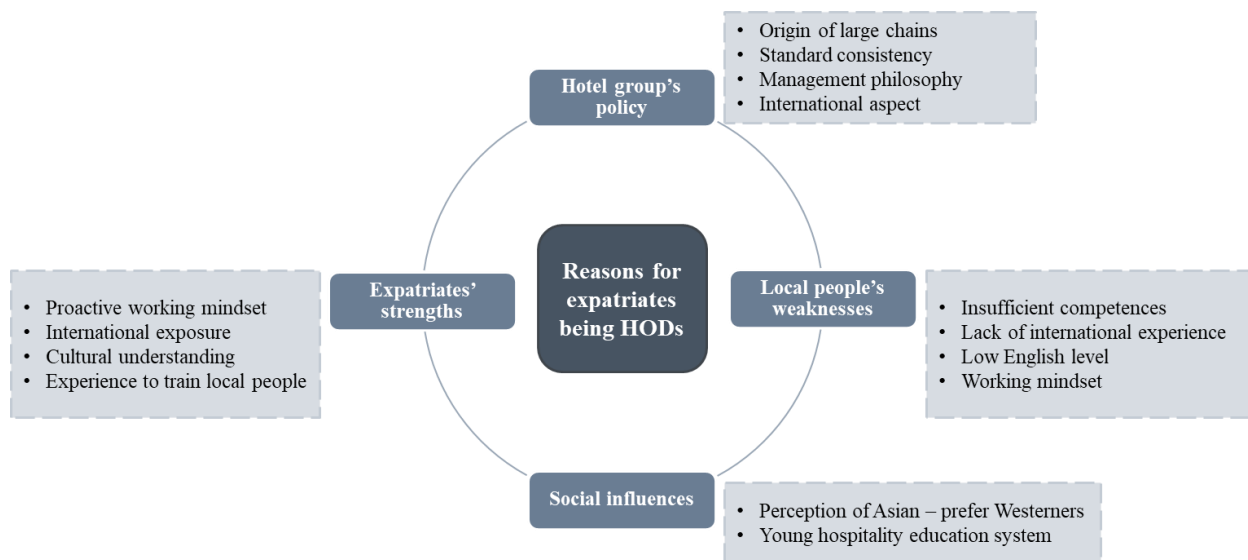
## 7 Chapter 7: Enhancing Career Opportunities For Local Graduates

To widen the career opportunities in the hospitality industry for local graduates, it is critical that involved stakeholders have a comprehensive understanding of the reasons why top positions in international hotel properties are not yet prioritized for local people. To effectively address this issue, this chapter summarizes the challenges that are hindering the career development pathways of local hospitality graduates in Vietnam. After that, various suggestions to elevate the overall quality of the national hospitality workforce are introduced, in the hope of brightening career prospects for local graduates.

### 7.1 Career Development Pathways Of Local Graduates

After having a good understanding on the strengths and weaknesses of hospitality graduates in Vietnam at the moment, relevant stakeholders need to look at the bigger picture and examine the reasons local graduates are not occupying top positions in multinational hotels operated in the country. Industry professionals and hospitality educators participated in this study revealed their opinions on this issue (Figure 13).

*Figure 13: Challenges for local graduates to occupy top positions in multinational hotels in Vietnam*



Firstly, one of the main reasons leading to the phenomenon of expatriates occupying top hospitality positions in developing countries is because of the place where international hotel groups come from. Until recently, most of the top global hotel chains are originated from Western countries. This is also partly due to a global capitalist world, in which Vietnam has been transitioning since the 1990s/2000s, from a socialist to a capitalist economy. International hotel brands have a degree of quality and standards that can only be brought in by foreign talents. Hence, to maintain the desired service and standard consistency level across different countries, these hotel groups need a key person who understands and is able to represent the

company's values positively. This is an essential factor contributing to the success of international hotel companies around the world. Expatriates who were born and grew up in these countries are believed to have a better understanding of the company's culture, allowing them to perform the work more effectively. They are often pre-selected and have undergone extensive training at the corporate level.

We need to understand the work culture of these companies. Mostly are Europeans and Americans. [...] I think it's just the matter of where the company comes from. (P7)

Most of the hotels or hotel chains would like to maintain and keep their standard, like the way they do hotel chain around the world. (A5)

Although the personnel appointment in global hotel chains is highly dependent on the management philosophy of each company, the international aspect is an area that cannot be overlooked in these hotel groups. Each hotel group may adopt a different strategy to recruit and optimize their labor resources to gain a competitive advantage in the market. Nevertheless, participated Directors of Human Resources in this study encouraged local hospitality graduates to be open-minded with having expatriates in the organization, as their presence is an essential criterion for a hotel to be called "international".

Whenever Accor moves around, as I know, they will have an expatriate GM. Even they really want to put French GM or French related. So, it's not just about competency. Be open with that. When we call it international, then it must be international. (H3)

International hotel must have international employees. So, this is the special requirement of the word "International Hotel". (H10)

Putting aside the uncontrollable factor about hotel group's philosophy on hiring a quality workforce, there appears the responsibility of higher education to raise the necessary competencies and experience of local Vietnamese to qualify for those key positions. In this regard, Vietnamese hospitality industry has the demand for both technical competencies and management competencies – key criteria to occupy top positions. To supply a high-quality workforce, the hospitality education system of the country need to have a diversity of routes: polytechnics/vocational colleges to train technical competencies; and higher education institutions/universities to train students on management and strategic-critical thinking competencies.

Besides the need to improve industry-specific competencies, local candidates are also perceived to be insufficient in English proficiency. Many Vietnamese hoteliers are not confident and comfortable in expressing their opinions in English, which is a basic requirement for top management positions in international upscale hospitality properties.

About the communication, the English levels. Some of them do not feel comfortable yet when sharing their thinking, sharing their thoughts at the table. (H11)

Working in an international hotel myself, I see my domestic HODs, I think they are very capable. Sometimes it's just the language that is the barrier. (H5)

Results also reveal inappropriate working mindset as a detrimental factor limiting the opportunity for local graduates to climb the career ladder. A portion of Vietnamese managers have demonstrated a high level of selfish mentality at work. Instead of using their abilities to optimize the company's outcomes, these managers focus more on gaining personal benefits and ignore potential consequences affecting the team.

With some Vietnamese people, when they are at high level, they still think of themselves too much. So sometimes, not because they do not have the ability, but because they're thinking for themselves more than for the company or employees. (H2)

On the other hand, Directors of Human resources highly praise the proactive and independent working mindset that expatriates demonstrate when working in top management positions. Expatriate directors are open to change and innovation, which is a critical competency to thrive in the business world nowadays. These international employees also value working efficiency and do not let personal connections or emotions impact their decisions.

Expatriates are open to think out of the box. They are willing to try new things, while local people sometimes are so scared to try new things, and this stops them from thinking out of the box. (H4)

If you work with expat people, they will not put old feeling or the old relationship too important. They will think about what the right thing is to do, only. That's why when they work at a high level, it's easy for them to make decisions. (H2)

Moreover, expatriate leaders are widely recognized for their strengths and advantages in cultural understanding and international exposure. Thanks to their diverse experiences in various countries, expatriates are more culturally sensitive and open-minded to different cultural perspectives. This is a fundamental requirement for hotels belonging to global chains, whose customers come from all around the world.

We need one person who really understands the culture barrier in a lot of countries over the world, and the customer behavior as well. (H7)

International exposure is a key thing when we are international hotels, we expect to receive international travelers. (H1)

From a talent management perspective, several Director of Human Resources unfolded the main reason for expatriate recruitment is to groom and train local talents. Unfortunately, in reality, not every expatriate takes this mission seriously during their term in developing countries. More focus is often placed on the economic contribution, outweighing other aspects.

We still need an expat to come and share their experience, share their lens, share their mindset to the local team and gradually train them. (H1)

The mission of all the general managers working here should be to train all the people under them [...]. Unfortunately, some of these expertise general managers just come here with the idea of making profit for their respective hotels here and after three- years term, they leave Vietnam. (I11)

To address this self-interest, multinational hotel chains have launched the localization strategy, requiring expatriates to identify potential talents and develop the local team during their term in less developed nations. This policy has specifically been included as a major clause in the working contract between the hotels and these senior professionals.

I applied in the hotel here, we can hire an expat, try to use them as much as possible, as the trainer, and coach and develop local team. [...] If I sign the contracts with you, you need to develop for me 2 local talents. (H4)

Looking at the issue from another angle, one barrier that prevents the career advancement of local hospitality talents is the Asian mentality that look up to Westerners. Regrettably, this perception is not only prevalent amongst customers but also local hotel owners, who show a clear preference to recruit expatriates for general manger position, instead of giving the opportunity to local people.

Vietnamese people generally look down on the Vietnamese's ability. That's one of the reason Vietnamese have not much chance to work high position in hotel or resort. (H2)

If there is any issue during their stay, they are always asking for GM or EXCOM member. But for Vietnamese guests, a Vietnamese being present to handle the case is not as effective as if the GM or the ECOM is a foreigner. (I1)

Explaining for the small number of Vietnamese in top positions, a frequently mentioned rationale is the country's short history in educating hospitality industry at tertiary level, especially when compared with Western countries such as United States, Switzerland, and Australia. At this development stage, Vietnam has not yet had the talent pipeline, who have been well educated and accumulated extensive industry experience. It is expected for Vietnam to take another 15-25 years in order to build the local pool of talents who have sufficient knowledge and experience to lead hospitality industry in the country.

Higher education in those regions were not focused, compared to the Western part of the world, including Australia. That might be why we see so many expats working in the industry. (A8)

There are not enough Vietnamese talents that have been developed and going overseas to learn, to study and come back to lead and guide teams. [...] You don't have that talent pipeline. So, it's basically 25 years behind. (I8)

Especially for the pre-opening phase of new hospitality establishments, the presence of expatriates in the management team is essential in developing countries like Vietnam. For this period, a team of expatriates who are experts in every area within hotel operation are formed by the management team at corporate level. This group of selected personnels are then sent to the less developed nations, utilizing their expertise to prepare all pre-opening procedures, whilst training the local team to meet the hotel group's



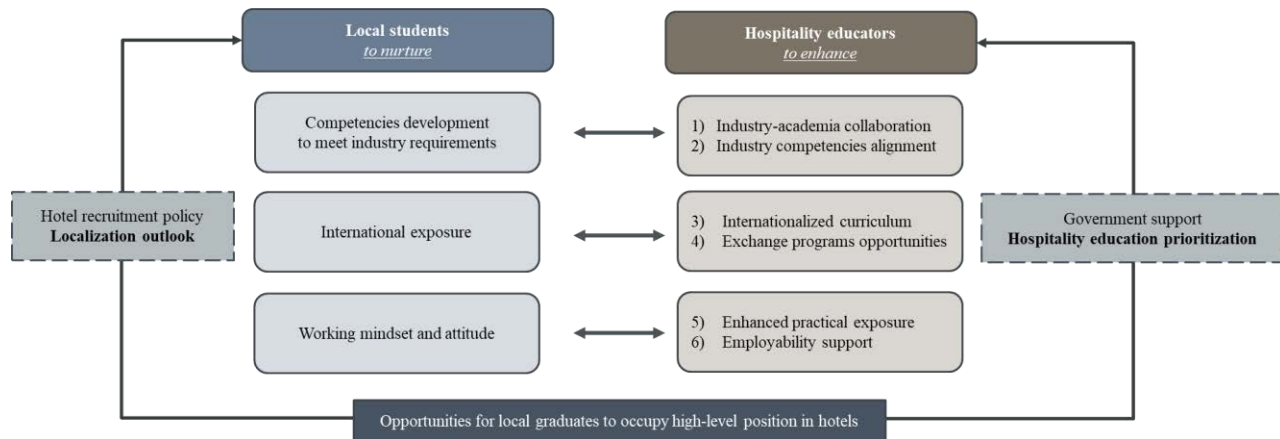
standards. At this point of development, it is very difficult to find Vietnamese talents who have sufficient credentials to perform this demanding aspect of hotel operations.

The Vietnamese who have enough knowledge and experience to open hotel is very limited. (H8)

In general, local professionals often face barriers to achieve high-level strategic positions in hospitality establishments, which are frequently filled by expatriates due to differences in working mindset, international exposure, and cultural understanding. Expatriates are often perceived as having a more proactive work mindset, characterized by anticipating challenges, driving innovation, and aligning with the dynamic demands of the global hospitality industry. In contrast, local employees may be seen as more reactive, addressing issues as they arise rather than taking a forward-thinking approach, which can limit their appeal for strategic roles. Moreover, expatriates typically bring diverse international experiences, enabling them to implement strategies that align with global standards and navigate cross-cultural complexities effectively. In comparison, local employees often have fewer opportunities to gain such exposure, creating gaps in strategic insight and global adaptability. While locals possess deep knowledge of their own culture and consumer preferences, expatriates' ability to integrate multiple cultural perspectives and their familiarity with global business norms further reinforce their suitability for leadership roles. To address this disparity, it is crucial that global hotel chains provide local professionals with opportunities for international training, cross-cultural exposure, and leadership development, alongside fostering a more proactive organizational culture. Such efforts can empower local employees to compete for strategic positions while leveraging their unique strengths to complement expatriates' expertise, leading to more balanced and inclusive leadership in the hospitality industry.

## **7.2 Areas For Improvement**

Understanding the challenges of hospitality higher education in Vietnam, industry professionals recommended six initiatives that educators need to enhance in order to facilitate students' career development and widen career opportunities for local graduates in the industry. The purpose is to produce hospitality graduates who can tick three requirements, including: competencies development to satisfy the industry's demands, international exposure, proper working mindset and attitude (Figure 14).

*Figure 14: Suggestions to increase career opportunities for local Vietnamese graduates*

The model highlights the intersection between employers' desired outcomes and educators' involvement to ensure local hospitality students can address the needs required by industry employers. Employers' desired outcomes, represented through Wiggin & McTighe's model, emphasize the importance of competencies development, international exposure, and cultivating a professional mindset and attitude to meet industry standards. These elements align closely with the hospitality industry's growing focus on localized talent pools, driven by hotel recruitment policies.

Localization strategies reflect the need for graduates who not only meet global service standards but also resonate with local cultural and operational contexts, making them ideal candidates for leadership roles. However, fostering this talent pipeline necessitates systematic efforts in competency building and exposure to diverse, internationalized working environments. The interplay between these factors underscores the necessity for comprehensive training mechanisms tailored to bridge **existing skills gaps**, ensuring that local graduates can excel in high-level hotel positions while adhering to regional hiring policies.

The educators' role, framed through Taba's model, is pivotal in enhancing the preparedness of local students to meet industry demands. Hospitality educators are tasked with implementing strategies such as fostering industry-academia collaborations, aligning curricula with industry competencies, and facilitating internationalized education frameworks, including exchange programs. These measures are essential to equip students with both theoretical knowledge and practical exposure, ensuring their employability in a competitive market.

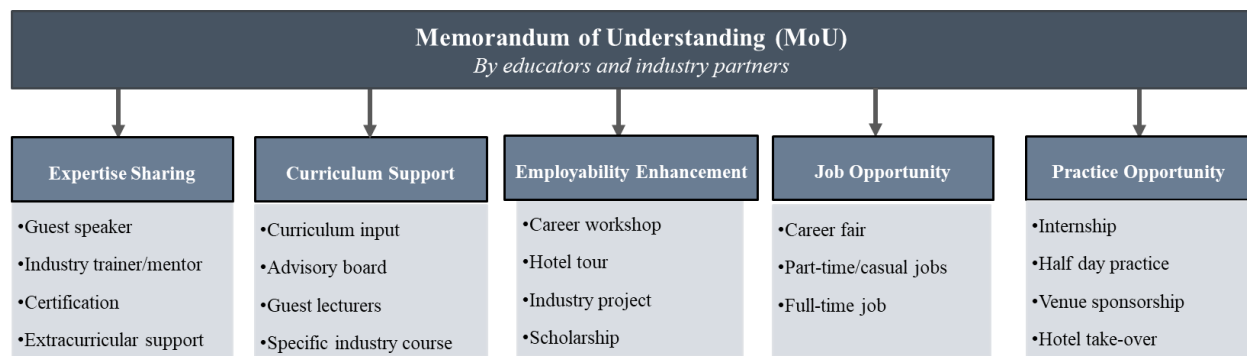
The model also stresses the need for enhanced government support, highlighting the importance of prioritizing hospitality education to drive systemic improvements. Government initiatives can play a transformative role by incentivizing partnerships, funding infrastructure for hands-on learning, and

supporting curriculum innovation aimed at nurturing global competencies. Through such interventions, the collaboration between educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders can address critical gaps in practical training and international exposure, ultimately enhancing the employability of local graduates and their capacity to assume leadership roles in the hospitality sector.

### 7.2.1 *Industry-Academia Collaboration*

Firstly, to ensure graduates can satisfy the employers' requirement, hospitality educators should pay more attention to industry-academia collaboration. Interviews with industry professionals and hospitality academics in Vietnam have highlighted various collaborating practices that are believed to be effective in bridging the gap between the hospitality industry and tertiary institutions (Figure 15).

*Figure 15: Collaborating practice between hospitality industry and tertiary institutions*



Noticeably, both educators and industry employers advocate for the signage of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the industry and academia partners. This official commitment is the foundation for a sustainable collaborating partnership. Most of the time, the main clause in these MOUs is about internship programs for students.

That's part of our HR strategies. At the local hotel level, we sign MOU with key reputed universities in the field. With that MOU, we promise to provide 3- or 6-month internship each year for their students as part of their learning program. (H5)

Besides providing internship and practical opportunities for hospitality students, one of the fundamental aims of having MOU is to bring expertise from the industry into academic settings. Some common forms of expertise sharing are being guest speakers, industry mentors, or supporting universities in their extra-curricular activities provided for students. Moreover, to help students nurture their practical competencies, hotels express their willingness to provide professional trainer to come and teach students at university free of charge. The topics can be diverse, covering all functions within hotel operations, such as: Food and Beverage, Front Office, Finance, or even soft skills. The inclusion of industry professionals who

are currently actively working in the industry can significantly enhance the practical aspects of the lessons, as these experts can bring real-life examples from the workplace into the classroom. Unfortunately, not many universities in Vietnam have utilized this offering for their students' benefits.

We partner as a trainer. For all students, we offer trainers. If they have any kind of lessons regarding F&B, FO, Finance, we are happy to offer our trainers. They can come there, conduct the lesson for the class free of charge. [...] We are open to that but there are only few universities, they use those opportunities. (H4)

On the other hand, from the educator side, although they value having industry experts in academic settings, educators face difficulties to include any industry-specific course into the curriculum, mainly due to qualification requirements and time arrangement. The Vietnamese MOET requires individuals teaching at university level to have at least Master degree, which is a criterion that many experienced industry professionals do not have.

Even if I want to invite the business side to teach, practical implementation is very difficult. Salary and bonus regime, qualification requirements, time. Businesses want to follow their time, but schools only have limited time slots. (A1)

To equip future graduates with contemporary practices, one major aspect that industry can support hospitality academics is to provide curriculum input. Although this step is often included in the curriculum development stage of any education program, industry practitioners are not satisfied with the current exchanging practices, in term of both quality and frequency. Therefore, to enhance the quality of industry insights in the hospitality curriculum, industry professionals strongly encourage education partners to form an advisory board. People participating in this consulting group should comprise of experts who are leaders in the industry, actively involved in the human resources development at their hospitality properties, such as Hotel General Manager and Director of Human Resources. Currently in Vietnam, only international universities are adopting this strategy for their program improvement.

It's better if they have a procedure to coordinate with the hotel to have a review and update the curriculum more frequently. (H12)

Every university needs an industry body with whom they work, like a task force industry body. [...] Need to get an advisory from hotels and spend the time to go to Hilton, Melia and to Marriott properties, whatever and say: Can you put one or two people from each one of your hotel companies that can advise what you want. Maybe 1 leading Human Resources director and one leading general manager to sit on the Advisory Board. They only have to meet, maybe two times a year. Doesn't have to be a full day meeting or something, but a couple of hours. (I9)

This practice has also been implemented in benchmark universities in this study, as they believe this is one of the best strategies to produce an industry-informed hospitality curriculum. At these universities, the frequency of advisory panel meeting is once every year.

We do have the industry advisory Committee. They do give us feedback on our curriculum on a regular basis. They are incorporated in our review. (A8)

To ensure the best procedure, once a year, we formally have an advisory panel who come in and sit with me for my program and sit with the school for other programs. (A7)

An aspect under employability enhancement that hospitality educators in Vietnam should learn from reputable programs in the region is the inclusion of industry project in the curriculum. Vietnamese educators need to seriously consider incorporating this component in their education programs, which have been long known for its excess in academic knowledge.

We try to make it very real-world. For this semester, students are working on their projects at the hotel, in the restaurant. [...] So, they know the real time story, the real-world problem, challenges, opportunities and requirements. (A7)

To enhance students' industry exposure and employability, hospitality educators and industry professionals regularly collaborate to conduct career workshops and hotel tour experiences for students. However, the current quality of these activities is vastly different, as it is heavily dependent on the cooperative spirit and the efforts that both sides put into those activities. Understanding the financial constraints that do not allow hospitality universities in Vietnam to have in-school practical facilities, industry employers actively show their willingness to sponsor venue to enhance students' practical exposure. As long as educators and the industry partner can negotiate on the appropriate timeslot, students are invited to come to hotel and conduct their practical modules using the hotel facilities, whether it can be at hotel's guest room or an in-house restaurant outside operating hours.

Instead of students having to practice in mockup room at the university, they can come over to our actual guest room and practice how to set up at our hotel. We also offer the restaurant because we have some restaurants only open for dinner, or lunch, we offer the restaurant at the closed time for students to come earlier to practice bartender skills, table set-up skills. (H4)

For students who show their potential in school or during internship, industry employers are willing to provide scholarship to attract those talents. This practice reaffirms the significant role of high-quality labor resources, especially for a service-orientated industry as hospitality. Additionally, to recruit potential graduates, employers actively participate in career fairs organized by the universities. A good promotion of the company's brand and values in these events is an effective way to bring the company closer to students.

Some student, we even give them the scholarship. We will make sure that after they graduate, they work for us. (H2)

We regularly participate in job fairs, career fairs, to promote our brand, our hotel and to actively recruit students as well. (H5)

Besides the aim to recruit potential full-time employees, the reason explaining such an active cooperative spirit from industry partners is because these hotel employers recognize the positive impact of

a strong collaborative relationship with hospitality universities have on their labor resource, especially during difficult time. The support from educators and students is critical when the hotels have urgent events, or during COVID time when hotels are in shortage of permanent employees.

When we have an urgent need for casual laborers, or we need to fill up our vacancy for full time, I'm always maintaining a connection with them. They send us the best CVs that they have to fill up our vacancies. (H11)

During the COVID, we have to cut down on our number of permanent staff. That's why we really need the help and the extra manpower from their students, the interns. (H5)

However, despite the hotels' efforts, industry professionals complained on the unsupportive attitude from public hospitality universities in Vietnam. Not only are they not active in the collaborating approach, but they also require lots of unnecessary paperwork and being inefficient in their working process. Director of Human Resources at hotels revealed the most challenging issue when working with these universities is about the coordinator personnel. Firstly, there is a frequent change of human resources responsible for this position in public universities, resulting in inconsistent communication and various unnecessary procedures that affect collaborative efficiency. Secondly, this person often does not work directly with students. He/she needs to transfer the information they receive from the hotel partners through lectures, risking the potential of misinformation.

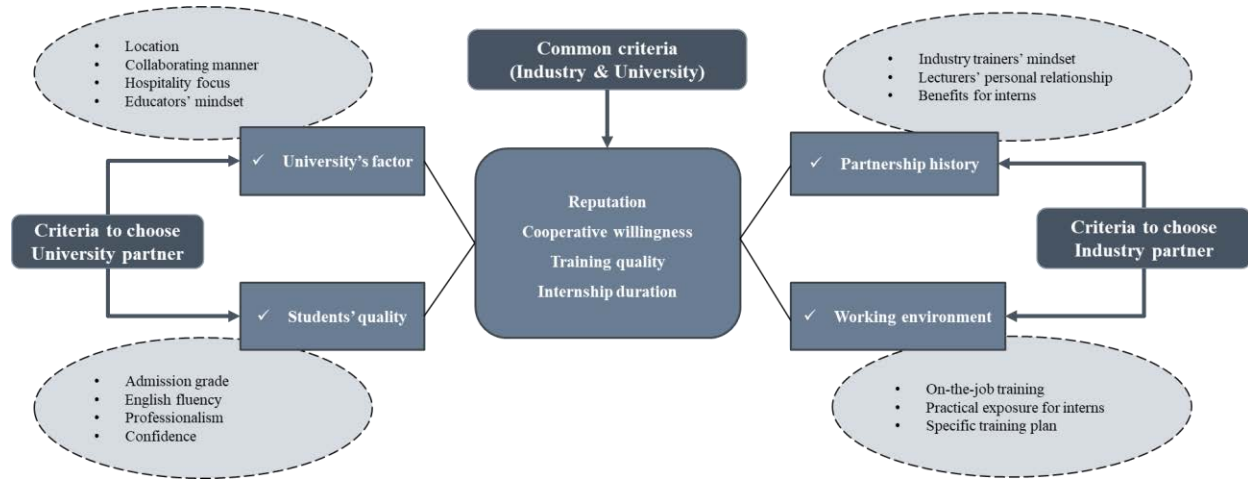
Some universities change the person in charge many times (early/middle/end of the year). Changing the person in charge is fine but they need to handover the full info. Every time a new person is in charge, we have to share again all info & requirements. (H4)

On the other hand, industry professionals expressed their satisfaction working with the coordinators from private and international universities, due to their professional work approaches.

When I work with the coordinator between the enterprise and the school, when I work with private university, the coordination is very good. They reply e-mail or they send request or everything in a very professional manner. (H7)

The way international schools often have one person responsible for collaborative relationship with the industry, so it will be easier to work and more professional. (H8)

Therefore, to address the aforementioned issue, the selection of an appropriate partner is an essential factor for an effective long-term collaboration. Hospitality educators and industry professionals revealed key criteria they consider when deciding which partner to work with (Figure 16).

*Figure 16: Criteria to choose collaborating partner*

To assess the potential of a collaborative partner, both employers and educators look for four common criteria, which are partner's reputation, cooperative willingness, training quality and the time duration allowed for students' internship. From the hotel's perspective, they observe and cross check the university's reputation in the market. Whereas, for educators, their key criterion is the brand name of the hospitality establishment. Preference is given to hotels belonging to reputable global chains, such as Marriott or InterContinental Hotels Group.

The main criteria would be their reputation [...] if they have partnership with one of our hotels before so we can cross check their reputation. Mostly their reputation in the field. (H5)

The first criterion is within the brand name. For example, we usually collaborate with the big company. (P3)

International corporations are still prioritized because they have a recognized SOP. (P1)

In addition to cooperative spirit - a basic requirement for a partnership, hotels also pay focus on the extent to which the university partner is willing to offer necessary counselling for students during the internship, as well as how they will collaborate with hotels to monitor their students in this period.

Constant effort in monitoring intern students, offer coaching / counselling if required (I10)

In term of training quality, while hotel companies may follow the corporate guidelines to choose collaborating education partners, hospitality educators assess the property's vision on labor resources, whether they aim to create the future workforce and prioritize training potential talents, or they see interns as a cheap source of labor to exploit.

Hotel follows IHG Academy selection guidelines and tools when hiring IHG Academy participants. (H6)

They focus more on creating a new generation. When they focus on training, it will be easier for me to give students for them so that I can make sure not to receive complaints from students about the company. (P5)

Another factor that plays a decisive role in industry-academia partnership is the match in internship time and duration that both sides require students to undertake. Besides the number of months students do internship, reaching consensus on what time in the year they undertake their internship is also critical. A strong collaborative relationship can only be built if both sides can negotiate on the most appropriate timeslot for this activity.

How long they can support their students to do their internships and do part time jobs. (I3)

Internships in the summer semester will often not be interesting because students have many other plans. Let's just say internships are paid, but students don't care much unless compulsory. (P1)

In addition to the common criteria shared by both parties, from the industry's perspective, location is a key factor for consideration when selecting a university partner. Employers prefer universities that are located near their property, as this close proximity will help the hotel more conveniently receive extra help from students for big events or weekend work.

I think it's more important that we take graduates from local universities, especially for ongoing interns [...] We want to borrow interns for big functions or weekend works, give them more exposure to big functions. (I9)

Surprisingly, industry employers are only interested in universities that have hospitality programs in as a separate department, as this factor indicates the university's priority on educating this service sector. Students who are nurtured in an educational environment where hospitality is at the core are believed to have better hospitality mentality. Moreover, the mindset and expertise of educators from these hospitality-focused universities can enhance students' mental readiness, certainly saving a significant amount of training time required from employers when students enter the workforce. At university-level, employers pay particular attention to the collaborating manner from potential university partners. They assess how the university's coordinator approaches and communicates, as the way this person conducts their work can represent the professionalism of the university.

Most importantly, they should have hospitality or hotel management as the main core value of the other program. [...] The people who learn in university where hospitality is a core subject, normally have the hospitality mentality. That costs a lot of time to coach people who do not have it. (I4)

The people who approached us are very important because they're representatives from the university. The right approach, professional approach represents the image of the university, [...] This kind of thing gives us a little assumption about the university. (H10)

Apart from assessing the academic aspect, employers also evaluate students' quality before entering a mutual agreement with any education providers. While some industry professionals reveal their



preference to recruit students from universities with high admission grades, some hotels even go beyond and ask the university to send a batch of students for internship so that they can have an objective assessment of the students' quality from these institutions. On top of common requirements for professionalism and self-confidence, students are selected based on their English level. Interestingly, industry employers confessed to their practice of recruiting people who cannot speak English during the COVID period, when the main market was local Vietnamese. However, these people will soon be dismissed when the international market resumes. It is ascertained that proficiency in English is a necessity to enter a five-star international working environment.

On the property level, the first thing we choose is university that can teach good level of English. If they can't speak English. I mean it's different now with COVID. We take a lot of people that could speak with the locals. [...] They'll only be on short-term contracts because there's no point in keeping them when the international tourists come back. (I9)

From the educators' perspective, criteria to choose industry partner are mainly based on the partnership history between both parties and the working environment that the industry partner can provide for their students. Academics stressed the importance of having a well-built training plan for students when they have their first internship. While some educators prefer to partner with high-scale international properties due to their established training procedures, others focus more on having properties that can provide sufficient on-the-job training and real-life experience to enhance what students have learnt in the classroom. These educators are open with hotels having different star-ratings.

We try to have a broad range of partners to be able to present a well-rounded picture to our students. The hotel's star does not matter. It's about the experience required to enhance the outcome of the subject. (P6)

Last but not least, a criterion that cannot be neglected is the salary and benefits provided for students during these industry placement periods, including but not limited to monetary allowance, accommodation, insurance and meal plans. This is an aspect where educators may prioritize long-term industry partner, as they are reluctant to spend additional time and efforts to negotiate these issues with new hotel establishments.

With some kind of new companies, for example, Regent Phu Quoc, we need to look for another place: the staff house, accommodations for the student, policies for the students as well, like insurance for example. It's additional value but it's very important. (P3)

For a country with a long coastline like Vietnam, besides hotel establishments in big cities, the hospitality and tourism development also spread across various smaller provinces, with a large number of resorts and hotels located along the beach coast of the country. These remote locations of hospitality employers create more challenges in designing a suitable remuneration package for student interns, given the fact that majority of higher education institutions are located in a few major cities, such as Hanoi, Ho

Chi Minh City and Da Nang. Regardless of the long distance, student interns are not offered the same remuneration rate as full-time employees during their internship period at the property, which normally lasts for two to three months. It was only after COVID-19 that hospitality employers in the country are willing to offer a small amount of monetary allowance to interns to attract these labors as a result of the post-pandemic recruitment crisis.

### **7.2.2 *Industry Competencies Alignment***

To prepare work-ready graduates, competencies alignment between the industry's requirements and what hospitality educators teach students in academic settings is the basic foundation. This study interviewed employers on the most important competencies they look for when interviewing graduates. In general, although the competency requirement will be different for each recruiting position, all applicants coming for interview will be assessed on three aspects: knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

When we said about competency, I divided it into 3 parts. First about knowledge. Second is about the skill and the last is about the attitude. It totally depends on each job requirement. (H12)

Besides the general foundation knowledge, especially for number-related competencies, hospitality professionals require students to possess industry-specific knowledge. Hospitality students who can show basic understanding about the industry will stand out from the crowd in the interview process. For university graduates that have limited industry exposure, advanced industry knowledge is not required. Nevertheless, industry recruiters pay significant attention to graduates' service mindset and their can-do attitude to meet customer expectations. These are essential requirements for an industry in which customers' requests can be demanding and varied. For students who graduated from tertiary education, employers look for a higher level of strategic thinking, ownership judgement and more advanced competencies, compared to vocational college graduates. Students are expected to have a certain extent of independence while working.

When you are at a high level of education, the employer actually expected you to have something more advanced, in terms of knowledge and skill. (I6)

They need to be doing their own job, meaning they need to be individualistic as well. (I8)

They must have base knowledge about the industry. [...] We don't ask for advanced skills or advanced knowledge because we train them once they are here with us. But they must have at least the basic knowledge. (H5)

Apart from industry knowledge requirement, industry professionals pay special attention to how students present themselves during the interview, students' grooming, attitude, self-confidence, career commitment and willingness to learn. This is understandable for the hospitality industry where professionalism is the standard. To interact effectively with customers, students also need to demonstrate

their confidence to communicate and deliver the expected service, even with their limited industry experience.

Even when school or university send students to the hotel for hotel tours, or internship, or short visits, we observe the appearance of the student. From that one, we can even evaluate the training content from the university. Appearance is just appearance, but it speaks a lot. (H10)

You need to find people that can make eye contact and are confident enough of themselves to deal with guests. (I9)

More importantly, before actually entering the workforce, students need to have realistic expectations about the hospitality working environment. Employers emphasized the efforts from educators to provide initial industry exposure during school years. This is an area where the involvement of academics is critical to shaping proper career perception for future hospitality graduates.

As a fresh graduate, we do not expect a lot of work experience from them. Although we know that they should have gone through a lot of internships, maybe once, maybe twice, maybe more than that. (H1)

For the company's sustainable development, industry employers placed great value on students' positive thinking and career commitment, especially for the younger generation nowadays who tend to lose patience easily. Although students are strongly encouraged to develop their own career development plan, they should not underestimate the value of work experience and time spent in the industry.

I prefer someone that has patience. Being aggressive in terms of personal development is good. But at the same time, we need to be patient because real-life experience cannot just come in one or two days or a few months. It takes times. (I3)

For soft skills requirements, employers critically assess students on their adaptability, critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal, and teamwork competencies. Fortunately, hospitality academics in Vietnam also understand the importance of nurturing these soft competencies for students in university environment. On the other side, interviews have revealed several competencies that are deemed important for employers, but educators have not given much attention. These competencies include but are not limited to leadership, pressure handling, strategic thinking, ownership judgment or project management. Above all, hospitality employers prioritize graduates who have a growth mindset and willingness to learn. In reality, differences between education and industry are unavoidable. Consequently, students' growth attitude and their learning spirit is vital to close this skills gap. Table 42 presents competencies that industry professionals perceive to be the most important for hospitality graduates, in comparison with the perception of educators on this aspect.

Table 42: Competencies industry perceive most importance (but educators not)

| Competencies Industry professionals consider the most important |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Alignment with educators |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Generic competencies                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accounting/number</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Already emphasized       |
| Industry-specific competencies                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Industry knowledge</li> <li>Operational skill</li> <li>Service mindset</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                            | Already emphasized       |
|                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professionalism</li> <li>Technical skill</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                          | Not yet emphasized       |
| Contemporary competencies                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commercial</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Already emphasized       |
|                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revenue management</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                | Not yet emphasized       |
| Soft competencies                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adaptability</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Critical thinking</li> <li>English</li> <li>Interpersonal</li> <li>Problem solving</li> <li>Teamwork</li> </ul>                                                                 | Already emphasized       |
|                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change management</li> <li>Creativity and innovation</li> <li>Decision making</li> <li>Leadership</li> <li>Ownership judgement</li> <li>Pressure handling</li> <li>Project management</li> <li>Strategic thinking</li> </ul> | Not yet emphasized       |
| Employability competencies                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Industry exposure</li> <li>Realistic expectation</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                  | Not yet emphasized       |
| Attitude                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proper work attitude</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                              | Already emphasized       |
|                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Career commitment</li> <li>Career passion</li> <li>Confidence</li> <li>Humble</li> <li>Positive thinking</li> <li>Proactiveness</li> <li>Result-driven</li> </ul>                                                            | Not yet emphasized       |

|  |                           |  |
|--|---------------------------|--|
|  | • <b>Willing to learn</b> |  |
|--|---------------------------|--|

Going through the COVID pandemic, hospitality industry professionals and educators have witnessed drastic changes in the industry as a consequence of this global crisis. They highlighted various competencies that they believe will become more important after the pandemic.

As the hospitality industry has suffered from serious manpower crisis after COVID, the competency in human resources management has become an important requirement for hospitality graduates, who aim to be future managers. Noticeably, the industry has witnessed an ever-increasing request for service customization and personalization amongst customers. To satisfy customers' demands after pandemic, hospitality employees need to develop their ability to provide personalized service.

Nowadays, they want to feel more personalized service. Customize tourist behavior. We also need to be updated and match the requirements of the guests. (H11)

Going through the isolated COVID-19 period, working-from-home and online interaction have now been the norm in modern society, forcing hospitality enterprises to evolve and adapt continuously. These practices have consequently led the hospitality workforce to nurture their competencies in this domain, especially in the area of social media and digital marketing. Therefore, industry employers strongly emphasized the need to nurture graduates' competences in digital and information-technology.

Digital skills now need to be trained more specifically, professionally, applying different programs, software, apps to the service operation process. (A2)

Social media and digital marketing because people spend more time on these platforms. We need to be familiar. (H4)

Interestingly, the unexpected occurrence of COVID pandemic has created a dramatic shift in hotel revenue management, due to the fact that historical data which were often used to forecast future trends had become invalid. To survive during this period, hotel revenue managers were forced to review their strategies, hence, recognize the vital role of data analysis competency.

Now every business is about revenue. So, we need someone who has strong commercial experience. Everything they do needs to generate revenue. (I3)

Definitely have a deeper understanding of data. Using the data to commercial knowledge. (I7)

Besides the new competencies derived from the digital world, hospitality industry professionals also witness a surge of awareness in responsibility towards sustainability, not only from frequently mentioned environmental perspective, but also from the social perspective.

After COVID-19, we think more about social responsibility. We also have a new course. We call it our social responsibility. (A5)

Under the domain of soft competencies, adaptability is essential. The crisis has shown that the ones with strong adaptability are those who can survive and thrive. In this aspect, for a hospitality company to adapt successfully during the challenging period, the employee's ability to be creative and innovative is what truly makes the difference. This is also the period when exceptional leaders show their abilities to lead the team effectively.

Adaptability. This is the key competency that we can see very well. Any company or any leaders who have stronger adaptability will be successful and stand up very fast. (H1)

You may be pushed to create new things to do. Because you don't have the experience, but you need the money. With a lot of failures, we'll have some new ideas, new ways to do things, new ways to look at things. (A6)

Leadership. You need to lead the team to go over that, you need to be on the floor and involve more in operation. (H4)

Additionally, industry employers expressed their preference to have employees who are equipped with crisis management knowledge and are willing to multi-task in the hospitality working environment. These two competencies are critical for hospitality enterprises to survive in any crisis, when their manpower can be extremely limited, and the companies have to focus on cost management.

Employees of the industry probably need to have a better sense of crisis management. (A8)

Things will be more now clustered because companies will work more on efficiency and effectiveness. [...] That multitasking is one of the competencies that is very important for moving forward. (I8)

Above all, to overcome difficult periods, the most important factor is to keep a proper working attitude and positive thinking. As long as employees remain their hopes and stay committed, the company will successfully conquer all hurdles and continue thriving.

We need someone to think positively. We are here to solve the problem. (I3)

Table 43 presents competencies that industry professionals and hospitality educators believe will become more important after the pandemic.

*Table 43: Competencies emerged after pandemic*

| Competencies more important after pandemic (evaluated by both industry and educators) |                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Generic competencies</b>                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human resources management</li> </ul>                                                   |
| <b>Industry-specific competencies</b>                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health safety</li> <li>• Personalized service</li> <li>• Safety and security</li> </ul> |

|                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Contemporary competencies</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data analysis</li> <li>• Digital e-commerce</li> <li>• Information technology</li> <li>• Revenue management</li> <li>• Social media</li> <li>• Strategic partnership</li> <li>• Sustainability</li> </ul>                                                                      |
| <b>Soft competencies</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptability</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Creativity and innovation</li> <li>• Crisis management</li> <li>• Change management</li> <li>• Critical thinking</li> <li>• Global mindset</li> <li>• Interpersonal</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Multi-tasking</li> </ul> |
| <b>Attitude</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence</li> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Positive thinking</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

### 7.2.3 *Internationalized Curriculum & Exchange Opportunities*

To reinforce the international exposure for hospitality students in Vietnam, educators are suggested to pay more attention to two aspects: the internationalization aspect of the curriculum, and the opportunities for students to join exchange programs. In an attempt to construct an internationalized curriculum, besides the inclusion of up-to-date contents and industry practices at global level, hospitality educators should incorporate the cultural diversity aspects into their lessons. Getting accreditation from global ranking systems is also an effective way to get the hospitality education programs recognized at international level.

We should be more culturally diverse; we should be the ones bringing it into the classroom [...]. Must be a very culturally adaptive classroom so that everybody is able to speak and stand up. (P7)

Universities in Vietnam should participate in school evaluation and classification programs worldwide and their degree need to be recognized internationally. (H6)

For hospitality students, the educators' efforts to provide different exchange opportunities increase students' understanding of the international market and working culture, therefore, enriching their

industry's perspective and experience. According to the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, as of September 2023, Vietnam has established over 600 joint education programs at university level with foreign higher education institutions in across more than 50 nations and territories. The most popular international programs are partnered between Vietnam and five countries: the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Australia, and South Korea. Analyzing the proportion of foreign-affiliated education programs by field, the most dominant sectors are economics and management (60%); science and technology (25%); humanities and social sciences (less than 10%) (Phuong, 2024). Despite numerous constraints that educators must work on to establish an effective collaboration with foreign education institutions, the benefits of these networks are valuable for not only lecturers, but also for students who are not educated in an international learning environment.

Leave the country and come back. Young people gain more experience. (I9)

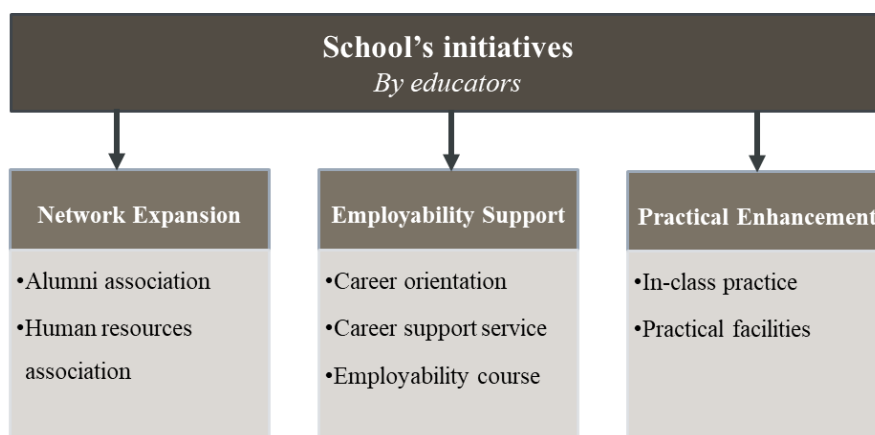
Students exchange program. (H6)

For academics, an active international network will be beneficial for program benchmark and improvement, increase the chances to get their degree recognized at a global level. Results have revealed great appreciation from employers, alumni and graduating students for universities that have good reputation in the market, which could be best illustrated by the international recognition of the university's hospitality education programs. Moreover, for hospitality students, different exchange opportunities from these partnerships will significantly enhance local students' international exposure, widen their perspectives and elevate long-term career opportunities.

#### 7.2.4 *Practical Exposure And Employability Support*

To improve students' employability, there are various initiatives for educators to reinforce in order to bring students closer to their potential employers (Figure 17).

*Figure 17: Initiatives to boost students' confidence to enter the workforce*





With external partners, educators should establish and expand networks with alumni associations and different human resources associations to widen job opportunities for hospitality students. For emerging economies, hospitality educators may also establish connection with some of the potential professional bodies, who are reputable in hospitality sub-areas, such as Hotel Concierge, Food and Beverage, Rooms Division. If such leading industry organizations are consulted and partnered in a strategic way, not only can hospitality students access a diverse range of career opportunities, but hospitality educators can also utilize the expertise from these industry professionals to craft intriguing activities to enrich the education program.

Internally, with hospitality students, educators need to improve the quality of career orientation activities, career supporting services and employability course. Before embarking on a professional development pathway, students should be well aware of their strengths and weaknesses in order to build a career roadmap for themselves. The early introduction of the Hospitality Employability course will assist this process more effectively.

Students should be confident in their abilities, must have a career development roadmap. (A2)

We have a subject called Hospitality Career Development, or orientation for them in the future after 4 years of school, as well as what their dreams are, we need to clarify with them right from term 1. (A2)

Interviews have highlighted the benefits of in-class practical modules in boosting students' confidence prior to graduation. A good implementation of theoretical knowledge under lectures' supervision will significantly enhance students' absorption of knowledge, preparing them physically and mentally for any circumstances in the workplace. However, as the quality of in-class practical modules is heavily dependent on the university's financial condition and training facilities, public universities do not have the advantage in this aspect, compared to their private and international counterparts. To minimize the consequences of limited practical facilities, another approach that educators from public universities should take is to encourage students to do part-time job during their four-year study time.

Students are encouraged to work and to do part time job during this student life. (P3)

So as long as students are willing to find a job in the hospitality industry, the chances are there to find such jobs. It's not only from the classroom. They can learn from practical work they do in the industry. They can bring their experience back to the classroom and contribute to the discussion and learning, based on their practical experience. (A8)

To achieve the most desirable results, educators need to convince students of the benefits of choosing a part-time job in the hospitality industry, as well as how this experience will assist their long-term career. The aim is to limit the chances that students take part-time job in other professions due to higher wages.

### 7.3 Chapter Conclusion

To level up the job prospects of local hospitality graduates, both educators and students should be conscious of issues that limit their career opportunities in multinational hotel companies. An accurate awareness of the local's weaknesses and expatriate's strengths can narrow the existing gap, consequently, open the career ladders for Vietnamese hospitality graduates.

Besides the improvement in lecturers' quality of local universities, industry professionals stressed the need for better quality and frequency in the way educators seek employers' insights for hospitality curriculum contribution. Discrepancy between the perceptions of employers and educators has been found on the most important competencies expected from hospitality graduates, along with emerging competencies as a result of COVID-19. These findings urge hospitality educators to review their current education program, at the same time, put more efforts on improving curriculum review procedure and industry-academia collaboration.

To tackle this challenge, an effective strategy is to form an industry advisory board, preferably comprising of senior personnels at hospitality enterprises who have a deep understanding of the industry's labor resources. The ideal meeting frequency with this group of experts to discuss industry trends and curriculum content would be every six months. The bottom line of this long-term partnership is mutual respect and alignment of mindset from both parties. Therefore, even if educators may insist to conduct comprehensive program reviews after one learning cycle, they should not underestimate the value of regular communication with industry employers, especially for a vulnerable and fast-changing industry as hospitality.

In this regard, the signage of Memorandum of Understanding between the industry and academia partners is the foundation for a successful partnership. From the industry side, employers affirmed their prioritization to support education institutions with whom they have signed the agreement despite their busy schedule. However, for educators, the benefits of this partnership have not been leveraged sufficiently. Industry employers complain about the overreliance of some public universities on their long history in hospitality education. More efforts and proactive initiatives from these universities are expected to create an effective industry-academia linkage.

For public universities, educators need to improve the way they receive and respond to industry feedback. Although industry partners have expressed the willingness to offer their expertise free of charge to come as trainer to university, they have not received active responses from educators. Moreover, to address the constraints on practical facilities at universities, educators should also optimize the benefits provided by industry partners to use their property as practice venue. The lack of effective practical modules

under lectures' supervision during university years has caused students' limited ability in knowledge implementation at hospitality workplace. A well-deserved reinforcement in this aspect will substantially shift the negative perception of employers on vocational competencies of hospitality university graduates.

Noteworthy, to achieve the most successful partnership, local universities in Vietnam should recruit a coordinator, who will represent the school and be responsible for effective communication and collaboration with the industry partners. As the coordinator will be the one working most closely with employers on internship arrangement and employment opportunities, he/she should be allocated several sessions across the semester to transfer necessary information directly to students, hence, avoid any potential miscommunication. Especially for universities whose vision is to leverage the hospitality major, it is useful to know that industry employers pay great attention to how the education partner prioritizes hospitality education at their multi-disciplinary university. Industry professionals are only interested in signing agreements with education institutions that have a separate hospitality department. This finding suggested a future development strategy for universities that still have hospitality operated under business department.

## **8 Chapter 8: Hospitality Curriculum – Comprehensive Overview, Evaluation And Strategies For Improvement**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This study aimed to investigate the skills and competency levels of hospitality students and deploy qualitative research methods to explore a process that channels tertiary institutions' responses to a changing and growing hospitality environment. After having a critical analysis of the problem, this chapter evaluates the extent to which the current hospitality education programs can effectively prepare graduates with required competencies to satisfy the demand of industry employers, discussing strategies to produce an industry-informed hospitality curriculum. Key suggestions include factors contributing to a successful hospitality curriculum, strategies to improve the quality of internship program, stakeholders' involvement in curriculum design process, and a collaborative process between industry and university to produce industry-informed hospitality curriculum.

### **8.2 Answer To Research Questions**

Through the implementation of data triangulation, this chapter answers the four research questions that were introduced at the beginning of the thesis.

#### **8.2.1 Research Question 1**

*What are the subjects offered in hospitality education programs at universities in Vietnam and reputable Asian universities?*

A key responsibility of hospitality higher education is to nurture individuals, who are adaptive and empowered, to address the future through critical thinking and innovative solutions (Mahmoud, 2018). Educators at universities should equip students with sufficient philosophical and sociological knowledge, which can then be used as the foundation for students' life-long journey (Lyu et al., 2016). Taking this approach, the seven compulsory subjects included in the VQF have reflected this responsibility, which include Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, Political Economics of Marxism and Leninism, Ho Chi Minh Ideology, Viet Nam Communist Party History, Scientific Socialism, Military Education, and Physical Education. For all selected local universities in this study, the mandatory foundation requirements have been mentioned in the programs' learning outcomes (under generic knowledge), which aim to produce graduates who can apply political principles, basic social science and humanities knowledge in professional practices and research.

In term of curriculum content, for hospitality graduates in Vietnam, educators put major emphasis on building students' foundation in the business field, as demonstrated by various learning outcomes related to business administration, entrepreneurship and management science. On the other hand, benchmark

universities in the region have been putting their priority on equipping students with knowledge that are specifically applicable in the hospitality industry. These universities also offer a specialization within their hospitality program, not only to differentiate themselves from other education providers, but also to gain attraction from industry employers who are looking for specialists in particular fields. Nevertheless, hospitality curriculum in Vietnamese universities are still allocating a significant space of the curriculum for general business management and economics subjects. This contrast is similar with the difference found in educational approach between hospitality curriculums in South Korea and China. While the hospitality curriculum for Chinese students focus on providing business foundation subjects, the curriculum in South Korea put priority on developing industry-specific and language competencies for hospitality students (Wang & Abukhalifeh, 2020).

In the hospitality industry, the ability to deliver exceptional service is critical to the success of hospitality enterprises (Jauhari, 2006). Especially after COVID-19, industry professionals in this study have witnessed a surge in customers' demand for service customization and personalization. This change in behavior calls for an emphasis on developing hospitality graduates' competence in service management. Reflecting on the current hospitality education programs, while all benchmark universities have recognized the value of service management subject, only one-third of investigated universities in Vietnam include this subject in their curriculum.

Compared to vocational college graduates, employers expect hospitality university graduates to possess a range of high-level competencies such as strategic thinking, critical thinking, problem-solving, pressure handling, ownership judgment, project management and independence at work. Although these competencies have been presented in hospitality programs' learning outcomes, it is difficult to assess the quality of teaching and learning of these competencies, especially with the limited number of subjects in the curriculum dedicated to developing students' competence in this aspect. To produce university graduates who are critical thinkers that can lead the industry, previous research suggested hospitality educators to allocate a deserving portion of the curriculum space to educate students on these competencies (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019; Dredge et al., 2012). Instead of carefully-structured curriculum with pre-determined format and guidance, hospitality educators should design more "unstructured" assignments, allowing students to manage their own projects and complete the work with little supervision (Huang et al., 2016). This approach also allows students to think 'outside the box', especially if these unstructured assessments are designed to measure students' creative problem-solving skills.

The profound effect of COVID on hospitality industry worldwide has led to the emergence of certain competencies required of hospitality workforce. Understanding the vulnerable nature of hospitality industry, all benchmark universities have offered subject to nurture students' competence in crisis

management. Especially after the pandemic, one of the key competencies that hospitality employers look for in graduates is crisis management, an area that needs urgent attention of academics.

Employees of the industry probably need to have a better sense of crisis management. (A8)

We need someone to think positively. We are here to solve the problem. (I3)

Nevertheless, hospitality educators in Vietnam have been neglecting their responsibility to equip students with this competency, as evidenced by no subject on crisis management to be seen in the hospitality curriculum. It is the responsibility of hospitality educators to ensure future graduates are well equipped with such competencies so that they can conquer potential similar challenges in the future.

After the pandemic, industry professionals brought to attention the demand for competencies on information technology, especially on data analysis and digital platforms. Although knowledge on information technology at general level has been included as a key learning outcome of hospitality education programs in Vietnam, educators have not yet paid enough focus on sub-sections such as data analysis and digital marketing. Despite the previous literature supporting the inclusion of these subjects for hospitality graduates (Martin-Rios et al., 2017; Ruetzler et al., 2014), none of universities in Vietnam has offered this subject for students. Meanwhile, two out of three benchmark universities have provided their students with subject on data analytics. This is an area that hospitality educators in emerging markets need to pay more attention to, especially in the current tech-savvy era where social media has become a mainstream media channel (Ruetzler et al., 2014; Sisson & Adams, 2013; Trinidad, 2020).

Analyzing the learning outcomes of hospitality education programs in Vietnam, certain self-management competencies have been mentioned, mostly fall under the 'Attitude' domain for personal moral qualities and professional ethical quality. The commonly mentioned competencies are related to students' willingness to learn, their self-study spirit, honesty, and confidence at work. However, in Vietnam, there appeared a lack of emphasis on nurturing students' competence in self-assessment and self-control, evidenced by the fact that only one university mention these competencies in the learning outcomes of their education program.

### **8.2.2 Research Question 2**

***How do industry professionals perceive the current education programs in Vietnamese hospitality universities in terms of preparing graduates with necessary competencies?***

In the discussion whether hospitality education programs should remain generic or industry-focused, results from this study highlighted the need to focus on equipping students with industry-specific competencies. Both industry professionals and university alumni complained on the excessive general

academic knowledge provided in hospitality curriculum in Vietnam. Especially for public universities, the current education programs are too generic that it makes hospitality graduates struggle to apply what they have learnt into the hospitality workplace. Even though employers do not require graduates to possess advanced level of industry knowledge upon graduation, the level of industry-specific competencies amongst hospitality graduates in Vietnam has not reached the desired basic-level requirement. This lack of formal education on industry-specific competencies is also mentioned as a key reason why local hospitality graduates are not able to occupy top positions in multinational hotel establishments in the country.

Despite the dominance of Food and Beverage subjects in hospitality curriculum of both benchmark universities and universities in Vietnam, industry professionals did not mention this competency as a key requirement they look for in hospitality graduates. Instead, employers referred to industry-specific competencies in general. Beside hospitality industry-specific competencies, employers mostly value generic competencies that equip students with higher-order concepts and proficiency in different management functions to succeed in their long-term career (Nolan et al., 2010; Sisson & Adams, 2013). Even though the inclusion of technical competencies is important, an overemphasis on nurturing these areas can put significant risk on the employability of hospitality graduates and their career prospects (Chen et al., 2018; Trinidad, 2020), as hospitality employers are not looking for hard competencies (Sisson & Adams, 2013). It is essential that educators can find a balance in these aspects as an over-theoretical or over-vocational curriculum will potentially affect the future development landscape of the industry (Lyu et al., 2016). This is in concurrence with perceptions of industry professionals in this study, who expressed their willingness to train fresh graduates in technical aspects to meet the company's standards when students land in the job.

For human-relation competencies, although educators have recognized the importance of this competency domain (as presented in programs' learning outcomes), industry professionals are not satisfied with the competence of hospitality graduates in this aspect. Students are perceived to be inadequately prepared in areas such as English, communication, adaptability, cultural sensitivity. For an industry that are vulnerable to uncertainties and external pressures as hospitality, the employees' adaptability and leadership competence have long been emphasized in the literature as key contributors to the organizations' competitiveness (Cheung et al., 2010; Suh et al., 2012; Talawanich & Wattanacharoensil, 2021; Wang & Tsai, 2012). Especially after COVID, with graduates who are interested in climbing the career ladder in hospitality industry, their ability to adapt and to lead others through turbulent times will be fundamental for the future growth of their career. However, in this study, employers witnessed fresh hospitality graduates struggle to adapt from the university setting to the working environment. Students' underdeveloped human-relation competency is one of the main reasons making this school-work transition more difficult.

Besides communication, hospitality graduates in Vietnam are perceived to be seriously lacking in cultural understanding and sensitivity. This could be due to the insufficient attention of hospitality educators to develop students' competence in this aspect, as only two out of six investigated local universities include cultural understanding in the learning outcomes of their programs. For global hotel chains, they also reported the workforces' limited ability in cultural awareness, open-mindset and flexibility in developing countries as the most critical challenges in their attempt to expand into emerging destinations (Velo & Mittaz, 2006). This lack of cultural understanding and international exposure is the reason explaining the presence of expatriates in developing countries. In the context of Vietnam, only hospitality students graduated from international universities in the country seem to perform better thanks to the international learning environment in these universities that allow students to adapt better to the multicultural environment at high-end hotel properties.

International university has knowledge and expertise from other countries. They come here to show some samples. (I11)

With international students, we see that they are quite confident, and they can actively approach us by themselves. (H5)

They also know and work well with their international people with different language or different English as well. That is very positive things about the International University. (H8)

Despite the presence of foreign language subjects in hospitality curriculum, recruiters consider English as a main hurdle limiting the development of Vietnamese hospitality workforce, especially with students graduated from public universities. Local candidates are not confident in expressing their opinions in English, which is a pivotal requirement to work in international five-star hotel properties. From students' viewpoints, they also admit that their limited English proficiency is the barrier preventing them from accessing valuable career opportunities. It is undeniable that proficiency in English is not only a primary condition to work in an multi-cultural environment, and but is also a decisive factor to determine hospitality graduates' employability (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019).

Depending on recruiting positions, industry employers in this study look for different competencies of hospitality graduates. Similar to previous research on employers' recruitment preference (Harkison et al., 2011; Srisangkaew, 2022; Trinidad, 2020; Wang & Tsai, 2012), hospitality employers in Vietnam also consider good self-management and working attitude as the most critical factors to select potential talents. However, despite the prevalence of these competencies in the programs' learning outcomes, industry professionals complained about students' improper attitude at work and lack of self-management. These young individuals underestimate the value of initial work experience, therefore displaying undesirable attitudes. From learners' perspective, students in this study also expressed their hope for more subjects on self-management competencies, in order to help them improve mental and physical endurance at the workplace.



Table 44 provides a comprehensive evaluations from employers' perspective on each type of universities offering hospitality education in Vietnam.

*Table 44: Employers' evaluations on universities offering hospitality education in Vietnam*

| EVALUATION                              | Public university                                                                                                 | Private university                                                                           | International university                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hospitality graduates                   | <b>Pros:</b><br>Good academic base, hard working, patience, humble attitude, regulation compliance                | <b>Pros:</b><br>English, confidence, open-minded, humble attitude                            | <b>Pros:</b><br>English, industry-specific competencies, cultural understanding, confidence, independence, logical thinking, open-minded, proactiveness, interpersonal skill |
|                                         | <b>Cons:</b><br>English, passive attitude, lack of confidence                                                     | No specific evaluation due to young history and limited number of students                   | <b>Cons:</b><br>Arrogance, impatience                                                                                                                                        |
| Education programs and training quality | <b>Pros:</b><br>Opportunities for post-graduate studies                                                           | <b>Pros:</b><br>Updated education program, practical facilities                              | <b>Pros:</b><br>International standard, well-rounded, practical facilities, expat lectures                                                                                   |
|                                         | <b>Cons:</b><br>Outdated, too theoretical, insufficient practical training, lecturers' limited industry exposure  | <b>Cons:</b><br>Young history and reputation, lecturers' formal qualification in hospitality | <b>Cons:</b><br>Expand rapidly (exploited lecturers)                                                                                                                         |
| Support for students                    | <b>Cons:</b><br>Lack of career orientation, limited career support service, no school's catch-up after graduation |                                                                                              | <b>Pros:</b><br>Sufficient career orientation, career support service, school's catch-up after graduation                                                                    |
| Network and collaboration               | <b>Cons:</b><br>Unprofessional collaborating manner                                                               |                                                                                              | <b>Pros:</b><br>Professional collaborating manner, international network                                                                                                     |
| Suitable position upon graduation       | Operational position                                                                                              | Administrative and management trainee position                                               |                                                                                                                                                                              |

Due to the vocational nature of the hospitality industry, practical hands-on experience plays an essential role in students' career transition. To achieve the balance between theoretical and vocational aspects of hospitality curriculum, internship program is a fundamental component. (Le et al., 2018b). In this study, besides some issues to be improved, a portion of hospitality students and alumni are grateful for

the positive impact of the internship experience on their employability, in concurrence with the benefits having been reported in previous literature, such as witness realistic industry picture (Huang et al., 2016), understand work culture (Crawford, 2013; Jack et al., 2017; Lee, 2008), widen post-graduation career opportunities (Chen et al., 2018; Crawford, 2013; Huang et al., 2016; Jack et al., 2017), and identify career goals (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007).

However, similar to reported literature on the issues with internship program, industry professionals in Vietnam are also dissatisfied with how students are prepared before entering their internship, resulting in the mistaligment in expectations between hospitality employers and interns (Chen et al., 2018; Qu et al., 2021; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007). Those students who experience negative experiences during their internship time tend to have unpleasant attitude and become less motivated to work in the industry after graduation (Fong et al., 2014). Holding a similar argument, Zopiatis and Theocharous (2013) analyzed the psychological readiness of students before and after they participate in internship programs in different countries. Results revealed that whilst successful internships can encourage students to stay in the hospitality industry; mediocre ones can ruin the dreams of future graduates (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013). These implications can directly affect the availability of immediate and high-level workforce, as well as the tourism and hospitality competitiveness of the country. These results stress the demand for effective internship management, requiring significant efforts from both educators and industry professionals to optimize the benefits of internship for hospitality students in Vietnam.

### **8.2.3 Research Question 3**

***How can universities in Vietnam improve their hospitality management curriculums for undergraduate students?***

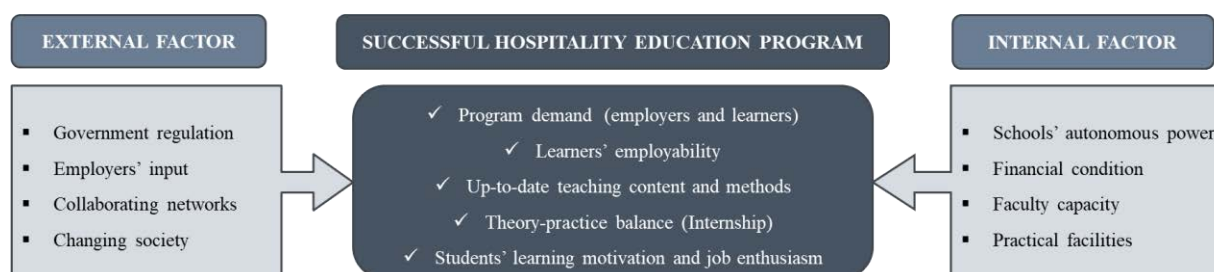
For a hospitality education program to be successful, going beyond equipping students with foundational knowledge, findings from this study supported the idea that hospitality curriculum should satisfy the demands of both employers and learners. The sufficient preparedness in industry-specific knowledge is critical to ensure hospitality graduates' employability and their competitiveness against graduates studying business management for their first job after graduation (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019; Huang et al., 2016). It is the responsibility of educators to update teaching contents and methods, as well as maintain the balance between theoretical and practical modules within the program at their education institutions, of which internship is a pivotal component. In this regard, the home base in which hospitality departments are located within larger universities is another essential factor (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017; Sisson & Adams, 2013). Research has shown that depending on the sector it is operated under, whether it

is economics, recreation, business or geography, the curriculum content of hospitality education programs can be vastly different (Scott et al., 2008).

Above all, students' learning motivation and their enthusiasm for the job is the foundation to the success of any hospitality education program. Interviews with industry leaders in this study have highlighted the critical role of having a proactive and open working mindset in hospitality working environment, which have been considered as the weaknesses of local hospitality workforce that only expatriates can bring in. After the industry has gone through tremendous hurdles of COVID-19, it is even more critical to select individuals who can stay committed and maintain positive thinking, especially when the young generation who tend to give up easily are entering the workforce. From their enthusiasm for the job, graduates will be able to make creative and innovative decisions, allowing them to stand out and win favors of both employers and customers (Jauhari, 2006). For students who are often intrigued by new topics and interaction, the internship program – as experiential learning activity, is one of the best ways to boost students' learning motivation and nurture their self-learning competencies for long-term career (Lyu et al., 2016). Research has found that students who have proper attitude and put in their efforts are those that will reap the most benefits of their study (Chen et al., 2018). Students need to seize any opportunity at the host training property to harness their professional skill, focus on deciding on their career interest, while grab their chance for future employment after graduation (Trinidad, 2020). Industry professionals highly value candidates who are hard-working, eager to learn and show initiative in difficult times, as this is the foundation for effective on-the-job training at international hospitality establishments. It is important that hospitality educators make students aware of industry expectations on students' attitudinal attributes at the early stage, to ensure graduates will not miss their chance of career promotion in the future (Harkison et al., 2011).

Figure 18 presents key factors contributing to the success of a hospitality education program, which can be used as a reference framework for educators when they develop and/or review the hospitality curriculum at their higher education institutions (developed by the author of this thesis).

*Figure 18: Factors contributing to a successful hospitality education program*



In the aspect of external factors, in Vietnam, to comply with the government regulation for accreditation at higher education level, all public and private universities in Vietnam are required to offer compulsory non-accumulative credit subjects to students, focusing on enhancing Vietnamese students' military service, physical capacity and political understandings. To elevate the quality of education programs, certain subjects are mandated as criteria for accreditation, requiring educators to follow (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017).

Under this area, factors such as input from employers, collaborating networks and the contemporary society can also have strong influence on a hospitality education program. For example, in this study, many hospitality employers advocate for the exclusion of governmental compulsory subjects, which they believe are not relevant to the hospitality industry and add more pressure on the limited curriculum space. The inclusion of these subjects in a four-year education program is blamed to be one of the main reasons for the unpreparedness of hospitality students, due to the lack of internship opportunities during their study. From the academics' side, in an attempt to produce a balanced theory-practice curriculum, hospitality academics have been complaining on the limited duration of the education program that does not allow sufficient training in both hard and soft competencies for students.

Within human-relation competency, communication is the area where most hospitality students are struggling with. Despite the prevalence of communication competency in programs' learning outcomes of almost all universities in Vietnam, hospitality graduates find it difficult to get along with colleagues at the workplace. To address this issue, hospitality educators are strongly encouraged to provide more knowledge on generational differences and diversity in professional settings to students, as well as to boost students' confidence to communicate more effectively. Some sub-areas of communication that are highly valued by employers are listening (Suh et al., 2012), maintaining eye contact, and using appropriate tone of voice (Lolli, 2013). Going beyond organizing workshops to nurture students' communication competence, educators should also design different methods for training and assessment of this competency into the curriculum (Hertzman et al., 2015)

The change in hospitality customers' behaviors and industry operation procedures to survive during the pandemic has also highlighted the critical role of revenue management in hospitality establishments. In a period where cost management is fundamental, hospitality employers have again recognized the value of effective revenue management strategies for companies to sustain during turbulent periods. While reputable hospitality programs in the world have given revenue management the place it deserves within the curriculum; unfortunately, this competency has been underestimated in hospitality curriculum in Vietnam. One potential reason explaining for the absence of hospitality revenue management subject in the country could be due to the limited number of faculties, who have sufficient knowledge and industry experience to

teach students in this domain. To address this issue, for some particular modules that academics find too difficult to teach, revenue managers should be invited to share their expertise and to conduct lessons to equip students sufficiently in this domain. Acknowledging the fact that revenue management competencies are complex and take time to develop (Cetin et al., 2016), hospitality educators need to collaborate with revenue managers who are actively working in the industry, in order to identify the necessary requirements that a future revenue management employee should possess and prepare for their students accordingly (Demirciftci et al., 2017).

In regard to internal human resources tactics, to deal with the shortage of manpower during COVID-19, some hotel employers were willing to recruit Vietnamese employees, who are not fluent in English, to work and cater for the dominant local market at that time. However, these employers also revealed their seem-to-be “unethical” behavior of dismissing these people as soon as international travelers resume tourism activities in the country. This phenomenon has raised two issues that deserve attention from hospitality educators, which are graduates’ competence in foreign language and human resources management. Firstly, to compete in the globalized economy, the demand to cultivate talents who are proficient in multiple languages will be a new challenge for hospitality educators to solve. In addition to English, research also noticed the increasing requirement for other language such as Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, Korean (Wang & Abukhalifeh, 2020). Secondly, after the industry has been severely affected by the mass layoff and recruitment crisis due to COVID-19, employers widely recognized the need to equip human resources management competency for future hospitality managers. Although this subject has been offered to hospitality students in Vietnam, the academic team are strongly encouraged to review the teaching content of this subject, as well as to implement any necessary changes in response to the recent pandemic and its unprecedented consequences on the industry. To mitigate this issue, educators should proactively seek more support from industry partners to develop up-to-date teaching materials, as well as collaborate on different in-school activities to balance out the heavy academic content, hence, narrow the gap between academic and industry settings.

In regards to internal factors influencing the quality of a hospitality education program, for local universities, the autonomous power given to each university can directly affect how academics design and review the hospitality curriculum, as well as their financial capacity to build practical facilities for students and to attract high-qualification lecturers. Although employers demonstrate their sympathy for public universities whose financial constraints make it unattractive with competent academics, the limited capacity of teaching faculties should not be the reason for the over-generic hospitality curriculum that lacks its unique identity. Instead of perceiving the emphasis on industry specialization as burden for educators (Sisson & Adams, 2013), hospitality academics need to brainstorm and initiate different campaigns to level

up the competency of existing lecturers, or to recruit new lecturers to teach specialized subjects at their universities (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017). For example, to effectively elevate hospitality guests' experience, employees need to possess solid understanding of service management, as well as up-to-date customer preferences and behaviors (Srisangkaew, 2022). Going beyond providing students a subject on service management, hospitality educators are suggested to apply the basics of service management into different subjects, to ensure students can critically assess and understand the importance of service quality in this industry (Solnet, 2012).

Given the influence of various internal and external factors on each university's educational philosophy, curriculum design and available resources (Le et al., 2018b; Zopiatitis & Constanti, 2007), it requires cooperative spirit from key stakeholders to reach a common voice on the most effective way to facilitate a hospitality education program that can satisfy different needs of not only industry employers, education partners, but also the needs of students' interns (Jack et al., 2017).

Table 45 provides a strategies for improving hospitality curriculum for three types of universities offering hospitality education in Vietnam.

*Table 45: Strategies for improving hospitality curriculum in universities in Vietnam*

| STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Public university                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Private university                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | International university                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the curriculum review frequencies</li> <li>• Engage and respond professionally to industry feedback</li> <li>• More industry-focused subjects</li> <li>• More soft skills and self-management training</li> <li>• Improve English teaching quality</li> <li>• Longer internship</li> <li>• More career orientations and employability skills</li> <li>• Increase industry working experience and international exposure for lecturers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage and respond professionally to industry feedback</li> <li>• More career orientations and employability skills</li> <li>• Foster relationship with alumni</li> <li>• Increase international exposure for lecturers</li> <li>• Increase recruitment requirement for lecturers (possess formal education qualification in Tourism and Hospitality)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control the number of students' enrollments (reasonable expansion strategy)</li> <li>• Maintain teaching quality and training consistency</li> <li>• Educate students to stay humble, patient, and not arrogant at workplace.</li> </ul> |

|                                                                                     |  |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster relationship with alumni</li> </ul> |  |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|

### **Strategies for internship quality improvement**

In fact, internship quality plays a critical role in the future career intention of hospitality graduates (Robinson et al., 2016; Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013). Both hospitality educators and industry professionals are responsible for clarifying the role of each party, as well as the common goal of internship activities for themselves and for students. Attempts to prevent any misalignment between both sides will help hospitality students optimize the benefits can be gained from their internship experience during university years (Qu et al., 2021). Hospitality educators need to provide effective career orientation for students, so that they are fully understand the employers' expectations, the purpose of the internship, as well as potential challenges that interns may face at the property.

In regard to the selection of internship departments, research has shown that students' job enthusiasm is diminished significantly if they are not given advanced training and only allowed to work tedious tasks during their internship (Chen et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2016). Noticeably, despite the prevalence of business foundation subjects in Vietnamese hospitality curricula, results from this study have revealed the main reasons for the low-level internship positions given to local hospitality students are due to the short internship duration arranged by universities, in addition to the students' insufficient competence in the administrative and managerial domains. While this phenomenon raise question on the actual teaching quality of these subjects at universities; reflecting from the hosting company's current practices, the majority of internship opportunities were mainly for basic operational jobs, dominantly in catering and housekeeping departments, indicating a lack of interest from employers to provide high-level practical opportunities for students (Le et al., 2018b). As a consequence of these limited internship options, students have been raising their complaints on the lack of learning opportunities across the duration they undertake their industry placement with hospitality employers (Chen et al., 2018). To improve this problem, while industry professionals are strongly encouraged to stay open-minded and give more opportunities to local students, hospitality academics need to consider this issue as their responsibility to review how students at their institutions are equipped with the required competencies, hence, implement necessary adjustment to widen internship opportunities for students.

Regarding the internship duration, hospitality educators and industry professionals in Vietnam could not reach a consensus on the ideal duration for hospitality students at university level. Two-month duration is not an sufficient amount of time for students to have a rounded picture of the industry realities (Jauhari, 2006). While employers also advocate for longer internship duration, preferably in six-month

period, to maximize the training opportunities of student interns at the workplace, academics find it difficult to satisfy this demand due to the limited curriculum space available. Previous research has highlighted the positive impact of longer internship duration on students' overall quality (Tesone & Ricci, 2005). Comparing with the six-month internship and program structure of benchmark universities, there are clear rooms for adjustment that educators in Vietnam need to actively work on, to match the requirements of industry employers. To ensure students can reap the most benefits from their internship experience, industry professionals and educators also need to agree on the most appropriate time for this practical experience. This time allocation should allow students to apply what they have learnt in theory into practice, hence, effectively boosting their learning spirit.

Even though the requirements for students coming to hotels for internship are not as high as for full-time employees, industry employers request students to participate in job interviews to check students' quality and their suitability for the interned positions. Students are evaluated based on the knowledge, skills and behaviors they present during the interview. Under impression management, besides students' attitude and their learning spirit, recruiters in this study also revealed their focus on assessing how hospitality students present themselves professionally during the interview, in term of grooming, self-confidence, job enthusiasm and career commitment. Employers believe that the role of hospitality educators is to nurture students' service attitude and enthusiastic spirit in their career (Huang et al., 2016; Singh & Jaykumar, 2019; Velo & Mittaz, 2006). Even though industry-specific technical competencies can enhance the property's work efficacy, employers prefer to recruit graduates who are enthusiastic about what they do (Tesone & Ricci, 2009). Before starting the internship, students should be introduced to employability course to make them well-informed of various career aspects, such as employers' expectations of interns, career planning strategies, job realities, impression management, and occupational exploration. Some of the activities that can be incorporated into the employability course are: organizing company introduction events, providing questionnaires for students' self-exploration and assessment, reviewing resume and conducting mock interview to help students prepare for their future interviews with employers (Chen et al., 2021; Chuang, 2011; Kitterlin-Lynch et al., 2015; Le et al., 2018b).

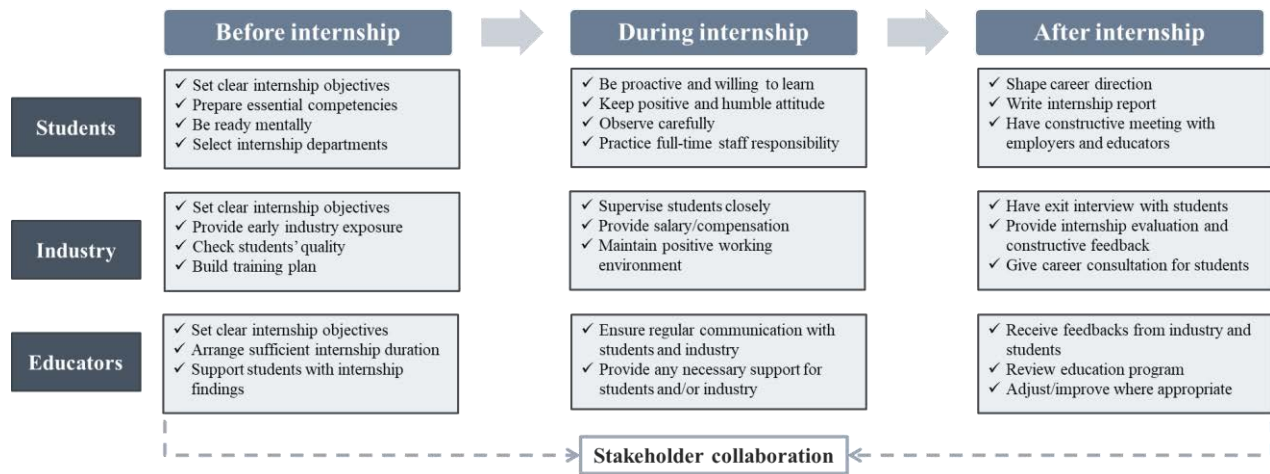
From the industry side, employers need to balance the use of interns as short-term cheap labor during peak seasons and the training quality that they can possibly provide to students. To help interns get access to high-quality on-the-job training at the properties, employers should enhance the competence of their staff, who will be trainers and mentors of students at the properties (Lyu et al., 2016). This is an important point as it critically impacts the intern's learning, experience and expectations. To monitor and assist students during their internship, from the Department Manager's side, a buddy system should be established to ensure students are trained properly and supervised closely. The buddy will be a senior



colleague in the same department, who has more experience in the job and is able to provide sufficient on-the-job training for students. In this regard, to boost students' dedication and encourage their commitment to the workload as full-time employees, employers should clarify the learning opportunities students can gain before they actually start the internship experience. Research has confirmed that students' dissatisfaction during internship can directly affect their self-esteem and attitude towards the hospitality career in the long term (Le et al., 2018b; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007).

To ease students' transition from classroom to industry settings, it is critical that educators maintain their presence and act as the middle-man during the whole internship process. Before the internship actually starts, educators should assist students to negotiate on the financial benefits that employers can provide during this period. It has been witnessed that unsatisfactory reward quality will negatively impact the performance of students at the enterprises (Lee et al., 2015). When students begin their internship at the property, the academics' guidance and support during this period is also deeply appreciated by both students and industry employers. For students, the involvement of representatives from their universities will make them rest assured that they will be protected against any potential misconduct from employers (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007). For employers, they highly value the efforts of educational partners to provide necessary counselling for students throughout the process, especially during the critical first two weeks of the internship when students struggle the most. From the human resources department, to maintain a positive working environment and ensure students' adaptability, catch-up meetings should be arranged frequently between students, the department supervisors and the human resources department representatives.

The key factors for a successful internship are constructive feedback, open communication and willingness to support from all stakeholders throughout the training period. Figure 19 introduces strategies to improve the quality of internship experience for hospitality students, detailing to-do checklists for relevant stakeholders in each phase.

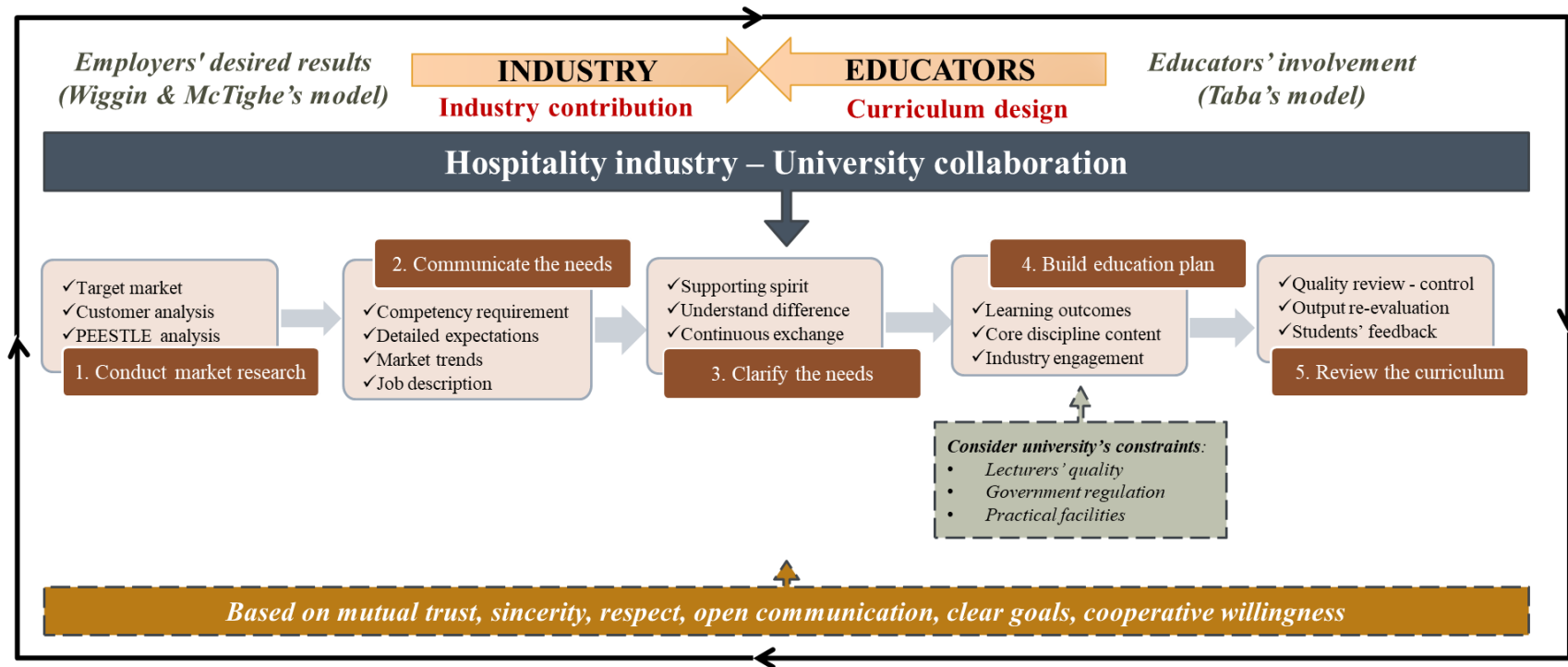
*Figure 19: Strategies for internship quality improvement*

#### 8.2.4 Research Question 4

*What is the theoretical model that educators can utilize to develop an industry-informed curriculum at education institutions teaching hospitality at university-level?*

The lack of collaboration mechanism is blamed to be a key factor hindering the successful partnership between hospitality industry and education partners (Le et al., 2018b). The challenge is to establish the most effective way that industry professionals can communicate the industry needs with educators, therefore, having a proper influence on the learning outcomes of the hospitality curriculum provided for students (Marneros et al., 2020). Using Taba's curriculum development model and Wiggins & McTighe's three stages of curriculum backward-design model as the underpinning theories of this research, the following diagram introduces the process to ensure effective industry-university collaboration for industry-informed hospitality curriculum (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Procedure to develop industry-informed hospitality curriculum



In the first stage, it is the responsibility of industry professionals to conduct market research, identify their target market and investigate customer characteristics. The aim is to produce a comprehensive list of competencies that hospitality graduates should possess to cater to the demands of these market segments. This piece of information will then be communicated to hospitality educators, who are in charge of curriculum design and training the future workforce to satisfy those requirements. In this regard, it is critical that industry professionals being mindful of the competencies they demand is appropriate for hospitality students at university level, not vocational college graduates.

Numerous research have emphasized on the rapid-changing nature of hospitality business environment, which can be also heavily influenced by factors that are beyond the industry's control, such as COVID-19 pandemic or any instabilities resulted from economic and political unrest (Huang & Baker, 2021; Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021; Marneros et al., 2021; Zopiatitis et al., 2019). Therefore, during the stage of market analysis, industry practitioners are strongly encouraged to adopt established macro-analysis framework such as PESTLE, to ensure they have taken into consideration all relevant external factors that can potentially impact the industry in the near future.

As the industry's growth rate is faster than what hospitality educators can comprehend and adjust in their curriculum (Ogbeide et al., 2021), to prevent time lag, the set of required competencies for graduates at universities should also comprise of future competencies, and not merely based on the current industry needs (Huang et al., 2016). For educators, the analysis of "job descriptions" document that hospitality companies use to recruit their manpower can also be regarded as industry handbooks, guiding educators to develop an industry-relevant curriculum (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003).

A well-defined and clearly communicated "job description" can play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between hospitality educators and industry employers, ultimately reducing perceptions of skill gaps or mismatched skills in the workforce. For educators, detailed job descriptions provide a concrete understanding of the specific skills, competencies, and knowledge that industry employers expect from graduates. This clarity allows educators to design and align curriculum that address these expectations, whether through theoretical instruction, hands-on training, or the incorporation of active learning methodologies like work-based or problem-based learning. For industry employers, clear job descriptions also serve as a guideline to determine whether the required roles are better suited to graduates from universities or polytechnic/vocational colleges. University curriculum often emphasize broader theoretical knowledge, critical thinking, and leadership skills, while polytechnic or vocational programs focus on practical, technical, and hands-on training. By understanding the alignment between job requirements and the educational focus of these institutions, employers can make more informed hiring decisions, ensuring that the candidate's educational background matches the job's demands.

This mutual understanding fosters better communication between academia and industry, helping to create a workforce that meets the practical and theoretical needs of the industry. Moreover, it minimizes employer dissatisfaction with new hires and provides students with more targeted career preparation, enhancing overall workforce readiness and reducing the perceived skill mismatches in the field. Above all, both industry professionals and academics need to pay continuous effort into re-evaluating and understanding the competency gap (Sisson & Adams, 2013; Szende et al., 2019). This is particularly essential when Generation Z - a new generation with distinctive characteristics are entering and will dominate the workforce (Talawanich & Wattanacharoensil, 2021).

In the second stage, after the employers have concluded the list of competencies required, they need to communicate this information to educators at universities. This is the time for both sides to communicate and clarify the needs, or any potential challenges or barriers that each party may face in an effort to achieve the desired outcomes. Not only should hospitality industry professionals be aware of the benefits to be gained from cooperative education programs (Marneros et al., 2020), but they also need to understand the existing constraints that their education partners have to oblige with (Anderson & Sanga, 2019; Griffin, 2020). During the whole process, both hospitality educators and industry employers should seek understanding and support from the other party for the successful implementation of the program. The exchange platform needs to be reinforced by mutual trust, sincerity, respect, open communication, clear goals, and cooperative willingness.

In this step, besides the general competencies requirement, industry employers should communicate clearly their detailed expectations on future graduates, as well as the market trends or any major influencing factors leading to their decision on these requirements. Only when educators fully understand the rationale behind that they can create the most effective education program to cultivate these competencies for students. To achieve the most desirable outcomes, a curriculum needs to be engaging, motivational, practical and flexible to facilitate a seamless implementation. An ideal curriculum model should cater to learners' needs at both individual and class levels, taking into account available study environments, time and facilities constraints (Bhuttah et al., 2019).

The success of hospitality graduates greatly depends on how industry professionals and the academic community collaborate to develop effective strategies (Srisangkaew, 2022). Industry professionals and educators need to reach mutual agreement on different aspects across the curriculum design process (Srisangkaew, 2022). Starting with comprehensive assessment of learners' needs and the education environment, effective curriculum design involves the formulation of clear objectives that align with students' capabilities, followed by subject requirements and logistical constraints (Bhuttah et al.,

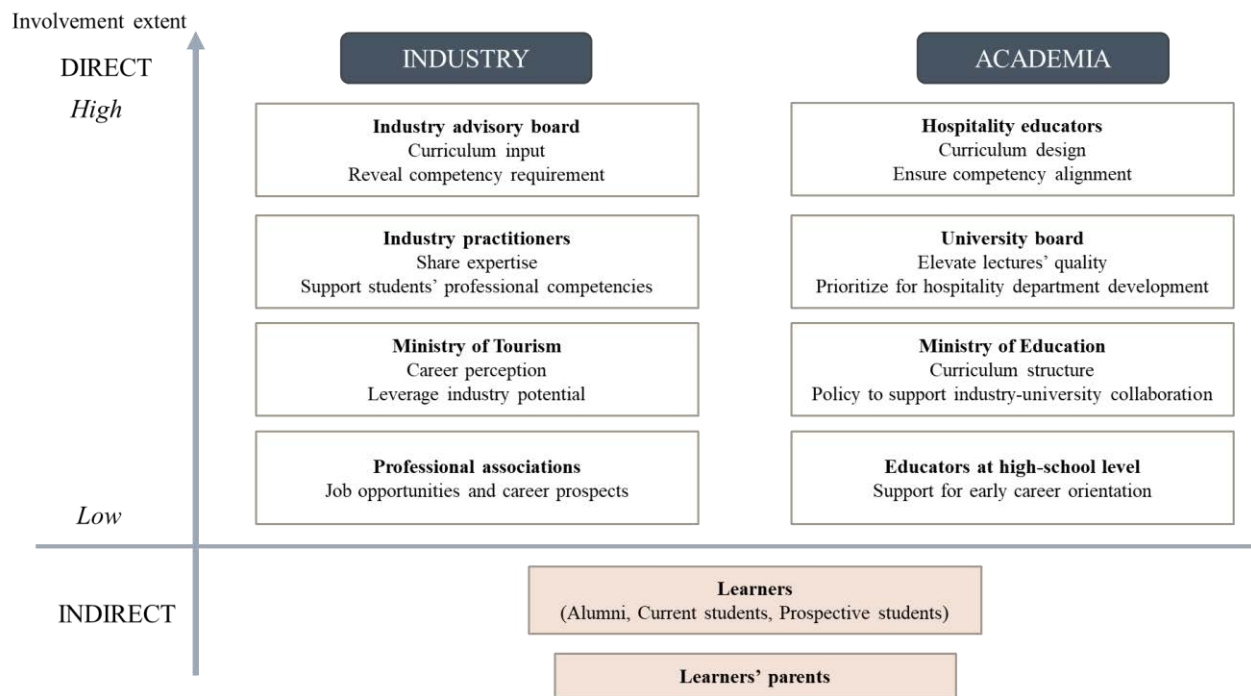
2019). The clear identification of these needs in the initial stage will provide the required information for a subsequent definition of education objectives that are tailored to students, their learning environments, as well as subject-specific and time requirements.

From the requirements of industry employers on hospitality graduates, educators should develop corresponding learning outcomes in their education programs to satisfy these demands (Marneros et al., 2021). After that, both sides should also reach conclusive agreements on key aspects of the curriculum, including the learning outcomes, content of core discipline, practical training opportunities, and field study planning. To enhance students' professional competencies, all relevant industry-involved activities during the whole program also need to be discussed in advance.

In the last stage, after an industry-informed curriculum has been developed, it is the responsibility of hospitality educators to control the program's quality and conduct necessary curriculum review procedures. During these teaching-learning processes, educators play the role of facilitators and mentors to provide guidance on learning activities, as well as to foster a inclusive and supportive learning environment for students (Tyler, 2013). To ensure the curriculum maintain its alignment with industry requirements and meet the pre-stated learning objectives, educators need to continue putting their efforts into three main areas: evaluate students' outcomes, seek feedback from industry professionals on graduates' ability, as well as to assess qualification indicators such as quality assurance audits and program benchmark (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017). In the education journey, the practice of providing formative assessment session is also a notable strategy to ensure constructive feedback are provided timely to both students and educators, enabling effective adjustments to the current learning approaches and teaching strategies, consequently, optimize the attainment of intended curriculum objectives (Ekpo, 2020).

### **8.3 Stakeholders Involvement In Curriculum Development**

At university-level, the power of university board members to decide the vision and educational philosophy of the university plays a critical role on shaping the main focus of hospitality curriculum. For hospitality graduates to operate efficiently in an open-bordered hospitality environment nowadays, educators should optimize the role of industry advisory board for effective curriculum design and competency alignment. Figure 21 illustrates clarified responsibilities of different stakeholders and their level of involvement in the process of producing an industry-informed hospitality curriculum.

*Figure 21: Stakeholders' involvement to produce industry-informed hospitality curriculum*

Considering multinational hotel companies as a major group of stakeholders contributing to the success of hospitality and tourism sector in developing countries, local government needs to develop policies to mandate the localization strategy, forcing these industry practitioners to share their expertise and provide high-level career opportunities for local people. Derived from interviews with research participants in this study, to address the current concern of industry professionals who feel discriminated against expatriates, local hotel owners in the country should erase the Asian mentality of looking up to Westerners. Regardless, given the rapid expansion of international hotel projects in recent years, the presence of expatriates is essential. Not only do they prepare for the pre-opening of new hospitality establishments, but they also come to train local staff, whose expertise is not yet up to the group's required standard. Therefore, rather than seeing expatriates as a threat taking job opportunities from local people, the country should perceive their presence as an unavoidable component that developing countries need to get along with, especially if these countries want to reach international hospitality service standard and have tourism and hospitality as key pillars of their economy.

To develop students' competence and increase their opportunities for cross-cultural exposure (Jauhari, 2006), some of the suggested approaches would be to provide various exchanging programs with education institutions in foreign countries, therefore, enhance students' international exposure and

proficiency in foreign language (Brookes & Becket, 2011). Besides the benefits of exchange programs, these initiatives are often costly and not accessible for all students. To tackle this issue, another feasible approach is to reinforce the practice of inviting expatriates to come and conduct sharing sessions with students, as part of their contribution to the social development of host communities. Instead of having an unfavorable attitude towards the presence of expatriates in multinational hotels, hospitality educators in developing countries may take advantages of these industry professionals as valuable resources for on-site cultural education. Not only does this strategy lift burden on students' financial capacity, but it also nurtures students' cultural sensitivity and elevate their cultural understanding from the early days, consequently, boosting their confidence to apply for international hotel properties after graduation.

In an attempt increase the industry's workforce productivity, the role of government bodies (Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Education) and hospitality professional associations to shape distinctive career path for university graduates and vocational college graduates is fundamental. While vocational colleges are responsible for training students on operational competencies to satisfy the industry's immediate needs, universities put emphasis on nurturing students' strategic management competencies and their ability to lead changes (Le et al., 2018a). At the moment, the limited number of strategic positions available upon graduation for hospitality graduates is an area requiring more proactive reinforcement from the local government in developing countries. Compared with Western countries, developing nations, including Vietnam, is lacking the talent pipeline who are well educated and experienced to occupy top positions in multinational hospitality properties. In this study, industry professionals expected another 15 to 25 years for the local talents to mature and lead the country's hospitality industry. For countries whose hospitality education at early stage, the perception of valuing practical skills whilst neglecting the benefits of an education degree is believed to be short-sighted to achieve sustainable development (Harkison et al., 2011).

For local citizens, it is also the role of the government in developing countries to launch effective public relation campaigns to shape proper perception about hospitality career. The authoritative bodies' support for industry-university collaboration can be the foundation to increase the attractiveness of hospitality careers for prospective students and job seekers (Sigala, 2021). For a wider society, local citizens, including prospective learners and their parents, should see the benefits of pursuing hospitality higher education and see worthwhile opportunities in hospitality career (Kwok, 2022). Hospitality should not be regarded as a low-level industry, in which working experience is the only criteria for success (Jack et al., 2017). The prevalent perception in developing countries that underestimates the value of higher education with excessive focus on low-skilled jobs has detrimentally affected the motivation of the well-educated



hospitality workforce (Le et al., 2018a). This is the area where supports for early career orientation from educators at high-school level can leave significant impact.

#### **8.4 Chapter Conclusion**

Studies have revealed the differences in the hospitality curriculum design and implementation between a dedicated tourism and hospitality school versus curriculum housed within a business school (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017). Each of these education settings offers unique advantages and limitations, shaping students' learning experiences and their career readiness in distinct ways.

For hospitality curriculum located under business schools, one of the primary advantages is the opportunity to enhance students' interdisciplinary learning. Learners in these institutions can enjoy the benefit of having a comprehensive business education by the incorporation of business-centric subjects such as marketing, management, entrepreneurship and finance. The broader perspective gained from this education approach will prepare students with a good understanding of how the hospitality industry is situated within the larger context of economic principles and business in general. Moreover, the enhanced exposure to various business disciplines also improve cross-functional competencies for students, making them more adaptable in different potential career roles.

Regarding networking opportunities, students pursuing hospitality education programs in larger business school may take advantages of connecting with peers from diverse disciplines and widening their professional connections. As large business schools tend to have strong collaboration with numerous industries, hospitality students in these universities can have access to a broader spectrum of practical opportunities, such as internships, mentorships, or even full-time job opportunities upon graduation.

On the other side, this model also raises several challenges. As the hospitality curriculum in larger business school are likely to focus more on generalized business principles, it reveals a serious lack of in-depth industry-specific hospitality knowledge and skills. Working under a small discipline within a multidisciplinary university, hospitality and tourism educators face the challenge of justifying the rationale to introduce new hospitality courses, especially against business academics, who are not aware of the unique features of this service sector (Scott et al., 2008). Additionally, given the double-layer management hierarchy (university and school level), hospitality faculty members have little autonomous power, requiring them to put significant efforts on persuading these management boards for any approval of program adjustment (Scott et al., 2008). As a consequence of these challenges, hospitality students pursuing undergraduate programs in broader business schools often receive limited training on industry-focused topics due to the complex nature of these competing priorities. This is similar to the findings from this

study, of which educators stressed on how the lack of autonomy have hinder the development of a high-quality hospitality curriculum.

In contrast with hospitality programs located under business schools, education programs produced by dedicated tourism and hospitality schools provide numerous advantages, primarily through in-depth specialized education. The curriculum developed by such schools are specifically tailored to equip students with knowledge in the hospitality and tourism sector, covering a wide range of industry-specific topics. This purposive focus in curriculum development process ensures students receive all the necessary extensive training to nurture hospitality-relevant competencies, preparing graduates who are able of coping with the unique challenges in this service sector. Reflecting from subject offerings by universities investigated in this study, benchmark universities (Taylor's and Hong Kong Polytechnic) have introduced some distinctive subject offerings on unique hospitality-related sectors (such as Airline management, Attraction management). Undoubtedly, this is a notable plus point for these independent hospitality and tourism schools to impress both prospective learners and industry employers.

The practical experience provided to students in these independent hospitality and tourism schools is another remarkable point. Understanding the vocational requirement of hospitality industry, these schools usually incorporate students' practical exposure as a compulsory component within their education programs. Compared to hospitality students studying in larger business schools who might have to suffer from the shortage of practical training opportunities that are critical for hospitality industry (front office operations, housekeeping); graduated from dedicated hospitality and tourism schools are provided with internships and in-class practical modules that are closely tied to the real-world situations, such as training kitchens, mock hotel rooms and hotel simulations. On the negative side, a highly relevant and specialized focus on the hospitality industry can also make graduates possess narrower skill sets, which can be a disadvantage for them to apply for other professional roles in the workplace.

Last but not least, financially, while dedicated hospitality schools may be sufficiently equipped with technical resources such as industry-specific software and tools to support students' learning, compared to larger business schools, their limited network with employers from only one sector can put significant constraint on facility investment, as well as research fundings and opportunities. On the other hand, for large business schools, thanks to the better financial resources from various disciplines with diverse funding schemes, they typically possess more innovative and state-of-the-art infrastructures to support students' development, including technological tools, practical facilities, research centers and school's libraries. However, reflecting on the current hospitality education landscape a developing nation such as Vietnam, despite the fact almost all hospitality programs are situated within larger business schools

and universities, educators and industry employers continue to complain on the limited practical facilities and financial constraints to support students. Therefore, to objectively evaluate this issue, a nation's development stage of hospitality industry and its education system are unneglectable factors.

In summary, dedicated tourism and hospitality schools and business schools provide valuable yet distinctive approaches to hospitality higher education. Depending on each students' career goals and their learning preferences, they can choose between these two educational settings. For students who seek to possess a broad business foundation and the flexibility to explore diverse career paths, hospitality programs in business school can be an appropriate option. For the other group, who aim to have a deep dive into the industry and prefer robust practical training experience for industry immersion, the hospitality curriculum offered by dedicated tourism and hospitality schools can satisfy these needs.

#### **8.4.1 *Political Influences***

In reality, curriculum development process can be conducted at multiple levels, from classroom-based initiatives to broader scales as at school, district, regional, and national levels. Amongst various forces impacting curriculum design, Tyler (2013) found out a comprehensive array of factors, particularly putting great emphasis on the dynamic interactions among students, subject specialists, societal demands, learning psychology, school philosophies, and educators themselves. Collectively, all these elements determine the content, structure, as well as delivery of any education programs (Tyler, 2013). Besides educational influential factors, curriculum developers also need to consider different aspects, including various social forces such as politics, culture, economics, technology, religion and history. Globally, there have been numerous factors impacting education, forcing curriculum to evolve in response to generational changes over time and prevailing philosophical currents dominating societies, such as technological advancements, globalization, population diversity, as well as spiritual and religious influences (Soto, 2015). As observed in previous studies by Primrose & Alexander (2013), and Tyler (2013), policies in the education sector are directly shaped by the political ideologies of governing parties (Primrose & Alexander, 2013; Tyler, 2013).

Political ideologies play a fundamental role on how curriculum is developed, shaping the education paradigm of a nation (Soto, 2015). These factors greatly impact the functions and structure of universities of not only in Vietnam, but also their benchmarked international institutions, including Taylor's University, Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Griffith University.

The political ideology of Socialism in Vietnam has a pivotal influence on the national education system, emphasizing on the MOET's centralized control over shaping curriculum standards, as well as university's admissions and funding. The aim of this centralized approach is to ensure educational outcomes

are in alignment with national ideologies and goals. However, this approach also results in limited room for innovation, flexibility and critical thinking. Educators in Vietnam are also constrained in academic freedom, due to the distinct ideologies of Socialism that greatly value educational-political alignment with State's control.

In the context of hospitality education, to ensure the alignment with the country's educational goals, the hospitality curriculum and teaching pedagogy in Vietnamese universities are witnessed to be a strong reflection of socialist ideologies, as these institutions have to follow the standardized curriculum framework mandated by the national MOET. This education approach put significant limitation on how quickly and effectively these education programs can respond to industry demands and global trends. In this aspect, influenced by the political principles of Socialism, the quality assurance and accreditation in Vietnamese education sector put priority on State's oversight to maintain uniform standards. Despite certain inconsistencies in actual enforcement at the moment, universities in the country must comply with the MOET's standards to undergo evaluations periodically. Noticeably, to enhance international credibility and gain global recognition, a number of higher education institutions have been putting efforts into achieving international accreditation.

The access to funding and resources is another area that universities in Vietnam are heavily impacted by the national political ideologies. Guided by socialist principles, the reliance of the education sector on government funding results in unavoidable disparities in resource distribution amongst public and private education institutions. Even though private universities can enjoy more flexibility and diversity in funding resources through private investments and tuition fees, the overall resource allocation is still under the control of state policies.

Acknowledging various limitations that the higher education system was struggling with, aiming to improve the overall quality and competitiveness of Vietnamese higher education system globally, the recent reform strategies in Vietnam have shifted the focus towards a more diversified and open educational approach. These initiatives focus on granting more autonomous power to universities in term of academic freedom, financial autonomy and governance changes. While the recent reform initiatives have been pushing for the adoption of industry-relevant and competency-based curriculum, the implementation effectiveness varies greatly amongst local universities.

In contrast, for benchmark universities in Asia- Pacific, to align with the ideology of encouraging partnership between public and private sectors for a market-driven approach, these education institutions benefit from a variety of funding resources, not only from government but also from private sectors to

support high-quality education and advancement of research facilities. International universities such as Griffith University, Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Taylor's University are operated under the influence of different political ideologies, which are more liberal and market oriented. These political elements lay an encouraging platform for innovative research, with a high degree of autonomous power, flexible education framework and strong industry collaboration, hence, fostering a highly practical and industry-relevant education paradigm. In recognition of the 'Asian Paradigm' in hospitality, they put great emphasis on Asian culture and the religious philosophy in hospitality higher education. These international institutions have long been accredited by numerous international bodies, acknowledging their high-quality education and competitive positions at global level.

Noteworthy, even though these benchmarked institutions have been operating in education environments that support academic freedom and promote innovation; for the case of Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the recent political change in Hong Kong with Mainland China have raised significant concerns about academic freedom. This issue is a typical reflection of how complex the relationship between educational paradigms and political ideologies can be.

The political philosophies of Vietnam, grounded under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam and in its socialist orientation, have heavy impact on the hospitality service culture in the country. The socialist philosophy focuses on collectivism and community welfare, manifesting in the service culture through cooperation and teamwork spirit. The emphasis on collectivism not only shaped the hospitality working culture but it also fosters a working environment where collaboration and mutual support between employees are highly appreciated, resulting in a boost in service quality thanks to the sense of camaraderie with shared responsibility.

Given the nature of hospitality industry where effective teamwork is essential for smooth operations, the Vietnamese socio-political emphasis on community welfare and collectivism show a strong alignment with the industry's demand for team-oriented working approach and collaborative efforts. Nevertheless, stakeholders involved in hospitality industry cannot underestimate the difference in focus of the hospitality enterprises (who typically prioritizes profitability and economic performance) versus the Vietnamese socialist orientation (emphasizing community welfare and collective goals), which can be at odds with private businesses' profit-driven motives.

On the positive side, the Vietnam's political philosophies, which are deeply rooted in socialism and national pride, have profound impact on the hospitality working culture, shaping various aspects of the working environment, such as teamwork, social responsibility, cultural integration, regulatory compliance,

as well as organizational structure. These features of socialist principles foster a unique and cohesive working culture, contributing to the creation of a high-quality hospitality experience that reflects the national values and development goals.

On the other side, there are notable differences in areas of hierarchical structures and adaptability. The influence of the Communist Party in Vietnam, which advocates on socialist principles, has led to centralized management practices, in which the power to make decision is usually concentrated at higher levels within the organization. While this centralized management approach may help creating a clear hierarchical structure for streamline operations, with orderly and disciplined working culture to ensure uniformity and consistency in hospitality service standards, it also put significant constraints on the decision-making and autonomy power of lower-level employees, limiting their ability to adapt and be innovative. Sometimes, this approach can conflict with modern hospitality practices that usually encourage employees' empowerment and autonomy. To enhance customer satisfaction, ideally, hospitality organizations needs their employees to be adaptive, respond effectively to customer needs and market trends, by making quick decisions in a decentralized decision-making hospitality setting. It is undeniable that the traditional bureaucratic processes in Vietnam can hinder the development of hospitality employees in aspects of rapid adaptability and creative solutions. Therefore, having a thorough understanding on these multifaceted influences is essential for hospitality professionals in Vietnam to navigate the local socio-political and cultural landscape effectively while meeting industry expectations and providing exceptional service.

#### **8.4.2 *Cultural Influences***

Besides political ideologies, the cultural factors also play a fundamental role during the process of designing a curriculum (Soto, 2015). Acknowledging the fact that Asian hospitality has been profoundly shaped by cultural norms, the cultural factor is particularly influential in the people-focused nature of hospitality. As the service quality is highly dependent on the personal engagement between hospitality employees and customers, appropriate behaviors and attitudes of service providers is critical for guests' experience. Especially for an industry with frequent employee-customer direct interaction as hospitality, the employee's willingness to genuinely deliver hospitality service from the heart or merely as a job task can leave distinctive impression.

In the context of Vietnam, patriotism, as promoted by the local government and a key element of Vietnam's political philosophy, have great influence on the attitudes and behaviors of hospitality staff. As a demonstration of national pride, Vietnamese employees feel a sense of responsibility in representing their

country and the national culture, continuously strive to offer high-quality hospitality service to not only enhance guests' experience but also to promote the country's positive image in general. In essence, the political emphasis on cultural preservation in Vietnam creates a natural alignment with the focus on cultural sensitivity of hospitality industry. As an Asian country, the political philosophy in Vietnam also put a great emphasis on cultural preservation and promotion, which directly impact how hospitality employees conduct their work.

Consequently, for hospitality education programs at universities in Vietnam, these training programs need to reflect the country's commitment to national identity and cultural pride, addressing various components on cultural sensitivity and how to present local customs to tourists in a positive manner. Given the country's richness in cultural heritage and the local government's consciousness for cultural values preservation, this alignment fosters a hospitality environment that is respectful of cultural diversity whilst celebratory of local traditions. Integrated into Vietnam's hospitality education, the efforts to promote cultural values and cultural sensitivity in hospitality mainly focus on promoting Vietnamese cultural values, traditions, and customs and incorporating them within hospitality services, aiming to provide authentic cultural experience for tourists. Aligning with the country's emphasis on cultural heritage and cultural integration, hospitality staff in Vietnam are usually received training to ensure local customs and traditions are highlighted and respected sufficiently in their service delivery, as well as the cultural distinctiveness that help their services become unique.

To measure national culture, among a large number of cross-cultural studies comparing Asian and Western cultures, the typology of cultural dimensions produced by Hofstede has been extensively utilized (Litvin, 2019). Recognizing that some countries share similarities and attributes, Hofstede (1983) identified distinctive national characteristics and created cultural clusters through the examination of homogeneous groups of countries. Derived from his study, three cultural dimensions were perceived as closely linked to service quality, which are uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, and collectivism/individualism (Hofstede, 1983).

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the extent to which a culture feels threatened by uncertainties or unknown situations, leading to a significant increase in sensitivity to risks and potential conflicts (Hofstede, 2001). Cultures that have high uncertainty avoidance tend to implement stricter regulations and rules to mitigate such risks. This cultural trait leaves its influence on different aspects of life, especially in the hospitality industry. In service settings, the likelihood of a hospitality service provider failing to provide rigid and uniform service to all customers escalated significantly when dealing with rapidly evolving and diverse demands from customers (De Bellis et al., 2015), resulting in an inadvertent heighten uncertainty.

Therefore, the efficient and standardized service models that have been commonly used in Western cultures may not be suitable to apply in the Asian contexts.

The hospitality businesses in Asia put more priority on delivering personalized and customized services, aiming to cater to specific preferences of each customer, hence, enhance customer satisfaction. Compared to Western counterparts, previous study by Musa and Thirumoorthi (2011) has revealed that tourists who stayed in Asian lodging accommodations felt a friendly and welcoming environment, which is rich in personalized service and customers were treated like family (Musa & Thirumoorthi, 2011). On the opposite side, this approach on service customization may come at the expense of the standardization and service efficiency that have become the hallmarks of hospitality practices in Western culture (Mattila, 2000).

Compared to the West, the Asian cultures are usually considered more feminine, which prioritize cooperative and caring attributes rather than goal-oriented and assertive traits (Patterson & Smith, 2001). This cultural orientation creates a hospitality environment in which empathy and good interpersonal relationships are highly valued.

In this aspect, collectivism is a remarkable feature of Asian cultures, which appreciates social cohesion and group harmony over individualism (Lowe et al., 2015), often result in a workplace where mutual support and teamwork amongst members are paramount. Previous research has highlighted that employees working in collectivist cultures are more likely to be more invested in organizational goals (Pizam et al., 1997), tend to engage better in organizational citizenship behavior (Magnini et al., 2013), and demonstrate stronger commitment to the companies (Griffith et al., 2006). This cultural foundation embeds the service-oriented mindset amongst employees, aligns well with the principles of the hospitality industry, in which service mindset is the key criteria for success. Noticeably, the majority of hospitality brands rooted in Asia put great emphasis on promoting the traditional Asian values (Chon et al., 2020).

In summary, the rapid internationalization phenomenon and economic development have resulted in significant changes in social norms, beliefs and lifestyles amongst various Asian countries. It is undeniable that the ability of a hospitality firm to maintain high-level service standards consistently is critical. Regardless, the strong Asian collective identity remains robust as "cultural capital", evolving around the unique traditions that shape the Asian paradigm in the hospitality industry (Chon et al., 2020).

In the context of Vietnam, despite the growing push towards achieving these quality standards in hospitality industry, there remains inconsistencies due to the varying levels of resources and training



availability between regions in the country. This limitation results in disparities in hospitality service quality, which is also the key challenge that the Vietnamese hospitality industry has to deal with: to find the balance between the drive for service standardization whilst accommodating local cultural nuances, given the resource constraints. The Asian culture, in combination with the socio-political emphasis on collectivism in Vietnam, has created a unique approach to hospitality that highly values community welfare and personalized service, sometimes at the expense of the service consistency and efficiency which have been prevalent in Western hospitality practices.

## **9 Chapter 9: Industry-Informed Hospitality Curriculum – Critical For Graduates' Success**

### **9.1 Concluding Thoughts**

Given the intricacy of the curriculum development process and its influence on the program's quality (Dehghani & Pakmehr, 2011; Oktadiana & Chon, 2017), the key questions to be discussed between industry practitioners and hospitality educators is about what competencies to be taught and why (Morris & Adamson, 2010). While both parties are responsible for defining an ideal and standardized hospitality curriculum that satisfy all relevant stakeholders (Marneros & Gibbs, 2015), the vast difference in curriculum content and educational objective of each university has created confusion amongst industry recruiters (Ricci, 2010; Scott et al., 2008). Examining the curriculum content for hospitality graduates in Vietnam, educators emphasize on equipping students' knowledge in the business domain. A significant space of the hospitality curriculum in Vietnamese universities is still allocated for general business management and economics subjects.

This is in contrast with the opinions of industry practitioners interviewed in this study, who advocate for preparing hospitality students with industry-specific competencies. Both industry professionals and university alumni complained on the excessive general academic knowledge provided in hospitality curriculum in Vietnam. From the recruiters' perspective, although they do not require fresh graduates to possess advanced level of industry knowledge, the current level of industry-specific competencies amongst hospitality graduates in Vietnam has not met the desired requirement. This insufficient preparedness on industry-specific competencies is also regarded as an unfavorable factor hindering the career development of local hospitality graduates in multinational hotel establishments in the country. In this regard, for modules that are critically relevant to hospitality industry, but academics are not confident and not yet possessed the required knowledge, industry managers need to be invited to share their expertise and to conduct lessons for students.

In an attempt to provide a balanced hospitality curriculum for students, the inclusion of internship component has been a widespread practice to increase students' training opportunities. However, due to the disparate responsibilities and needs between stakeholders, there are discrepancies on the most effective way to formulate this practical component within the hospitality curriculum (Jack et al., 2017). Consequently, the establishment of an appropriate internship model for hospitality students remains an unsolved challenge, given the unique characteristics of each higher education institutions in term of curriculum design, program structure, resources, industry networks, administration procedure and overall mission (Jack et al., 2017; Le et al., 2018b; Zopiatitis & Constanti, 2007; Zopiatitis et al., 2021). To address this issue and optimize the benefits of internship for hospitality students, this study introduces strategies for effective internship

management, under the format of checklists for three key stakeholders: hospitality educators, student interns and industry professionals. Above all, for students to adapt quickly from classroom to industry working environment, it is essential that educators maintain their presence and put efforts on acting as middle-man before, during and after the internship period.

Noticeably, given the service-oriented nature of hospitality industry, industry leaders in this study have emphasized on the necessity of equipping students with a proactive and open working mindset, which have unfortunately been considered as major weaknesses of local hospitality workforce. To ensure students will not lose points in front of employers and miss their chance of career promotion in the future, hospitality educators need to make sure students are well-aware of this expectation on attitudinal attributes, ideally in the early stage before students enter the hospitality working environment (Harkison et al., 2011).

Theoretically, the relationship between university and industry should be constructed based on common objectives (Griffin, 2020). However, in current practices, most of these partnerships are hindered by little commitment from both parties and lack the knowledge-based economy's true spirit (Beesley & Davidson, 2013; Gardini, 2018; Lyu et al., 2016). Similar to many other countries in the region, the accreditation bodies and government policies in Vietnam play a powerful role on the process of curriculum design, evaluation and revision at higher education institutions. Acknowledging the influence of difference factors on each university's educational philosophy, curriculum design and available resources, this study consolidates major factors contributing to the success of a hospitality education program, stressing the need for cooperative spirit from relevant stakeholders to understand all these internal and external factors.

This study confirmed the need for hospitality educators to seek common ground with industry professionals to satisfy the industry's requirement and enhance graduates' employability. Despite the various internal and external factors that have influence on hospitality curriculum design and review process at universities, the necessity to develop and deliver an industry-informed curriculum to enhance hospitality students' competence in the future workplace is unnegotiable, especially for hospitality management to be considered as a legitimate study area and thrive in the long-term. To achieve a nationwide positive effect, the role of government bodies is crucial to support the industry, the academia, and students (Beesley & Davidson, 2013; Mahmoud, 2018). This study clarified the responsibilities of different stakeholders and their level of involvement in the process of producing an industry-informed curriculum for hospitality students.

An effective curriculum planning procedure requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders with their key roles. The lack of collaboration mechanism between hospitality university and industry partners is blamed to be a key factor hindering the successful partnership (Le et al., 2018b). The challenge is to

establish the most effective way for industry professionals to communicate their needs with educators, having a proper influence on the program's learning outcomes (Marneros et al., 2020). It is the responsibility of hospitality educators to provide an interactive communication platform to exchange information and gain insights on industry practices. As hospitality graduates are expected to possess both theoretical and vocational competencies, a well-designed industry-involved activities and internships across the whole education program are essential to ensure graduates' success. This study constructed a diagram illustrating the process to ensure effective industry-university collaboration for industry-informed hospitality curriculum. The enhanced role of industry partners in curriculum design can significantly improve the hospitality curriculum fit, therefore, bridge the gap between the current education programs and the industry's priorities (Nolan et al., 2010).

Previous studies has recognized the influence of each nation's development stage on hospitality curriculum, emphasizing the need for effective hospitality curriculum design to align with the demands of local society and unique features of each destination (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2015; Oktadiana & Chon, 2017). Similar to many Southeast Asian countries, the accreditation bodies and government policies in Vietnam have powerful influence on the curriculum design, evaluation and revision processes at universities. Tyler (2013) categorizes philosophical influences on curriculum development into two types: essentialists – emphasizing on cultural heritage, and progressives - valuing contemporary societal issues and challenges (Tyler, 2013). A thorough understanding of these contextual needs, which are shaped by the demands of society, student, and the subject itself is critical to stay relevant with the evolving societal dynamics over time (Soto, 2015).

Research has confirmed the pivotal role of hospitality education in preparing a good-quality workforce. Vietnam, as an emerging destination, requires a continuous supply of skilled graduates to ensure the burgeoning hospitality industry is able to sustain a high standard of service culture. It requires ongoing effort of hospitality educators to review the curriculum and address the human resources demand from the employers, producing a hospitality workforce that are employable and professionally motivated to take on new career challenges for the industry's future.

## **9.2 Contribution to a Theoretical Framework**

The challenge of finding a balance between theory and practice in hospitality education has been widely accepted as an ongoing concern across hospitality tertiary education worldwide (Wang et al., 2010). As higher education institutions continue putting efforts on enhancing their approaches to curriculum development and work-integrated learning, the growing demand for an innovative industry-relevant education model is evident to prepare graduates for not just initial employment but also for their career success in a rapidly changing hospitality working environment (Bhuttah et al., 2019). Derived from the

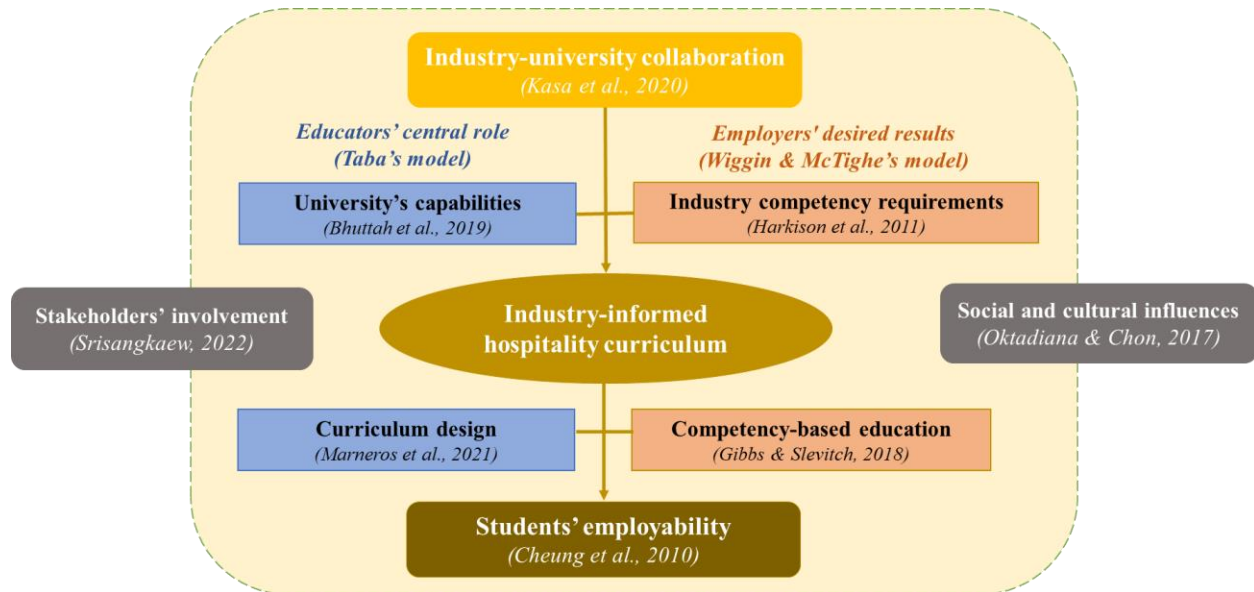
findings of this study, the new framework (Figure 22) is the first one attempted to blend the two prevalent curriculum development models, Taba's (1974) grassroot methodology and Wiggins and McTighe's (2011) backward-design model as the underpinning theories, to construct the framework for an industry-informed hospitality curriculum. The thesis thus advances theoretical discourse by proposing a curriculum development model that is adaptable, inclusive, and forward-thinking, contributing to the broader understanding of curriculum theory in service-oriented disciplines.

Taba's (1974) model introduces a participatory and inductive approach, emphasizing grassroots engagement with educators, industry professionals, and students in curriculum development. This grass-roots methodology disrupts traditional top-down curriculum planning by placing educators, industry leaders, and students at the center of the design process, ensuring responsiveness to critical global trends. This theoretical evolution aligns with the increasing emphasis on experiential learning and stakeholder collaboration, reshaping how educators conceptualize curriculum development in service-driven sectors.

In parallel, Wiggins and McTighe's (2011) backward-design model contributes a structured, outcomes-focused framework to the hospitality and tourism field, emphasizing alignment between learning goals, assessments, and instructional strategies. The thesis extends this model to the hospitality and tourism context by prioritizing essential industry competencies, as desired outcomes. The model's emphasis on strategic alignment between industry demands and educational objectives represents a theoretical innovation, providing a blueprint for designing competency-based curriculum that equip graduates for both immediate employment and long-term career growth.

The hospitality industry exemplifies the benefits brought by an industry-informed curriculum approach, where curriculum development process incorporates competency-based framework, insights from industry practitioners and practical opportunities to ensure students' employability. Figure 22 proposes a conceptual framework of key components contributing to the successful implementation of industry-informed hospitality curriculum. Higher education institutions are encouraged to use this framework to facilitate students' academic progression, enrich student experiences, and optimize students' overall achievement.

Figure 22: Key components for the successful implementation of industry-informed hospitality curriculum



The figure presents a theoretical model for developing **an industry-informed hospitality curriculum**, with the curriculum itself positioned at the center, signifying its pivotal role in emphasizing the integration of academic, industry, and cultural considerations. At its core, the curriculum serves as the convergence of key elements that ensure its relevance to both academic objectives and industry demands. The model highlights the importance of **industry-university collaboration** (Kasa et al., 2020), which fosters alignment between academic programs and real-world needs. Industry-university collaboration is identified as a key driver in aligning academic programs with the evolving needs in real working environment. **Employers' desired outcomes**, guided by Wiggin & McTighe's model, ensure that the curriculum addresses specific **industry competency requirements** (Harkison et al., 2011), and equips students with the necessary skills for employability. Furthermore, the inclusion of **competency-based education** (Gibbs & Slevitch, 2018) underscores the focus on measurable learning outcomes that prepare students for practical roles in the competitive hospitality industry.

This theoretical model also emphasizes the enabling role of educational institutions and educators in successfully delivering such a curriculum. **University capabilities** (Bhutta et al., 2019), such as infrastructure, faculty expertise, and institutional resources, are essential for sustaining curriculum development and ensuring its effectiveness. Additionally, **the educators' central role** (Taba's model) underscores their importance in bridging academic theory with practical application. This holistic approach ensures the curriculum remains robust, responsive, and future-oriented.

The model also highlights critical contextual factors that shape the curriculum's design and implementation. Stakeholders' involvement ensures that diverse perspectives from industry professionals, educators, and other key actors are incorporated into the curriculum, fostering its relevance and acceptance. Similarly, social and cultural influences (Oktadiana & Chon, 2017) emphasize the importance of tailoring the curriculum to the unique contexts of different regions, acknowledging the interplay between global standards and local practices. These considerations enrich the curriculum but also introduce challenges in balancing varying priorities across stakeholders and adapting to rapidly shifting industry demands. However, the interconnected nature of these components also introduces challenges, such as balancing diverse stakeholder priorities and adapting to rapidly changing industry demands. By critically integrating these elements, this theoretical model aims to enhance students' employability (Cheung et al., 2010) and ensure the curriculum remains adaptable and future-oriented in addressing the dynamic needs of the hospitality industry.

To achieve successful industry and university collaboration, it is critical that both parties understand the demands and capabilities of each other. While educators need to pay their utmost effort to satisfy the competency requirements from industry partners, hospitality employers have to be conscious of the education partners' capabilities and uncontrollable constraints. These cooperative spirits from both sides lay the foundation to construct an industry-informed hospitality curriculum. Going beyond understanding the competency requirements from hospitality employers, to ensure students' employability after graduation, the efforts from educators to design the curriculum and develop competency-based education framework are pivotal. For the successful implementation of industry-informed hospitality curriculum, throughout the development process, educators need to maintain the active involvement from all relevant stakeholders, while taking into consideration various social and cultural factors that may potentially influence the desired educational outcomes.

New improvements in the industry-academic linkage can be achieved by understanding the perceptions of four major stakeholders of hospitality education management: educators, graduates, alumni, and industry professionals. This study contributes to a better understanding on the current hospitality higher education in Vietnam, through the lenses of various stakeholders involved in producing high-quality hospitality university graduates to supply for the industry. The Vietnamese education landscape in this study provides a perspective in the context of an emerging economy, and a growing hospitality industry where there is a need to address the education programs and skills gaps of graduates. The findings of this study help explore the gap between industry expectations and hospitality education in emerging destinations, thereby significantly improving students' confidence and employability when entering the workforce.

Particularly for emerging destinations, the need to realign educational resources for the sustainable development of the hospitality industry requires more in-depth research. Using the Vietnam hospitality tertiary education as a case study, this thesis explores how an industry-informed curriculum may help to produce quality human resources for an emerging tourist destination. These results also add to current knowledge the change in required hospitality competencies and skills that the industry is expecting from tertiary education graduates after experiencing an unexpected global crisis. Reflecting from the findings of this study on the curriculum composition for undergraduate hospitality education programs, as well as practical approaches for universities to improve hospitality industry-academia collaboration, these implications may also be applicable to other developing countries that are looking for ways to develop their future workforce.

### **9.3 Practical Implication**

Taking the case of an emerging tourist destination whose hospitality education and industry development is at early stage such as Vietnam, the findings from this study and its implications provide a set of recommendations for multiple stakeholders in the hospitality industry.

For hospitality tertiary educators, the analysis of competencies demanded by the industry will be useful in redesigning their curriculum and education programs. In addition to the theory-practice balance in hospitality tertiary education, this study reveals different factors having an impact on the curriculum design and revision strategies at hospitality higher education institutions. These results pave the way for effective curriculum management to enhance the confidence and employability of hospitality students after graduation.

A significant contribution of the study lies in the selection of content for inclusion in curriculum within bachelor degrees of hospitality management in emerging destinations. Since the competency requirement for hospitality graduates can be heavily influenced by distinct cultural and geographical backgrounds, this study adds valuable insights on hospitality higher education and graduates' competencies in the context of Vietnam, laying the ground for the sustainable growth of the hospitality workforce in countries whose hospitality industry is at also at early stage of development. Educators in the discipline are encouraged to use the results of this study to compare and evaluate the current education programs in their higher institutions for further improvement.

After the global pandemic, attracting students to enroll in hospitality undergraduate program and convincing them of the industry's potential have been frequently mentioned challenges for hospitality educators. To reshape this social unfavorable perception and increase the attractiveness of hospitality as a career for both prospective students and their parents, this study introduced a framework to support



hospitality industry and university collaboration, which can be used as the communication platform for educators and industry employers to brainstorm and launch different initiatives.

As this study is the first attempt to compare hospitality graduates and education programs from three types of education institutions (public, private and international), prospective students and their families may also use these findings to have a more comprehensive understanding of the current landscape of hospitality higher education, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of these institutions. Depending on each family's circumstances and students' competence, prospective students may use this information to help them determine an appropriate university to pursue their undergraduate hospitality degree.

For industry professionals, findings from this study can help enhance their recruitment strategy after COVID-19 and improve their partnership with hospitality higher education institutions to raise the quality of potential candidates. With better understandings of students' competencies acquisition after studying hospitality undergraduate programs, employers may use these findings to realign their expectations on hospitality graduates, as well as to select appropriate hospitality education partner to collaborate and revise their recruitment strategy to attract promising talents to join their properties. Besides contributing their insights with educators during the curriculum design process to develop hospitality curriculum, industry professionals can play a more proactive role in participating in different industry-involved activities to enhance students' professional development during university years. In an attempt to enrich students' practical exposure and prepare them sufficiently before entering the workforce, the employers' willingness to cooperate and support educators will not only narrow the industry-academia gap, but also help produce a pool of graduates who are work-ready upon graduation.

For hospitality students who may feel demotivated about their future after the pandemic, the results of this study may make them better informed of what employers are looking for, and therefore actively prepare and equip themselves with the necessary competencies to thrive in their future careers. Although hospitality educators and industry professionals are responsible for collaborating and producing an industry-informed hospitality curriculum, this study emphasized the need for students to take ownership of their learning and be aware that it is their learning spirit that will be the decisive factor leading to their employability and long-term career success.

Last but not least, findings from this study provide empirical evidence and valuable insights to inform effective policy development that supports the collaboration between hospitality educators and industry professionals. To infuse industry practical knowledge into the curriculum, the Ministry of Education are strongly encouraged to review policy on having industry practitioners become lecturers in some industry-focused modules. Academics in this study admitted to their limited industry experience and

are willing to invite industry partners to teach certain practical modules at universities. However, the government's current requirement for lecturers possessing at least Master degree is a criterion that many industry seniors do not have. For professionals who have extensive industry experience, there should be some flexibility on academic qualification requirement, so that their expertise can be transferred to students and not be wasted.

Especially for developing countries whose hospitality industry is dominated by multinational hotel chains, the government's role in protecting career opportunities for local hospitality graduates is essential for the sustainable development of the country's hospitality industry. Given the prevalence of management training programs established by numerous global hospitality brands nowadays, both hospitality educators and industry professionals are strongly encouraged to brainstorm and discuss the most effective way to incorporate these programs with the internships and curriculum mapping for students who are interested in this fast track. These efforts can consequently help hospitality graduates save a significant amount of time in their career development roadmap to get a supervisory role.

Aiming to elevate the country's hospitality workforce, government authorities and professional associations may use these results to plan for the future growth of the hospitality industry at the national level. To encourage greater involvement from industry professionals, local government should consider mandating the practices of hospitality establishments to receive students' interns and collaborate with higher education institutions. This is a critical area to address the complaints from academics and students on the unsatisfactory on-the-job training quality and lack of interest from employers in providing high-level internship opportunities for local student interns.

Going beyond the current practices of having employers evaluate student interns at the end of their internship, this review process should also be applied to other involved stakeholders. To improve the quality of internship experience for students, both student interns and hospitality academics need to be given the opportunity to share their feedback and evaluate the industry partner on how these employers have engaged in the industry-academia relationship, as well as the quality of the internship experience provided to students. These feedbacks then need to be submitted, reviewed and controlled by governmental authorities who are responsible for the country's hospitality education.

To ensure the proactive initiatives and engagement from hospitality academics achieve the desired outcomes, government authorities can implement a policy requiring hospitality employers to submit an annual report on how they have collaborated with the education partner to provide practical training platform and support the development of the local future workforce. Specifically, this reinforcement should

be stated as an obligatory corporate social responsibility of multinational companies to contribute to the host community.

#### **9.4 Limitations**

The main limitation of this study is accessibility to the detailed curriculum, which universities and institutions are not willing to share due to the competitive nature of the education sector. The researcher could not get access to the detailed information on the internships programs or specific training content adopted in these hospitality education programs. Consequently, in this study, for the document analysis, results were analyzed mainly based on the list of subjects' titles included in the Bachelor program for hospitality students at their education institutions.

Ideally, more in-depth research on each subject's content, learning outcomes, teaching pedagogies, and assessment methods should be included. One limitation of this thesis is its limited exploration of teaching pedagogies and learning methods, which play an important role in addressing the skill gaps of Hospitality students for the job market. While the study provides valuable insights into mismatched skills from the perspectives of employers and learners, it could benefit from a deeper analysis of how teaching methodologies influence the effectiveness of the curriculum. A discussion on active learning approaches—such as work-based, action-based, or problem-based learning—would have enhanced the study's ability to address the practical development of labor skills. Additionally, findings that university educators may have limited industry experience and lower levels of international exposure suggest a potential reliance on theoretical learning environments. While teaching methods are not the central focus of the thesis, their relevance to the proposed model and its outcomes makes this an area worth further exploration.

A limitation of this dissertation is the access to some data in Vietnam's and benchmark's programs. While the decision to include a broader range of programs aimed to capture diversity and provide a wider perspective, it may have influenced the depth of the analysis in certain areas and introduced challenges in achieving a fully comprehensive analysis. Future research could build on this work by exploring ways to address this limitation by incorporating more data or selecting additional programs with complete datasets which would enhance the robustness of the analysis and contribute to a more refined benchmarking process.

However, to serve the purpose of providing evidence for data triangulation with interviews of industry professionals and other stakeholders on hospitality graduates' competence, the use of subjects' title as key material for data analysis can sufficiently provide the required information for comparison. Although some supplementary competencies may still be covered as a small aspect of a subject (for example: competency in sanitation and hygiene under Food and Beverage management subject), the level

of knowledge that students can obtain from these few modules cannot be as deep as those who study a separate subject dedicated to nurture students' competence in that aspect.

Last but not least, in this study, alumni from each educational institution and current students from different programs were interviewed independently rather than being included in focus groups. This method may have missed the opportunity to capture group dynamics or collective insights that could emerge from a shared discussion. Additionally, the use of independent interviews may have introduced biases, as the context of individual responses could vary significantly based on the interviewee's background, program, or institutional experience. Even though focus groups are beneficial for fostering dynamic discussions and exploring shared or contrasting perspectives among participants with similar backgrounds, it was not possible to utilize this method within the current study due to the resources and accessibility constraints, given the various locations and professional commitments that research participants were engaged in. Future research could build upon this work and include well-structured focus groups for more robust and comparative discussions.

### **9.5 Recommendation For Future Research**

Despite the prevalence of internship component in hospitality education programs, industry professionals express their unsatisfactory attitude with the low effort from educators to follow-up with the progress of their students and maintain their presence during the internship duration. All involved stakeholders seek to have an improved internship design that enables better control and support from educators (Le et al., 2018b; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007). Based on to-do lists for each party in the internship as suggested from this study's findings, future research can explore the extent to which industry employers expect academics' involvement across the whole period of students' industry placement, as well as specific activities that deem necessary to facilitate this practical element. From the academia side, hospitality educators should also be interviewed to see if these proposed strategies and actions are feasible to accommodate within the busy schedule of educators.

Investigating the current practices, interviews also identified contrasting opinions on how students select internship department, whether students can freely choose their internship department/properties, or the school should decide this factor based on the programs' pathways. Even though educators understand the equal importance of all departments within hotel operations, they put particular emphasis on ensuring students are allocated appropriate internship positions. This is another area requiring more attention, if hospitality students should choose the internship position based on their dream career path or it should be directed by educators based on the programs' study plan.

Recognized as the global language, English proficiency is a primary condition to determine hospitality graduates' employability in an multi-cultural environment (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019). Although candidates' competence in other languages can be used as their competitive advantage in the hospitality job market, their proficiency in English is a foundational requirement. While English has long been considered as an official second language at schools across Vietnam, hotel employers still consider English insufficiency as a hurdle to the career opportunity of local hospitality graduates in the country, preventing numerous potential local talents from entering the five-star environment. Even though all investigated universities in Vietnam have included English subjects in the hospitality curriculum for undergraduates, local hospitality candidates are perceived to be lacking in confidence to express their opinions in English, a pivotal requirement to apply for a job in international hotel properties. This issue echoes for the need of further research, to examine the quality of English training at hospitality universities, as well as to investigate the rationale behind the perceived low level of English competence amongst local hospitality students, and hence, provide recommendations to elevate the teaching quality of this foreign language in the country.

Similar to many other countries, hospitality higher education in Vietnam suffers from the common negative perceptions about hospitality career, which significantly decrease the industry's attractiveness as a sustainable career. Unfavorable perceptions such as low-skill job, high turnover, low salary and benefits have resulted in challenges to attract good students to enroll in hospitality education programs at university level. Industry professionals in this study are worried about how hospitality educators can compete with other industries to get the most potential students. Especially after the COVID pandemic, it is critical that both educators and industry professionals reinforce their collaboration to promote the industry potential and regain students' interest in pursuing hospitality industry (Kwok, 2022; Sigala, 2021). Preferably, these initiatives should be implemented as soon as possible, when prospective students are still in secondary and high schools. Future research is suggested to dig deeper into career orientation aspects at universities. Specifically, more studies should be conducted to identify the most effective approach and relevant activities to be included in each stage of career orientations, corresponding to the knowledge, maturity level and emotional state of students.

This study examines the current focus on hospitality undergraduate education programs in Vietnam, suggesting the need for hospitality educators to regularly review and update their curriculum where necessary. Findings from this study revealed the underlying reason behind employers' preference to recruit hospitality graduates from private and international universities is due to the lack industry working experience and international exposure of lecturers from public universities. Industry professionals critically emphasized the role of lecturers in producing quality education programs. Employers blamed the quality

and research capabilities of teaching faculties as the main cause for the current outdated content of hospitality education programs. The results of this study revealed that the autonomous power of each individual university and the home base of hospitality department within larger universities can significantly influence how hospitality academics design their education program. Additional research can explore if industry employers consider these factors to choose their collaborative education partner, as well as how these factors may have impact on employability of hospitality graduates.

This paper uses qualitative interviews and document analysis as the key methods to investigate the research problem. More longitudinal research can be conducted to assess the effectiveness of hospitality education programs in long term, as well as to investigate how the internship experience may influence the career path of hospitality graduates and their speed to climb the career ladder after graduation. Given the various industries under hospitality and tourism sector, this study can be replicated with other education programs such as tourism, recreation, food and beverage, and events management.

Further research is recommended to conduct with other range of samples, such as other types of hospitality industry professionals and hospitality education programs. This study focuses on upper-upscale hospitality establishments and universities with high admission grades. Future studies can expand the data population to include companies and universities from lower rank. This approach can highlight differences in graduates' competencies expectation from the perspective of employers in limited-service and high-end hospitality properties, therefore, provide interesting insights and valuable lessons for effective curriculum management in hospitality tertiary education on a broader scale.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A - Letter of invitation to hospitality academics

*Email subject: Invitation for participating in PhD research – for University*

Dear ...,

I am writing this email to invite your university to participate in a research study about ***The collaboration between hospitality universities and the industry to enhance students' employability***. This study is being conducted by PhD candidate – Nguyen Hong Hanh at James Cook University Singapore.

With your extensive experience in curriculum development and industry partnerships in one of the best hospitality universities, I truly believe that your expert insights will contribute significantly to my study.

You are eligible to participate in this research project if you

- actively involved in the curriculum design and development of the Bachelor degree of Hospitality management.

and/or

- have sufficient knowledge about industry partnerships at their universities.

Participation in this study means agreeing to:

- Provide your university's **current study plan** for students enrolled in Bachelor degree of Hospitality management.
- Participate in a 40–60-minute **Zoom/onsite interview or email interview** with the researcher, expected to take place from March 2022.

If the university accept this invitation and is willing to share your expert opinions on the topic, please kindly response by replying to this email saying you are willing to be involved. A follow-up email will be sent to you with an attached consent form and more detailed instructions. Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated.

If you would like additional information about this study, please simply reply to this email or contact me at

Thank you for your consideration, and once again, please do not hesitate to contact me if you are interested in knowing more about this project.

Principle Investigator: Nguyen Hong Hanh

Email: [honghanh.nguyen@my.jcu.edu.au](mailto:honghanh.nguyen@my.jcu.edu.au)

Phone/WhatsApp:

**Appendix B - Letter of invitation to hospitality industry professionals**

*Email subject: Invitation for participating in PhD research – for Industry professionals*

Dear...,

I am writing this email to invite The Director of Human Resources of your respected hotel to participate in a research study about ***The collaboration between hospitality universities and the industry to enhance students' employability***. This study is being conducted by PhD candidate – Nguyen Hong Hanh at James Cook University – Singapore campus.

With his/her extensive experience in partnership with the education sector as the Director of Human Resources in one of the best hotels, I truly believe that his/her expert insights will contribute significantly to my study.

You are eligible to participate in this research project if you

- actively involved in developing partnership and internship programs with hospitality universities in Vietnam.
- have sufficient knowledge about necessary skill sets required of hospitality students for recruitment.

Participation in this study means agreeing to:

- Participate in a 40-60-minute Zoom/onsite **interview or email interview** with the researcher, expected to take place in June 2022.

If your hotel and the Director of Human Resources accept this invitation and are willing to share your expert opinions on the topic, please kindly response by replying to this email saying you are willing to be involved. A follow-up official email will be sent to you with an attached consent form and more detailed instructions. Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated.

If you would like additional information about this study, please simply reply to this email or contact me at

Thank you for your consideration, and once again, please do not hesitate to contact me if you are interested in knowing more about this project.

Principle Investigator: Nguyen Hong Hanh

Email: [honghanh.nguyen@my.jcu.edu.au](mailto:honghanh.nguyen@my.jcu.edu.au)

Phone/WhatsApp:

**Appendix C - Letter of invitation to hospitality university alumni**

*Email subject: Invitation for participating in PhD research – for Alumni*

Dear...,

I am writing this email to invite you – as an alumnus of ... university to participate in a research study about ***The collaboration between hospitality universities and the industry to enhance students' employability***. This study is being conducted by PhD candidate – Nguyen Hong Hanh at James Cook University – Singapore campus.

With your experience as a graduated student from one of the best hospitality universities, I truly believe that your valuable insights will contribute significantly to my study.

You are eligible to participate in this research project if you

- Successfully completed your Bachelor degree in Hospitality management at ... university in Vietnam.
- Currently actively working in the hospitality industry and have sufficient knowledge about the necessary skill sets required of hospitality students for recruitment.

Participation in this study means agreeing to:

- Participate in a 40-60-minute Zoom/onsite **interview or email interview** with the researcher, expected to take place in June 2022.

If you accept this invitation and are willing to share your valuable opinions on the topic, please kindly response by replying to this email saying you are willing to be involved. A follow-up official email will be sent to you with an attached consent form and more detailed instructions. Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated.

If you would like additional information about this study, please simply reply to this email or contact me at

Thank you for your consideration, and once again, please do not hesitate to contact me if you are interested in knowing more about this project.

Principle Investigator: Nguyen Hong Hanh

Email: [honghanh.nguyen@my.jcu.edu.au](mailto:honghanh.nguyen@my.jcu.edu.au)

Phone/WhatsApp:

**Appendix D - Consent form**

This administrative form  
has been removed

**Appendix E - Categories of analysis and their theoretical references for interviewguide (sample)**

| <b>Research Participants: Course Developers</b> |                                                                               |                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Theme</b>                                    | <b>Categories of analysis</b>                                                 | <b>Theoretical references</b>                                                           |
| <b>Hospitality education programs</b>           | Responsibility of hospitality higher education institutions                   | (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017; Lyu et al., 2016; Suh et al., 2012)                            |
|                                                 | Competencies aiming to develop for hospitality students                       | (Marneros et al., 2021; Min et al., 2016; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005; Scott et al., 2008) |
|                                                 | Challenges facing to develop necessary competencies                           | (Nguyen, 2019; Testa & Sipe, 2012)                                                      |
|                                                 | Learning model of hospitality management bachelor degree                      | (Crawford, 2013; Lee, 2008; Yang & Cheung, 2014)                                        |
| <b>Students' employability</b>                  | Enhance students' practical exposure                                          | (Kitterlin-Lynch et al., 2015; Jauhari, 2013)                                           |
|                                                 | Challenges to improve students' employability                                 | (Jack et al., 2017; Le et al., 2018b; Zopiatis et al., 2021)                            |
| <b>Pandemic-induced changes</b>                 | Changes in customers' behaviors in the post-pandemic period                   | (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021; Shamshiripour et al., 2020)                                |
|                                                 | Competencies will emerge after the pandemic - learnings from this crisis      | (Alonso et al., 2020; Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021; Zopiatis et al., 2021)                |
|                                                 | Industry changes expected in the future                                       | (Bilgihan et al., 2014; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006; Suh et al., 2012)                     |
| <b>Curriculum design and development</b>        | Parties involved in the curriculum design, development and evaluation         | (Morris & Adamson, 2010; Oktadiana & Chon, 2017)                                        |
|                                                 | Process of curriculum design, development and evaluation                      | (Lunenburg, 2011; Primrose & Alexander, 2013; Soto, 2015)                               |
|                                                 | Determinant factors in a hospitality management curriculum design             | (Kwok, 2022; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006)                                                  |
|                                                 | Components of the curriculum to review                                        | (Batra, 2016; Ekpo, 2020)                                                               |
|                                                 | Challenges & opportunities for collaborating with international institutions  | (Khuong & Thi Tran, 2018; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2015; Tran et al., 2018)          |
| <b>Quality workforce development</b>            | Roles of employers' feedback and demands in the hospitality curriculum        | (Marneros & Gibbs, 2015; Millar et al., 2010; Clark et al., 2017)                       |
|                                                 | Expatriates occupy top positions in developing countries                      | (InterNations, 2019; Le et al., 2018b)                                                  |
|                                                 | Challenges for hospitality tertiary education in emerging destinations        | (Nguyen, 2019; Scott et al., 2008)                                                      |
|                                                 | Procedure to ensure hospitality curriculums are aligned with industry demands | (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019; Kamp, 2020; Marneros et al., 2021)                             |



**Appendix F - Interview questions for six group of research participants**

| <b>Research participants<br/>(6 groups)</b> | <b>Interview questions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
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| <b>Course developers</b>                    | <p><b>Hospitality education programs</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you believe is the responsibility of hospitality higher education institutions?</li> <li>2. What are the competencies that your education program is aiming to develop for hospitality students?</li> <li>3. What are the key challenges that your university is facing to develop any of these competencies?</li> <li>4. What is the learning model of your university's hospitality management bachelor's degree?</li> </ol> <p><b>Students' employability</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you enhance students' practical exposure at your university and make sure they are ready for employment?</li> <li>2. What are the current challenges that hospitality universities are struggling to improve students' employability?</li> </ol> <p><b>Pandemic-induced changes</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What changes in customers' behaviors do you expect in the post-pandemic period?</li> <li>2. What are the competencies that you believe will emerge after the pandemic? Does the university intend to develop any new subjects to nurture these new competencies? What industry policy changes you expect in future?</li> <li>3. What are the key learnings from this crisis for the educators? What suggestion do you have in dealing with similar situations?</li> </ol> <p><b>Curriculum design and development</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the parties involved in the curriculum design, development and evaluation at your university?</li> <li>2. What is the process of curriculum design, development and evaluation at your university?</li> <li>3. What do you believe are determinant factors in a hospitality management curriculum design?</li> <li>4. What components of the curriculum do you review (course structure, focus and course content, teaching pedagogies)?</li> <li>5. What do you think are the challenges and opportunities for collaborating with international institutions to enhance hospitality curriculum internationalization?</li> </ol> <p><b>Quality workforce development</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the roles of employers' feedback and Industry demands in the hospitality curriculum? How do you make sure that students are well-aware of their potential employers' requirements?</li> <li>2. What do you think are the reasons behind the fact that head departments in international hotel companies in developing countries are mostly occupied by expatriates? Do you have any suggestions to improve?</li> </ol> |

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|                                      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What are the challenges for hospitality tertiary education in emerging destinations like Vietnam?</li> <li>4. What do you think might be the best procedure to ensure hospitality curriculums are aligned with industry demands?</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Head of Industry partnerships</b> | <p><b>Students' employability</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. How do you enhance students' practical exposure at your university and make sure they are ready for employment?</li> <li>6. What are the current challenges that hospitality universities are struggling to improve students' employability?</li> <li>7. Internship quality is a concern. How do you control and evaluate internship quality at your university?</li> <li>8. To improve students' employability, does your university offer employability and career-planning courses? Who are the ones designing and leading such courses?</li> </ol> <p><b>Pandemic-induced changes</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What changes in customers' behaviors do you expect in the post-pandemic period?</li> <li>2. What are the competencies that you believe will emerge after the pandemic? Does the university intend to develop any new subjects to nurture these new competencies? What industry policy changes you expect in future?</li> <li>3. What are the key learnings from this crisis for the educators? What suggestion do you have in dealing with similar situations?</li> </ol> <p><b>Industry collaboration</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the practices that your university is currently implementing to collaborate with the industry as an education partner?</li> <li>2. Please elaborate on the activities that involve industry inputs and participation at your university.</li> <li>3. What are the criteria for your university to decide on an appropriate industry partner?</li> <li>4. How would you describe your overall experience with those industry partners?</li> <li>5. What are the challenges that hospitality universities are facing to improve the quality of collaborative relationship with the industry partners?</li> <li>6. What do you believe are the key factors behind an effective industry-education collaboration?</li> </ol> <p><b>Quality workforce development</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you think are the reasons behind the fact that head departments in international hotel companies in developing countries are mostly occupied by expatriates? Do you have any suggestions to improve?</li> <li>2. What are the challenges for hospitality tertiary education in emerging destinations like Vietnam?</li> <li>3. What do you think might be the best procedure to ensure hospitality curriculums are aligned with industry demands?</li> </ol> |
| <b>Director of Human Resources</b>   | <p><b>Graduates' competencies</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you believe is the responsibility of hospitality higher education institutions?</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

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|  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. What are the competencies that hospitality industry recruiters looking for when interviewing hospitality graduates?</li> <li>3. What are the most important five competencies needed by hospitality graduates to become successful and overcome the challenges when they start working?</li> <li>4. How do you rate the current hospitality education programs offered in universities in Vietnam in term of preparing students with necessary competencies?</li> <li>5. How do you rate the interns and graduates coming from public, private and international universities? How are those interns different from each other?</li> </ol> <p><b>Students' internship programs</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does your company have internship program for hospitality students from universities in Vietnam? Can you describe it briefly?</li> <li>2. Internship quality is a concern. How do you control and evaluate internship quality provided by your hotel?</li> <li>3. What are the challenges faced by interns and fresh graduates while started working at your hotel?</li> <li>4. What can you suggest academics and hospitality students do to optimize the benefits of the internship program?</li> </ol> <p><b>Collaboration with university</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. What are the practices that your hotel is currently implementing to collaborate with the hospitality universities as an education partner?</li> <li>8. Please elaborate on the activities that your hotel has provided inputs and participated with the university partner.</li> <li>9. What are the criteria for your hotel to decide on an appropriate university partner?</li> <li>10. How would you describe your overall experience with those universities?</li> <li>11. What are the challenges that the industry is facing in an effort to improve the quality of collaborative relationship with the education partners?</li> <li>12. What do you believe are the key factors behind an effective industry-education collaboration?</li> </ol> <p><b>Pandemic-induced changes</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are key challenges that your hotel is facing currently in the times of current global pandemic?</li> <li>2. What changes in customers' behaviors do you expect in the post-pandemic period?</li> <li>3. What are the competencies that you believe will emerge after the pandemic? What industry policy changes you expect in future?</li> <li>4. What are the key learnings from this crisis for the industry professionals? What suggestion do you have in dealing with similar situations?</li> </ol> <p><b>Quality workforce development</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you think are the reasons behind the fact that head departments in international hotel companies in developing countries are mostly occupied by expatriates? Do you have any suggestions to improve?</li> <li>2. What are the challenges for hospitality tertiary education in emerging destinations like Vietnam?</li> <li>3. What do you think might be the best procedure to ensure hospitality curriculums are aligned with industry demands?</li> </ol> |
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| <p><b>Department Heads</b></p>   | <p><b>Graduates' competencies</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. What do you believe is the responsibility of hospitality higher education institutions?</li> <li>7. What are the competencies that hospitality industry recruiters looking for when interviewing hospitality graduates?</li> <li>8. What are the most important five competencies needed by hospitality graduates to become successful and overcome the challenges when they start working?</li> <li>9. How do you rate the current hospitality education programs offered in universities in Vietnam in term of preparing students with necessary competencies?</li> <li>10. How do you rate the interns and graduates coming from public, private and international universities? How are those interns different from each other?</li> </ol> <p><b>Students' internship programs</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Does your company have internship program for hospitality students from universities in Vietnam? Can you describe it briefly?</li> <li>6. Internship quality is a concern. How do you control and evaluate internship quality provided by your hotel?</li> <li>7. What are the challenges faced by interns and fresh graduates while started working at your hotel?</li> <li>8. What can you suggest academics and hospitality students do to optimize the benefits of the internship program?</li> </ol> <p><b>Collaboration with university</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. What are the practices that your hotel is currently implementing to collaborate with the hospitality universities as an education partner?</li> <li>14. What are the criteria for your hotel to decide on an appropriate university partner?</li> <li>15. What do you believe are the key factors behind an effective industry-education collaboration?</li> </ol> <p><b>Pandemic-induced changes</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. What are key challenges that your hotel is facing currently in the times of current global pandemic?</li> <li>6. What changes in customers' behaviors do you expect in the post-pandemic period?</li> <li>7. What are the competencies that you believe will emerge after the pandemic? What industry policy changes you expect in future?</li> <li>8. What are the key learnings from this crisis for the industry professionals? What suggestion do you have in dealing with similar situations?</li> </ol> <p><b>Quality workforce development</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. What do you think are the reasons behind the fact that head departments in international hotel companies in developing countries are mostly occupied by expatriates? Do you have any suggestions to improve?</li> <li>5. What are the challenges for hospitality tertiary education in emerging destinations like Vietnam?</li> </ol> <p>What do you think might be the best procedure to ensure hospitality curriculums are aligned with industry demands?</p> |
| <p><b>Final-year student</b></p> | <p><b>Motivation and expectations</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

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|                          | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What criteria did you consider when you choose a certain university to pursue hospitality career?</li> <li>2. What expectations did you have for these universities?</li> <li>3. What motivated you to pursue career in the hospitality industry? Does the education program help you maintain this motivation?</li> </ol> <p><b>Education programs</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Has your career perception changed after you completed your internship?</li> <li>2. What difficulties did you face when you started your internship?</li> <li>3. How do you evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of education programs at your university?</li> <li>4. What do you think of the quality of hospitality education programs in tertiary institutions?</li> <li>5. What factors do you believe are the most important to prepare work-ready graduates?</li> <li>6. What area of improvement can you suggest improving the current curriculum?</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>University alumni</b> | <p><b>Motivation and expectations</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. What criteria did you consider when you choose a certain university to pursue hospitality career?</li> <li>5. What expectations did you have for these universities? Did the university meet your expectation?</li> <li>6. What motivates you to pursue career in the hospitality industry? Did the education programs help you maintain this motivation?</li> </ol> <p><b>Education programs</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you think of the quality of hospitality education programs in tertiary institutions?</li> <li>2. How do you evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of education programs at your university?</li> </ol> <p><b>At Workplace</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What difficulties did you face when you started your career?</li> <li>2. What factors do you believe are the most important to prepare work-ready graduates?</li> <li>3. What area of improvement can you suggest improving the current curriculum?</li> <li>4. Have your standpoint and perception changed since you started working in the industry? What do you think have changed?</li> </ol> |

**Appendix G - Information sheet****INFORMATION SHEET**

**PROJECT TITLE: "Industry-informed curriculum management in hospitality tertiary education: The case study of Vietnam"**

You are invited to take part in a research project about the development of an industry-informed curriculum in hospitality tertiary education to enhance graduates' employability. The study is being conducted by Nguyen Hong Hanh and will contribute to the Doctor of Philosophy in Tourism at James Cook University.

The purpose of this study is to investigate skills and competency levels of the hospitality sector and deploy design thinking method to explore a continuous adaptability process that channels tertiary institutions' responses to a changing and growing hospitality sector environment.

If you agree to be involved in the study, you will be invited to be interviewed. The interview, with your consent, will be audio-taped, and should only take approximately 40-60 minutes of your time. The interview will be conducted via Zoom.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and you can stop taking part in the study at any time without explanation or prejudice. You can withdraw unprocessed data within 2 years of data collection. Participation in this study will not cost you anything. There will be no reimbursement for your participation in this study.

It is low risk research. There should not be any risks or distress for participants.

Results of the study will be provided to you, if you wish. If you would like a summary of the results of this study, please contact the principal investigator at the email address listed below.

Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential. The data from the study will be used in research publications and reports (journal articles, theses, conferences). You will not be identified in any way in these publications.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact – **Nguyen Hong Hanh and Dr. Thirumaran Kailasam.**

**Principal Investigator:****Nguyen Hong Hanh****College: School of Business****James Cook University Singapore****JCU Phone:****Email: [Honghanh.Nguyen@my.jcu.edu.au](mailto:Honghanh.Nguyen@my.jcu.edu.au)****Supervisor:****Name: Thirumaran. Kailasam****College: School of Business****James Cook University Singapore****Phone:****Email: [k.thirumaran@jcu.edu.au](mailto:k.thirumaran@jcu.edu.au)**

*If you have any concerns regarding the ethical conduct of the study, please contact:  
Human Ethics, Research Office  
James Cook University, Townsville, Qld, 4811  
Phone: (07) 4781 5011 ([ethics@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@jcu.edu.au))*