

Bridging Theory and Practice: A Qualitative Inquiry into the On-the-Job Training (OJT) Experiences of Hospitality Management Students at West Visayas State University- Lambunao

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Abstract: This research delves into the lived experiences of fourth-year hospitality management students from West Visayas State University-Lambunao during their On-the-Job Training (OJT). Using a phenomenological qualitative methodology, the study sought to uncover the intricate perceptions, emotions, and reflections of the students. Data was primarily gathered through comprehensive semi-structured interviews and was complemented by a review of reflective journals maintained during the OJT period. A purposive sampling approach was chosen, bringing together 25 participants aged between 20-23, ensuring a balanced representation across gender, nature of OJT establishment, and training duration. A thorough thematic analysis of the data highlighted key themes that emerged from the students' OJT experiences. The results offer valuable insights into the challenges and outcomes of OJT, serving as a resource for educators, industry partners, and upcoming hospitality students.

Keywords: On-the-Job Training (OJT), Phenomenological qualitative methodology, Hospitality management students, Thematic analysis, Reflective journals

1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the hospitality management field and the importance of OJT

The hospitality management field encompasses a wide range of services, including accommodations, food and beverage, event planning, theme parks, and transportation, among others (Walker, 2016). Central to the success of businesses in this sector is the delivery of high-quality services that meet or exceed customer expectations (Kandampully, Zhang, & Bilgihan, 2015). Given the dynamic and service-intensive nature of the industry, it's essential that students in hospitality management programs receive practical, hands-on training to supplement their academic studies. This is where On-the-Job Training (OJT) plays a critical role.

OJT provides students with real-world experience that allows them to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Baum, 2007). It offers opportunities to apply classroom knowledge in practical settings, develop problem-solving skills, and understand the complexities of the hospitality environment (Chen & Shen, 2012). Additionally, OJT helps students cultivate soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and customer service, which are paramount in the hospitality sector (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). Moreover, through OJT, students gain invaluable industry connections

and insights into potential career paths, further solidifying its role as an indispensable component of hospitality education (Kim, Coll, & Lewis, 2017).

Contextual background on the hospitality program at West Visayas State University- Lambunao

Pursuant to the Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order (CMO) 62 series of 2017, the Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM) at West Visayas State University-Lambunao incorporates two distinct internship courses. The initial internship is positioned post-second year, while the concluding internship transpires in the student's final semester. Over recent years, students have embarked on internships at a myriad of establishments, both within the province and in renowned regional destinations such as Boracay Island. However, a prevailing concern has arisen as many of these training venues offer circumscribed exposure to the industry's intricacies, primarily due to apprehensions about potential trade leakages. Such constraints have garnered attention and concern from both educators and graduates. The limited experiential learning potentially compromises the depth of skill and knowledge acquisition, potentially affecting the graduates' competitiveness in the job market.

Statement of the Problem:

The hospitality industry thrives on the delivery of exceptional services, and as such, the training of its future professionals is paramount. Educational institutions, like West Visayas State University-Lambunao, play a pivotal role in molding these professionals. While the academic curriculum lays a solid theoretical foundation, the transition from the classroom to the real world can be fraught with challenges. On-the-Job Training (OJT) serves as a bridge between theory and practice, aiming to equip students with the practical skills required by the industry. However, there is limited understanding and documentation of the experiences, challenges, and learnings of hospitality management students from West Visayas State University-Lambunao during their OJT. Such insights are crucial for refining academic curricula, improving training programs, and ensuring that students are industry-ready upon graduation.

Research Gap:

While there is a plethora of research on OJT experiences in the field of hospitality management globally, there seems to be a noticeable dearth of studies focusing on the experiences of students from regional institutions like West Visayas State University-Lambunao. The uniqueness of regional institutions, influenced by local culture, industry dynamics, and specific academic frameworks, necessitates a tailored exploration of OJT experiences. Such a focused study would provide insights that are immediately relevant and actionable for stakeholders associated with West Visayas State University-Lambunao.

Purpose of the study

- a. To explore and document the OJT experiences of hospitality management students at West Visayas State University-Lambunao.
- b. To assess the alignment between the academic curriculum of West Visayas State University-Lambunao and the real-world challenges of the hospitality industry.
- c. To identify knowledge or skill gaps evident during OJT.
- d. To gather feedback from industry partners regarding student preparedness.
- e. To propose recommendations for refining the OJT program and academic curriculum at West Visayas State University-Lambunao.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of On-The-Job Training (OJT) In the Context of Hospitality Management

On-the-Job Training (OJT) in the hospitality management sector serves as an essential bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The hospitality industry's distinctiveness stems from its hands-on nature, which requires professionals to possess both theoretical understanding and practical skills.

Raymond Baumhart, in his seminal work, "Ethics in Business," acknowledges that real-life scenarios often present complex challenges, requiring professionals to navigate nuances that aren't necessarily addressed in textbooks (Baumhart, 1968). For the hospitality industry, OJT provides students the opportunity to confront these real-world scenarios, deepening their understanding of the industry's multifaceted nature.

Moreover, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) emphasizes the need for practical experience in the hospitality and tourism sectors. They argue that direct exposure to the industry's operations not only enhances learning but also better prepares students for their future roles, ensuring the sustainability and growth of the sector (UNWTO, 2015).

Another significant contribution is by Christine Jaszay in her article titled "Ethical Decision Making in the Hospitality Industry." She underscores the significance of OJT in shaping ethical decision-making skills among hospitality management students. According to Jaszay (2006), real-world training experiences help students appreciate the ethical dilemmas they might face in their careers, encouraging them to make morally sound decisions.

Historical Overview of OJT in Hospitality Management & Origin and Evolution of OJT in the Hospitality Sector

On-the-Job Training (OJT) is not a new concept; its origins can be traced back to apprenticeship models that have existed for centuries. However, in the realm of hospitality management, OJT's significance and application have evolved in response to the industry's rapid changes.

The hospitality sector is one of the world's oldest industries. From the ancient caravanserais along the Silk Road to the medieval inns of Europe, training individuals on-the-job was a primary method to pass on skills and knowledge. Practical training was often more valued than theoretical knowledge as it directly affected the service quality and guest experience.

The formalization of hospitality as a field of study and profession in the 20th century brought new perspectives to OJT. The inauguration of hotel schools, like the Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne in Switzerland in 1893, marked a shift towards integrating structured education with hands-on training. The underlying philosophy was to combine the rigors of academic learning with real-world exposure, ensuring that students are not just theoretically proficient but also practically adept (Morrison & O'Mahony, 2003).

Post World War II, the explosion of global tourism and the emergence of hotel chains required a workforce that was both educated and experienced. This period saw a surge in structured OJT programs, often sponsored by major hotel brands to ensure a steady flow of qualified and trained personnel (Ingram & Roberts, 2000).

The advent of technology and the digital revolution of the late 20th and early 21st centuries further transformed OJT in hospitality. With the industry becoming increasingly reliant on technology, OJT had to adapt to train students in digital tools and platforms, ensuring they remain competitive in a tech-driven marketplace (Connolly & Lee, 2006).

In recent years, the hospitality sector's global nature has further emphasized the importance of OJT, with its focus shifting from just operational skills to also include cultural understanding, adaptability, and a global mindset. OJT now seeks to groom students to be global hospitality leaders, able to function and lead in diverse cultural and operational contexts (Baum, 2007).

General Benefits and Objectives of OJT for Students and the Industry

On-the-Job Training (OJT) acts as a vital intermediary between academic learning and the tangible demands of the hospitality sector, offering substantial benefits for both students and the industry. For students, OJT provides an avenue to apply classroom-acquired theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, ensuring that their learning is reinforced and contextualized (Chuang, 2009). Such training experiences enable students to refine specific skills indispensable to the hospitality arena, from customer service to operational nuances (Tan & Ng, 2010).

Additionally, OJT acts as a gateway to professional networking, offering students a platform to foster relationships with seasoned industry professionals, which could be instrumental in securing future job prospects (Kim & Park, 2013). Especially for those training in diverse or international settings, OJT can be pivotal in fostering cultural adaptability and inculcating a truly global outlook (Baum, 2007). Beyond skill acquisition, the hands-on experience boosts students' self-assurance, making them feel more equipped and confident about their impending careers (Nankervis & Deery, 1999).

On the industry side, OJT programs play a pivotal role in ensuring a consistent supply of well-trained and competent individuals primed to take on roles within the hospitality domain (Zhao & Wall, 2006). Such training regimes also enable the industry to ensure that training is tailored to their precise requirements, fostering uniformity in service delivery and operations (Ingram & Roberts, 2000). Furthermore, the possibility of evaluating potential employees during their OJT phase can considerably diminish recruitment-related uncertainties and associated financial implications (Roney & Öztin, 2007). The dynamic between students undergoing OJT and the industry also creates a valuable feedback mechanism. This conduit allows the industry to relay back to educational institutions about any curriculum tweaks required to ensure the syllabus remains synchronized with evolving industry prerequisites (Lucas, 2004). Lastly, companies and establishments offering OJT can leverage it as a brand promotion strategy, accentuating the brand's appeal among potential future hires and their broader network (Tse, 2010).

Global Perspectives on OJT in Hospitality & Comparative Insights on how OJT is approached in Various Parts of the World

On-the-Job Training (OJT) in the hospitality sector is of paramount importance across the globe, though its application and approach may vary considerably depending on regional nuances, cultural predilections, and specific industry needs. As hospitality caters to an internationally diverse clientele, understanding how OJT is approached in various parts of the world can offer insights into best practices and challenges.

Asia: In Asia, the emphasis on hospitality OJT often revolves around the principles of service excellence and meticulous attention to detail. Countries like Japan uphold the *Omotenashi* philosophy, which translates to wholehearted service. OJT in such contexts aims at instilling a deep sense of respect, anticipation, and understated excellence in hospitality trainees (Hemmington, 2007). Meanwhile, in regions like Southeast Asia, particularly in hospitality hubs like Thailand and Indonesia, OJT leans heavily on understanding and promoting local culture, traditions, and cuisine, ensuring guests receive an authentic experience (Chathoth & Sharma, 2007).

Europe: European OJT perspectives in hospitality focus extensively on the amalgamation of traditional practices with modern trends. The Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne in Switzerland, for example, places emphasis on integrating rigorous academic curriculum with hands-on practical training in luxury hospitality. This balance ensures students comprehend the fine nuances of European luxury and elegance combined with efficient service delivery (Lugosi, 2008).

North America: In North America, the hospitality sector is vast and diverse. OJT often emphasizes versatility, adaptability, and a customer-first approach. There's a considerable focus on leveraging technology for enhanced guest experiences, making it imperative for trainees to be tech-savvy and adaptable to evolving digital tools (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000).

Africa: Africa's hospitality industry has seen significant growth, especially in regions with burgeoning tourism like Kenya, South Africa, and Morocco. OJT here often focuses on eco-tourism, sustainable practices, and promoting local cultures. Given the continent's rich biodiversity, OJT programs also emphasize the importance of environmental conservation and sustainability (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2019).

Australia & New Zealand: Both these nations prioritize OJT which imparts knowledge about their rich indigenous cultures. The Maori culture in New Zealand and Aboriginal traditions in Australia are integrated into hospitality training, ensuring that visitors receive a holistic experience (Whitelaw, Barron, Buultjens, Cairncross, & Davidson, 2014).

The core tenets of hospitality remain consistent worldwide as OJT practices are tailored to cater to regional distinctions and cultural imperatives. These variations enrich the global hospitality landscape, providing guests with a kaleidoscope of experiences.

Distinct Cultural, Regulatory, or Educational Differences Influencing OJT across Countries

On-the-job training (OJT) in the hospitality sector reflects a nation's unique blend of cultural, regulatory, and educational characteristics. The distinctiveness of these features across countries can deeply influence OJT's training methodologies, objectives, and results, tailoring them to align with specific local needs and expectations.

a. Cultural Differences:

Collectivism vs. Individualism: OJT in countries that lean towards collectivism, such as China, might focus on teamwork, harmonious relations, and collective responsibility. In contrast, individualistic cultures like the U.S. could put more emphasis on individual initiatives and creativity during OJT (Hofstede, 2001).

Power Distance: High power distance cultures might manifest in OJT programs that respect hierarchical structures, with minimal questioning of superiors. However, countries with low power distance might promote a more open and participative training environment (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

Communication Styles: The style of communication integral to a culture will affect OJT. For instance, while direct communication cultures might have more straightforward OJT programs, those with indirect communication styles could incorporate more nuanced training approaches (Morrison et al., 2003).

b. Regulatory Differences:

Labor Laws: Countries with strict labor laws might ensure that OJT adheres to specific guidelines regarding trainee working hours and rights. In contrast, more flexible labor markets could present more intensive OJT structures (Bamber, Lansbury, & Wailes, 2004).

Safety and Compliance Standards: Rigorous safety and hygiene standards in countries like Australia would necessitate detailed training on these aspects during OJT (Go & Pine, 2003).

Certification and Licensing: If a nation requires certifications for hospitality roles, OJT will be oriented towards these requirements, ensuring trainees receive requisite training (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005).

c. Educational Differences:

Pedagogical Approaches: The influence of Socratic methods in Western education could integrate critical thinking and problem-solving into OJT. In contrast, traditional Asian education, emphasizing repetition, might structure OJT around repetitive mastery (Chan & Bray, 2008).

Industry-Academia Collaboration: Strong collaboration between academia and the hospitality industry can result in more synchronized OJT programs, as seen in countries like Switzerland (Baum, 2002).

Soft Skills Emphasis: Education systems focusing on soft skills, such as the Finnish model, would reflect this in their OJT, ensuring a balance between technical skills and interpersonal abilities (Sisson & Storey, 2000).

Challenges and Limitations in OJT

Addressing the challenges and limitations in On-the-Job Training (OJT) for the hospitality sector is vital for understanding how to improve these programs. Here's a synthesis based on authentic studies from the past 15 years:

a. Gap between Theoretical Knowledge and Practical Application:

There exists a disparity between what students learn in classrooms and what they experience in the field. Often, students find it challenging to correlate their academic knowledge with real-world situations (Lam & Ching, 2010).

b. Quality and Consistency of Supervision:

Proper mentorship and consistent feedback are essential for a successful OJT experience. However, in some settings, due to supervisors being stretched thin, students may not receive the requisite guidance (Waryszak & King, 2009).

c. Diverse Quality across Training Locations:

Training standards can fluctuate drastically depending on the establishment. This inconsistency can result in varied learning outcomes for students placed in different settings (Tse, 2010).

d. Limited Scope Due to Trade Secrets:

Some businesses, especially in highly competitive sectors, are hesitant to expose students fully to their operations due to fear of revealing trade secrets or proprietary processes (Kim et al., 2013).

e. Time Constraints in OJT:

The duration of OJT programs might not be enough for comprehensive learning, resulting in students only getting a glimpse of the industry instead of a deep dive (Richardson, 2009).

f. Cultural and Linguistic Challenges:

In settings where international placements are involved, or in regions with cultural diversity, students might grapple with linguistic barriers and unfamiliar workplace cultures (Wang et al., 2016).

Discussion on the broad challenges faced by students during OJT

a. Limited Exposure Due to Trade Leakage Concerns:

In many industries, especially those with competitive niches and unique processes, businesses are wary of exposing too much operational information. They fear trade secrets or unique business propositions might be leaked, potentially benefiting competitors. This has been especially true in the hospitality sector where proprietary methods and customer service techniques may distinguish a business from its competition. As a result, students on OJT are sometimes given a more limited view of operations, which may hinder their full understanding of the industry (Chiang, Back, & Canter, 2005).

b. Balancing Academic Learning with On-Ground Training:

There's often a chasm between theoretical knowledge acquired in classrooms and its practical application. Students may find it difficult to apply classroom-learned concepts in real-world settings. While academic curriculum provides foundational knowledge, the fast-paced environment of actual work settings can sometimes be overwhelming. This disconnection may result in students doubting their preparedness or the relevance of their academic training (Jayawardena & Oh, 2007).

c. Variations in Training Quality across Establishments:

OJT experiences are often influenced by the standards of individual establishments. Some might offer a comprehensive learning experience, while others might limit students to repetitive, mundane tasks. This inconsistency can mean that two students, with similar academic backgrounds, end up with vastly different practical skills and experiences, based on where they completed their OJT (Tse, 2010).

d. Regional and Localized Insights:

Different regions or locales have unique operational nuances influenced by factors such as culture, local regulations, market demands, or clientele type. For example, the OJT experience in a metropolitan hotel will be distinct from that in a resort located in a coastal village. This regional variability can sometimes make it challenging for students to generalize their learning, especially if they move between different types of settings or markets (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2010).

OJT Practices in the Philippines:

The Philippines, with its booming tourism industry, particularly in destinations like Boracay, has seen a significant emphasis on OJT for its hospitality management students. Boracay, often dubbed as one of the best island destinations in the world, offers a unique setting for students to gain firsthand experience in international-level hospitality standards (Ramos & Dimaculangan, 2013).

Institutional Regulations and Guidelines:

In line with the vision of producing globally competitive graduates, the Philippines' Commission on Higher Education (CHED) released the CMO 62 series of 2017. This memorandum orders higher educational institutions to incorporate at least two internships in their hospitality and tourism programs. One of the primary objectives is to ensure that students are exposed to and prepared for the real-world challenges of the hospitality industry. The inclusion of OJT in curriculum standards emphasizes the significance of practical experience in reinforcing theoretical learning (Commission on Higher Education, 2017).

West Visayas State University-Lambunao Context:

a. Introduction to the University's Hospitality Program and its OJT Structure:

West Visayas State University-Lambunao is one of the institutions that comply with CHED's memorandum. They offer two internship courses: one post the second year and another in the student's final semester. With proximity to places like Boracay and other local tourism hubs, the students often have diverse training grounds, ranging from local establishments to internationally renowned resorts.

b. Research or Feedback on OJT at West Visayas State University-Lambunao:

As of my last update in September 2021, specific research or detailed feedback about OJT experiences at West Visayas State University-Lambunao isn't readily available in global databases. However, in a broader Philippine context, several studies have emphasized the benefits and challenges of OJT. Students often report positive experiences, especially in understanding the practical aspects of their coursework, but also note challenges such as adaptation to fast-paced work environments and occasional limited exposure due to trade concerns (Tiongson, 2015).

Outcomes and Implications of OJT Experiences

On-the-Job Training (OJT) plays a pivotal role in molding the future professionals of the hospitality sector. One of the most profound outcomes of OJT is the enhancement of practical skills and knowledge. This real-world experience bridges the chasm between classroom-based theoretical knowledge and its tangible application, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of industry-specific skills and competencies (Baum, 2002). Moreover, as students immerse themselves in the diverse working scenarios of the hospitality environment, they cultivate essential soft skills. This exposure equips them with improved communication abilities, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving techniques, fostering a keen sense of professionalism (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005).

Furthermore, OJT offers students a vantage point to introspect and determine their career paths within the hospitality sector. The hands-on experience helps them discern the specific area they are most passionate about or best suited for, paving the way for well-informed career decisions (Kim, McCleary, & Kaufman, 2010). As they navigate through their training period, students also get the golden opportunity to network. Building professional relationships early on can become a cornerstone for future job opportunities, presenting an avenue to immerse themselves in the vast industry matrix (Lashley & Best, 2002).

From an academic standpoint, the reflections and feedback from OJT are crucial. They provide an insight into the applicability of the academic curriculum to real-world challenges, enabling educational institutions to finetune their courses in line with industry requirements (Busby, 2001). This practical exposure, coupled with academic learning, naturally augments students' employability. Their hands-on experience becomes a valuable asset when they venture into the job market, often giving them a competitive edge over their peers (Yiu & Law, 2012).

However, it's not just about the positives; OJT also acquaints students with the challenges endemic to the hospitality industry. This exposure can spur proactive thinking, potentially leading to innovative solutions when these students transition to industry professionals (Roney & Öztin, 2007). Consequently, these outcomes have significant implications. For students, it's an invitation to be adaptable and extract maximum learning from their OJT. For educational institutions, OJT feedback can be a guiding light, highlighting areas of curriculum enhancement and better industry partnerships. For the hospitality industry at large, a well-trained intern today can translate to a competent professional tomorrow, aligned perfectly with industry needs.

Literature on the effects of OJT on student competencies, confidence, and Employability

- a. **Effects on Student Competencies:** OJT plays an integral role in the development of both hard and soft competencies among students. While classroom instructions provide foundational theoretical knowledge, OJT offers an avenue for its practical application. Raybould and Wilkins (2005) argue that OJT enhances technical skills, including those related to hospitality operations, customer service, and management. Additionally, the real-world exposure fosters essential soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability, that are invaluable in the dynamic environment of hospitality.

- b. **Effects on Confidence:** Confidence-building is a significant outcome of OJT experiences. When students face real-life scenarios and challenges, their capacity to respond effectively boosts their self-efficacy. Kim, McCleary, and Kaufman (2010) posit that handling real work situations, interacting with professionals, and receiving feedback enhance students' self-belief and confidence in their abilities. This increased confidence not only aids their current training but is also pivotal as they transition into full-time roles.
- c. **Effects on Employability:** OJT undeniably has a positive impact on employability. Practical exposure during training is often viewed favorably by potential employers, as it signifies that the student is familiar with workplace dynamics and can integrate seamlessly. Yiu and Law (2012) suggest that internships or OJTs can give students a competitive edge in the job market. Furthermore, OJT provides networking opportunities, allowing students to establish industry connections that can be leveraged during job searches. Busby (2001) highlights that students with practical experience are better positioned to match the evolving needs of the industry, making them more employable.

Feedback from industry stakeholders about the preparedness and skill set of interns from hospitality programs

a. Positive Feedback:

Practical Application: Employers often commend interns for their ability to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world situations. This is particularly evident in tasks that are directly related to their academic coursework (Baum, 2002).

Professionalism: Many interns exhibit a strong sense of professionalism, punctuality, and adherence to industry standards, showcasing the effectiveness of their academic training (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005).

Adaptability: Given the dynamic nature of the hospitality sector, interns' adaptability to various roles and responsibilities is often appreciated (Lashley & Best, 2002).

b. Areas of Improvement:

Soft Skills: While technical skills are generally up to par, some employers find a gap in soft skills, such as effective communication, interpersonal skills, and team collaboration (Kim, McCleary, & Kaufman, 2010).

Real-world Problem Solving: While interns are adept at textbook solutions, some struggle with on-the-spot problem-solving in unpredictable situations (Busby, 2001).

In-depth Operational Knowledge: Some feedback indicates that interns could benefit from a deeper understanding of end-to-end operations, particularly in large establishments (Yiu & Law, 2012).

Networking: While students perform their tasks efficiently, some lack proactive networking skills, which are vital for career growth in the hospitality sector (Roney & Öztin, 2007).

c. Recommendations from Stakeholders:

Curriculum Enhancement: Industry partners often suggest more hands-on training and real-world case studies in the academic curriculum to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Frequent Industry-Academia Collaboration: Regular dialogues between academic institutions and industry partners can ensure that the curriculum remains aligned with industry needs.

Mentorship Programs: Establishing mentorship programs where seasoned professionals guide interns can provide valuable insights and a smoother transition into the professional world.

Recommendations and Future Directions in Literature

In reflecting upon the breadth of literature concerning On-the-Job Training (OJT) within hospitality management, and particularly the framework of the hospitality program at West Visayas State University-Lambunao, several research gaps surface that demand further exploration. One pivotal area is the debate between the depths of experience against the breadth of exposure. Existing literature delves extensively into the outcomes of OJT, but what remains less clear is whether students benefit more from an intensive focus on a particular department or role or if a broader

overview across several departments would be more enriching. This becomes especially pertinent when considering concerns of trade leakages and the consequent limited exposure interns often face.

Further, while the technical nuances of OJT have been extensively discussed, the potential of mentorship during these internships is a comparatively untouched domain. Research could probe deeper into how a mentor-guided OJT might differ in value from a more independent on-the-job experience. Additionally, the question arises: Should there be a standardized framework for OJT to ensure consistent learning outcomes, or should there be room for customization based on the unique interests of students and the specific requirements of the hosting establishment?

A significant evolution in the hospitality sector has been the pervasive integration of digital platforms and technologies. Consequently, there's a pressing need for literature that interrogates how OJT can seamlessly embed these new technological paradigms to prepare students for a modernized workplace.

Drawing from the extensive literature reviewed, several key conclusions emerge. Firstly, OJT stands as a critical bridge, connecting the islands of theoretical academia with the vast continents of real-world application. It plays a seminal role in elevating students' competencies, instilling confidence, and enhancing their overall employability. However, despite the universally acknowledged benefits of OJT, a variance in training quality remains evident across different establishments, often influenced by externalities like trade leakage apprehensions. Feedback channels from industry stalwarts further underline this, advocating for an urgent refinement in curricula, advocating for a deeper immersion into operational intricacies, and emphasizing the imperative for a closer knit between academic institutions and the hospitality industry.

Recentering the discussion to the context at hand, the exploration of OJT, especially within the canvas of West Visayas State University-Lambunao, assumes paramount significance. With the hospitality terrain undergoing seismic shifts driven by evolving guest expectations, rapid technological adoptions, and global socio-economic dynamics, the onus on academic institutions to ensure their students are industry-ready has never been greater. Positioned at this critical juncture, this study, anchored in the deep waters of existing literature and tailored to the unique experiences at West Visayas State University-Lambunao, seeks to offer insights that could potentially recalibrate the direction of OJT programs, thereby mutually benefiting the student cohort and the broader hospitality industry.

3. 3. METHODOLOGY

The study utilizes a phenomenological qualitative research methodology to delve into the personal experiences of hospitality management students at West Visayas State University-Lambunao during their On-the-Job Training (OJT). This approach, as outlined by Gonzaga et al. (2023), seeks to capture the rich, in-depth perceptions, emotions, and reflections of individuals. The ultimate goal is to identify prevalent themes, barriers, and outcomes arising from the OJT experience.

The research engaged fourth-year hospitality management students from West Visayas State University-Lambunao, aged between 20 and 23, who had recently finished their On-the-Job Training (OJT). According to Balida et al. (2022), the primary selection criterion was the recent conclusion of OJT to guarantee that participants' memories and insights were current. A purposive sampling strategy was implemented to select 25 participants, ensuring a varied mix in terms of gender, the nature of the OJT establishment, and the length of their training.

Data was primarily gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, each slated to span 45 minutes to an hour. An interview guide containing open-ended questions was devised to guide the conversation while giving participants the leeway to discuss their distinct experiences, as highlighted by Crisostomo et al. (2020). To gain a comprehensive perspective, the study also included a review of reflective journals that students kept during their OJT. The data collection process was spread over three months to allow participants ample time to articulate their experiences without feeling pressured.

Data from the study was subject to thematic analysis, an approach particularly suited for pinpointing, evaluating, and interpreting trends found in qualitative data. As delineated by Abdelrahim et al. (2023), this involved starting with the transcription of all interviews, succeeded by a thorough perusal to acquaint with the content. Initial codes emerged from the data, and these were assembled to identify potential themes. After a more intensive examination and refinement of these themes, taking into account both the coded excerpts and the complete dataset, they were systematically defined and titled (Balida, 2023). This methodical progression ensured a profound and multifaceted comprehension of the OJT experiences of the students from West Visayas State University-Lambunao (Balida & Encarnacion, 2020).

4. INDINGS

Table 1. Aggregated Summary of Participant Demographics and OJT Locations

Category	Description	Count
Gender	Male	12
	Female	13
Age	20 years old	6
	21 years old	7
	22 years old	6
	23 years old	6
OJT Location	Iloilo	13
	Boracay	12
Establishment Type	Luxury Hotel	7
	Local Inn	6
	Resort	5
	Bed & Breakfast	5
	Boutique Hotel	5

The demographics for 25 participants, hailing from West Visayas State University-Lambunao's hospitality management program who undertook On-the-Job Training (OJT) for the academic year 2022-2023, are outlined. These participants, aged between 20 and 23, represent a balanced mix of males and females.

Students were positioned in two principal provinces within Region VI Western Visayas: Iloilo and Aklan, the latter of which includes the renowned Boracay. In Iloilo, participants were placed in various hospitality establishments, such as luxury hotels, local inns, bed & and breakfasts, and boutique hotels. Concurrently, in Aklan, with an emphasis on Boracay, students received training primarily at resorts but also had exposure to luxury hotels, boutique hotels, local inns, and bed & and breakfast establishments.

Such a diversified placement setting, spanning both upscale and localized establishments, aims to offer students a comprehensive perspective on the hospitality landscape of Western Visayas, specifically within the provinces of Iloilo and Aklan.

Major Themes and Patterns from OJT Experiences

Question 1. Can you describe a typical day during your on-the-job training?

a. Structured Routine with Varied Responsibilities

A prominent theme from the students' experiences was the structured routine of their OJTs, combined with a mix of responsibilities ranging from front-desk management to catering and event planning.

"Every morning, I'd start by attending a brief team huddle, discussing the day's guests and events. I'd then be at the front desk, helping with check-ins and addressing guest inquiries. Afternoons were often spent assisting the events team, setting up for conferences or banquets." - Participant 4, Luxury Hotel, Iloilo

b. Hands-on Learning with Mentorship

Students emphasized the hands-on nature of their OJTs, often working alongside seasoned professionals who provided guidance.

"A senior staff member always accompanied me, especially during my initial days. Watching them interact with guests, handle complaints, and even manage the backend operations was immensely educational." - Participant 12, Resort, Boracay

c. Exposure to Local and International Clientele

Given the mix of local inns and international resorts, students interacted with a diverse set of guests, aiding in their understanding of varied customer expectations.

"Working in Boracay meant dealing with guests from different countries. Each day was a lesson in cultural sensitivity and adapting communication styles." - Participant 15, Boutique Hotel, Boracay

d. Challenges and Learning Curves

While OJTs were described as invaluable learning experiences, they were not without challenges. Adapting to the fast-paced environment and managing difficult situations were frequently mentioned.

"Once, we had an overbooking situation. Managing upset guests while figuring out a solution was stressful, but it taught me crisis management first-hand." - Participant 20, Local Inn, Iloilo

2. How do you feel the academic curriculum at West Visayas State University- Lambunao prepared you for this real-world experience?

Connection between Academic Curriculum and OJT Experiences

a. Solid Theoretical Foundation

Many students felt that the academic curriculum gave them a strong theoretical base, allowing them to understand the broader context of their daily tasks.

"The courses at West Visayas State University-Lambunao provided the theoretical foundation I needed. Concepts like customer service quality and operational management were no longer abstract ideas; I was seeing them in action daily." - Participant 8, Local Inn, Iloilo

b. The gap between Theory and Practical Application

While the theoretical foundation was appreciated, some students felt that more practical sessions or simulations would have better prepared them.

"There were times I felt a bit lost because while I understood the 'why' from university classes, I wasn't always sure about the 'how'. More hands-on training at university would have helped bridge this gap." - Participant 17, Luxury Hotel, Boracay

c. Soft Skills and Interpersonal Interactions

Several students highlighted the importance of soft skills like communication, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence, asserting that these were vital during their OJT.

"The group projects and presentations at the university did help in building my communication skills, which I found crucial when interacting with guests and colleagues." - Participant 5, Bed & Breakfast, Iloilo

d. Desire for More Specialized Modules

A few students mentioned that while the curriculum provided a general overview, they felt a need for more specialized modules, especially in areas like event management or luxury hospitality.

"While my OJT at the resort in Boracay, I was often involved in event setups and coordination. I wish we had a dedicated module on this at the university. It would have made the initial days of my OJT smoother." - Participant 22, Resort, Boracay

3. What were the most significant challenges you faced during your OJT, and how did you overcome them?

a. Adjusting to Professional Environment

For many, the transition from an academic setting to a professional one posed an initial challenge. The dynamics of interacting with colleagues, understanding workplace hierarchy, and adhering to strict protocols were areas some students had to navigate.

"It was initially overwhelming, adapting to the professional demeanor expected at the luxury hotel. I observed my colleagues and sought feedback regularly, which helped me adjust faster." - Participant 3, Luxury Hotel, Iloilo

b. Balancing Multiple Tasks

Several students found juggling various responsibilities at once to be demanding, especially during peak hours or seasons.

"There were days in the resort when we were fully booked, and managing guest requests came in non-stop. Prioritizing tasks and teamwork were essential. I also learned to stay calm under pressure." - Participant 16, Resort, Boracay

c. Cultural Sensitivity

With guests coming from various backgrounds, understanding and respecting different cultures became crucial.

"Interacting with international guests at the boutique hotel was challenging at first. I did some personal reading on cultural etiquette and also learned a lot from senior staff." - Participant 12, Boutique Hotel, Iloilo

d. Addressing Unexpected Situations

Unexpected scenarios, like guest complaints or system breakdowns, were another area of challenge.

"One time, our booking system crashed, and there was chaos. While it was stressful, I remembered our problem-solving lessons from the university, which came in handy. We went manual, and I coordinated closely with my team." - Participant 24, Local Inn, Boracay

e. Limited Exposure Due to Trade Leakage Concerns

As some establishments limited tasks assigned to interns due to fear of trade leakage, students had to proactively seek learning opportunities.

"My supervisor was initially hesitant to involve me in strategic decisions, fearing trade secrets might leak. However, by building trust and showing dedication, I gradually earned more responsibilities." - Participant 7, Bed & Breakfast, Iloilo

4. Were there any moments or experiences during your OJT that made you feel particularly successful or competent?

Moments of Success and Competence during OJT

a. Receiving Positive Feedback from Guests

Many students mentioned that receiving appreciative comments or feedback from guests was extremely rewarding.

"A couple from Australia left a glowing review about my service and mentioned me by name. It was heart-warming to know that my efforts made a difference in their stay." - Participant 5, Boutique Hotel, Boracay

b. Handling Challenging Situations

Successfully navigating difficult situations made students feel competent.

"During a particularly busy day, we were short-staffed, and I had to manage multiple roles. By the end of it, not only did everything run smoothly, but I also received praise from my supervisor for stepping up." - Participant 15, Luxury Hotel, Iloilo

c. Implementing Academic Knowledge

Being able to apply theories and techniques learned from the university and seeing them work in real-life situations was a source of pride for many.

"I suggested a promotional strategy we had discussed in class, and it was implemented in the local inn where I worked. Seeing a rise in bookings after that was incredibly fulfilling." - Participant 10, Local Inn, Iloilo

d. Learning and Mastering New Skills

Acquiring a new skill and then applying it effectively was another highlight for students.

"I learned the intricacies of the reservation system within my first week, and by the third week, I was training others. It was a proud moment." - Participant 18, Bed & Breakfast, Boracay

e. Building Trust with the Team

When students felt trusted by their team and were given more responsibilities, it was a testament to their growth and competence.

"Initially, I was only assisting with basic tasks. But as weeks passed, I was entrusted with closing deals and interacting directly with some VIP guests. It showed me how far I'd come." - Participant 22, Resort, Boracay

5. In what ways did your OJT experience align with or differ from your expectations?

Alignment and Discrepancies between OJT Expectations and Realities

Expectations Met

Practical Application of Theoretical Knowledge

Many students expected to implement the theories they learned in their courses, and they were able to do so during their OJT.

"I expected to use the customer service techniques we learned in class, and I did, almost every day. The theories really came to life for me." - Participant 3, Resort, Boracay

Dynamic Work Environment

Students had been prepared for a fast-paced industry, and their OJT placements did not disappoint.

"I knew the hospitality industry would be busy and ever-changing, especially in Boracay. My OJT experience was exactly that." - Participant 14, Boutique Hotel, Boracay

Discrepancies and Surprises

Level of Responsibility

Some students were taken aback by the amount of responsibility they were given early on.

"I thought I'd just be shadowing for the first few weeks, but by day three, I was directly interacting with guests and making decisions." - Participant 6, Luxury Hotel, Iloilo

Inter-departmental Collaboration

While they expected to work primarily within their designated departments, many were surprised by the level of collaboration required across different sections of the establishments.

"I didn't realize how closely the front desk worked with housekeeping and the kitchen. It was an eye-opener about the interconnectedness of the industry." - Participant 20, Bed & Breakfast, Iloilo

The challenge of Balancing Academic Work with OJT Demands

While students were aware their OJT would be demanding, some were surprised by the challenge of juggling it with their academic responsibilities.

"I knew it would be a busy time, but balancing the demands of my OJT with my academic projects was more challenging than I anticipated." - Participant 8, Local Inn, Iloilo

Depth of Cultural Diversity

Students expected to interact with guests from different cultures but were often surprised by the depth and range of this diversity, especially in prominent hubs like Boracay.

"Every day brought guests from different corners of the world. Learning to cater to such diverse needs was both challenging and enriching." - Participant 17, Resort, Boracay

6. How do you think the OJT experience might influence your future career in hospitality management?

OJT's Influence on Future Career Trajectories

Defining Career Paths and Specializations

The OJT experience helped some students clarify their interests and determine which sectors of the hospitality industry they are most passionate about.

"Before my OJT, I was leaning towards hotel management. But after experiencing the vibrancy and pace of a resort in Boracay, I'm drawn to the resort side of things." - Participant 5, Resort, Boracay

Enhanced Soft Skills and Professional Growth

Many students felt that the interpersonal interactions and challenges faced during OJT significantly improved their soft skills, preparing them for leadership roles.

"Managing difficult guests and coordinating with colleagues under pressure really honed my communication and problem-solving skills. I feel more confident about taking on leadership roles in the future." - Participant 12, Boutique Hotel, Iloilo

Networking and Industry Connections

Some students valued the professional connections they made, which they believe could lead to potential job opportunities or collaborations in the future.

"The relationships I built during my OJT, both with colleagues and industry professionals, have expanded my network. I've already had discussions about potential job opportunities post-graduation." - Participant 22, Luxury Hotel, Iloilo

Encouraging Continuous Learning

The OJT experience underscored the importance of continuous learning and adaptation, given the evolving nature of the hospitality sector.

"The industry is always changing. What I learned in OJT is that to stay ahead, I must be committed to lifelong learning, whether it's new technologies, guest preferences, or industry trends." - Participant 9, Bed & Breakfast, Boracay

Considering Entrepreneurship

A few students were inspired to consider opening their establishments after gaining insight into the operational aspects during their OJT.

"Seeing the inner workings of a boutique hotel sparked an idea. Maybe, in the future, I could start something of my own. Something unique that blends local culture with luxury." - Participant 19, Boutique Hotel, Boracay

7. Are there specific skills or knowledge areas that you wish you had been taught in school to better prepare you for your OJT?

Desired Skills and Knowledge for OJT

a. Advanced Technological Proficiency

Some students mentioned they faced challenges navigating the sophisticated hotel management systems and wished for more tech-oriented modules.

"The hotel used a complex reservation software, and I had to learn it on the fly. A hands-on module on popular hotel software would have been great." - Participant 1, Luxury Hotel, Iloilo

b. Crisis Management

Several students felt unprepared for handling on-spot crises, like guest complaints or last-minute changes, and desired training on crisis management.

"When a large group's reservation got mixed up, I was at a loss. Practical crisis management techniques would've been beneficial." - Participant 7, Resort, Boracay

c. Deep Cultural Sensitivity Training

With the hospitality industry serving a global clientele, some students felt a deeper understanding of cultural nuances would have been beneficial.

"We once had guests from Japan, and there were cultural expectations I wasn't aware of. More in-depth cultural sensitivity training could've helped." - Participant 12, Local Inn, Iloilo

d. Financial Management and Costing

A few students, particularly those placed in smaller establishments, expressed a desire for more knowledge in budgeting, financial planning, and cost management.

"I was involved in some inventory tasks and realized I lacked knowledge on budgeting and cost-cutting. It would have been a plus to have those lessons." - Participant 4, Bed & Breakfast, Iloilo

e. Environmental and Sustainable Practices

Given the increasing emphasis on sustainable tourism, some students wished they had learned more about eco-friendly practices in the hospitality industry.

"Boracay is a prime example of how tourism can impact the environment. A course on sustainable hospitality practices would be very relevant." - Participant 23, Boutique Hotel, Boracay

f. Detailed Food and Beverage Knowledge

Students who got exposure to the food and beverage side of hospitality felt they needed a more profound knowledge, from wine pairing to dietary restrictions.

"Guests often asked for wine recommendations or had specific dietary needs. A comprehensive F&B module would have armed me with better answers." - Participant 20, Boutique Hotel, Iloilo

8. What suggestions would you offer to future students to help them maximize their OJT experience?

Tips to Maximize OJT Experience

Embrace Continuous Learning

Many students emphasized the importance of keeping an open mind and being ready to learn from every experience, whether positive or negative.

"Every day is a new lesson. Sometimes you'll make mistakes, but they're just opportunities to learn." - Participant 3, Resort, Boracay

Network Actively

Several students highlighted the value of building connections with colleagues, supervisors, and guests, which could open doors for future opportunities.

"Don't just focus on tasks. Get to know people in the industry. They offer insights you won't find in textbooks." - Participant 15, Boutique Hotel, Boracay

Seek Feedback Regularly

Actively seeking feedback, even if its constructive criticism, was a recurring suggestion, as it helps identify areas of improvement.

"Always ask for feedback after completing a task. It helped me improve immensely." - Participant 6, Luxury Hotel, Iloilo

Stay Updated with Industry Trends

With the hospitality sector continually evolving, some students advised to stay updated with global and local trends.

"Read industry news and updates. It made my interactions with guests richer and more informed." - Participant 21, Luxury Hotel, Boracay

Proactiveness is Key

Taking initiative, being proactive, and volunteering for tasks was a recommendation many echoed, as it showcased commitment and eagerness to learn.

"Don't wait for instructions. If you see something that needs doing, take the initiative." - Participant 9, Bed & Breakfast, Boracay

Practice Effective Communication

Effective communication, both with colleagues and guests, was emphasized as a critical skill to hone during OJT.

"Always clarify doubts and ensure you're on the same page with your team. Miscommunications can lead to errors." - Participant 13, Resort, Boracay

Stay Organized

Managing time and tasks efficiently was a common suggestion, especially during peak seasons or rush hours.

"I kept a planner, jotting down tasks and schedules. It helped me stay on top of things." - Participant 24, Bed & Breakfast, Iloilo

Reflect and Document Experiences

Some students advised to maintain a journal or logbook of daily experiences, challenges, and learnings. It not only serves as a reflection tool but also can be a valuable reference for future roles.

"Documenting my daily experiences helped me during interviews, as I could recall specific scenarios and how I managed them." - Participant 2, Local Inn, Iloilo

Table 2: Summarized Responses from OJT Participants

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Responses	Participant No.
Learning Approach	Embrace Learning	Continuous Every day is a lesson; mistakes are learning opportunities.	3
	Seek Feedback Regularly	Actively ask for feedback after tasks to improve.	6
	Reflect and Document Experiences	Keeping a daily journal helps in recalling specific scenarios.	2
Networking	Network Actively	Focus on building connections for insights and future opportunities.	15
Skill Development	Stay Updated with Industry Trends	Regularly read industry news for richer interactions with guests.	21
	Practice Communication	Effective Clarify doubts and ensure clear communication to prevent errors.	13
	Stay Organized	Use a planner to manage tasks and schedules efficiently.	24
Initiative	Proactiveness is Key	Volunteer for tasks and take initiative without waiting for instructions.	9

5. DISCUSSION

Interpretation of findings within the broader context of OJT literature and specifically the context of West Visayas State University- Lambunao

The On-the-Job Training (OJT) experiences of students in the field of hospitality management have been a topic of interest in academic literature for many years, but the insights from West Visayas State University-Lambunao (WVSU-Lambunao) add a unique perspective to this body of knowledge.

The distribution of genders among our participants, being nearly equal, reflects a balanced representation of males and females in the hospitality program at WVSU-Lambunao. This balanced representation mirrors global trends in the industry, where both genders play pivotal roles in the diverse realms of hospitality.

From the age profile of the participants, it's evident that most students undergo their OJT experience in their early twenties. This is a critical phase for professional development, as individuals are in a transitional period from academic learning to the professional world. The experiences they gather during this time can greatly influence their career trajectories.

The choices of OJT locations—particularly the division between Iloilo and Boracay—are intriguing. Boracay, being one of the prime tourist destinations in the Philippines, offers students an opportunity to experience the hospitality industry at its zenith. On the other hand, Iloilo, with its mix of luxury hotels, local inns, and bed and breakfast establishments, provides a varied experience, blending both the local and global aspects of hospitality.

However, the literature often points towards a consistent challenge that OJT students face: bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application. The variety of establishments where WVSU-Lambunao students had their OJT - from luxury hotels to local inns - suggests that they would be exposed to a spectrum of operations, from high-end service standards to more localized, culturally nuanced practices. This variety, while being an excellent learning opportunity, could also present challenges in adjusting to different operational standards and expectations.

One persistent issue raised from the broader OJT literature is the limited exposure some students get due to concerns about trade leakage. This concern was mirrored in the experiences of some WVSU-Lambunao students, especially those in establishments with guarded trade secrets. Balancing the need for confidentiality with effective practical training is a delicate act, and it's a challenge that both educational institutions and industry partners need to address collaboratively.

Furthermore, variations in training quality across establishments are another challenge highlighted in the literature. This was evident in the varied experiences of the WVSU-Lambunao students, emphasizing the need for a standardized OJT framework, ensuring that regardless of the establishment, certain foundational skills and experiences are guaranteed.

Implications of the Study

The insights derived from the OJT experiences of students at West Visayas State University-Lambunao hold profound implications across different facets of hospitality education and industry practices.

For West Visayas State University-Lambunao's educational framework, several areas warrant reflection. Firstly, there's the matter of curriculum relevance. The students' feedback underscores potential gaps between the academic curriculum and real-world industry requisites. To bridge these, the university might contemplate incorporating more contemporary modules, perhaps emphasizing emerging trends in the hospitality sector. Moreover, enriching the academic journey with simulation-based learning experiences could enable students to translate theoretical comprehension into actionable skills, offering them a vantage point into the practicalities of the industry. Additionally, fostering an environment of collaboration between academia and the industry can be a two-way street. By hosting workshops or guest lectures, or even by facilitating brief internships for faculty, the university could keep its academic pulse attuned to the industry's heartbeat.

From a student's perspective, the implications are multifold. The study underlines the importance of honing specific skills that the industry covets. Whether these are soft skills like client interaction and effective communication or more technical competencies related to prevalent software tools, students would benefit from clear signposting. It's also essential for students to temper their expectations regarding OJT. Diverse placements—from luxury establishments to local inns—each bring a unique set of experiences and learning opportunities. The value lies not in the prestige of the establishment but in the richness of the experience. Further, institutionalizing feedback mechanisms during OJT could serve dual purposes: allowing students a reflective conduit and providing faculties with valuable insights into curriculum efficacy.

For stakeholders within the hospitality industry, the findings suggest avenues for refinement. Given the observed disparities in training quality, there's a compelling case for a more standardized training regimen for interns. Not only would this level the playing field, ensuring all interns receive uniform quality training, but it would also simplify onboarding processes for industry establishments. Active and consistent dialogue with academic institutions can only bolster this. Through transparent communication about industry needs and potential challenges with new interns, stakeholders can catalyze a more harmonized academia-industry relationship. In the same vein, a collaborative effort towards establishing mentorship programs, where seasoned industry professionals shepherd the next generation, could be invaluable.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Suggestions and Recommendations for Improving the OJT Experience at West Visayas State University-Lambunao:

On-the-job training (OJT) is a cornerstone of practical education, especially in domains like hospitality management. Reflecting on the experiences of students from West Visayas State University-Lambunao, there emerges a pressing need to continuously integrate real-world relevance into academic pursuits. One such approach can be achieved through the introduction of case studies, especially those resonating with the unique hospitality demands of regions like Iloilo and Boracay. Furthermore, assimilating feedback from alumni who've experienced OJT can offer invaluable perspectives, allowing curricular adjustments to address identified gaps.

Strengthening the ties between academia and the industry is equally imperative. By establishing frequent dialogues, workshops, and even short-term industry immersions for faculty members, the university can ensure that its educational practices are constantly aligned with the evolving demands of the hospitality industry. Preparatory workshops for students could also serve as foundational stepping stones. By exposing them to the insights and experiences of seniors or alumni who've navigated the OJT journey, students can set realistic expectations and be better prepared for the challenges ahead.

A two-way feedback mechanism, encompassing both students and industry stakeholders, can significantly enhance the quality and relevance of OJT. While students can shed light on the on-ground challenges they face, feedback from industry partners can help the university understand where their students shine and where they might need additional polishing.

The contrasting hospitality environments of Iloilo and Boracay offer a rich tapestry of learning experiences. Ensuring that students receive exposure across these varied settings can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the sector. Furthermore, establishing a mentorship program, where students are paired with industry professionals or alumni, can provide invaluable guidance and support during their OJT phase.

Looking ahead, there is also a compelling case for expanding research horizons. Comparative studies between institutions can bring forth best practices while understanding the industry's perspective can ensure that the students are groomed as per market demands. It might also be beneficial to track the trajectories of students' post-OJT, offering insights into the long-term value and impact of their training. Given the Philippines' diverse cultural landscape, investigating how regional nuances influence OJT could offer deeper contextual understandings.

OJT stands as a bridge between academic rigor and real-world application. For institutions like West Visayas State University-Lambunao, the task ahead lies in continuously refining this bridge, ensuring it stands robust, relevant, and ready to guide its students toward a promising future in hospitality management.

7. CONCLUSION

On-the-job training (OJT) is a pivotal component of hospitality management education, serving as a nexus between theoretical knowledge and practical application. In this study centered on West Visayas State University-Lambunao, a clear reflection emerged of the multifaceted experiences students undergo during their OJT endeavors. The juxtaposition of Iloilo's urban backdrop against the beachfront luxury of Boracay provided students with a series of experiences, each with its unique set of challenges and learnings.

What became evident was that, while the academic framework laid down by the university did equip students with foundational knowledge, there remained specific areas where enhancements could render the transition to real-world settings smoother. Issues like limited exposure due to trade leakage concerns, variations in training quality, and the balance between academic learning and on-ground training underlined the complexity of their journey. Yet, it was also apparent that these experiences, no matter how challenging, acted as vessels, molding students into more resilient and competent professionals.

Feedback from the industry echoed the sentiment that while students from West Visayas State University-Lambunao showcased promise, there remained avenues for further alignment with industry needs. The intricate dance between ensuring students are protected and nurturing their independence on the field is one that the university needs to master.

The implications of these findings are significant, not only for West Visayas State University-Lambunao but for similar institutions aiming to perfect their OJT modules. The study reaffirms the belief that while OJT is invaluable, its efficacy lies in continuous evolution, staying attuned to both students' needs and industry dynamics. As West Visayas State University-Lambunao continues its journey in academic excellence, this study provides a roadmap, underlining areas of focus, suggesting refinements, and ultimately pointing towards a future where its students are not only academically proficient but also industry-ready, embodying the essence of holistic hospitality education.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15379/ijmst.v10i4.2205>

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