

# Determinants of Training Competitive Business Professionals in the Hospitality Industry

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## ABSTRACT

Against the background of increasing level of competition in the hospitality industry, the growth of tourism on a global scale, the importance of training competitive professionals in the hospitality industry is growing. The purpose of the academic paper lies in defining the determinants of training competitive business professionals in the hospitality industry. The methodology of the research is based on a survey of 314 students of higher educational institutions (HEIs) of Ukraine among the four educational programs "Management of tourism and hotel and restaurant business". The results indicate to the fact that five groups of determinants of influence on educational programs for training professionals of the hospitality industry have been revealed, among which the highest level of impact is provided by student support (this group of determinants ensures 43,99 % of the effectiveness of programs). The second place in terms of influence level is occupied by the network of connections in the hospitality industry (variation 7,36 %), the innovation of educational programs (variation 5,93) is in third place. It should also be mentioned that the important factors in the quality of educational programs are the educational environment (4,84 %) and the availability of certificates confirming the quality of faculties and programs. As a result of statistical analysis based on the t-test, no significant difference was revealed between the students' genders in the perception of the determinants of the quality of training programs (curricula). Significant differences were found between assessments of the perception of the quality of training programs by first-year students / second-year students, junior and senior specialists.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The importance of training competitive professionals in the hospitality industry is growing;
- Paper lies in defining the determinants of training competitive business professionals in the hospitality industry.

**Keywords:** Training of specialists in hospitality management, quality management in the hospitality industry, determinants of quality of educational programs

In settings of the increasing level of competition in the hospitality industry, the growth of tourism on a global scale (UNWTO, 2022 a; 2022 b), the importance of training competitive business professionals in the hospitality industry is growing. Over the past twenty years, researchers have identified a number of determinants of the effectiveness and quality of educational programs as follows: a practical approach based on the experience of hospitality

industry experts, innovative training programs, active learning methods, distance learning, learning environment and student support. Along with this, the basic trends in the training of specialists should

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also be outlined, namely: the development of skills and abilities, competencies of future specialists in the management of the hotel and restaurant business. Scholars often link the formation of skills and competencies with the practical experience of specialists, which is formed in the process of internship, professional activity, adopting the experience of hospitality professionals during training. Considering the foregoing, it is relevant to study the perception by students – future specialists of important determinants of preparation for work in the hospitality industry.

The purpose of the academic paper lies in defining the determinants of training competitive business professionals in the hospitality industry.

## Literature Review

Over the past twenty years, the issues of the determinants of training business specialists in the hospitality sector have been discussed in the scientific literature. Scientists single out the principal components of the training system, namely: a practical approach to learning, student support, innovative training programs in accordance with the employers' needs, improving the quality of faculty management, inclusion of various practical trainings in the training programs for the development of skills and competencies, simulation training for the training of specialists, distance learning with the use of ICT, etc.

Lee, Huh & Jones (2016), in their empirical study, have systematized these components of hospitality training based on a survey of 314 students enrolled in four different US hospitality management programs. Table 1 briefly describes the qualitative attributes of each component of the system for training specialists in the hospitality industry, among which the students have identified the principal ones:

- “(a) Student Support,
- (b) Industry Networking,
- (c) Innovative Curriculum,
- (d) Learning Environment,
- (e) Faculty and Program Credentials”.

In the investigation conducted by Lee *et al.* (2019) based on a survey of 329 US students studying at hospitality management faculties, a tendency has

been revealed to take into account the students' needs as an integral part of the success of their training program. Students have noted the importance of five areas characterizing the quality of education in the hospitality industry as follows: student support, networking, innovative curricula, and learning environment and faculty and program credentials.

## Determinants of training specialists in the hospitality industry

### *Practical training and interaction*

The criteria for the quality of educational programs for training specialists in hospitality management have been defined in the scientific literature, including as follows:

1. The use of a practical approach (Catrett, 2018) in training business professionals based on experimental practices due to the need for managers to perform numerous tasks in further work, implement innovations in the field of hospitality, improve service (Chan & Hawkins, 2012 Xu *et al.* 2018);
2. Frequent interaction of teachers and students (Deale, 2013). For instance, a study of Iriste & Katane (2016) proposes the concept of a learning environment for developing the competitiveness of hotel managers.

The authors use a constructivist approach and principles of learning based on experience, active learning. Learning based on practice and experience provides the development of students' skills for future professional activities, skills of practical problem solving. The experience-based learning is a self-regulating, active and constructive process where students collaborate and exchange ideas, developing communication skills. Thus, on the basis of previously acquired experience, students construct and accumulate new experience, new cognitive structures are formed. The principle of active learning involves the creation of the learning environment for self-actualization of students, self-expression, creative activity, which is extremely important for the introduction of innovations in the hospitality industry. Experience-based learning and active learning are significant principles for promoting the competitiveness of professionals in the learning environment of a higher educational institution.

**Table 1: Quality Attributes in Higher Education**

Category	Quality Attribute
Training	Interactions between student and faculty Programs with hospitality-related content Practical and theoretical hospitality courses Orientation programs
Curriculum	Clear goal, philosophy, and value Reputable academic degrees Keep programs up to date Scholarship opportunity Personal assistant for disabled students A variety of class selections Reasonable requirements for majors
Staff Management	Faculty with industry backgrounds Educators carry out plans as promised Sets office hour to assist students Quick and effective online communication College dean responsible for academic programs
Plans	Easily transferable practical and theoretical skills Advanced-level hospitality courses Exchange programs Constant assessment/reevaluation
Industry Experience	Optional Practical Teaching (OPT) and curricular practical training programs/ internships Provide hospitality industry trainings Opportunity to attend industry events
Virtual Learning	Group and teamwork discussions Simulation-based trainings Hands-on practice Provides a real feeling of the work task
Networking	Networking with industry professionals Guest speakers from current industry Partnerships with industry professionals Future employment accessibility
Learning Environment	Tutoring services Reliable learning facilities Appropriate student–faculty ratio Internet accessibility Visually appealing campus environment
Distance Learning	Use of electronic devices One-on-one interaction between students and educators Active participation using technology Different from a traditional classroom setting

Source: Lee, Huh & Jones (2016).

### ***Innovative Curriculum***

The competitiveness of the hospitality industry depends on the management skills of business professionals. Therefore, training programs should

reveal the creative potential of students through practical training. Training programs should also contain the basic requirements and trends in the hospitality industry (Goh & King, 2020), cover various subsectors in order to enable students to

decide on future specialization. Curricula should also be constantly updated, that is, they should be innovative in connection with changing needs of the hospitality industry, transform goals, philosophy, values (Barron, 2008; Lee *et al.* 2019).

### ***Faculty Credentials***

Continuous improvement in the quality of faculty management should also take place in order to ensure that the gap between academic practice and practice in the hospitality industry is reduced. Quality improvement also includes the enhancement of teaching strategies by educators, the use of innovative teaching methods to develop skills in demand in the field outlined (Deale *et al.* 2011). The faculty should involve teachers who have practical experience in management in the hospitality industry, and who can pass their own experience to students, and consider various cases in management (Phelan, Mejia & Hertzman, 2013).

### ***Industry Practice***

Inclusion of various practical trainings in curricula for developing the skills of quality management, service, efficiency and operational productivity, as well as developing communication skills is of particular importance (Phelan, Mejia and Hertzman, 2013). Specialist training programs should include internship programs that will provide students with the experience in solving practical problems, in particular, the possibility of seasonal practice, part-time employment. Increasing the level of the mobility of students and intercultural interaction (Lugosi and Jameson, 2017) also requires integration into exchange training programs for developing students' skills to work in a multicultural environment (Lam and Ching, 2007).

### ***Simulation Learning***

Educational institutions are increasingly aware of the importance of simulation learning for training of specialists, which improves and develops decision-making skills, problem solving, gives an understanding of how the hospitality industry functions (Fawcett & Lockwood, 2000). Simulation training helps to increase students' self-confidence, develop the level of motivation by understanding their own potential in solving complex problems. In addition, simulation training makes it possible

to work in a team and develop interpersonal relationships (Edelheim & Ueda, 2007).

### ***Distance Learning***

Distance learning using ICT promotes more organized training of students (digital interaction, video conferencing, Internet, audio, recordings and telephones). Specialist training programs integrate distance learning and ICT in connection with the understanding of the growing trend towards digitalization of the hospitality sector, which in general improves service and maintenance in the industry (Deale *et al.* 2011).

### ***Student Support***

Specialist training programs should develop their own infrastructure; they should improve the physical learning environment, which contributes to a greater level of student satisfaction and motivation (Nien-Te *et al.* 2011; Lee *et al.* 2019). Student support should also include equipping classrooms with technology in order to provide a dynamic learning experience (Kuo *et al.* 2017).

### ***Industry Networking***

Students should get feedback from professionals, who have been already working in the hospitality industry, in order to understand the list of skills that they need in their work. The networks of events and activities of educational institutions and the private hospitality sector should provide an opportunity for future professionals to share perceptions of what skills and competencies are required in the work (McCleary *et al.* 2008). Traditional events (career days, information sessions and / or job fairs, student tours, student clubs) should also include online communication, for instance, on social networks, which provide students with valuable information about potential employers (Lee *et al.* 2019).

### **Skills of competitive business professionals in the hospitality industry**

The study conducted by Raybould & Wilkins (2005) on the skill structure of hospitality managers in Australia has revealed the following skills to be of particular importance, namely: interpersonal communication, problem solving, and self-management skills. 850 Australian hospitality

managers and 211 hospitality management students took part in the sample survey. The study of Tavitiyaman, Weerakit & Ryan (2014) was designed to examine the leadership competencies required for general managers (GMs) in hotels in Thailand. The research factor analysis has identified six components of leadership competence as follows: leadership, motivational / interpersonal skills, strategic orientation, planning and implementation, team building and ethics, communication skills, flexibility and concern for the society. The results have shown that team building and ethics, leadership and communication skills are the most important factors for GMs. Along with this, flexibility and strategic orientation were the least important competencies for them. According to a study of Wilks & Hemsworth (2012) on competencies that are crucial for leaders in the hospitality industry, based on a study of the structure of a bachelor's degree in Portugal and a survey of hoteliers, the authors note that soft skills are assessed as essential for effective work in this area. According to an OECD survey of skills in demand in different countries in the entertainment and recreation sphere, on average, the following skills are in need in the EU market, namely: time management, personnel management, social skills (the ability to persuade, negotiate, provide instructions, the ability to focus on service and its quality), the ability to solve complex problems (OECD, 2022).

## METHODOLOGY

### The research tools and methods

The academic paper uses the methodology proposed by Lee, Huh & Jones (2016), which involves surveying students on assessing the quality attributes of each component of the specialist training system in the hospitality industry, namely:

1. Student Support.
2. Industry Networking.
3. Innovative Curriculum.
4. Learning Environment.
5. Faculty and Program Credentials.

Each component contained attributes that were included in order to assess the quality of preparation of curricula in the hospitality industry and that were developed based on a literature review as important

determinants of training. In order to verify the validity of the content and reliability of the survey results, a pilot survey was conducted with the participation of 35 students. In the course of the pilot survey and consultations with teachers, the importance of certain quality attributes of curricula was confirmed.

The perception by the students of the importance of outlined determinants of curricula were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not important at all, 7 = extremely important). The questionnaire included social-demographic features of the respondents.

### Data collection

Data was collected from hospitality management students in Ukraine. In order to avoid sampling bias, four different curricula for training specialists in the field of hospitality management in higher educational institutions of Ukraine were selected. Curricula "Management of tourism and hotel and restaurant business" provide for the acquisition of educational qualification level of the bachelor for a period of 4 years. The areas of activity of future specialists after completing the curricula are as follows: management of enterprises of hotel and restaurant and tourist business, management of resources of enterprises of hotel and restaurant and tourist business (financial, material, information); planning and activity arrangement of enterprises of the hotel, restaurant and tourism business; personnel management; marketing activity management; development and research management; crisis management; investment management; inventory management; overall performance management of the enterprise.

During the autumn semester of 2021, an online questionnaire was formed on selected determinants of the quality of curricula and sent to the departments of faculties of the hotel and restaurant business of higher educational institutions, which were then sent to students via social media. In total, 314 responses from four different curricula of hospitality management were collected.

### Data analysis

The collected data were analysed in two stages. Firstly, with the help of frequency analysis, profiling

of respondents' data was carried out. Secondly, the collected data on the determinants of training programs were analysed using exploratory factor analysis in the SPSS software environment to assess the importance of each of them. In order to assess the significance of the determinants of the training of specialists, the Factor loading indicator, the Pearson correlation coefficient, was used, which makes it possible to identify the most significant factors influencing the resulting value. Theoretically, the load of factors should be more than 0,30. The variance extraction rule was also used to estimate the number of determinants of influence on the training of specialists: in the case when the variance (standard deviation, SD) of the factor was more than 0,7, the factor was considered to be included in the analysis as a significant determinant of the impact on the education of specialists of hospitality industry. The variation indicator was also used in the course of the analysis in order to explain the extent to which a certain group of determinants influences on the training of specialists.

## RESULTS

The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 2. The sample of respondents included 94 (30 %) male and 220 (70 %) female students. In three of four curricula being involved, female respondents significantly outnumbered male respondents. This result is consistent with numerous studies of the profiling of hospitality training programs (Kim *et al.* 2017; Lee *et al.* 2019). From among the students - respondents, the majority

were junior (30 %) and senior students (41 %). The participation of second-year students (15 %) and first-year students (14 %) was less, forasmuch as these groups of respondents at the time of the research were taking not only the main courses of hospitality educational programs, but also general education courses.

### Determinants of training programs (curricula) for specialists in hospitality industry in higher educational institutions

Prior to conducting the exploratory factor analysis, two tests (the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity) were performed in order to assess the reliability of the survey results. The Kaiser-Meier-Olkin score was 0,885 (>,5), which indicates that the sample of the respondents is sufficient for factor analysis. The result of the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ( $p < 0,05$ ), indicating a statistically significant relationship between the variables. After confirming the adequacy of the sample, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out, using the varimax rotation method for 29 determinants of training specialists of hospitality industry assessed by students for determining the principal parameters of quality in hospitality industry in higher educational institutions. As a result of the factor analysis conducted, it has been revealed that the value of factor loads is more than 0,7, which indicates a correlation between the determinants of training specialists and their impact on the quality, competitiveness of training programs (curricula). Five groups of determinants

**Table 2:** Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents

Characteristics	Hospitality management program				Total
	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Program 4	
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	28 (27)	8 (17)	47 (50)	13 (19)	94 (30)
Female	76 (73)	39 (83)	47 (50)	56 (81)	220 (70)
Total	104 (100)	47 (100)	94 (100)	69 (100)	314 (100)
<b>Year of studying</b>					
1	39 (38)	0 (0)	4 (4)	0 (0)	43 (14)
2	16 (15)	2 (4)	16 (17)	13 (19)	47 (15)
3	19 (18)	14 (30)	31 (33)	31 (45)	95 (30)
4	30 (29)	31 (66)	43 (46)	25 (36)	129 (41)
Total	104 (100)	47 (100)	94 (100)	69(100)	314 (100)

Source: Author's calculations based on survey data; Data are in n (%).

of training influence on educational programs (curricula) for training professionals in hospitality industry, among which the highest level of impact is exerted by student support (this group of determinants ensures 43,99 % of the effectiveness of curricula). The second place in terms of influence level is occupied by the network of connections in the hospitality industry (variation 7,36 %), the innovation of educational programs (variation 5,93) is in third place. It should also be mentioned that the important factors in the quality of educational programs are the educational environment (4,84 %) and the availability of certificates confirming the quality of faculties and programs. In the aggregate, these five factors accounted for 65,84 % of the variance, which explains the effectiveness of the curricula.

The aggregate averages of the five quality factors were calculated to investigate the relative importance

of the five factors. As indicated in Table 3, the most important measure of quality was student support (consolidated average = 6,20). Student support was the only quality factor with the consolidated average value more than 6, and the average importance ratings for most individual quality attributes of this factor were also higher than 6. In particular, the availability of scholarships (6,41) was the most important attribute of quality for students in the hospitality industry. The equal significant attributes were also as follows: availability of financial aid, availability of services for students with (physical / mental) challenges, availability of career services. The second most important determinant of the quality of student training programs was the network of connections in the field of hospitality (consolidated average = 5,94). Two significant attributes in this group of factors are the ability to communicate on and off campus (6,27) and the

**Table 3: Quality Dimensions of Hospitality Higher Education**

No.	Factor	Factor loading	M (SD)	Variance Explained (%)
<b>F1. Student Support</b>				
1	Availability of financial aid	0,853	6,31 (1,10)	43,99
2	Availability of scholarships	0,839	6,41 (0,97)	
3	Availability of services for students with (physical/mental) challenges	0,695	6,16 (1,04)	
4	Availability of career services	0,683	6,35 (0,94)	
5	Availability of domestic and international exchange programs	0,66	6,02 (1,08)	
6	Availability of staff members specialized in student services	0,61	5,97 (1,03)	
			Com = 6,20	
<b>F2. Industry Networking</b>				
1	Presence of student organizations that target the hospitality industry	0,802	5,74 (1,10)	7,36
2	Presence of student chapters of industry organizations	0,748	5,50 (1,14)	
3	Required work experience as a part of the curriculum	0,698	5,73 (1,21)	
4	Diverse opportunities for employment	0,654	6,17 (0,99)	
5	Availability of industry mentor programs	0,654	5,84 (1,05)	
6	Networking opportunities on and off campus	0,629	6,27 (1,02)	
7	Opportunities to engage in one-on-one interactions between students and industry	0,526	6,01 (1,03)	
8	Faculty with significant industry experiences	0,512	6,27 (0,97)	
			Com = 5,94	
<b>F3. Innovative Curriculum</b>				
1	Hands-on learning in the classrooms/laboratories	0,764	6,19 (1,10)	5,93
2	Opportunities for earning industry certifications as a part of the curriculum	0,727	6,04 (1,12)	
3	Wide variety of classes in different components of the hospitality industry	0,725	6,05 (1,08)	
4	Practical and theoretical hospitality courses	0,689	5,71 (1,12)	
5	Demonstration of continuous assessment and evaluation of the course offerings	0,579	5,67 (1,04)	
6	The use of technology, such as simulations, in coursework	0,521	5,63 (1,14)	
			Com = 5,88	

F4. Learning Environment			
1	Visually appealing campus environment	0,723	5,54 (1,19)
2	Live demonstration facilities	0,713	5,75 (1,05)
3	Courses being offered in a variety of delivery formats from a physical classroom to hybrid to online environment	0,663	5,63 (1,15)
4	Computer laboratories/study areas	0,632	5,80 (1,07)
5	Availability of tutoring services for students	0,514	5,78 (1,17)
			Com = 5,70
F5. Faculty and Program Credentials			
1	Hospitality program or college/school being separate from other programs or colleges/schools within the university	0,761	5,13 (1,39)
2	Faculty with significant academic publications	0,701	5,20 (1,37)
			Com = 5,17

Source: Author's calculations based on survey data.

availability of teachers with extensive experience in the industry (6,27). In addition, practical training in classrooms / laboratories (6,19) in the group of factors of curriculum innovation was also perceived by students as of particular significance. In general, the learning environment (consolidated average value = 5,70) and faculty and program credentials (consolidated average value = 5,17) were perceived by hospitality industry students as relatively less important than other quality factors.

Using the consolidated averages of the five performance factors for student training program, an independent sample t-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in the perceptions of the five quality factors between male and female students. As a result, no statistically significant difference was revealed between genders in the perception of the determinants of the quality of training programs. In general, the assessments of male and female students on quality factors were almost the same. The results of the t-test make it possible to conclude that gender does not affect the students' perception of the quality level of education in the hospitality industry.

In order to study the differences in students' perceptions of the quality of training programs depending on the year of study, the assessments of the determinants of student training programs were divided into four groups depending on the year of study: first-year students, second-year students, junior and senior specialists. Due to the fact that the number of responses in the groups of first-year students and second-year students was small, these students were in the early stages of the process of studying management in the hospitality

industry, and these two groups were combined. Consequently, the three groups were compared: first-year student / second-year student (n = 90), junior specialist (n = 95) and senior specialist (n = 129). ANOVA analysis of variance was performed to determine the significant difference between the perceptions of the determinants of training programs by students. Significant differences were revealed in the average values of assessments of the perception of the quality of education for all determinants of quality, except for the faculty and program credentials. In particular, significant differences were found between assessments of the perception of the quality of training programs by first-year students / second-year students, junior and senior professionals. No significant difference was revealed between the assessments of the determinants of training programs by junior and senior specialists.

## DISCUSSION

In order to meet the needs of students with respect to educational training programs, teachers and administration of the higher educational institutions are offered several ideas. Firstly, third-year students and fourth-year students assessed several determinants among factors of student support. This indicates to the fact that curricula in hospitality management industry should prioritize helping students find funding for their studies, in particular, through scholarships, provide services for students with physical or mental disabilities, as well as provide career opportunities in the field of hospitality through a network of connections. The findings outlined confirm previous studies that have identified the importance of student support,

in particular, in terms of funding and network of contacts in the hospitality industry (Lugosi, P., & Jameson, 2017).

Secondly, students' assessments of the hospitality network as a determinant of the quality of training programs suggest that teachers and administrators of hospitality management sphere should consider attracting educators with experience in the industry, which will provide both employment or internship opportunities for students, and transfer of practical knowledge (Nien-Te, Kuo-Chien & Chia-Hui, 2011; Phelan, Mejia & Hertzman, 2013). These proposals can provide a higher level of competitiveness of students in the labour market through the development of practical skills in the hospitality industry. Along with this, students will be able to establish communication, interpersonal relationships. One of the problems of higher educational institutions is the lack of various employment opportunities.

Administration and faculty educators should develop innovative training programs in order to cover various aspects of the hospitality industry, which will enable students to choose the sector of future employment according to their own interests (Kim, Lee & Fairhurst, 2017; Iriste & Katane, 2016). The opportunity to engage in a variety of internships is also of particular importance (Goh & King, 2020).

Thirdly, in the process of studying the perception of innovativeness of curricula, students preferred the attributes of practical training in classrooms and laboratories, a wide range of classes covering various aspects of the hospitality industry, in particular, simulation training in groups and teams. As preliminary studies have shown, current educational programs of hospitality management industry focus on the practical experience of students and the key abilities required when working in the hospitality industry towards performing many tasks (Deale, 2013). Therefore, students note the importance of practical classes in training programs.

The e-learning environment makes it possible for students to learn and communicate using ICT, which provides a greater level of preparation for work in the industry (Lee *et al.* 2016). Curricula of hospitality management industry should weigh

the costs and benefits of the development of the learning environment and technology in the infrastructure of higher educational institutions, from the implementation of software in the context of assessing the effectiveness of practical training. An important factor in the quality of educational programs is the provision of teachers with resources for training or retraining, advanced training and development.

## CONCLUSION

In the course of the research, significant differences in students' perceptions of the importance of the quality of education depending on the year of study of students have been revealed. However, no significant difference in the perception of male and female students of the importance of quality education determinants was found. The most significant determinants of training programs for third-year students and fourth-year students are student support, a network of connections in the hospitality industry, innovative training programs, learning environment. At the same time, these determinants are less important for future specialists of the first and second courses. Consequently, the basic recommendations for teachers and administrations of HEIs in respect of improving training programs (curricula) are as follows: giving preference to assistance to students in finding funding for their studies, in particular, through scholarships, providing educational services for students with physical or mental disabilities, providing career opportunities in the field of hospitality through a network of connections, attracting teachers with experience in the industry, which will provide both the opportunity for employment or internships for students, and the transfer of practical knowledge.

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