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Assessing Hospitality Management Students' Competence: Basis For Designing A Skills Development Program

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to evaluate the competencies and training preferences of hospitality management students at the University of Eastern Philippines (UEP) to serve as a foundation for developing a skills enhancement program. The study employed a descriptive research method with a survey design and involved third-year hospitality management students from the UEP Main Campus in Northern Samar. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure students' perceived competence levels and training preferences. The findings indicated that students consider themselves to have high competence in areas such as Philippine historical and cultural heritage, professionalism and ethics, global citizenship, housekeeping operations, F&B service and operations, and risk management. Conversely, students reported moderate competence in preparing financial reports, human capital development functions, administrative and managerial skills, tourism laws, and creating and implementing business plans. Despite their perceived high competence in some areas, students expressed a strong preference for training on housekeeping, F&B service and operations, and risk management. Other highly preferred topics for a skills development program included Guest Service in Hospitality and Tourism, Food Styling and Design, Bartending, Cocktail and Mocktail Mixing, and Tour Guiding. The majority of respondents (84.3%) were willing to attend the training sessions, with a preferred duration of 1 hour and 30 minutes per week. The results will be used to design a skills development program for the UEP Hospitality Management Department. The study also provides a framework for other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that follow the CMO.62 S.2017 guidelines to optimize their student programs.

INTRODUCTION

Hospitality is a significant aspect of the tourism industry. According to Kim *et al.* (2014), as cited by (Bagon *et al.*, 2023), the growth of the hospitality and tourism industries has led to an increased demand for graduates, particularly those with expertise in management. However, graduates of hospitality management in the twenty-first century are facing a highly competitive and unstable job market (Espellita Jr & Maravilla Jr, 2019). Dhiman (2012) notes that students in tourism and hospitality are often ill-prepared for entry-level managerial and operational roles and require extensive training before they can function effectively in a company. Industry leaders and employers in the tourism sector have expressed concerns about the lack of necessary knowledge, skills, and other employability attributes among graduates (Wakelin-Theron *et al.*, 2018). They have emphasized the need for hospitality management graduates to possess the skills and competencies required by the industry to remain competitive (Capua, 2021). However, studies show that graduates entering the workforce often lack these competencies, which affects their employability (Gibbs & Slevitch, 2019a). Fresh graduates who are not adequately prepared often experience stress when transitioning from university to the work environment, as they struggle to meet their high aspirations (Bagon *et al.*, 2023). This gap between reality and student aspirations should be

addressed during their studies.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are facing increasing pressure to equip graduates with the essential competencies needed to succeed in various tourism and hospitality sectors (Wakelin-Theron *et al.*, 2018). The role of HEIs in addressing skills gaps in the industry is crucial, as research has shown a significant need to bridge these gaps (Carlisle *et al.*, 2021). HEIs offering tourism and hospitality courses must actively support the development of core competencies and cultivate the knowledge, skills, and attributes necessary for success in the industry (Prof Candida Silva, 2021). Additionally, it is important for tourism and hospitality education to ensure that graduates are equipped with the skills to serve guests and stay updated on technological advancements (Kasa *et al.*, 2020). This underscores the vital role of HEIs in preparing graduates to meet industry demands. Therefore, hospitality educators must integrate these competencies into the curriculum to strengthen the connection between employment requirements and HEIs (Gibbs & Slevitch, 2019a). Developing student competencies through technical and non-technical training in the classroom is essential for enhancing employability skills, fostering the growth of hospitality employees, ensuring longevity in the industry, and ultimately delivering high-quality customer experiences (Gibbs & Slevitch, 2019b).

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Research findings also show that HEIs are concentrated on putting strategies into place that would improve the development of abilities for employability after graduation. The growth of global employability and competency for graduates depends on HEIs implementing robust innovation and cooperation strategies. (Abelha *et al.*, 2020). For example, a recent report from Artess (2016) highlights effective strategies that HEIs can adopt, based on existing literature, to incorporate employability into institutional initiatives. These strategies include creating and streamlining services for institutional career guidance, enhancing employability through extracurricular and curricular activities, facilitating employer networking and real-world experiences, assisting students with their personal growth, and encouraging global mobility and critical thinking regarding their overall educational experiences.

Furthermore, hospitality educators need to provide a wide range of learning experiences that contribute to the development of students' competencies. They ought to think about adding a hands-on element, like an internship or specialized job training, to attain comparable results in terms of enhancing students' management skills (Breen *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, to get the best and most pertinent learning outcomes, including attitudes, knowledge, and skills, HEIs must develop and apply cutting-edge learning procedures. (Simatupang & Yuhertiana, 2021) as cited by (Putra *et al.*, 2022).

The University of Eastern Philippines (UEP) is committed to providing a relevant curriculum to fulfill its mission. The Hospitality Management Department, in particular, must not only periodically review its curriculum but also implement programs such as skills development training to enhance the learning experience of Hospitality Management students and better meet the needs of the tourism and hospitality industry. Consequently, it is also important to monitor the students' competencies to identify areas where students excel and areas where they might need additional support. Therefore, the goal of this study is to assess the competencies of cohort hospitality management students and determine their training preferences. The information gathered from the study can also be used to document learning gains, identify any plateaus or regressions, and provide targeted interventions when needed. The results of the study will serve as the basis for designing a skills development program for the Hospitality Management Department at the University of Eastern Philippines. This study also allows for data-driven adjustments and improvements to optimize program learning outcomes in other HEIs, especially those who observe the CMO.62 S.2017; Policies, Standards and Guidelines for Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management and Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Level of Competence

Talent is in high demand due to the hotel and tourism

industries' explosive growth since the turn of the century. Consequently, there is a notable discrepancy between the global demand and availability of talent in these industries (Liu *et al.*, 2023). The tourism and hospitality sectors have seen a worsening of the labor market imbalance between supply and demand in recent years (Guo *et al.*, 2023). There is growing concern about industry requirements and graduate capability. Previous studies have shown that hotel management programs do not adequately prepare students for success in the modern workplace. The demands of employers and, on occasion, the skills taught to students entering the industry have changed, according to McMurray *et al.* (2016), cited by Ang Singh Dang (2022). Globally, graduates' employability and competency development depend on high levels of innovation and teamwork in higher education (Abelha *et al.*, 2020). Educational institutions have an obligation to assist graduates in gaining the essential skills necessary for success in the competitive labor market (Raras *et al.*, 2024). Many efforts are made to give students the managerial skills and competencies required for operations to be successful (Breen *et al.*, 2014). To demonstrate stronger personal competencies, educators in the hospitality and tourism management industry should polish their students' acquired talents (Bagon *et al.*, 2023). How these competencies might be created and assessed is the question that might come out of this conversation. According to studies that provide some curricular modifications, these are incredibly uncommon. Interestingly, not much research has been done on how to develop and enhance these competencies. Further research is needed to completely understand how to evaluate and improve this set of competencies (Abelha *et al.*, 2020).

Additionally, tourism and hospitality education should prioritize competency development, support students in gaining professional management skills, and increase their self-efficacy in addition to technical skill development (Putra *et al.*, 2022). Competency development and assessment are ongoing processes, claims Wong (2020). Competencies and abilities must be taken into consideration and evaluated since they become crucial priorities and influence how 21st-century students studying hospitality and tourism management perform in the organization or setting where they will be employed (Bagon *et al.*, 2023). The behavioral traits people bring to a job that enable them to perform it competently are referred to as competencies. Competencies include, but are not limited to, motivations, qualities, self-observations, attitudes, norms, and job-specific knowledge (Angad Singh Dang *et al.*, 2022). Some study suggests that students can determine their managerial competencies by using self-assessment procedures (Breen *et al.*, 2014).

Furthermore, prior studies show that the most highly regarded capabilities for graduates in the hospitality sector are strong interpersonal, social, leadership, problem-solving, and teamwork skills (Raras *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, because stakeholders often lament that workers lack soft skills, studies are paying more attention

to them (Samy *et al.*, 2023). The fact that there are fewer researches on technical skills does not mean that they are less important; rather, it indicates that they are more traditionally the center of emphasis at HEIs and may thus not be as vital as they formerly were. The requirement for a wide range of abilities is believed to be problematic for universities and may have an impact on curriculum revision (Abelha *et al.*, 2020). Alternatively, some contend that the development of general managerial abilities ought to be given top priority in educational institutions (Raras *et al.*, 2024).

Training Preferences

Despite difficult economic times, the hospitality sector is nevertheless expanding globally. The necessity for hotel management colleges and hospitality programs to properly prepare the workforce grew as a result of the rising demand for employees. To guarantee that graduates perform better in the hospitality sector, schools must offer instruction (Pai *et al.*, 2020). A staff with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills is necessary due to the dynamic and constantly changing nature of the hospitality sector (Doke & Sarode, n.d.). The goal of the hotel management program is to attract top-tier students and get them ready for supervisory positions in the hospitality industry. The goal of a hotel management program is to build interpersonal skills for both the present and the future prospective.

However, it is evident that HEIs are concerned about promoting employability competencies, and that studies are addressing this issue. The argument over the best way to address this concern whether it be by incorporating it into undergraduate programs' curricula, providing elective extracurricular activities, or emphasizing the development of competencies that can occur in work-related experiences seems to be a pertinent dimension (Abelha *et al.*, 2020). In order to give students practical training and a taste of the real world, hospitality management institutions should prioritize training them through a variety of on-the-job and off-the-job training sessions (Pai *et al.*, 2020). A diverse range of learning experiences that support the development of students' competencies should be incorporated by educators in the tourism and hospitality fields. They ought to seriously think about adding a hands-on element, like an internship or some kind of specialized training, which will yield comparable results in terms of enhancing students' management skills (Breen *et al.*, 2014).

Hospitality management training will benefit students from understanding how to carry out tasks and how various tasks are completed in various fields in the hospitality sectors. For instance, hotel management training covers topics that will enable students to oversee their roles in the hospitality and catering industry with sufficient management function knowledge. Students who master hospitality management will be able to work under all conditions as required by their jobs. Students who complete the training will gain knowledge of the

various factors used in the hospitality industry, as well as the operations of various departments and their standard operating procedures. They will also be prepared to become professionals in the hospitality industry by learning cost control measures that will improve economic factors and business operations success. Establishing benchmarks for the caliber of services they provide to their clients will be beneficial. Gaining knowledge of hospitality management fosters good attitudes about the industry, which in turn boosts one's confidence in managing operations and becoming a successful business owner in a variety of industries. Education in hotel management can be obtained by theoretical or practical study (Londhe, 2023).

In today's competitive market, businesses need a skilled workforce to succeed in the industry (Londhe, 2023). The hospitality and tourism sector operates in a competitive environment, emphasizing the importance of a strong business foundation and customer service skills (Kumar & Lakhawat, 2022). Practical training is essential for preparing students for future roles in the industry (Pusiran *et al.*, 2020, as cited in Sulong *et al.*, 2021). Practical training focuses on developing the professional competencies and skills required for success in the tourism and hospitality industry (Radygina, 2023). Practical training in the field of tourism and hospitality encompasses a variety of methods, including internships, project work, case studies, simulations, and more. These approaches not only provide students with hands-on experience but also help them develop analytical and communication skills essential for a successful career in the industry. Furthermore, practical training involves collaboration not only with industry partners but also with educational institutions to ensure that training programs are up-to-date and aligned with industry trends. By incorporating practical training into their curriculum, universities and colleges prepare graduates to thrive in the dynamic field of tourism and hospitality and excel in their careers. The features of practical training in the tourism and hospitality industry are based on the competencies being formed for the main activities of specialists and include:

- Work with guests (training in communication skills with tourists and the ability to solve problems that arise during a trip or hotel stay);
- Teamwork (forming an understanding of your role in the team and the ability to distribute tasks and coordinate your actions with the actions of other team members);
- Understanding cultural differences (teaching to respect cultural differences and adapt to them);
- Digital and technological literacy (teaching how to work with new technologies and various digital systems that provide room reservations, online booking of tickets, the processes of rendering and providing services, etc.);
- Knowledge of legislation (forming knowledge of the legislation regulating the industry and the ability to apply it in work);
- Resource management (teaching students to manage resources such as time, money, and staff).

These features necessitate collaboration models between universities and employers, such as dual education and internships. In dual education, students acquire theoretical knowledge at the university and practical skills at the workplace. Internships provide students with exposure to real work environments and the opportunity to gain practical experience. The practical training process involves several stages: defining goals and objectives, analyzing requirements, identifying student needs, developing a program, selecting internship placements, organizing the process, monitoring assignments, evaluating results, analyzing and adjusting based on feedback, preparing reports, and ensuring ongoing quality through monitoring and analysis. Practical training should encompass a comprehensive understanding of the industry structure, theoretical knowledge, and the development of practical skills and abilities (Radygina, 2023).

Some studies have shown that Gen Y hospitality students prefer hands-on coaching and one-on-one mentoring. They are also open to flexible scheduling. Ideally, mentors should tailor teaching methods to each individual and create a learning environment that encourages social interaction between learners and facilitators. Students appreciate the freedom to choose or modify their learning curriculum and value recognition based on work performance rather than academic qualifications. On-the-job training is the preferred method, but it requires more acknowledgment (Li & Kong, 2016). Consistent with previous research, hospitality students express a preference for active learning over passive lectures, group work, and opportunities to be creative (Deale, 2019). While higher education is important, it often focuses on academic skills rather than soft skills that are crucial for employability. Graduates are encouraged to acquire soft skills independently to improve their chances of self-employment (Samy *et al.*, 2023). Tourism and hospitality programs should provide practical facilities for in-house training and real-world client interactions (Alam *et al.*, 2024). By offering relevant education and training programs, the skills and capabilities of tourism and hospitality workers can be enhanced (Putra *et al.*, 2022). The development of competencies in higher education

institutions aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Collaboration between governments, multilateral agencies, and higher education institutions is essential to target publicly funded research and establish partnerships across sectors (Abelha *et al.*, 2020).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researcher used a descriptive research method with a survey design. This method was chosen because it allowed the collection of data and information without changing the environment. The study involved a one-time interaction with the respondents through an electronically translated survey questionnaire. According to (Bickman & Rog, 2014), descriptive studies are suitable for answering questions such as “what is” or “what was,” making this method appropriate for the study. The population consisted of third-year hospitality management students at the University of Eastern Philippines (UEP) – Main Campus in Northern Samar.

The Level of Competencies questionnaire items were adapted from the UEP Hospitality Management Curriculum Map Outcomes developed in 2018 and modified to fit the study’s context. The items to determine the Training Preferences were identified based on an initial assessment conducted by the researcher by interviewing students. Level of Competences and Training Preferences was measured using a 5-point Likert Scale.

To ensure that the survey questionnaire effectively conveyed the intended meaning and instructions to the targeted population, face/content validity was conducted. Five UEP Hospitality Management Professors evaluated and commented on the questionnaire’s contents. No items were found to be below the K* (Kappa designating agreement in relevance) of 0.76, hence no items were excluded.

A scale reliability test was conducted after a pilot testing of the instrument at the University of Eastern Philippines – Catubig Campus to ensure internal consistency. The results, provided in Table 1, showed that the Cronbach α values were all above the recommended threshold value of 0.7 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), indicating internal consistency.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis (n=37)

Variables	Cronbach’s α	Items	α if item dropped	Items	α if item dropped
Level of Competence	0.963	C1	.963	C16	.960
		C2	.962	C17	.961
		C3	.964	C18	.961
		C4	.963	C19	.961
		C5	.963	C20	.961
		C6	.963	C21	.962
		C7	.962	C22	.961
		C8	.963	C23	.961
		C9	.960	C24	.962
		C10	.961	C25	.962

		C11	.961	C26	.961
		C12	.961	C27	.961
		C13	.961	C28	.962
		C14	.961	C29	.961
		C15	.961		
Training Preference	0.943	T1	.941	T9	.943
		T2	.938	T10	.939
		T3	.938	T11	.939
		T4	.937	T12	.938
		T5	.941	T13	.942
		T6	.937	T14	.940
		T7	.939	T15	.940
		T8	.936		

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to assess the competencies of cohort hospitality management students and determine their training preferences. The findings from this study were organized in tables presenting the basis for designing a skills development program. Table 2 shows the respondents' age and gender profile. This study showed that the majority of the respondents belong to the age group of 20-22 years old (90, 88.2%). While some belong to the 23-25 years old group with 12, 11.8%. Meanwhile, data on gender demonstrates that the majority of the respondents are female with 78, 76.5%. While 24 male respondents are constituting 23.5%.

Table 2: Respondents Profile (n=102)

Age Group	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
20-22 years old	90	88.2
23-25 years old	12	11.8
Gender		
Female	78	76.5
Male	24	23.5

Level of Competence

In this study, the respondents' competence level was assessed using the twenty-nine outcomes in the UEP-Hospitality Management Curriculum Outcomes. As shown in Table 3, the indicator with the highest mean is "I value the Philippine historical and cultural heritage" with an average of 4.63, which means that students profess high competence in terms of Philippine historical and cultural heritage. Other indicators that respondents acknowledge to have high competence are the following indicators

Table 3: Level of Competence

Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation	Adjectival Rating	Interpretation
1. I can exhibit proficiency in hospitality management through my involvement in various types of laboratory activities and simulations.	4.17	.834	Agree	Moderate Competence

"I manifest a high degree of professionalism through observance of ethical and professional behavior," with a mean of 4.44, meaning students have high competence in terms of professionalism and ethics. Respondents also strongly agree with the indicators "I can demonstrate global awareness through responsible global citizenship" with a mean of 4.35, "I can perform and maintain various housekeeping services for guests and facility operations" with an average of 4.33, "I can apply management skills in F & B service and operations" with a mean of 4.25, "I can make a plan and implement a risk management program to provide a safe and secure workplace" with an average of 4.23, and "I exercise high personal, moral, and ethical standards" with a mean of 4.21. This means that students are perceived to have high competence in global citizenship, housekeeping operations, F&B service and operations, risk management, and ethics.

Meanwhile, the five indicators with the least mean and of which the respondents agreed to are "I can prepare and monitor industry-specific financial transactions and reports", "I can perform the human capital development functions of a tourism-oriented organization", "I can demonstrate administrative and managerial skills in a service-oriented business organization", "I can interpret and apply relevant laws related to the tourism industry", and "I can make a business plan and implement business-related activities", with an average of 3.69, 3.75, 3.85, 3.90, and 3.92 respectively. The findings show that students consider themselves with moderate competence in preparing financial reports, performing human capital development functions, administrative and managerial skills, tourism laws, and making and implementing business plans.

2. I am aware of how to utilize research methodologies that will allow me to generate new knowledge, address problems and issues, and promote development.	4.08	.737	Agree	Moderate Competence
3. I value the Philippine historical and cultural heritage.	4.63	.687	Strongly Agree	High Competence
4. I can demonstrate global awareness through responsible global citizenship.	4.35	.623	Strongly Agree	High Competence
5. I can clearly communicate in several modes of delivery (oral, written, and visual) in English and Filipino.	4.02	.671	Agree	Moderate Competence
6. I manifest a high degree of professionalism through observance of ethical and professional behavior.	4.44	.669	Strongly Agree	High Competence
7. I can perform the basic functions of management such as planning, organizing, leading, and controlling.	4.13	.595	Agree	Moderate Competence
8. I can apply the basic concepts that underlie each of the functional areas of business and employ these concepts in various business situations.	4.06	.639	Agree	Moderate Competence
9. I know how to select the proper decision-making tools to critically, analytically, and creatively solve problems and drive results.	4.02	.700	Agree	Moderate Competence
10. I can apply information and communication technology (ICT) skills as required by the business environment.	3.94	.669	Agree	Moderate Competence
11. I work effectively with other stakeholders and know how to manage conflict in the workplace.	4.12	.676	Agree	Moderate Competence
12. I can make a business plan and implement business-related activities.	3.92	.710	Agree	Moderate Competence
13. I can demonstrate corporate citizenship and social responsibility.	4.08	.652	Agree	Moderate Competence
14. I exercise high personal, moral, and ethical standards.	4.21	.536	Strongly Agree	High Competence
15. I can demonstrate knowledge of the tourism industry, and local tourism products and services.	4.10	.634	Agree	Moderate Competence
16. I can interpret and apply relevant laws related to the tourism industry.	3.90	.748	Agree	Moderate Competence
17. I can perform risk mitigation activities.	4.02	.641	Agree	Moderate Competence
18. I know how to utilize information technology applications for tourism and hospitality.	3.98	.754	Agree	Moderate Competence
19. I can manage and market a service-oriented business organization.	3.94	.725	Agree	Moderate Competence
20. I can demonstrate administrative and managerial skills in a service-oriented business organization.	3.85	.777	Agree	Moderate Competence
21. I can prepare and monitor industry-specific financial transactions and reports.	3.69	.829	Agree	Moderate Competence
22. I can perform the human capital development functions of a tourism-oriented organization.	3.75	.837	Agree	Moderate Competence
23. I know how to utilize various communication channels proficiently in dealing with guests and colleagues.	4.02	.779	Agree	Moderate Competence
24. I can produce food products and services complying with enterprise standards.	4.04	.816	Agree	Moderate Competence
25. I can apply management skills in F & B service and operations.	4.25	.682	Strongly Agree	High Competence
26. I can perform and provide full guest cycle services in the front office.	4.02	.754	Agree	Moderate Competence

27. I can perform and maintain various housekeeping services for guests and facility operations.	4.33	.550	Strongly Agree	High Competence
28. I can make a plan and implement a risk management program to provide a safe and secure workplace.	4.23	.546	Strongly Agree	High Competence
29. I can provide food and beverage service and manage the operation seamlessly based on industry standards.	4.12	.583	Agree	Moderate Competence

LEGEND: 1.00 – 1.79 (Strongly Disagree / No Competency); 1.80 – 2.59 (Disagree/Low Competence); 2.60 – 3.39 (Neutral / Partial Competence); 3.40 – 4.19 (Agree/Moderate Competence); 4.20 – 5.00 (Strongly Agree/High Competence)

Training Preferences

In this paper, the respondents were also asked about their preferences on pre-identified topics, should there be a skills development program for the UEP-Hospitality Management Department. Table 4 shows that the very

much preferred topics are Guest service in Hospitality and Tourism; Basic Food Service; Basic Housekeeping Operations; Food Styling and Design; Bartending, Cocktail, and Mocktail Mixing; Tour Guiding; and Risk Management.

Table 4: Training Preferences

Topics	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation	Rank
Guest Service in Hospitality and Tourism	4.58	.605	Very Much Preferred	1
Data Analytics and Digital Fluency	3.79	1.091	Moderately Preferred	15
Entrepreneurship and Innovation	4.10	.975	Moderately Preferred	12
Sustainability and Ethics	4.06	.938	Moderately Preferred	13.5
Revenue Management and Budgeting	4.15	.978	Moderately Preferred	10.5
Basic Hospitality Accounting	4.15	1.109	Moderately Preferred	10.5
Property Management System	4.06	.916	Moderately Preferred	13.5
Front Office Forecasting	4.19	.971	Moderately Preferred	8
Basic Housekeeping Operations	4.48	.804	Very Much Preferred	3
Destination Branding and Marketing	4.17	.810	Moderately Preferred	9
Tour Guiding	4.29	.750	Very Much Preferred	6.5
Basic Food Service	4.54	.641	Very Much Preferred	2
Bartending, Cocktail, and Mocktail Mixing	4.31	.853	Very Much Preferred	5
Food Styling and Design	4.37	.768	Very Much Preferred	4
Risk Management	4.29	.800	Very Much Preferred	6.5

LEGEND: 1.00 – 1.79 (Not Preferred); 1.80 – 2.59 (Slightly Preferred); 2.60 – 3.39 (Somewhat Preferred); 3.40 – 4.19 (Moderately Preferred); 4.20 – 5.00 (Very much Preferred)

Respondents were also asked if they are willing to attend a session if there is ever a Skills Development Program. Table 5 demonstrates that the majority answered ‘Yes’ with 86, corresponding to 84.3%. Whereas some answered Maybe with 16, 15.7%.

Table 5: Are you willing to attend the session/s?

	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Yes	86	84.3
Maybe	16	15.7

Correspondingly, respondents were asked how much time they prefer for the session/s to take per week. Table 6 presents that most respondents prefer 1 hour & 30 minutes, with 36, 35.3%. While 33, 32.3% favor 1 hour; 24, 23.5% prefer 2 hours, and 9, 8.8% choose 30 minutes per week.

Table 6: What is the time duration you prefer to have the session/s to take per week?

Time Duration per Week	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
30 minutes	9	8.8
1 hour	33	32.3
1 hour & 30 minutes	36	35.3
2 hours	24	23.5

Discussion

The objective of this paper is to assess the competencies of cohort hospitality management students and determine their training preferences as a basis for designing a skills development program. Findings revealed that students profess a high level of competence in terms of Philippine historical and cultural heritage, professionalism and ethics,

global citizenship, housekeeping operations, F&B service and operations, and risk management. While among the twenty-nine indicators to measure students' competence, the five areas where students are said to have moderate competence are preparing financial reports, performing human capital development functions, administrative and managerial skills, tourism laws, and making and implementing business plans. Thus, it is recommended that if a Skills Development Program is implemented by the UEP-Hospitality Management Department, they consider these areas to be the main focus of the topics and training for students to have high competence. Also, it was found in this paper that despite having perceived to have high competence in housekeeping, F&B service & operations, and risk management; respondents still very much prefer that these topics be included if a Skills Development Program is realized.

Furthermore, findings revealed that respondents also very much prefer topics such as Guest service in Hospitality and Tourism; Food Styling and Design; Bartending, Cocktail, and Mocktail Mixing; and Tour Guiding. The Department may want to consider including these areas as well if the schedule permits. Additionally, it is also suggested to have the training for 1 hour & 30 minutes per week.

Moreover, this study highlights not only the importance of monitoring the students' competencies to identify areas where they excel and areas where they need additional support but also the importance of implementing programs such as skills development training to enhance their learning experience to better meet the needs of the tourism and hospitality industry. Enhancement and value-added learning such as this ensures that students are prepared for the future and become more marketable in the industry. The information gathered from the study can also be used to document learning gains, identify any plateaus or regressions, and provide targeted interventions when needed. The results of the study will serve as the basis for designing a skills development program for the Hospitality Management Department at the University of Eastern Philippines. Again this study also allows for data-driven adjustments and improvements to optimize student programs in other HEIs, especially those who observe the CMO.62 S.2017; Policies, Standards and Guidelines for Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management and Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the competencies and training preferences of third-year hospitality management students at the University of Eastern Philippines (UEP) to inform the creation of a new skills development program. Using a descriptive survey, the research found that students rated themselves highly competent in areas like professionalism, ethics, global citizenship, housekeeping, F&B operations, and risk management. However, they reported moderate competence in preparing financial reports, human capital functions, managerial skills, tourism laws, and business

planning. Students highly preferred training in topics such as Guest Service in Hospitality and Tourism; Basic Food Service; Basic Housekeeping Operations; Food Styling and Design; Bartending, Cocktail, and Mocktail Mixing; Tour Guiding; and Risk Management. A significant majority (84.3%) were willing to attend sessions lasting 1 hour and 30 minutes per week.

The findings highlight a gap between perceived and desired skill levels. Recommendations include developing a Skills Development Program focusing on the areas of moderate competence (like financial reporting and business planning) while incorporating the highly preferred topics. This approach, with the preferred schedule, will ensure the UEP curriculum remains relevant and better prepares students for industry demands. The results of this study may also be used to monitor student competencies, document learning gains, and make data-driven adjustments to optimize program outcomes.

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