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## Addressing Research Anxieties and Skill Deficiencies Among Hospitality Management Faculty and Students: Evidence from a Public Higher Education Institution in the Philippines

HersheyLou Cabig<sup>1\*</sup>, Jesszon Cano<sup>2</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Research engagement in hospitality management education remains a persistently underexplored dimension of academic preparation, despite the discipline's growing emphasis on evidence-based innovation and industry-responsive knowledge production. This study investigates the research anxieties and skill deficiencies experienced by Hospitality Management faculty and students in a public higher education institution in the Philippines, where the tension between vocational identity and scholarly expectation is particularly acute. Grounded in Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1982), Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (1988), and Lent, Brown, and Hackett's Social Cognitive Career Theory (1994), the study employed a qualitative descriptive design using Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) with 20 purposively selected faculty members and senior students. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) revealed seven interconnected themes: psychological paralysis rooted in fear of failure, knowledge and skill deficiencies arising from practice-theory disconnects, challenges in identifying hospitality-relevant research problems, difficulties in academic writing and scholarly communication, complexities in conducting literature reviews and data analysis, institutional resource constraints, and the absence of meaningful recognition for research output. Findings expose critical gaps in how research support systems are designed and delivered within hospitality programs, where students are trained primarily for industry roles rather than scholarly inquiry. The study proposes targeted, discipline-specific interventions that address both the affective and structural barriers unique to hospitality management education, with implications for program administrators, faculty developers, and policymakers committed to building a sustainable research culture in applied hospitality programs.

### INTRODUCTION

Hospitality management as an academic discipline occupies a distinctive and at times uncomfortable position within the higher education landscape. Originally conceived as vocational preparation for the service industries of tourism, food and beverage, lodging, and events management, it has progressively evolved into a recognized field of scholarly inquiry, complete with peer-reviewed journals, research conferences, and growing expectations for faculty and student engagement in original knowledge production. Yet this evolution has not been uniformly accompanied by the institutional infrastructure, professional preparation, or cultural shift necessary to support genuine research engagement, particularly within public higher education institutions in developing contexts such as the Philippines (Tribe, 2010; Kiefer, 1988).

The result is a deeply felt tension among Hospitality Management faculty and students who are simultaneously expected to be industry-competent practitioners and academically productive researchers, two identities that do not always cohere naturally. Faculty trained primarily through professional experience rather than doctoral research programs frequently encounter gaps in methodological knowledge, academic writing fluency, and scholarly confidence. Students, meanwhile, approach

research courses as obligatory academic hurdles rather than opportunities for disciplinary contribution, often because their prior exposure to research has been abstract, decontextualized, and disconnected from the operational realities of the hospitality industry they aspire to enter (Fidgeon, 2010; Lugosi & Jameson, 2017).

Underpinning these challenges are well-documented psychological and cognitive phenomena. Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1982) illuminates how low research confidence creates self-reinforcing cycles of avoidance, while Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (1988) explains the overwhelming nature of navigating unfamiliar research methodologies alongside demanding coursework or heavy teaching loads. Lent, Brown, and Hackett's Social Cognitive Career Theory (1994) further contextualizes how environmental and institutional factors shape the research-related interests, intentions, and behaviors of hospitality academics and students alike. Together, these frameworks reveal that research underperformance in hospitality education is not primarily a matter of intellectual capacity but of systematic, addressable barriers at psychological, instructional, and institutional levels (Boud & Lee, 2009; Kamler & Thomson, 2014).

This study addresses that reality directly. Through Focus Group Discussion conducted with Hospitality Management faculty and senior students at a public

<sup>1</sup> Bohol Island State University -Bilar, Philippines

<sup>2</sup> Bohol Island State University -Candijay, Philippines

\*Corresponding author's e-mail: [hersheyLou.cabig@bisu.edu.ph](mailto:hersheyLou.cabig@bisu.edu.ph)

higher education institution in Bohol, Philippines, it maps the specific contours of research anxiety and skill deficiency as experienced within the disciplinary context of hospitality management. By situating the findings within both established theoretical frameworks and the particular demands of hospitality scholarship, the study produces actionable, discipline-specific recommendations for transforming research engagement in this underserved corner of the academic world (Brew, 2013; Pearson *et al.*, 2008).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research engagement among hospitality management academics and students is shaped by a distinctive constellation of disciplinary, psychological, and institutional forces. This literature review situates the present study within the broader scholarship on research anxiety, academic skill development, and institutional support, with particular attention to how these dynamics manifest within hospitality education.

### The Research Identity Problem in Hospitality Education

Hospitality management's dual identity as both a vocational and academic discipline creates a unique research identity challenge for its faculty and students. Tribe (2010) argues that the field has historically struggled to establish a coherent epistemological foundation, oscillation between industry-derived practical knowledge and the theoretical frameworks imported from allied social science disciplines such as sociology, economic, and management studies. This epistemological ambiguity translates into genuine uncertainty among hospitality academics about what constitutes legitimate and valued research within their discipline.

Fidgeon (2010) documented how many hospitality programs, particularly those within polytechnics and public colleges, continue to privilege vocational competence over scholarly inquiry in their faculty hiring, workload allocation, and institutional reward structures. Lugosi and Jameson (2017) extended this analysis, demonstrating that hospitality students frequently enter research courses with pre-formed identities as future industry professionals rather than scholars, making it difficult for them to invest meaningfully in research activities they perceive as peripheral to their career goals. This identity gap between practitioner self-concept and researcher role demands is a critical and underappreciated driver of research anxiety in hospitality programs.

### Psychological Barriers: Self-Efficacy, Cognitive Load, and Imposter Syndrome

Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1982) provides the foundational lens for understanding research anxiety in hospitality education. Researchers' beliefs about their own capabilities directly determine whether they approach research tasks with effort and persistence or retreat into avoidance. In hospitality contexts, where many faculty

members hold master's degrees in professional fields rather than research-focused doctoral qualifications, self-efficacy for research is structurally undermined by limited prior experience with independent scholarly inquiry (Kiefer, 1988). Students, similarly, arrive in research courses with minimal exposure to the conventions and expectations of academic scholarship, leading to pronounced confidence deficits that inhibit meaningful engagement.

Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (1988) is equally illuminating. The simultaneous demands of mastering unfamiliar research methodologies, navigating academic writing conventions, managing coursework or teaching responsibilities, and meeting institutional research expectations create conditions of cognitive overload that severely impair learning and performance. Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) extended this framework to demonstrate how fragmented attention and competing task demands compound the difficulty of sustained research engagement. For hospitality students balancing practicum requirements, part-time industry employment, and academic coursework, the cognitive burden of research is particularly acute.

Imposter syndrome, extensively explored by Clance and Imes (1978) and subsequently by Hutchins (2015), represents a third and pervasive psychological barrier. In hospitality education, where the academic-practitioner divide creates persistent uncertainty about scholarly legitimacy, faculty and students alike frequently experience the sense that they do not belong in research spaces, that their contributions are unworthy of scholarly attention or that their methodological choices will be judged harshly by "real" researchers from more established disciplines. This phenomenon is compounded by the relative scarcity of hospitality-specific research role models and mentors, particularly within public higher education institutions.

### Institutional Structures and Research Culture in Applied Programs

Institutional factors are equally determinative of research engagement outcomes. Colbeck (1998) and Laudel and Gläser (2008) documented the systemic barriers within public higher education that constrain research productivity; inconsistent funding, limited professional development resources, excessive administrative and teaching burdens, and institutional cultures that effectively subordinate research to other organizational priorities. These challenges are amplified in hospitality programs, where industry engagement, practicum supervision, and community extension work already compete intensively for faculty time and energy.

Harland and Staniforth (2003) demonstrated that institutional recognition and reward systems profoundly shape research motivation. When research output goes unacknowledged – or worse, is treated as an optional extra rather than a core professional obligation, faculty motivation to invest in the time-intensive process of scholarship erodes rapidly. Brunner (1991) further

highlighted that writing support structures, typically taken for granted in research-intensive universities, are frequently absent in teaching-focused public institutions, leaving hospitality faculty and students to navigate academic writing without adequate guidance.

### **Skill Development and Disciplinary-Specific Research Report**

Kamler and Thomson (2014) and Boud and Lee (2009) advocated for comprehensive, relationally embedded approaches to research skill development that integrate collaborative learning, targeted mentorship, and contextually sensitive instruction. In hospitality management contexts, these principles translate into the need for research training that is explicitly anchored to hospitality-relevant research questions, industry datasets, and scholarly literatures, rather than generic methodological instruction that feels disconnected from the discipline's concerns.

Pearson *et al.* (2008) documented the promise of technology-enhanced learning platforms and virtual mentorship programs as accessible and personalized alternatives to traditional research training models, particularly relevant for faculty and students in regional or resource-limited institutions. Brew's (2013) work on undergraduate research further challenged institutions to reconceptualize research as a developmental and integrative dimension of hospitality education rather than a terminal assessment requirement, an insight with direct implications for how research courses are designed and taught within hospitality programs. Despite this scholarship, Lovitts (2008) noted the persistent gap between research support intentions and actual practice, underscoring the urgency of developing more systematic and empirically validated approaches to research capacity building in applied disciplines.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to capture the nuanced, context-specific experiences of Hospitality Management faculty and students with respect to research engagement. A qualitative approach was selected because the central phenomena of interests – research anxiety, skill deficiency, and perceived institutional support – are inherently experiential and meaning-laden, and are therefore better accessed through open, dialogic inquiry than through standardized measurement instruments. The descriptive design enabled the research team to provide a comprehensive, contextualized account of participants' experiences without imposing predetermined hypotheses or manipulating variables. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were the primary method of data collection, chosen for their capacity to generate rich, interactive discourse that surfaces shared experiences, disciplinary norms, and collectively held perceptions within the Hospitality Management academic community.

Participants were Hospitality Management faculty

members and senior students from a public higher education institution in Bohol, Philippines. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that all participants possessed direct, substantive experience with research processes within the hospitality management academic context. Faculty inclusion criteria required active involvement in research or student research supervision within the preceding three years. Student inclusion criteria required current enrollment in a senior research course or active engagement in a hospitality-focused thesis or capstone research project. A total of 20 participants were recruited, with representation distributed across faculty and student cohorts to ensure a balanced range of perspectives on research engagement within the discipline.

The primary instrument was a self-structured FGD guide developed by the research team and grounded in the study's theoretical frameworks. The guide comprised open-ended questions organized around three thematic areas: (1) research anxieties and skill deficiencies, exploring participants' confidence levels, perceived knowledge gaps, and specific challenges encountered in conducting or supervising hospitality-focused research; (2) institutional support and mentorship, assessing the availability, adequacy, and perceived effectiveness of research support mechanisms within the hospitality program; and (3) the integration of research into hospitality instruction and community extension, examining how research outputs are translated into classroom practice and industry-relevant community engagement.

The instrument was validated by a licensed psychometrician with expertise in qualitative research, who assessed question relevance, clarity, neutrality, and ethical appropriateness. Pre-testing with a comparable sample of hospitality faculty and students confirmed the clarity and appropriateness of the questions and informed minor refinements prior to data collection.

FGD sessions were conducted in comfortable, confidential setting within the institution. Participants were fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw without consequence. Written informed consent was obtained prior to each session. Sessions were audio-recorded with participants' explicit permission and subsequently transcribed verbatim. A trained research assistant served as note-taker during each session, capturing non-verbal cues and group interaction dynamics that supplemented the audio record.

Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated transcript reading and reflective annotation; (2) systematic generation of initial codes identifying significant features of the data; (3) clustering of related codes into candidate themes; (4) iterative review and refinement of themes against the coded dataset and full transcripts; (5) definition and naming of themes to ensure conceptual clarity and alignment with the study's research objectives; and

(6) production of the final analytic report synthesizing themes into a theory-informed narrative. To enhance trustworthiness, the research team engaged in continuous comparative analysis, peer debriefing, and reflexive journaling throughout the analytic process to minimize interpretive bias and ensure that themes remained grounded in participant experience.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Seven themes emerged from the thematic analysis, collectively mapping the psychological, methodological, and institutional dimensions of research engagement challenges as experienced specifically within Hospitality Management education. Participant voices are integrated throughout to anchor the analysis in disciplinary reality.

### Theme 1 - Psychological Paralysis: Fear of Failure in a Practice-Oriented Discipline

The most pervasive theme was the experience of fear-driven research paralysis. A faculty participant articulated this with striking clarity: “I am always afraid that I’ll get it wrong, and it makes me hesitant to even start writing.” This sentiment was widely echoed among both faculty and students, reflecting a disciplinary context in which the norms of scholarly performance are less familiar and less socially reinforced than those of professional hospitality service. Unlike hospitality operations, where competence is demonstrated through observable service delivery, research quality is judged by invisible scholarly standards that many participants felt ill-equipped to meet.

Bandura’s (1982) self-efficacy theory explains the mechanism: when researchers lack confidence in their scholarly capabilities, they avoid research tasks, which reduces their accumulated experience, which further erodes confidence, a cycle that is particularly entrenched in vocational disciplines where research identity is weakly formed. Imposter syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978; Hutchins, 2015) compounded this dynamic, with several faculty members expressing the belief that “real researchers” came from other, more traditionally academic disciplines, and that hospitality scholarship was somehow less legitimate or less rigorous by comparison. Addressing this theme requires not only skill building but deliberate affective support, creating research environments in which hospitality faculty and students experience their disciplinary knowledge as a scholarly asset rather than a liability.

### Theme 2 - The Practice-Theory Disconnect: Knowledge Without Application

A second defining theme was the gap between formal research instruction and practical research capability. One student participant captured this precisely: “We were taught research in college, but I never had real practice applying it in the field.” In Hospitality Management programs, this disconnect is structurally embedded: research methods courses are typically taught in isolation from the disciplinary literature, industry data, and learn to

construct research designs in the abstract but struggle to connect those designs to the observable phenomena of hotel operations, food service management, or tourism behavior that constitute their discipline.

Lent *et al.*’s (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory frames this gap as a failure of research self-efficacy development: without authentic, discipline-embedded research experiences that allow students to see themselves successfully producing hospitality scholarship, the motivational foundations for independent research engagement are never fully constructed. Lovitts’ (2008) critique of decontextualized research training resonates strongly here, pointing toward the need for research courses and thesis supervision within hospitality programs to be explicitly anchored in industry-relevant questions, hospitality-specific datasets, and the distinctive methodological traditions of hospitality and tourism research.

### Theme 3 - Identifying Hospitality-Relevant Research Problems

Research problem identification emerged as a particularly acute methodological challenge within the hospitality context. One participant expressed: “Coming up with a good research problem is the hardest part. I’m not sure if I’m choosing the right one.” In hospitality management, this challenge is compounded by the breadth and interdisciplinary of the field: participants reported uncertainty about which phenomena were sufficiently “academic” to warrant scholarly investigation, often undervaluing the research significance of operational questions drawn from their industry experience. The tendency to dismiss practice-derived questions as insufficiently theoretical reflects an internalized hierarchy that positions hospitality knowledge as secondary to imported social science frameworks.

McAlpine and Norton’s (2006) analysis of research problem identification as a socially embedded cognitive process is instructive: participants need exposure to the disciplinary conversation of hospitality research, its journals, its debates, its methodological traditions, before they can locate their own contribution within it. Without this disciplinary socialization, research problem identification remains an intimidating exercise in guesswork rather than a confident act of scholarly positioning. Mentorship from experienced hospitality researchers and structured engagement with the hospitality and tourism literature are essential to developing this capacity.

### Theme 4 – Academic Writing in a Discipline Trained for Operational Communication

Academic writing difficulties were pervasive and deeply felt. One participant acknowledged: “I have ideas, but I don’t know how to organize them into a coherent paper.” This challenge is acutely characteristic of hospitality education, where professional communication training emphasizes clear, concise, operationally oriented writing, situating findings within the literature, constructing

theoretical arguments, hedging claims appropriately, and engaging critically with prior scholarship, are rarely taught explicitly in hospitality programs and are poorly modeled in the professional materials students and faculty encounter in their industry roles.

Kamler and Thomson's (2014) framework positions academic writing not merely as a technical skill but as a process of academic identity formation: to write as a hospitality scholar is to claim membership in a scholarly community whose norms and expectations must first be made visible and then actively practiced. Writing groups, structured feedback cycles, and exposure to exemplary hospitality research articles are among the targeted pedagogical interventions most likely to accelerate this identity transition for both faculty and students.

### **Theme 5 – Literature Review and Data Analysis in a Nascent Disciplinary Field**

Conducting comprehensive literature reviews and executing rigorous data analysis presented consistent challenges. One participant admitted: "It's hard to filter through so many articles and find what's really relevant." In hospitality management, this challenge is amplified by the discipline's interdisciplinarity character: relevant scholarship is dispersed across tourism studies, business management, food science, cultural studies, and psychology, requiring researchers to navigate multiple disciplinary literatures without always having clear criteria for relevance or quality. The absence of strong disciplinary gatekeeping, characteristics of more established fields, makes it difficult for novice hospitality researchers to distinguish seminal works from peripheral contributions. Boud and Lee's (2009) argument that literature review is a sophisticated intellectual practice requiring disciplinary socialization, critical analytical skills, and the capacity to identify and articulate research gaps is particularly resonant in this context. Similarly, data analysis skills, whether thematic, statistical, or content-based, require sustained practice within hospitality-specific research contexts. Generic research methods instruction, divorced from disciplinary application, rarely develops the analytical fluency that independent hospitality scholarship demands.

### **Theme 6 – Institutional Resource Constraints and Structural Barriers**

Structural and resource-based barriers were consistently identified as significant impediments. Representative faculty comments included: "Even if I want to publish, there's no budget allocated for it," and "Balancing teaching, admin work, and research is impossible without some form of de-loading." In public higher education institutions in the Philippines, Hospitality Management department frequently operate with constrained budgets, high faculty-to-student ratios, and extensive practicum supervision demands that leave little protected time for research. The expectation that faculty engage in research without commensurate workload relief or

financial support reflect a systemic misalignment between institutional research aspirations and the actual conditions of academic life in hospitality programs.

Colbeck's (1998) analysis of the structural incompatibility between teaching-intensive workloads and research productivity is directly applicable here. Without deliberate institutional restructuring, including dedicated research time, accessible funding mechanisms, and administrative processes streamlined for the realities of applied program faculty, calls for enhanced research productivity in hospitality departments will remain aspirational rather than achievable.

### **Theme 7 – Recognition and the Invisible Labor of Hospitality Scholarship**

The absence of meaningful institutional recognition for research output was identified as a critical demotivator. One faculty participant stated poignantly: "Sometimes it feels like no one notices the effort we put into publishing." In hospitality programs, where excellence in teaching, industry engagement, and practicum coordination are highly visible and socially rewarded, the comparatively invisible labor of research, conducted in private, evaluated by the distant peer reviewers, and published in journals rarely read by institutional administrators, receives disproportionately little acknowledgement. Harland and Staniforth's (2003) research on institutional reward systems demonstrates that sustained research motivation requires concrete and consistent recognition that signals institutional valuation of scholarly contribution. In the absence of such recognition, even intrinsically motivated hospitality researchers find it difficult to sustain the long-term investment that meaningful scholarship demands.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study makes visible the discipline-embedded nature of research anxiety and skill deficiency among Hospitality Management faculty and students in a Philippine public higher education institution. The seven themes identified, psychological paralysis, practice-theory disconnects, research problem identification challenges, academic writing difficulties, literature review and analysis complexities, institutional resource constraints, and inadequate recognition, are distinctively shaped by the vocational identity and interdisciplinary positioning of hospitality management. Addressing research underperformance demands more than remedial training; it requires a fundamental rethinking of how research culture is cultivated in hospitality education, equipping faculty and students with the scholarly tools, confidence, and institutional support to produce rigorous, impactful scholarship.

## **Recommendations**

Institutions should: (1) develop sustained, discipline-specific research capacity-building programs anchored in hospitality literature and industry-relevant questions; (2) establish formal mentorship programs pairing faculty

and students with experienced hospitality researchers, with mentorship recognized in workload calculations; (3) allocate accessible, transparent funding for data collection, publication, and conference participation; (4) implement faculty de-loading policies to protect dedicated research time; (5) integrate research outputs into teaching and community extension to demonstrate real-world impact; and (6) create meaningful recognition structures – including publication awards and performance review acknowledgement – so that the labor of hospitality scholarship becomes an institutional priority.

### Limitations And Future Directions

This study is limited to a single institution, restricting generalizability across contexts. The qualitative, cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and FGD responses may reflect social desirability. Future research should conduct comparative analyses across diverse institutional types and employ longitudinal designs to track research capacity development. International comparisons across Southeast Asian hospitality programs would further contextualize these findings.

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