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# Perceptions of Academic and Professional Barriers in Hospitality Education: Insights from Public Sector University Students in Pakistan

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## ARTICLE DETAILS ABSTRACT

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Hospitality education is an important part of preparing students for professional careers in tourism and related industries. However, in Pakistan, students of public universities often face barriers that affect both their academic learning and future employment opportunities. This study explores the perceptions of undergraduate and graduate students from a public sector university in Pakistan regarding the challenges in hospitality education. The findings reveal that students believe hospitality programs focus more on theoretical learning than practical exposure. Many students reported a lack of industry linkages, insufficient training opportunities, and limited facilities compared to private institutions. This research contributes to understanding the gaps in hospitality education in Pakistan and offers insights that can guide improvements in academic programs and career development pathways.



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## Introduction

“Hospitality is a social function involving the provision of food, drink, and accommodation in settings ranging from commercial enterprises to private homes, where the host–guest relationship is central.” (Telfer, 2000). This definition expands the scope of hospitality beyond the confines of hotels and restaurants, highlighting its cultural, social, and human-centered dimensions. In Pakistan, however, hospitality is still widely perceived as limited to hotel-based employment, which limits recognition of the wider professional and academic opportunities within the field.

As a graduate in Tourism and Hospitality Management who has also worked in the hospitality industry in Pakistan, I have personally observed both the passion of students entering the field and the lack of academic and institutional support that often limits their growth. Many aspiring professionals find themselves navigating a field with limited public awareness, few postgraduate options, and minimal career guidance, making it difficult to fully realize hospitality management as a viable and fulfilling career in Pakistan.

The scope of this study is limited to exploring the challenges students face in hospitality education, especially in understanding career options and the need to improve what is taught in the curriculum. Objectives of the study are as follows; to identify the main academic and non-academic barriers affecting the growth of hospitality management as a career in Pakistan and to assess students' satisfaction level with the overall hospitality education system in public sector universities.

### **Background of the Study**

In recent years, Pakistan has experienced a steady growth in tourism and hospitality activities, encouraged by government initiatives and private sector investment. Despite this progress, the academic development of hospitality management has not matched the pace of industry demand. Most universities only provide basic undergraduate programs, while the absence of advanced postgraduate degrees in Tourism and Hospitality management fields, an outdated curriculum and poor cooperation between universities and the industry make it difficult to prepare skilled professionals. Another issue is that hospitality is still not seen as a respected or stable career option by students, teachers, and society in general society at large. Because of this perception, many keen students face confusion, lack of career advice, and almost no proper mentorship. The difference between what the industry needs and what universities provide makes it harder for graduates to find good jobs. It also holds back Pakistan from building a strong and competitive hospitality sector that can match international standards.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Importance of Hospitality Education**

Hospitality education is considered essential in shaping a skilled workforce that can meet the growing demands of the tourism and hospitality sector worldwide. According to Ivančić, Laškarin Ažić, and Badurina (2022), effective education in this field improves service quality while also contributing to the wider social and economic development of societies by preparing individuals to adapt to evolving industry needs. Similarly, the World Travel & Tourism Council (2023) highlights education and training as key drivers in sustaining the increasing demand for hospitality professionals across the globe. Despite these global trends, Pakistan lags behind as hospitality education remains undervalued and underdeveloped. The limited alignment between academic programs and industry potential signals the urgent need for curriculum reform, faculty

development, and greater investment to create graduates who are competitive at both the national and international level.

### **Infrastructure Gaps: Lack of Practical Facilities**

Effective hospitality education requires hands-on learning through dedicated labs, mock setups, and training kitchens. Unfortunately, many institutions in Pakistan do not provide such infrastructure. For example, public universities often lack culinary labs, practice kitchens, or simulation environments, leaving students with theoretical knowledge but limited practical exposure (Hospitality Plus, 2022).

While private institutions may offer better facilities, their tuition fees often run into lakhs of rupees, making them inaccessible to a large segment of students. Many capable and motivated students from middle- or low-income backgrounds rely on public sector universities for affordable education. This creates a disparity in access to quality training, with public university students missing out on essential hands-on learning experiences due to underfunded programs.

Without such facilities, students are less prepared for real-world industry expectations, undermining their competitiveness and confidence.

### **Shortage of Qualified Teachers and Industry Collaboration**

Another significant issue is the shortage of professionally trained educators in hospitality management. According to the Vice Chancellor of Bahauddin Zakariya University, most public-sector institutions lack qualified human resources to teach culinary arts and hospitality subjects (Hospitality Plus, 2022).

Additionally, there is minimal collaboration between academia and the industry in Pakistan. Globally, research shows that partnerships between universities and hospitality businesses significantly improve the relevance and quality of education (Abenova & Dzhanmuldaeva, 2018). Without such collaboration, students are often unaware of current trends, soft skills, and managerial practices that employers demand (Deale & Maxwell, 2018). This disconnect results in graduates who are not industry-ready, even if they possess academic degrees.

### **The Misconception of Hospitality as ‘Hotel Work’ Only**

One of the major issues affecting hospitality management in Pakistan is the limited public understanding of what the field truly encompasses. Many people—students, parents, and even educators—narrowly define hospitality as just “hotel jobs” or “serving food.” In reality, hospitality is a broad, multi-sector industry that includes tourism, events, airlines, air bnb customer service, destination management, and more (Ivančić et al., 2022). Because of this misconception, many academically strong students do not consider hospitality as a serious or respected career path. This perception limits the potential growth of the field and discourages innovation and investment in hospitality education.

## **Barriers Faced by Women in Hospitality Careers**

Another overlooked area in hospitality education and industry in Pakistan is the gender inequality and the challenges faced by female students and professionals. While hospitality is traditionally seen as a service-oriented and people-friendly field, many conservative societal norms in Pakistan discourage women from pursuing careers that involve late working hours, interaction with male guests, or jobs in hotels. This limits not only career growth but also learning opportunities during university life, such as internships or field visits. Female students often feel unsafe or unsupported in practical settings, and many institutions do not provide separate training spaces or flexible arrangements for women (Batoool & Sajjad, 2019). To make the industry more inclusive, hospitality education needs to actively support gender diversity through policy changes, awareness campaigns, and safe professional environment

## **Data, Variables and Methodology**

For this study, a questionnaire was designed to understand the academic and professional barriers in hospitality education in Pakistan. It included 15 questions based on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree). The survey was shared online with undergraduate students and some graduates of Tourism and Hospitality Management from the University of the Punjab. In total, 100 valid responses were collected, along with feedback from graduates who are already working in the field.

The questionnaire mainly focused on two areas: **Academic barriers** such as an outdated curriculum, lack of practical training, and irrelevant subjects and **Professional barriers** such as low career recognition, gender issues, limited facilities, and few opportunities.

The collected data was first entered into Microsoft Excel for organization and cleaning. After that, it was transferred to SPSS for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to study overall student perceptions, and ANOVA was applied to see if there were any significant differences in views among different groups of respondents.

## **Results and Analysis**

The responses collected in this study mostly reflect the views of students from the University of the Punjab, which is a public sector institute. Many students highlighted that collaboration between the university and the hospitality industry is weak. They also shared that important training facilities, such as room division labs, training kitchens, and front office practice areas, are missing. Students further mentioned that internships and training opportunities are limited and do not fully prepare them for professional work.

In comparison, private universities offer better facilities and practical setups. However, their tuition fees are very high, making them unaffordable for most students. This creates a clear gap where students from wealthy families can access advanced training, while those studying in public universities are left with outdated systems.

**ANOVA**

Hospitality education in Pakistan is undervalued compared to other professional fields.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	77.584	1	77.584	133.448	.001
Within Groups	56.976	98	.581		
Total	134.560	99			

The ANOVA test for the statement “*Hospitality education in Pakistan is undervalued compared to other professional fields*” shows a significant difference between junior and senior students. The p-value (.001) confirms that the difference is real and not due to chance. The F-value (133.448) is also very high, which shows a strong gap between the two groups.

Both groups agreed that hospitality education is not given the same importance as fields like medicine, engineering, or business. However, senior students felt this more strongly, possibly because they are closer to graduation and more aware of job market challenges. Juniors, who have not yet faced the professional world, showed less concern.

Table 2

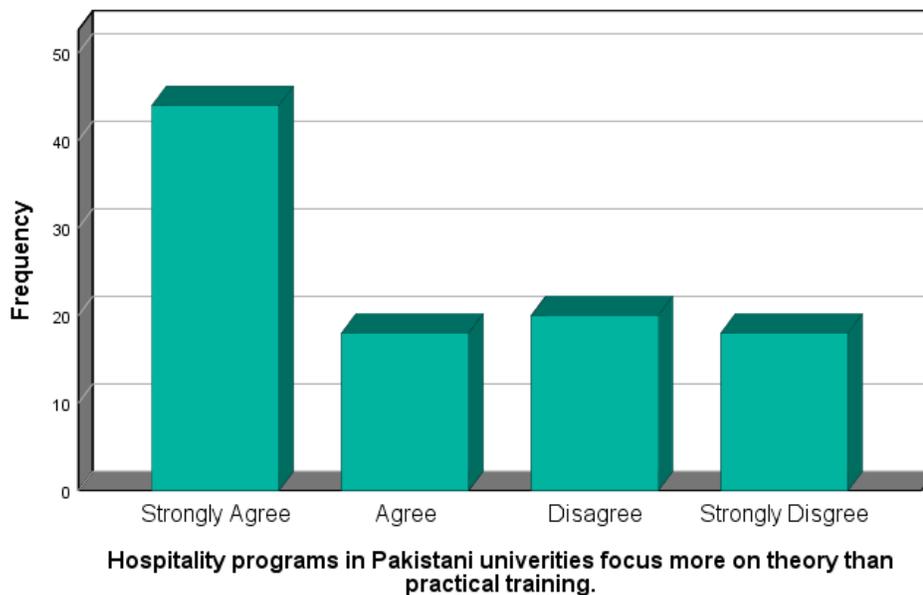
ANOVA Analysis\_of Gender-Related Challenges in Pursuing a Career in Pakistan's Hospitality Sector

**ANOVA**

Gender-related challenges exist in pursuing a professional career in the hospitality sector of Pakistan

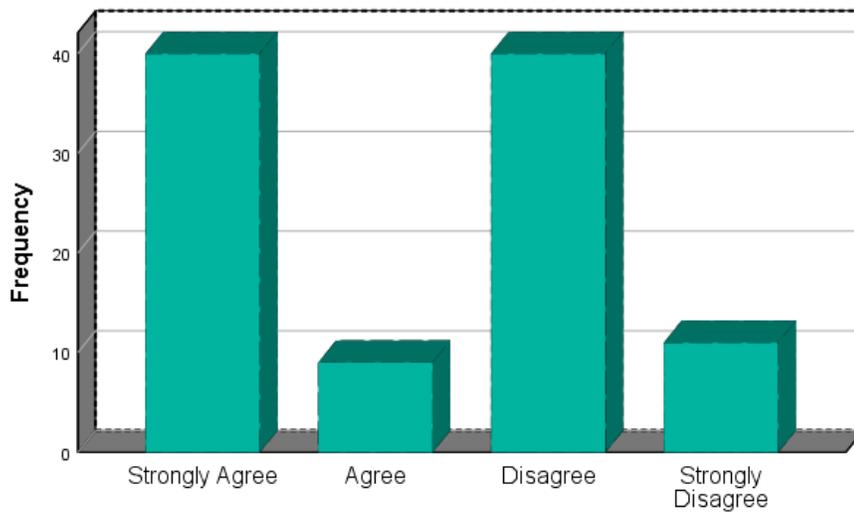
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.000	1	5.00	8.621	.004
Within Groups	56.976	98	.581		
Total	61.976	99			

The ANOVA results indicate a significant difference ( $p = .004$ ) between male and female students concerning the perception of gender-related challenges in pursuing a career in Pakistan's hospitality sector. This suggests that men and women experience these challenges differently. Female students tend to perceive greater obstacles, such as limited opportunities for advancement, safety issues, and cultural restrictions in hospitality jobs. Male students, on the other hand, report lower levels of concern, which may reflect their comparatively fewer encounters with these barriers.



Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) point out that practical learning in hospitality education helps students develop real-world skills and prepares them better for jobs than theory alone. The results of the survey in this study also support this view. Most respondents agreed that hospitality programs in Pakistan put more focus on theory and give less attention to practical training. Students feel they do not get enough hands-on exposure, such as internships, hotel-based training, or fieldwork, which are essential in the hospitality industry.

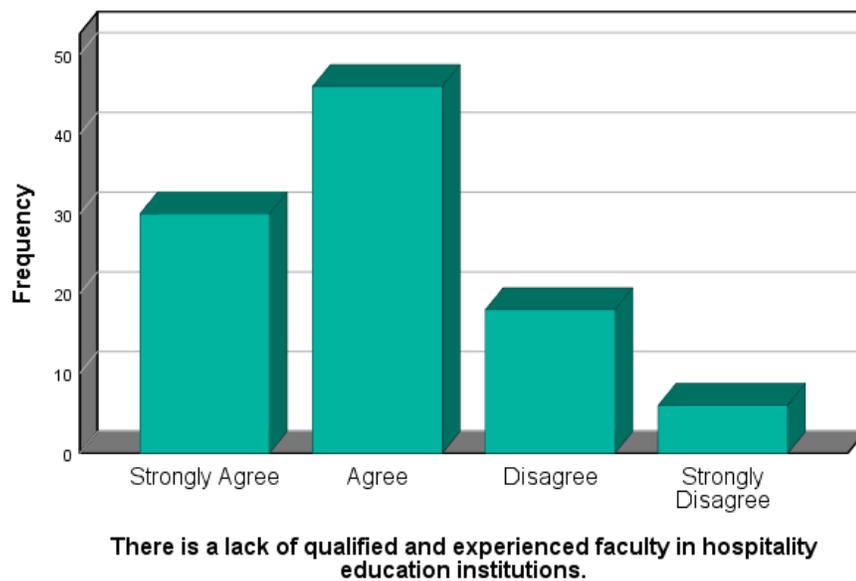
Although students study subjects related to hotel operations and management, they explained that they rarely get the chance to practice these skills in real or simulated settings. This gap leaves them less prepared for industry requirements, where practical knowledge is very important. Some also noted that internships and field training are either limited or not well managed, making it difficult to apply classroom learning in actual work situations.



**The curriculum in hospitality education programs in Pakistan is outdated and does not match industry needs**

Many students mentioned that some courses in their program, such as Heritage Management and Archaeology, were not very useful for their professional growth. Their feedback matches with the responses that disagreed about the curriculum being fully aligned with industry needs.

On the other hand, graduates who had already joined the workforce shared a different view. They explained that subjects like Front Office Management and Human Resource Management (HRM) were very helpful and directly applied in their jobs. This shows that while certain courses may appear less relevant during study, others are highly valuable in building practical skills and improving career opportunities. In general, the responses highlight a clear gap between academic content and industry requirements, with opinions varying depending on whether the respondent was still a student or already working in the field.



Students believe that one major reason for the shortage of qualified teachers in hospitality education is that many of them come from general academic backgrounds and lack direct industry experience. Since hospitality management is a practical and skill-based field, students expect teachers who have worked in hotels, travel companies, or similar areas.

Another issue is the lack of training opportunities for teachers themselves. As hospitality is still growing in Pakistan, there are fewer programs to help faculty stay updated with new industry trends and practices. Because of this, there is often a gap between what students learn in class and what is actually needed in jobs.

Students also pointed out the absence of international exposure. In countries with strong hospitality education, faculty often hold international training or certifications. In Pakistan, this is uncommon, which makes students feel that teachers are not fully prepared to train them for global-level competition.

### **Conclusion**

This study shows that hospitality education in Pakistan faces both academic and professional challenges. On the academic side, programs place too much emphasis on theory, include outdated subjects, and lack practical facilities such as room division labs, front office practice areas, and food and beverage training centers. Professionally, careers in hospitality are often undervalued compared to other fields, and gender-related barriers persist.

Students expressed a strong need for more hands-on training, allowing them to practice essential hotel operations such as housekeeping, front office management, and food service. Graduates working in the industry highlighted that skill-based courses, including Front Office and Human Resource Management, are particularly useful in preparing them for real-world work.

To address these issues, universities should consider updating their curriculum, removing irrelevant topics, and expanding practical training opportunities by establishing hotel-like laboratories. Additionally, forming closer partnerships with hotels and restaurants would help students gain valuable on-the-job experience and improve their readiness for professional careers.

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