

Navigating Work-Life Balance: *Insights from Nepali Students Working in Austria's Gastronomy and Hospitality Sector*

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Abstract

The paper deals with the work-life balance among the Nepali students working in Austria's gastronomy and hospitality sector. The paper has adopted the case study analysis to navigate the work-life balance scenario of the Nepali students residing in Austria. The paper presents a total of five case studies. An interview was conducted with the selected interviewees to develop case studies. The paper found that participants faced long working hours, cultural adaptations, and language challenges, impacting academic performance and personal lives. Despite these, they demonstrate resilience, acquiring essential skills like financial management. The main concern among the interviewees was a language barrier and difficulty in the adoption of technology within the hospitality sector of Austria.

Key Words: *gastronomy, Nepali student, work-life balance.*

Introduction

In an era where the pursuit of a well-balanced life has become a critical aspiration, students working in Austria's bustling gastronomy and hospitality sector face the dual challenge of balancing their academic commitments with the demanding nature of service industry jobs. For many students, employment in this sector offers a valuable opportunity to gain practical experience and financial independence. However, [Khanna \(2012\)](#) stated that the hospitality industry is characterised by extended working hours, often exceeding 12 hours, which can hinder students' ability to engage in academic activities and personal life. This sentiment encapsulates a key struggle faced by students, who must navigate a delicate balance between work obligations, academic responsibilities, and personal well-being.

Austria's hospitality industry, known for its high standards and seasonal peaks, often requires employees to work irregular hours, weekends, and holidays. [Schoffstall \(2012\)](#) pointed out that although work experience improves career possibilities, there are drawbacks as well, like stress and problems managing time. According to [Kusluvan et al. \(2010\)](#), employment in the hotel industry currently usually entails long hours, a lot of labour, shift work, and interacting with finicky customers. In this context, the concept of work-life balance takes on particular significance, as students strive not only to fulfil their professional roles but also to maintain their academic performance and personal lives.

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A sizable portion of Nepali students go overseas each year to further their studies. In the fiscal year 2023-24 alone, 112,593 students received 'No Objection Certificates' to study abroad, according to data from the Ministry of Education (<https://noc.moest.gov.np/>). Of these, approximately 1,000 students are currently residing in Austria for their academic pursuits. Many Nepali students in Austria seek employment in the hospitality and gastronomy sector to help cover their education and living expenses. This sector offers flexible work schedules that can accommodate students' academic commitments. Due to labour shortages, Austria's hospitality industry relies heavily on international workers, including students. Common job roles for Nepali students include positions as kitchen assistants, waitstaff, bartenders, and housekeeping staff in hotels and restaurants. The strong tourism industry in Austria, particularly in cities like Vienna, Salzburg, and Innsbruck, provides additional opportunities for Nepali students to find work in this field.

This paper aims to investigate the real-life experiences of Nepali students employed in the hotel and gastronomy industries in Austria, with an emphasis on how they manage the conflicts between their personal lives, careers, and studies. We hope to clarify the wider ramifications of student work in this challenging field by looking at the difficulties and coping mechanisms that students use to stay balanced.

Review of Literature

One of the most extensively studied ideas among the numerous facets of work-life study is work-life balance, which has drawn more attention recently because of its important implications for both individual well-being and organisational performance. The hospitality industry offers special potential and challenges for putting work-life balance policies into practice because of its demanding nature and ongoing demand for labour flexibility.

Work-life Balance

The term "balance" is frequently used in conjunction with the idea of work-life in literature. To illustrate the contrast between these two aspects of a person's existence, work-life is frequently referred to as work and life or work and family. However, because the phrase "balance" suggests an equal distribution of work and life, people struggle with the idea that these two elements of their lives should be equally divided ([Shah & Ward, 2003](#)). This is why scholars in the field of work-life frequently struggle with the term. Finding a harmonious balance between one's professional and personal lives is known as work-life balance ([Sthapit, 2018](#)).

Due to demographic shifts, global labour mobility, technology improvements, and the blurring of geographic barriers, work-life balance has become essential to human resources management. More importantly, prior research has validated the influence of work-life balance on both positive and negative outcomes in an individual's personal and professional life. Many companies in the hotel industry see flexible work arrangements to modify work hours to satisfy personal demands ([Stavrou & Ierodiakonou, 2011](#)). Initiatives for work-family balance benefits both the company and the employee since the latter's improved performance helps the organisation achieve its goals while the former's personal goals are realised ([Poudel & Sthapit, 2021](#); [Sthapit, 2021](#)).

Balancing work and personal life are essential for both men and women, requiring a perspective that sees these spheres as interconnected and of equal importance ([Bailyn et](#)

al., 2001). In Nepal, women often carry significant family obligations, including childcare and household duties, in addition to their professional responsibilities. Work-life balance initiatives, such as flexible work hours and sufficient leave policies, help women manage these demands effectively, alleviating stress and preventing burnouts (Subedi & Bhandari, 2024). Jackson & Schuler (1985) identified various strategies for blending work and personal life, such as rethinking the concept of home to accommodate work, breaking up the workday for personal activities, and exploring diverse work-life integration methods. These strategies foster a more balanced and harmonious relationship between work and personal life. Greenhaus et al. (2003) described work-life balance as the degree to which an individual is equally involved in and satisfied with both their work and family roles.

Work-life balance refers to an individual's ability to manage the demands and responsibilities of both work and family. The term is often used interchangeably with related concepts, such as work-family balance, work-family interface, work-family satisfaction, which can create confusion due to the lack of a clear, standardised definition (Mohanty & Mohanty, 2014). Jones et al. (2006) suggest that work-life balance involves an employee's perception of their capacity to effectively manage their work and family duties. Allen (2012) views it as an overarching term for research examining the interplay of various life roles. Similarly, Blake (2014) emphasises that work-life balance reflects employees' perceptions of their ability to successfully juggle work and family responsibilities.

Work-life Balance in Hospitality Industry

In the contemporary hotel and hospitality industry, achieving work-life balance can be facilitated through organisational policies that take family responsibilities into account. This includes offering flexible work arrangements that help employees manage their work obligations alongside their home responsibilities (Redmond et al., 2006). Work-life balance refers to a personal level of engagement that allows employees to manage their various roles while maintaining a sense of harmony (Clarke et al., 2004). It also reflects an employee's ability to handle the diverse challenges of daily life. This concept is crucial for achieving a balanced and harmonious work-life integration (Hill et al., 2001). Due to the lack of flexibility in many hospitality positions, students find it challenging to manage their work and school obligations. As a result, employers can lessen some of the stress that student employees experience by offering support in the form of mentorship and empathy (Lewis & Les Roches, 2010).

Recent trends indicate that hospitality organisations are placing greater emphasis on work-life balance initiatives, which could benefit students entering the workforce (Diamantis & Puhr, 2022). In the hospitality industry, workers must accept that hotels operate around the clock, 365 days a year, including weekends and public holidays. The industry has long been associated with extended working hours, and this demanding work environment can lead to higher stress levels, negatively affecting students' mental health and academic performance (Knežević et al., 2024). While the hospitality sector offers numerous career opportunities and advancements, it also requires significant commitments and effort. Many roles involve frequent relocations or international assignments, particularly with global brands. These transitions often require difficult decisions about staying in one's current role or moving to a new location, which can present challenges for families in terms of housing, schooling, and maintaining communication. Despite the challenges, these moves can open doors to better job prospects and higher income. In a career-focused

hospitality culture, the pressures and stresses of work and family life can accumulate when they are not well balanced. The industry's demanding work hours, especially during peak times like holidays, can contribute to stress and fatigue for both employees and their families (Angelini, 2016). People are crucial to every aspect of service (Fáilte & Fáilte, 2005), which often demands long and irregular working hours, increased face-to-face interaction (Blomme et al., 2010; Xiao & O'Neill, 2010), as well as the need for better coordination, shift work and even working during holidays and festivals. To support student workers, educational institutions and employers should work together to develop programs that encourage a healthy work-life balance, including workshops on time and stress management (Singh & Sreenivasan, 2024).

Empirical Review

Xiao and O'Neill (2010) discovered that the culture of a hotel and the management approach of general managers influence work-family challenges, including workplace flexibility, employee turnover, knowledge management, and career progression. When general managers see human resources as a competitive advantage, work-family concerns are viewed as part of their broader strategic priorities. Peshave and Gujarathi (2014) examined the work-life balance (WLB) of hotel employees in India and its effect on employee productivity. Their findings show that while the hotel industry is concerned about its workers' WLB, the measures taken to address the issue have not been very effective. The study also ranked WLB-related employment practices as the second most important factor in enhancing employee productivity within the hotel sector.

Recognising the importance of work-life balance in the hospitality industry, Fernandes and Awamleh (2019) emphasised the need for additional research on this topic. Hospitality workers are often required to work long hours, especially during weekends and holidays, which can negatively impact their work-life balance. Vernekar and Heidari (2019) pointed out that the hotel industry faces staffing shortages due to its service-oriented nature, with seasonal fluctuations affecting employees' personal lives. Women now represent nearly half of the workforce, and the long hours and heavy workloads raise concerns about work-life balance, particularly for women with responsibilities outside of work. This underscores the need for better work-life balance initiatives in the industry.

Bali et al. (2021) investigated the work-life balance (WLB) of hotel employees in urban areas and explored the factors affecting it. The study revealed notable variations in the WLB levels among hotel staff, shaped by organisational factors, gender, age, and family dynamics. In conclusion, the study found that hotel industry employees generally do not achieve a satisfactory work-life balance.

In their study on job satisfaction among hotel industry employees, Stamolampros and Dousios (2023) noted a significant rise in meaningful discussions about work-related stress, client behaviour, and management approaches. While aspects such as employee treatment, the workplace environment, and company culture were tied to higher satisfaction, work-life balance and managerial practices were found to be more directly associated with increased dissatisfaction.

In a study conducted by Adyatma (2023) in Bali, Indonesia, it was found that work-life balance was experienced by four participants but not by one. The research highlighted

that factors such as hierarchy, marital status, and culture have a significant influence on employees' work-life balance, while long working hours, overtime, and irregular schedules were recognised as negative consequences. Yeole et al. (2023) investigated the impact of work-life balance, employee turnover, and work pressure on the performance of employees at five-star hotels in Goa, India. The study revealed that employees often face challenges like extended working hours, overtime, and job-related stress due to high work demands. Balancing work and personal life prove to be difficult, with many employees working more than eight hours a day and missing important family events. While some employees manage to juggle both work and family life, others experience a decline in their work performance due to the long hours.

Research Methods

The main aim of this paper is to examine the study-work-life balance of Nepali students in Austria. A qualitative approach was used to achieve this, employing a biographical method to create cross-case studies within this context. Case studies are a popular research method, especially in evaluations, where researchers perform thorough analyses of individual cases or participants. These cases are usually defined by time periods and activities, with researchers gathering detailed data using various techniques over a prolonged timeframe (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). The cases included in this study were drawn from Nepali students enrolled at various universities in Austria and employed in the country's hospitality and gastronomy industries. A total of five case studies were selected using purposeful sampling. This method, commonly employed in qualitative research, focuses on identifying and selecting cases that provide rich, insightful information, ensuring the efficient use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and choosing individuals or groups who possess substantial knowledge or experience related to the phenomenon being studied (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Besides knowledge and experience, Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) emphasise the significance of participants' availability, willingness to engage, and their ability to express and reflect on their experiences and opinions clearly. In-depth interviews were conducted with the participants, ensuring their anonymity and obtaining their consent beforehand, to investigate their work-life balance within Austria's gastronomy and hospitality sectors.

Limitations

The research was carried out in a particular region with a small sample size over a limited timeframe. As a result, the findings may not be applicable to other regions, fully applicable to the broader population, or indicative of long-term patterns.

Case Analysis

This section presents the case studies of Nepali students employed in the hospitality and gastronomy sector of Austria.

Case I: Cultural Shifts and Culinary Insights

Participant 1, aged 26, pursued his Master's in Applied Economics at the University of Vienna. He chose to work in the restaurant industry due to a language requirement in other sectors and the fact this job allowed him to utilise his proficiency in Hindi. Initially, he struggled to balance work and studies, working 20-40 hours per week, often taking

midnight shifts that affected his academic performance. Adapting to a new culture was challenging, particularly due to the language barrier. He added, "In Austria, the way food and drinks are served is completely new to me. They have an unimaginable taste of mixology. I need to allocate time to learn the names of cocktails and other stuff." He found the job market more competitive than he had anticipated and faced challenges adjusting to the weather. However, he recognised that Austria offered better infrastructure and transportation than Nepal. He emphasised the importance of learning the local language to facilitate the adjustment process. Key lessons he learned include financial management, work-life balance, mental health awareness, and the value of foreign language skills. He advises future students to conduct thorough research and learn the local language before relocating to Austria.

Case II: Adapting to High Standards and Advanced Technology

Participant 2, a 27-year-old from Nepal, is studying for an MSc in Water Management and Environmental Engineering at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU University). Living within walking distance of his university, he works 20 hours a week at one of the world's largest fast-food chains, primarily on weekends. As public universities in Austria do not charge tuition fees, his earnings are sufficient to cover his living expenses. While he finds it manageable to balance work and study, he acknowledges that it becomes stressful during exams. The main challenge for him has been adjusting to the language barrier, particularly in informal conversations. He explained, "Although I haven't worked in the hospitality sector in Nepal, I believe there are two key differences in food preparation. First, Austrian restaurants maintain higher quality standards, which may not always be the case in Nepal. Second, Austria leverages advanced technology, using machines for mass production that reduce labour needs, unlike in Nepal, where labour plays a more prominent role." He also noted that Austrian social life differs from his expectations of Europe, particularly due to a lack of vibrancy in social interactions. While he appreciates the better material living standards in Austria, he misses the social and familial connections he had in Nepal. His most significant takeaway from studying in Austria is the confidence he gained through the education system. He advises future students to focus on learning German if they plan to settle in Austria and work in the hospitality sector, while also preparing for initial financial challenges.

Case III: Breaking Through the Language Barrier

Participant 3, a 23-year-old student at the University of Vienna, who does a dual job of a cashier and a cook in a restaurant mentioned, "I had to manage my time for study, that's all. I work at the cash counter as well as at the kitchen; hence I just try to manage learning some German words related to the hospitality sector which makes my work easier." He chose the gastronomy sector for its flexible working hours and because proficiency in German is not a requirement. However, he finds it challenging to manage 20 hours of work per week alongside his studies. While his job covers rent and living expenses, he admits to making sacrifices in his personal spending. He notes that his manager tries to accommodate his class schedule, but he still struggles with submitting assignments on time and preparing for exams. The difficulty of balancing work, study, and personal life is significant for him. Cultural differences and the language barrier continue to pose challenges. He believes that international student life is inherently demanding and requires a great deal of adaptability. Despite these hardships, he remains optimistic that life in Austria will improve over time.

Case IV: A Journey of Growth and Independence

Participant 4, a 24-year-old student from Nepal, is enrolled in a tourism management program at Ohev Tourism School. He works as a chef at a world-renowned themed restaurant chain in Vienna, having chosen the gastronomy industry due to his passion for hospitality and creating positive experiences for others. He works 20 hours per week, and his earnings are sufficient to cover his living expenses. Although he faced initial challenges adjusting to his new environment, he now finds it manageable. He shared, “I have one year of experience as a barista and in the hospitality sector in Nepal. However, the standards here in Austria are significantly higher. Training starts with the basics, and the emphasis on food quality is precise. For instance, if a customer orders a medium-rare steak, it must be cooked to perfection—neither medium nor rare, but exactly medium-rare.” He also emphasised that learning German is essential for integration into the Austrian hospitality sector. His main challenge was living independently for the first time, but he gradually learned to embrace solitude and self-reliance. He believes life in Austria is somewhat like his expectations but advises future students to be prepared for independent living and to learn the local language to ease their transition.

Case V: Learning on the Go

Participant 5, a 23-year-old student at Webster University, works as a kitchen helper at an Indian restaurant. He works 20 hours per week, which initially didn't provide enough to cover his university fees, so he brought money from Nepal to help manage his expenses. Balancing work and study have been challenging for him. His late-night shifts affect his attendance at morning lectures, and he also struggles with cultural and language differences. As a result, he had to learn about Austrian culture to better integrate. He added, “When I get time, I will try to learn the terminology of the hospitality sector in German.” He describes life in Austria as far from relaxing, as it requires constant hard work and effort. However, he acknowledges that Austria offers a better material quality of life than Nepal. He misses his family, friends, and the festivals from home. Despite the challenges, he has gained valuable life skills, including financial management and perseverance. He advises prospective students to consider public universities to avoid high tuition fees and to learn the local language for a smoother experience in the hospitality sector.

Conclusion and Implications

This study explored the work-life balance of Nepali students employed in Austria's gastronomy and hospitality sector, highlighting the intricate challenges they face as they balance demanding work schedules with academic commitments and personal well-being. The experiences of the participants illustrate the strain of long working hours, cultural adjustments, and language barriers, which often impact their academic performance and personal lives. Despite these challenges, these students demonstrate remarkable resilience, learning valuable skills such as financial management, time management, and cultural adaptation.

For many, the opportunity to work in Austria's hospitality sector provides necessary financial support, but it also requires sacrifices. The constant juggling between work and study, coupled with the stress of adapting to a new culture, paints a picture of international student life that is both rewarding and taxing. Although western work offers a better

material quality of life compared to Nepal, the sacrifices related to work-life balance are significant. Students must often make difficult choices, such as missing family events or social gatherings, to manage their academic and professional responsibilities.

In summary, while the gastronomy and hospitality sector overseas offer opportunities for employment and personal growth; the students' experiences underscore the importance of a well-structured support system to help them navigate the demands of both work and study. This study suggests that achieving a sustainable work-life balance requires a more holistic approach from both educational institutions and employers, with a focus on fostering an environment that supports the well-being of students from abroad.

Implications

The results of this study carry significant implications for a range of stakeholders, such as policymakers, educational institutions, employers, and the students themselves:

Policy Recommendations

- **Government Support for International Students:** To mitigate the financial pressures faced by international students, the foreign government could enhance financial support initiatives, such as scholarships, grants, or more affordable housing options. Additionally, policies that provide greater access to work permits with flexible conditions could help students balance work and study more effectively.

Recommendations for Educational Institutions

- **Academic Support Services:** Foreign universities should consider offering more robust academic support for international students, particularly those employed in demanding sectors like hospitality. This could include flexible class schedules, extension of assignment deadlines during peak work periods, and dedicated academic advising services.
- **Cultural Integration Programs:** Universities should expand cultural integration programs, including language courses and social events, which could ease the transition for international students and help them feel more connected to their peers and the broader community.

Recommendations for Employers

Flexible Work Arrangements: Employers in the gastronomy and hospitality sector could provide more flexible work hours to better align with students' schedules. For example, they could ease the demands of late-night shifts or weekend work during exam periods, giving students more time to focus on their studies.

- **Training Programs:** Employers should invest in training programs that help students integrate more easily into the workplace, especially those from different cultural backgrounds. This could include language support and cultural awareness training to bridge gaps and improve communication in the workplace.

For Nepali Students

- **Pre-arrival Preparations:** Aspiring Nepali students should be encouraged to invest time in learning the local language and understanding the cultural nuances of life in foreign countries before arrival. This will not only facilitate a smoother integration into both academic and professional environments but also help mitigate the language barriers they may face in the workplace.
- **Time Management Skills:** Nepali students planning to work in the hospitality sector overseas should consider developing strong time management and stress-management skills. Balancing work and study will require careful planning, and students should be proactive in seeking help from academic advisors or counselling services when needed.

Implications

- **Longitudinal Studies:** Future research could examine the long-term effects of balancing work and study on international students' mental health, academic success, and career prospects through longitudinal studies. Additionally, comparing the experiences of Nepali students with those from other countries in similar sectors could offer insights into the unique challenges faced by different cultural groups.

Exploring Employer Practices: Further research could investigate how employers in the gastronomy and hospitality sectors can better support international students. Examining the link between work-life balance and employee satisfaction could provide important insights for enhancing workplace policies and practices.

In conclusion, while Nepali students working in Austria's gastronomy and hospitality sector face considerable challenges in balancing work, studies, and personal life, there are evident opportunities for both educational institutions and employers to play a supportive role in enhancing their overall well-being. By offering more flexible work arrangements, fostering cultural integration, and improving institutional support systems, Austria can help international students thrive both academically and professionally.

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