Article

Exploring Students' Understanding and Practices of Cultural Hospitality: A Thematic Review of Global and Nepali Perspectives

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Abstract

This thematic review examines how the culture of hospitality, the art of serving the guest selflessly with respect for their unique background, fits into the hospitality education and training. The study follows a qualitative review approach, analyzing literature, industry requirements, and existing hospitality programs to assess how cultural awareness is incorporated into student's learning. The findings till the time is that most of the hospitality industry is more focused on the technical skill, that is, hard skill, while the cultural hospitality or the soft skill, is still in the shadows. Combining cultural hospitality with modern hospitality education can better prepare students for the global job market, foster welcoming environments and increase guest experiences. The study also highlights practical approaches for teaching cultural hospitality, such as implementing cultural values and local practices into classroom activities and aligning learning with real-world industry requirements. The review concludes that planned training in cultural hospitality, supported by appropriate teaching methods and continuous guidance, can empower students and educators to meaningfully integrate cultural values into the hospitality education which further meets the industry expectations.

Keywords: cultural hospitality, hospitality education, cultural competence, globalization

Introduction

Cultural hospitality is a critical component of present hospitality. It is essential for addressing the needs of an increasingly globalized world. As international travel continues to grow, the hospitality industry requires professionals capable of delivering inclusive, culturally sensitive service to diverse guests. Hospitality education is the foundation for acquiring these skills to provide students with both operational proficiencies and intercultural competencies for cultivating significant guest experiences (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). Students exhibited a strong interest in acquiring these skills to enhance their professional competitiveness; however, they faced challenges, such as language barriers, unfamiliar cultural norms, and the demands of balancing academic and practical responsibilities (Cheung & Li, 2019).

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Cultural competence is a part of hospitality education, where schools and training institutes are moving away from traditional, task-based courses. It is adopting the programs that better reflect the needs of a global economy, which is mainly focused on. Nepal is famous for its diversified ethnic groups and rich cultural history and hospitality, so creating hospitality curriculum has its unique set of opportunities and challenges.

The hospitality sector of Nepal has a vital role in the national economy being a major source of foreign currency, but it suffers from the problem of finding qualified human resources with specific training, especially having cultural competency, as the ability that always gives selfless hospitality beyond the guest's expectations (Adhikari, 2021; Karki & Sharma, 2023). The hospitality programs of Nepal or related training always focus on more practical hard skills, and they are very unaware of cultural competence, which can be called the soft skill. This kind of situation always makes it hard for the graduate or the hospitality workforce to provide with utmost hospitality for the guest coming from different cultures or countries of the world for lack of cultural awareness. There could be different obstacles, like language barriers and having less knowledge about their culture. It further makes it harder to understand their needs and make them satisfied with the services that they are offered. It is therefore most important to have proper understanding of both community-based hospitality and other hospitality business houses as a whole. This type of practice in the hospitality industry would increase skilled workforce, which can compete with the global workforce, protecting our core local and cultural values and improving the quality of services that we deliver. However, there are many challenges in including or teaching cultural hospitality. It is more than becoming an excellent or successful teacher or trainer. You also need to plan carefully, including learning how to communicate with people from other cultures around the world and identifying the things that make a cultural difference before you apply what you have learned into practice (Hjalager & Andersen, 2020). As hospitality education is not limited to the classroom, students should apply their learning hands-on skills in their daily working life, such as internships, apprenticeships or as employees. It always poses challenges to balance their time constraints. Sometimes, institutions lack the resources or experienced instructors to provide comprehensive training on culture. Some programs are doing very well, which offer classes and workshops that teach individuals about other cultures. Some fail because they do not have enough financial resources or the infrastructure though willing to address this kind of issue (Kim & Jeong, 2018). This difference has many consequences. For example, the university or the training institute with an outstanding program and a curriculum produces graduates who are very poorly equipped with cultural awareness to interact with people from different cultures. It makes them unprepared for what the hospitality business is actually looking for as the core competence in their employees or workforce.

Students' experience with teaching cultural hospitality is not always the same. People who have taken a lot of training are more capable and confident while dealing with guests from the same culture. But it becomes very uncomfortable, as they have very low confidence while dealing with those from a different culture in both learning and working places with cultural differences. (Okumus & Yagci, 2021). Students always want to learn in their comfort zone, and they do not want to come out of their comfort zone, which makes them unprepared for the professional issues (Baum, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly highlighted further deficiencies of our education system, which warrants a flexible curriculum that can easily adapt to evolving industry dynamics (Gretzel et al., 2021). Students having cultural competence and a blend of practical skills could secure better careers. They will be competent workforce for the long run (Tasci & Pizam, 2020). For the hospitality industry, the students must learn about cultural hospitality at school because modern tourists expect services that fulfill their needs with respect to their culture.

This all indicates that the implementation of cultural hospitality is not an easy job, and it also highlights the importance of professionals who can think beyond the traditional methods (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). If the cultural hospitality is not integrated into graduates, they will not only fail to compete in the job market but also deliver low service quality, resulting in negative impact on guests and dissatisfaction to employers (Cheung & Li,

2019). The objective of this thematic review is therefore to identify and analyze the need for incorporating cultural hospitality into modern hospitality education and training, with particular attention to its benefits to different stakeholders and implementation challenges. The whole research is guided by the role play by the cultural hospitality to enhance the graduate competencies, meet the hospitality needs and strengthen the hospitality institute.

Methodology

This paper follows a thematic review approach to find the existing literature that is published on different sites and at different periods. Similar thematic review approaches have been successfully applied in hospitality and tourism research to analyze educational practices, industry expectations and curriculum development (Baum, 2022; Hjalager & Andersen, 2020; Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). For this information, 11 different peer reviewed journals were reviewed systematically, focusing on the cultural hospitality, hospitality education and practices. To draw broader contextual insights into cultural diversity, service practices and hospitality, additional 16 papers, books, journals, online publication and reputable websites were consulted. The following key words were used to find out the contents on the internet or from the sources: organizational culture, service innovation, cultural diversity, communication, hospitality industry, soft skills, employee behaviors, leadership, motivation, work

ethics, culture, human resources, employee retention, sustainable tourism, cultural heritage, community-based tourism, guest satisfaction, guest retention, service quality, education, workforce, development, local culture values and hospitality services.

I went through the sources that are published within the period of 10 years and that discuss the hospitality and culture and its connections. For this, I read the title and abstract and excluded the articles that were not directly relevant. Full text articles were read carefully and important information noted and coded the on cultural hospitality, teaching practices, industry expectations and challenges. The recurring ideas are further grouped into themes and summarized to show how cultural hospitality enhances graduate competencies, meets industry needs and strengthens hospitality institutions.

Studies show that cultural competency is no longer a choice in hospitality education, as it is an integral part of hospitality for guest satisfaction. Lugosi and Jameson (2017) emphasize the imperative for educational programs that align with the realities of a globalized industry, given that hospitality professionals regularly engage with tourists from all global contexts. Li (2019) endorses this perspective, stating that students proficient in intercultural communication possess a competitive advantage in the labor market of the hotel industry. Tasci and Pizam (2020) mention that cultural intelligence is important for guests' happiness because it always generates high revenue. It ultimately increases the profitability of a business. The

results suggest that the need for cultural competence is growing because the sector is getting more diverse, and people are expecting more from it, as accessibility to the world has been super easy.

Theme 1: Effects on Hospitality Industry Economy and Branding

Scholars highlight that economic advantages and strategic brand differentiation are associated with cultural competence. Lugosi and Jameson (2017) mentioned that hotels and restaurants that meet the demands of people from different religions and ethnicities obtain more customers for their business. This is shown by the fact that hotels or restaurants that offer halal meat, vegetarian food, or gluten-free options had the extra revenue, and they had loyal customers (Khalek et al., 2023). Students who are skilled at dealing with people from different cultures help their firms compete in new markets as they can provide very unique services to the guests (Cheung & Li, 2019). Including local art, cuisine, and traditions in the hospitality industry, it helps in distinguishing brands in a competitive market, with a unique experience, which further strengthens local economies and increases revenue (Tasci & Pizam, 2020). The study shows that being knowledgeable of other cultures is important for making money and building unique, reputable companies.

Theme 2: Enhancing Guest Experience through Cultural Hospitality

Cultural hospitality is very important to

give travelers unique and unforgettable experiences. Globally, the culture varies from place to place, and every practice could be a new experience for people. It is better than just delivering services by trying to get in with local authentic hospitality and respecting different cultural backgrounds and requirements of its clients. The future of hospitality is dependent on professionals' ability to invite guests from different ethnic backgrounds, making them feel genuinely welcomed and valued. This system is helpful to build an emotional connection to the customer that makes them happier with customized cultural experiences, meet current needs and leave a lasting positive impression to the guests. It will encourage the travelers to visit the place frequently (Pizam, 2019).

The students educated in cultural hospitality with interpersonal skills acquire the ability to anticipate and accommodate a wider range of guest needs and wants before they articulate to them (Okumus & Yagci, 2021). This enhances the relationship between service providers and clients, resulting in increased business and positive word-of-mouth referrals. The academic consensus posits that cultural competence significantly influences long-term economic prosperity; that is, contented consumers are more interested in returning and recommending the establishment. Therefore, adding cultural hospitality training to school programs is good for both the experience of visitors and the long-term success of the hotel business in a successful way.

Cultural hospitality also prefers inclusivity by bridging the social and emotional gaps between guests and service providers. Tasci and Pizam (2020) state that those hospitality workers can tailor their interactions with clients depending on their values, rituals and the ways of communicating who know about other cultures and which often go beyond basic service standards. Lugosi and Jameson (2017) had strongly stated that the connection between culture and hospitality education enhances not only service satisfaction but also the emotional well-being of both clients and workers. When the hospitality personnel who work in the frontline show that they understand and respect the cultural differences, customers feel like they belong, turning regular service exchanges into important experiences. Tasci and Pizam (2020) state that this strategy enhances a brand's reputation, clarifies cultural misunderstandings, and helps the company maintain a good standing.

Theme 3: Encouraging Environment and People Friendly Practices

Countries like Nepal have great importance and influence of the cultural competency due to the spiritual and societal values for the long-term growth of the hospitality industry. These values are deeply rooted in our context. Hjalager and Andersen (2020) say that hospitality businesses may build better relationships with the community and promote responsive tourism by learning about the local cultures. This cultural knowledge also helps hotels and restaurants

use eco-friendly ways and fits in with local customs. This reduces their effect on the environment and builds a good relationship with the people who are living there.

Studies show that Nepal's tourism sector is featured with rich cultural heritage and religious plurality. However, adding cultural competence to hospitality education has both positive and negative impacts. Hospitality programs still mostly use traditional teaching methods and lack enough experiential learning that emphasizes intercultural communication. Karki and Sharma (2023) say that many schools are having problems in combining global hospitality standards with local cultural norms. This makes it difficult for students to navigate class and workplace. Baum (2022) also says that education after the epidemic gives Nepalese schools a chance to change their curriculum with the combination of traditional knowledge, inclusive teaching methods, and digital resources. This change in the teaching practice could help students become more flexible towards other cultures and better prepared to accommodate both domestic and international tourists in a world after the epidemic.

The importance of cultural competency is on gradual rise to sustain the hotel sector. Hospitality workers can literally connect with the host communities and develop good relationships, as they know a lot about local customs and cultural frameworks (Hjalager & Andersen, 2020). By making sure that the operating procedures follow local

environmental and social norms, these kinds of partnerships help in cutting down the waste and misuse of the resources, which leads to a more sustainable tourism industry. This ethical approach ensures that visitors' local cultures and ecosystems are not harmed. It is also important for the long-term benefits to the industry.

Staff who are aware of other cultures are important for keeping local customs and values alive because they know the impact and the benefits they can get from it. It has a vital role in creating a long-lasting hospitality business (Tasci & Pizam, 2020). Adding real cultural elements like local art, food and customs puts together the guest experience better, boosting the host community economically and socially. Students who take hospitality classes that emphasize sustainability and cultural competence are ready for the summons of the sector today to become responsible leaders, earning money with proper balance of social and environmental responsibilities (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017).

Theme 4: Pedagogical Challenges - Obstacles to Implementation

Many schools are facing trouble teaching cultural hospitality even though everyone agrees that it is important for the students. The successful education system of the world like European methods, nowadays, uses practical workshops and real-life situations to bridge the gap between theory and practice. It bears significance to cope with practical aspects (Hjalager & Andersen, 2020). These

programs provide students with the practical experience and critical thinking skills that they need to deal with prevailing cultural differences in the workplace. However, these methods are still the exception rather than the rule, which shows a big difference in the quality of education provided.

The major barriers to the hospitality school include limited funding and a shortage of skilled educators specializing in cultural competency. These factors contribute to the marginalization of such a subject in favor of conventional technical fields (Kim & Jeong, 2018). The absence of a well-structured and comprehensive curriculum based on cultural hospitality often lacks the skill to solve business challenges, which creates a big difference between educational achievements and professional expectations (Baum, 2022). To settle these differences in hospitality training, one must invest more money and make major changes to the curriculum.

Nowadays, incorporation of digital tools and experiential technologies into hospitality education is growing day by day. Gretzel et al. (2021) address that virtual reality and simulation technology can enhance students' multicultural service situations although direct interaction is a bit difficult. Mixed learning, integrating classroom theory, online courses and field trips to culturally diverse locations represents a creative methodology in Nepal for teaching and learning (Adhikari, 2021). Hospitality companies can ensure that cultural competence training stays useful, easier and less expensive by using technology and hands-on learning.

Theme 5: Student Experiences - What they Learned and What they had to Deal with

Though cultural hospitality has a greater influence on students, it comes with larger difficulties. Okumus and Yagci (2021) claim that students who get enough cultural training are more confident and able to adjust whether they have to work in different settings. These students develop important interpersonal skills that will make them able to be employable and ready for careers in hospitality markets connected to the rest of the world. The training is beneficial for the students to tackle cultural differences more efficiently, helping them grow both personally and professionally.

As it takes time to change, it might be difficult to negotiate the situation. Cheung and Li (2019) have defined that the existing difficulties, including language barriers and unfamiliar cultures, can be formidable in the absence of sufficient institutional support. The COVID-19 pandemic increases these challenges by hindering experiential learning opportunities, as extensive remote and hybrid models fail to replicate the interaction-intensive characteristics of hospitality education (Gretzel et al., 2021). The difference between possible benefits and challenges shows the importance of having robust support systems for students to be successful in cultural hospitality training.

In addition to this, the interest of students and their involvement are equally essential elements in delivering genuine cultural understanding. Research indicates that when students understand that cultural studies are strongly linked to professional achievement, their levels of engagement and reflection increase (Okumus & Yagci, 2021). Intercultural exchange programs in the society, community-based tourism lectures, and collaborative international coursework have also been demonstrated to increase students' cultural empathy. Karki and Sharma (2023) conclude that in Nepal, the compatible exposure to diverse local people may vary students' perceptions of inclusivity and develop an appreciation for diversified cultural heritage as an integral aspect of their professional identity. So, enhancing cultural pedagogy through experiential and reflective learning can easily influence both academic performance and students' readiness for the global stage as well.

Theme 6: Industry Perspectives and the Future of Hospitality Education

From the hospitality industry's point of view, it is very important to connect the education system with real-life work situations and to meet the needs of the industry with guest satisfaction. The fundamentally heterogeneous character of contemporary hospitality necessitates a comprehensive overhaul of the curriculum rather than incremental modifications (Pizam, 2019). The industry prefers professionals with a lot of cultural knowledge so that they fulfill the amenities for a wider range of guests, thereby earning image and money.

The industries have been advocating for structural reforms with the integration of cultural intelligence into hospitality education programs to cultivate a workforce adept at inclusive and culturally sensitive service (Tasci & Pizam, 2020). A need for certain developments in the industry, which stresses the commercial reasons for this kind of integration, should be forwarded by the industry in collaboration with providers (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). Baum (2022) says that if graduates do not fulfill these criteria, it will decrease their chances of getting a job and make it harder for employers to ensure standard of their services. So, ending the gap between what students get in school and what businesses need is still a very important issue for the hotel industry's long-term growth and sustainability.

The school and the business house, where the people are culturally competent, foster cooperative environment. Baum (2022) emphasizes the lifetime learning and professional training in addressing skill deficiencies in service quality and digital literacy which was a major issue in the hospitality industry during the post-pandemic period. A strategic association between educational institutions and industrial stakeholders can be cultivated to create inclusive learning environments where employees enhance their cultural knowledge consistently. It contributes to developing their interpersonal skills, which are common

soft skills sought by the industry in their employees (Tasci & Pizam, 2020).

In the developing countries like Nepal, where the hospitality sector is completely diverse with higher cultural value, collaborative training programs and mentorship initiatives can offer students and professionals practical experience with global service standards, preserving local authenticity (Karki & Sharma, 2023; Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). This integrated approach makes academic as well as industrial performance better, ensuring that the future hospitality professionals are flexible and aware of other cultures; it ultimately enables them to compete on a worldwide scale in a better way, fulfilling the expectations of guests as well as the industry.

Conclusion

Going through all the thematic reviews of literature, what I found is cultural hospitality is a central pillar of hospitality education rather than a supporting concept. If we think hospitality education is all about the hard skills, technical knowledge and techniques, we might be wrong because the cultural values and interpersonal skills are the key components that build a competency to give genuine hospitality. Genuine hospitality is instrumental in making guest satisfaction. This gap in study creates a big impact while serving the diverse guests from across the globe and diminishes the quality of real services. Integration of cultural hospitality into education is very important in a country like Nepal, which is rich in cultural practices

with diverse communities and ethnicities. Here, every ethnicity bears unique hospitality. Yet the current hospitality education and training system is not capable of utilizing the full advantage. It is therefore essential to include cultural awareness and hospitality in training and curriculum so that the students meet global industry needs. Even the industries become more competitive in the global market, preserving local identity and cultures.

Thematic analysis of the literature indicates that implanting cultural hospitality into education enhances students' readiness for the global job market, promotes inclusive and welcoming service environments and strengthens both industry and institutional outcomes. Increasing the locally relevant content and practices in teaching learning process could further improve the effectiveness of cultural hospitality training. By aligning curricula with practical industry expectations and cultural values, hospitality education can produce graduates who are not only technically competent but also culturally aware, adaptable and capable to deliver high-quality, globally relevant and sustainable hospitality services.

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