

Research Article

THE EFFECTS OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT CORE COURSE ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT'S CAREER GOAL BASED ON SOCIAL COGNITIVE CAREER THEORY IN A CHENGDU COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of a hospitality management core course on students' career goal-setting using Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and the Recognize-Design-Reflect (RDR) model. A mixed-methods approach combined surveys from 302 students with interviews and classroom observations. Quantitative results indicated improvements in self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goal clarity, with factor analysis identifying three key influences: skills training, decision-making support, and industry value perception. Paired t-tests and correlation analysis confirmed stronger links between self-efficacy and goal-setting. However, qualitative findings revealed that increased confidence did not always translate into industry commitment, as some students reconsidered their fit after deeper exposure to industry realities. The study underscores the dual function of career education: strengthening readiness while encouraging reassessment. It recommends integrating mentorship and adaptability training in curricula and improving industry transparency to support retention. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to explore the stability of career intentions and compare educational strategies.

Keywords: Hospitality Education, Career Goal-Setting, Social Cognitive Career Theory, RDR

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry has long been a key driver of global economic growth, contributing over 10% to global GDP (Legrand, Chen, & Laeis, 2022). In China, the sector experienced a strong post-pandemic rebound; for example, daily inbound and outbound travel during the 2023 Spring Festival increased by 26.2% compared to the same period in 2019 (Shi, 2023). Despite this momentum, a significant proportion of hospitality management graduates in China choose not to

pursue long-term careers in the industry (Zhong et al., 2022), contributing to a growing skills gap. Scholars have linked this trend to concerns about poor working conditions, limited advancement opportunities, and a disconnect between academic training and real-world industry needs (Üngüren & Kacmaz, 2022; Alexis, 2021).

This study explored how hospitality education might reinforce students' professional commitment by shaping their career intentions during a critical transitional stage. Grounded in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), it examined how self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and learning experiences interacted to influence career goal development (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Lent & Brown, 2013). Previous research has suggested that aligning students' expectations with industry realities—while simultaneously building their sense of efficacy—can enhance the clarity and stability of career decision-making (Tang, Pan, & Newmeyer, 2008).

Focusing on second-year vocational students preparing for internships, the study applied the Recognize–Design–Reflect (RDR) model to assess course impact. The Recognize phase identified student needs; the Design phase revised a core course (JB244) to integrate mentorship and experiential learning; and the Reflect phase evaluated post-course shifts in career motivation. This integration of SCCT and RDR provided a structured lens to examine how curriculum design shapes evolving career identity.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to investigate the impact of core hospitality management courses on students' career goals by addressing the following objectives:

1. To investigate the factors affecting of the hospitality management core course on career goal of the second-year students in a Chengdu college based on SCCT.
2. To develop the effective hospitality management core course based on the factors investigated from the second-year students in a Chengdu college based on SCCT.
3. To examine the effectiveness of hospitality management core course on second-year students' career goal based on SCCT.

RESEARCH SCOPE

This study focused on 302 second-year students enrolled in a vocational hospitality management program at a college in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China. At the time of data collection, students had completed foundational coursework and were preparing for internships, marking the second year as a critical transition between academic learning and industry exposure.

Chengdu, as a leading tourism destination in southwest China, offered a particularly appropriate setting for this research (Xue & Bai, 2023). Its well-developed hospitality sector and increasing demand for skilled professionals made it an ideal location to examine how vocational education supports career development. Accordingly, selecting a vocational college in Chengdu as the research site was both contextually relevant and geographically justified. Moreover, the institution’s curriculum closely reflected industry standards, which further strengthened the study’s practical significance.

The study examined key variables within the JB244: Hospitality Supervision course, focusing on how it shaped students’ career decisions. The core variables were structured as follows:

Table 1: Variables Description

Variable Type	Variable Name	Definition
Independent Variable	Hospitality Management Core Course	The second-year course JB244: Hospitality Supervision, central to this study
Mediating Variable	Self-efficacy	Students’ confidence in their professional abilities and their belief in successfully entering the hospitality industry
Mediating Variable	Outcome Expectations	Students’ perceptions of future career benefits, including salary potential, career growth, and job stability
Dependent Variable	Career Goal Setting	Students’ career decision-making, specifically their intention to pursue a career in hospitality management

Despite the study’s contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the research sample was drawn from a single vocational college, limiting generalizability to other institutions or regions. Secondly, data collection occurred within a single academic year (2025), assessing short-term effects rather than long-term career trajectories. Career goal development is an ongoing process, and future research should consider longitudinal studies.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- RQ 1: What were the factors within the hospitality management core course that influenced the career goals of second-year students in a Chengdu college based on the SCCT?
- RQ2: How did the identified factors from the hospitality management core course affect the career goals of second-year students in a Chengdu college based on SCCT?
- RQ3: How effective was the hospitality management core course in shaping the career goals of second-year students in a Chengdu college based on SCCT?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted the Recognize-Design-Reflect (RDR) model, combined with Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), to examine how hospitality management core courses influenced students' self-efficacy and outcome expectations, ultimately shaping their career goal setting. As shown in Figure 1, the Recognize Phase identified key factors shaping students' career goals, including learning experiences, industry awareness, and personal interests. These insights informed the Design Phase, during which JB244: Hospitality Supervision was revised to target these areas. The course emphasized career awareness, practical competencies, and adaptability through experiential learning, case studies, and simulations. It was hypothesized (H1, H2) that these adjustments would support clearer and more stable career goals (H3).

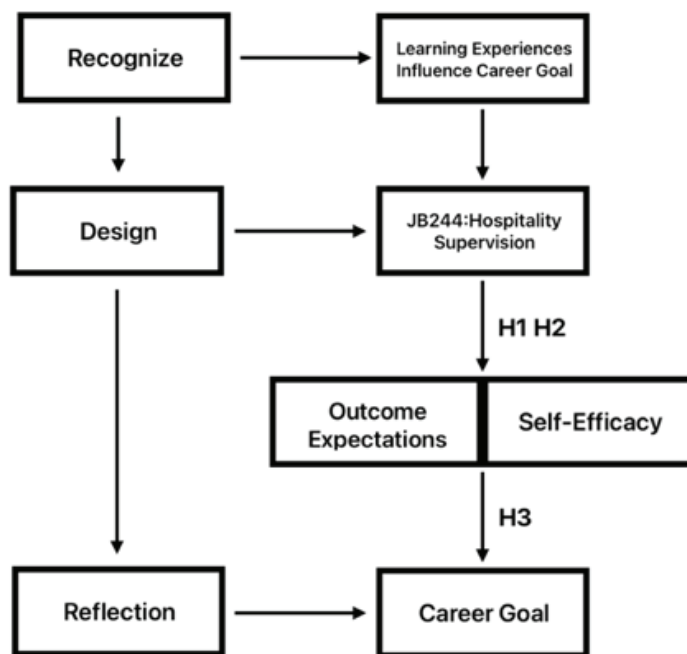


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The Reflect Phase then assessed the intervention's effectiveness by examining shifts in students' goals and decision-making processes. This not only evaluated the course's short-term impact but also offered direction for ongoing curriculum refinement, consistent with the RDR model's emphasis on iterative development.

METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods design under the Recognize–Design–Reflect (RDR) framework to explore how a hospitality core course shaped students' career goal-setting. In the Recognize Phase, a pre-test survey grounded in SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) was administered to 302 second-year students, incorporating the CEDSE (Betz et al., 2005) and CSES (Solberg et al., 1994) scales. Correlation and factor analyses identified key influences on self-efficacy and outcome expectations, which informed the course redesign.

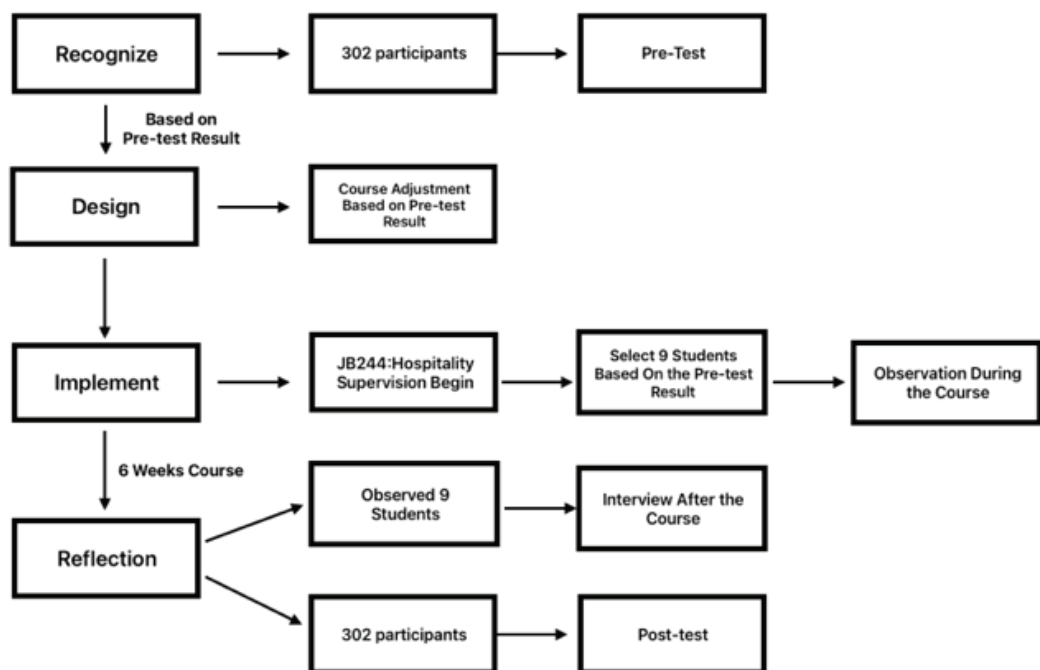


Figure 2: Research Design

Building on these findings, the JB244: Hospitality Supervision course was revised to emphasize career awareness, practical skills, and confidence-building. The updated curriculum, reviewed by three experts, integrated case-based learning and simulations. A six-week intervention was then implemented. Meanwhile, nine students were selected for classroom observation using Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984). In the Reflection Phase, post-test surveys and interviews captured changes in career thinking, with observation data used to support and triangulate the analysis.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

To evaluate the course's impact, this study employed a mixed-methods approach combining surveys, classroom observations, and interviews. The survey, administered to 302 students via wjx.cn, adapted items from the CEDSE (Betz et al., 2005) and CSES (Solberg et al., 1994) to assess self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goal-setting before and after the course. Classroom observations, guided by Kolb's experiential framework (1984), were conducted by the researcher and a trained instructor to monitor student engagement. Additionally, nine students participated in 20–30-minute semi-structured interviews to explore changes in career awareness.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 27.0, with descriptive, correlation, factor, t-test, and regression analyses conducted to examine course effects. Qualitative data from interviews and observation notes were thematically coded in NVivo 14.

3. Reliability and Validity

The reliability of the 39-item survey was confirmed using SPSS, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.904 indicating strong internal consistency. Test-retest reliability further supported its stability. For validity, the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method was applied, with all items scoring above 0.8 based on expert review. Additionally, triangulation across survey, interview, and observation data enhanced the overall credibility and robustness of the findings.

4. Ethical Consideration

This study was approved by the Rangsit University Ethics Committee (COA.NO. RSUERB2024-233) and conducted in accordance with institutional guidelines. All participants provided informed consent and could withdraw at any time. To minimize bias, data were collected anonymously, with no identifying information revealed in class. Surveys were conducted at the start and end of the course, and classroom observations took place in weeks 1, 3, and 6. All data were securely stored, and counseling support was available if needed.

RESULTS

1. RQ1: Course Factors Influencing Career Goal Setting

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on the learning experience section of the pre-test identified three key factors—Professional Skills and Network Expansion, Career Decision-Making and Internship Guidance, and Career Value and Fit—explaining 87.058% of total variance, indicating these factors effectively captured course elements shaping students' career goals. The specific data are shown in the following table:

Table 2: Factor Analysis

Item	Factor 1: Career Skills & Networking	Factor 2: Career Decision & Industry Readiness	Factor 3: Career Value & Job Fit
Resume Writing Confidence	0.812		
Interview Preparation	0.765		
Networking Opportunities	0.831		
Career Decision Support		0.798	
Internship Guidance		0.835	
Job Market Awareness		0.762	
Career Value Awareness			0.849
Job Fit Perception			0.932
Industry Pros & Cons Awareness			0.877

Professional Skills and Network Expansion (40.328% variance) reflected how job application training, industry lectures, and internships developed students' skills and professional networks. As shown in table 2 high factor loadings were observed for network expansion (0.917), job application preparation (0.917), and interview process learning (0.933).

Career Decision-Making and Internship Guidance (24.517% variance) encompassed career planning, internships, and role model exposure. Key items included internship strategies (0.939), observing professionals (0.960), and role model influence (0.936), highlighting their impact on career choices.

Career Value and Fit (22.213% variance) related to career value perceptions and personality-job alignment. High factor loadings for career comparison (0.849) and personality fit (0.932) suggested that greater exposure to career value discussions and suitability assessments could significantly influence students' likelihood of choosing hospitality as a career.

2. RQ2: How Did the Course Factors Influence Career Goal Setting?

This section examines how the core hospitality management course influenced students' self-efficacy and outcome expectations, ultimately shaping their career goal setting. The analysis integrates paired sample t-tests and correlation analysis to quantify changes before and after the

course, while qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations provide further insights into how students' perceptions and decision-making evolved.

2.1 Impact of the Course on Career Perceptions

As shown in table 3, the course significantly improved students' self-efficacy ($m=3.44 \rightarrow m=3.67$, $t = -4.26$, $p < .001$), particularly in "accessing career resources" ($t = -5.55$) and "interview preparation" ($t = -4.58$). Meanwhile, outcome expectations became more grounded. While students reported greater optimism regarding long-term job stability and career growth, expectations for high income ($t = 4.31$) and social recognition ($t = 7.05$) declined. As Student 3 observed, frontline roles often involve heavier workloads but offer lower pay, while Student 8 acknowledged salary expectations might not be realistic early on. Student 6 also expressed concerns about work intensity and job satisfaction.

These shifts were reflected in students' career intentions. The desire to pursue a hospitality career declined significantly ($m= 3.74 \rightarrow m= 3.30$, $t = 6.35$, $p < .001$). Student 9 realized their current skills might not meet career demands, and Student 6 expressed interest in more stable roles such as administration or HR. Still, others found renewed motivation—Student 5 saw growth potential in the field, and Student 8 felt encouraged by recognition from mentors. Overall, the results suggest that the course not only enhanced confidence but also facilitated more realistic and individualized reflections on career fit.

Table 3: t-Test Results

Variable	Pre-Test Mean (M)	Post-Test Mean (M)	t-value	p-value
Overall Self-Efficacy	3.44	3.67	-4.26	< 0.001
Career Resources	3.19	3.64	-5.55	< 0.001
Job Interview	3.47	3.75	-4.58	< 0.001
Good Salary	3.62	3.33	4.31	< 0.001
Good Social Recognition	3.71	3.24	7.05	< 0.001
Stability & Long-term Employment	3.71	4.06	-5.60	< 0.001
Career Development	3.61	3.85	-3.73	< 0.001
You Set Hospitality Industry as Career Goal	3.74	3.30	6.35	< 0.001

2.2 Influence of the Course on Variable Relationships

Correlation analysis (Table 4) revealed that the relationships between self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goal-setting significantly strengthened after the course. The correlation between self-efficacy and career goal-setting increased from $r = 0.16$ ($p = 0.005$) to $r = 0.53$ ($p < 0.001$), while outcome expectations rose from $r = 0.24$ to $r = 0.62$ ($p < 0.001$), suggesting a shift toward more intentional, capability-driven planning. Interviews supported this finding, with students noting that mentorship and hands-on tasks clarified their strengths. Moreover, the influence of personal satisfaction ($r = 0.16 \rightarrow 0.71$) and social recognition ($r = 0.24 \rightarrow 0.59$) surpassed financial rewards ($r = 0.25 \rightarrow 0.41$), indicating evolving career values. Classroom observations reflected similar trends, as discussions increasingly emphasized long-term development over short-term gains. Finally, students showed marked gains in resume writing ($r = 0.55$), interview skills ($r = 0.60$), and networking confidence ($r = 0.60$), confirming improvements in job-seeking readiness.

Table 4: Correlation Results

Variables	You Set Hospitality Industry as Career Goal	
	Pre-test	Post-test
Self-Efficacy	0.16, $p=0.05$	0.53, $p<0.001$
Job Interview	0.15, $p<0.001$	0.60, $p<0.001$
Establish Professional Relationship	-0.02, $p<0.001$	0.60, $p<0.001$
CV Writing	0.13, $p<0.001$	0.55, $p<0.001$
Outcome Expectations	0.24, $p<0.001$	0.62, $p<0.001$
Good Financial Rewards	0.25, $p<0.001$	0.41, $p<0.001$
Social Recognition	0.24, $p<0.001$	0.59, $p<0.001$
Personal Satisfaction	0.16, $p<0.001$	0.71, $p<0.001$

3. RQ3: Effectiveness of the Course in Shaping Career Goals

This section evaluates the impact of the hospitality management core course on students’ career goal setting, focusing on its direct and indirect effects. Regression analysis quantifies the course’s influence, while thematic analysis provides deeper insights into how students adjusted their career perceptions and decision-making following the course.

3.1 Regression Analysis

As shown in Figure 3, regression results revealed a significant negative direct effect of the course on career goal setting ($B = -0.440$, $\beta = -0.285$, $t = -6.35$, $p < 0.001$), with an explanatory power of $R^2 = 0.06$. This suggests that the course led some students to reassess their industry fit, reducing their likelihood of choosing hospitality as their career goal. The findings indicate that while the course improved students' industry awareness, it also encouraged them to make more informed and deliberate career choices.

Additionally, the course influenced career goal setting through two indirect pathways. First, it enhanced self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.172$), which positively impacted career goal setting ($\beta = 0.274$), suggesting that higher confidence enabled students to take a more proactive approach in refining their career plans. Second, outcome expectations ($\beta = -0.040$, non-significant) did not have a direct effect but showed a stronger predictive relationship with career goals ($\beta = 0.363$). This indicates that students' long-term perceptions of industry growth opportunities played a more significant role in career goal adjustment than self-efficacy alone.

Path Diagram of Course Intervention Effects on Career Goal (Corrected)

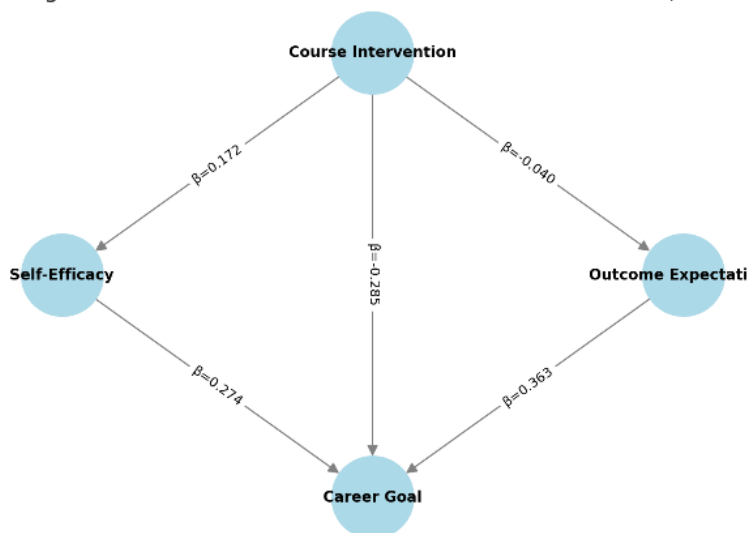


Figure 3: Path Diagram of Intervention Effects on Career Goal

3.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (Table 5) revealed three interrelated themes that supported the regression findings: industry reality awareness, self-efficacy development, and career expectation adjustment. Students reported shifting from idealized perceptions to more grounded understandings of the industry. One reflected, “I used to think this industry was highly lucrative, but now I see long-term growth matters more than starting salary,” echoing the course’s negative effect on goal-setting ($\beta = -0.285$). At the same time, practical tasks and team-based learning enhanced their confidence. As one student noted, “The course made me more confident, but also made me think—am I truly suited for this industry?” This illustrates the mediating effect of self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.274$). Finally, exposure to mentors and case studies led to expectation adjustments, with students expressing preferences for stable career paths and clearer promotion opportunities. These insights suggested that while the course strengthened career competencies, it also encouraged critical reflection on long-term industry alignment.

Table 5: Thematic Analysis

Code	Frequency	Category	Theme
Practical Task	24	Skills Upgrade	Self-Efficacy Development
Interactions	20		
Team-Based Task	12		
Practical Task	19	Self-Evaluation	
Course Design	22	Emotional and Physiological States	
Practical Task	11		
Course Design,	10		Career Path
Industry Tutor	3		
Course Design	6	Financial Expectation	Outcome Expectations
Industry Tutor	1		
Course Design	6	Job Satisfaction	Career Expectation Adjustment
Course Design	10	Career Realignment	

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The findings showed that the course influenced students' career decisions by strengthening self-efficacy and reshaping outcome expectations. While some gained clarity and confidence, others reconsidered their industry fit—highlighting career goal setting as an evolving process shaped by targeted education. The following sections discuss results in relation to each research objective and relevant literature.

Conclusion

This study addressed three research objectives through the lens of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). In relation to Research Objective 1, the findings revealed that career skills training, industry mentorship, and career value formation were central to shaping students' career goals. While skills training improved competencies such as resume writing and interview techniques, mentorship offered practical industry insights and networking opportunities. Meanwhile, value formation encouraged students to reflect on long-term aspirations and career fit.

To meet Research Objective 2, the JB244: Hospitality Supervision course was redesigned to target key SCCT variables—self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career interests. The revised curriculum emphasized hands-on learning, structured career planning, and mentorship integration, moving away from theory-heavy instruction toward applied learning. These changes are summarized in Table 6, offering a clear framework for future course development.

Table 6: Key Revisions to the JB244 Hospitality Supervision Course

Key Improvement Area	Strategy Implemented
Practical Training	Simulations, case studies, role-play in front desk/HR modules
Career Planning Integration	Early identity work, mock interviews, personalized guidance
Industry Engagement	Mentor sessions, site visits, real case analysis
SCCT-based Goal Setting	Self-assessments, goal coaching, career pathway modules

Regarding Research Objective 3, the course yielded a dual outcome: it strengthened students' clarity and confidence in career planning, while also prompting some to reconsider their alignment with the hospitality industry. This suggests that effective career education not only fosters professional competencies but also facilitates critical self-assessment, enabling students to align personal efficacy with realistic, long-term goals.

Discussion

The findings reinforced Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), demonstrating that students' career goal-setting was shaped by self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and environmental influences (Lent et al., 2000). The intervention not only enhanced students' confidence but also encouraged critical reflection, prompting many to reassess their initial career priorities. While financial rewards and social status had initially been emphasized, post-course reflections revealed a growing emphasis on career stability, personal fulfillment, and long-term development. This shift aligned with prior research indicating that career education can reshape students' perceptions and motivations (Raub, 2022; Lent et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2022).

Notably, the study underscored the dual role of career education—reinforcing commitment for some students while encouraging others to reconsider their industry fit. This contrast reflected the evolving nature of career goals when students are exposed to authentic workplace expectations. Mentorship and experiential learning emerged as key mechanisms in this process, supporting previous findings that such components enhance career clarity and foster long-term planning (Lent & Brown, 2013; Wang et al., 2022).

Taken together, these results suggested that effective career education must strike a balance between technical skill development and reflective, adaptive learning. By integrating mentorship, field exposure, and realistic career insights, programs can better support students in building confidence while making informed, resilient career decisions (Anthony et al., 2021; Lent et al., 2020).

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlighted the dual impact of career education in hospitality management: enhancing career awareness and self-efficacy while prompting some students to reassess their fit with the industry. Based on the findings, this section discusses implications for students, educational institutions, and the hospitality industry, followed by recommendations for future research.

Implications

The course not only enhanced students' skills and confidence but also encouraged critical reflection on their career fit. While some remained committed to hospitality, others began to prioritize long-term stability and personal fulfillment over short-term gains. This suggested that career education played a dual role—both empowering students and prompting reassessment of their alignment with the industry. For universities, the findings underscored the importance of

aligning curricula with industry realities by incorporating experiential learning, structured guidance, and sustained mentorship. From the industry perspective, students who became more aware of job demands and limited advancement often reconsidered their commitment. In contrast, those with strong mentorship and clear development pathways appeared more likely to remain engaged. Taken together, these findings pointed to the need for closer collaboration between educators and employers to offer transparent career trajectories, co-develop relevant course content, and ensure that training reflected the realities of the profession.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should employ longitudinal research to track how career goals evolve post-graduation, offering insights into the long-term effects of career education. Expanding research across diverse student populations and academic stages would improve understanding of how career education impacts students at different phases. Additionally, experimental studies comparing teaching approaches—such as simulations, case-based learning, and mentorship programs—could refine career education curricula to enhance effectiveness

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