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PREDICTORS OF READINESS TO HOSPITALITY PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE: MEDIATING ROLE OF SELF-EFFICACY

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ABSTRACT

Readiness for hospitality professional practice is a critical educational outcome; however, the mediating mechanisms driving student preparedness remain under-researched. To address this gap, this study examined experiential learning engagement and industry support as predictors of readiness for hospitality professional practice among fourth-year Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM) students, investigating the mediating role of self-efficacy. Guided by Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, a descriptive-correlational mediation design was adopted. Using Taro Yamane's formula, a probability sample of 262 participants was selected from a population of 762 across five campuses using proportionate stratified simple random sampling. Data were gathered via a structured instrument validated by experts and confirmed for internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, multiple linear regression, and Hayes' PROCESS macro. Results revealed very high levels of experiential learning engagement and industry support, alongside high levels of self-efficacy and professional readiness. Regression analysis showed both experiential learning engagement and industry support significantly predicted student readiness, with industry support emerging as the best predictor. Furthermore, mediation analysis confirmed that self-efficacy partially mediates these relationships, enhancing readiness both directly through practical exposure and indirectly through confidence. It is recommended that hospitality institutions and administrators integrate self-efficacy interventions and strengthen industry partnerships. Future researchers are encouraged to extend this framework through longitudinal designs and cross-disciplinary validation.

Keywords: *Experiential Learning Engagement, Industry Support, Self-Efficacy, Readiness to Hospitality Professional Practice*

INTRODUCTION

Operating under the broader umbrella of tourism, hospitality industry is defined as service-driven sector, encompassing food and beverages, and lodging services that relies on humans as part of its product which cannot be separated from its service component. According to Osei et al., (2020), hospitality is one of the sectors that is evolving worldwide continue shaping customer expectation, global standards, as well as technological advancements. To keep pace with these evolving demands, the educational institutions and hospitality businesses work side-by-side in investing learning opportunities to the future bearer of the industry.

The experiential learning engagement and industry support is then an indispensable component of effective hospitality education. Students encounter real workplace situations that demand teamwork, decision-making, and problem-solving through on-the-job trainings, simulations, and partnerships with hotels, restaurants, and tourism enterprises. It enables students bridge the gap between classroom learning and readiness to hospitality professional practice, cultivating competencies that align with employer expectations with these experiences.

Developing hospitality-ready professionals extends beyond acquiring technical abilities. It involves nurturing self-belief, resilience, and confidence collectively referred to as self-efficacy. Tentama and Nur (2021) emphasize that self-efficacy has a significant role when it comes to employability. It encourages to engage in in various learning and skills development that provide strength for the career readiness. Thus, it does not merely complement experiential learning but serve as the key psychological mechanism that transforms experience into professional competence.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the participants' assessment of their experiential learning engagement in hospitality management laboratory subjects?
2. What is the participants' assessment of industry support?
3. What is the level of the participants' self-efficacy in performing hospitality-related skills?
4. What is the participants' assessment of their readiness to hospitality professional practice?
5. Do students' experiential learning engagement and industry support significantly predict their readiness to hospitality professional practices?

6. Does self-efficacy significantly mediate the association of experiential learning engagement and industry support on the participants' readiness to hospitality professional practice?

Hypotheses

To address the above research questions, the following null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance:

Ho1: Students' experiential learning engagement and industry support do not significantly predict their readiness to hospitality professional practice.
Ho2: Students' experiential learning engagement does not significantly predict their readiness to hospitality professional practice.
Ho3: Industry support does not significantly predict the students' readiness to hospitality professional practice.
Ho4: Self-efficacy does not significantly mediate the association of experiential learning engagement on the participants' readiness to hospitality professional practice.
Ho5: Self-efficacy does not significantly mediate the association of industry support on the participants' readiness to hospitality professional practice. Industry support on the participants' readiness to hospitality professional practice.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive-correlational research design with mediation analysis. According to Hair et al. (2021), descriptive-correlational research examines the relationships among variables without manipulating them. In this context, the design was appropriate because the study focused not only on describing the variables but also on examining how experiential learning exposure and industry collaboration were associated with job readiness through the mediating role of self-efficacy. Furthermore, the design was consistent with the regression-based mediation model proposed by Hayes (2022), which examined the direct and indirect effects of variables to understand the mechanisms underlying their relationships.

The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula with a 5% margin of error. The total population of fourth-year BSHM students across the identified institutions was estimated at 762. In applying the Yamane's formula, the target sample size was calculated to be 262 participants. This computation ensures that the sample is representative of the population while maintaining statistical reliability at the specified margin of error. Since the number of fourth-year BSHM students varies across these campuses, a proportionate stratified random sampling is further employed to ensure that each campus is represented according to its population. The samples were distributed as follows: 30 from Campus A, 66 from Campus B, 35 from Campus C, 105 from Campus D, and 29 from Campus E.

Various statistical tools and procedures were employed to address the research questions. For research questions 1, 2, 3, and 4, descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation was employed to summarize and describe the participants' demographic characteristics and their assessment of the four main variables: experiential learning exposure, industry collaboration, self-efficacy, and readiness to hospitality professional practice.

Research question 5, multiple regression analysis was utilized to determine the extent to which experiential learning exposure and industry collaboration predict professional practice. This analysis identified the strength and significance of the direct effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The regression coefficients interpreted at a 0.05 level of significance, indicating whether the predictors significantly contribute to explaining variations in students' professional practice levels.

For Research question 6, mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2022) to examine whether self-efficacy mediates the relationship between experiential learning exposure and industry support on professional practice. The analysis estimates direct, indirect, and total effects to determine the mediating role of self-efficacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' assessment of their experiential learning engagement in hospitality management laboratory subjects. With overall mean of 4.52 (SD = 0.43), participants assessment of their experiential learning engagement in hospitality management laboratory subjects as very high. The findings suggest that students are highly involved in hands-on learning experiences that enhance their confidence, technical competencies, and preparedness for actual hospitality workplace practices. A significant majority responses fall under the "Agree" or 42.62 percentage which are expected responses to reasonable propositions and moderate response which description as "Neutral" or 1.64 percentage reinforcing the generally positive assessment of experiential learning engagement. All these imply that hospitality management laboratory subjects provide meaningful opportunities for students to actively participate in practical activities, apply theoretical concepts, and develop essential hospitality-related skills.

Rahmaningtyas et al. (2025), implied that experiential learning increases student satisfaction and employability skills, and by Dionson and Tan (2025) emphasized the role of laboratory experiences in supporting students' academic performance and skill development. Findings were in line with high estimation in the present study.

Table 1
Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Assessment of their Experiential Learning Engagement in Hospitality Management Laboratory Subjects

Range	Description	Interpretation	Frequency	Percentage
4.51-5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High	136	55.74
3.51-4.50	Agree	High	104	42.62
2.51-3.50	Neutral	Moderate	4	1.64
1.51-2.50	Disagree	Low	0	0.00
1.00-1.50	Strongly Disagree	Very Low	0	0.00
	Total		**244**	**100.0**
	Overall Mean		**4.52**	
	Interpretation		**Very High**	
	SD		**0.43**	

	Specific Indicators	**M**	**Description**	**SD**
1	The learning experience requires me to think critically.	4.55	Strongly Agree	0.55
2	I am stimulated by what I am learning.	4.49	Agree	0.58
3	I feel emotionally invested in this learning experience.	4.49	Agree	0.58
4	My educator encourages me to share ideas and experiences.	4.54	Strongly Agree	0.55
5	This learning experience aligns with my interests.	4.55	Strongly Agree	0.58

The data presented in Table 1 indicates that among specific indicators, the item with the largest mean is "The learning experience requires me to think critically" and "This learning experience aligns with my interests" obtained the highest mean (M = 4.55, SD = 0.55 and 0.58, respectively). The interpretation of the computed mean value is described as Strongly Agree. Participants perceived the experiential learning activities which positively promote critical thinking and connect learning with their interests, suggesting that the activities provided were highly engaging, and meaningful. This finding is supported by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), which highlights that active engagement and reflection in learning experiences promote deeper understanding and higher-order thinking skills.

In contrast, "I am stimulated by what I am learning" and "I feel emotionally invested in this learning experience" obtained the lowest mean (M = 4.49, SD = 0.58 for both indicators), described as Agree. The findings above show that participants generally perceived their laboratory learning experiences as engaging and meaningful. These aspects were relatively less evident as the standard deviation indicates that participants had similar

perceptions regarding their level of stimulation and emotional involvement in the learning activities. It implies that educators may further strengthen experiential learning approaches that increase students' motivation and emotional connection to learning.

Table 2 presents the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' assessment of their industry support. The overall mean of 4.54 (SD = 0.44) indicates that participants generally have "Very High" level assessment of the industry support. These findings indicate that the participants are provided with industry's support in their education and training process. The moderate and low level of variability further suggest that the responses similarly confirm that industry's support cause students' readiness to hospitality professional practice.

This finding is also supported by the study of Anuar et al. (2024), who highlighted that the support of the industry leads to a mutually beneficial relationship by providing an opportunity to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical work and stated that the collaboration of the industry is important for establishing the connection between classroom learning and work, and for enabling students to learn the actual skills and industry knowledge.

Among the specific indicators, the highest mean was obtained in "Industry mentors provide guidance during practical training," "Industry involvement helps me understand real workplace expectations," "Industry partners help resolve problems encountered during training," and "Industry engagement supports my readiness for professional practice," (M = 4.55; SD = 0.53, 0.57, 0.59, and 0.56 respectively). These are described as "Strongly Agree", implying that industry partners are important contributors in bridging the gap between classroom learning and actual workplace practice, thereby strengthening students' professional competence and confidence and is further supported by Anuar et al. (2024), who emphasized that industry support creates a mutually beneficial relationship among universities, industries, and students by providing opportunities to connect theoretical knowledge with actual workplace experiences.

Table 2
Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Assessment of the Industry Support

Range	Description	Interpretation	Frequency	Percentage
4.51-5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High	129	52.87
3.51-4.50	Agree	High	111	45.49
2.51-3.50	Neutral	Moderate	3	1.23
1.51-2.50	Disagree	Low	1	0.41
1.00-1.50	Strongly Disagree	Very Low	0	0.00
	Total		**244**	**100.0**
	Overall Mean		**4.54**	
	Interpretation		**Very High**	
	SD		**0.44**	

Specific Indicators		M	Description	SD
1	Industry mentors provide guidance during practical training.	4.55	Strongly Agree	0.53
2	Regular communication exists between educators and industry partners.	4.52	Strongly Agree	0.58
3	Industry partners provide access to facilities or resources for learning.	4.52	Strongly Agree	0.57
4	Industry involvement helps me understand real workplace expectations.	4.55	Strongly Agree	0.57
5	Industry partners help resolve problems encountered during training.	4.55	Strongly Agree	0.59
6	Industry engagement supports my readiness for professional practice.	4.55	Strongly Agree	0.56

In contrast, the lowest mean was observed for Item 2, and 3 “Regular communication exists between educators and industry partners,” and “Industry partners provide access to facilities or resources for learning” (M = 4.52, SD = 0.58 and 0.57), which also described as “Strongly Agree”. Although the overall evaluation was positive, this shows that there is slightly more variance in the responses as compared to other specific indicators. Therefore, reflecting strong partnerships between educational institutions and industry stakeholders. As emphasized by Anuar et al., (2024), industry support creates a symbiotic relationship among universities, industries, and students. Each benefiting from the shared goal of producing skilled, work-ready graduates.

Table 3 presents the frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation distribution of the participants' self-efficacy in the hospitality skills. The overall mean of 4.46 with (SD = 0.44) indicates that participants possess a high level of self-efficacy, demonstrating strong confidence in their hospitality-related skills, suggesting that the participants' self-response of self-efficacy in hospitality skills confirmed that they perceived themselves as capable of handling tasks, challenges, and responsibilities associated with readiness to hospitality professional practice. Moreover, a significant share of answers falls under “Strongly Agree” (43.85%) and “Agree” (52.46). The concentration of responses in the top two rating brackets (Agree and Strongly Agree) demonstrates a consistently high perception of personal capability among participants. This means most participants believe they can successfully perform and overcome challenges in the workplace.

Table 3
Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Self-response of Self-efficacy in the Hospitality Skills?

Range	Description	Interpretation	Frequency	Percentage
4.51-5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High	107	43.85
3.51-4.50	Agree	High	128	52.46
2.51-3.50	Neutral	Moderate	8	3.28
1.51-2.50	Disagree	Low	0	0.00

1.00-1.50	Strongly Disagree	Very Low	0	0.00	
	Total		**244**	**100.0**	
	Overall Mean		**4.46**		
	Interpretation		**High**		
	SD		**0.44**		
Specific Indicators			**M**	**Description**	**SD**
1	It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.		4.42	Agree	0.61
2	I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.		4.40	Agree	0.59
3	My resourcefulness enables me to handle unforeseen situations.		4.45	Agree	0.58
4	I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.		4.50	Agree	0.56
5	I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.		4.47	Agree	0.59
6	When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.		4.48	Agree	0.56

Among the indicators, “I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort” obtained the highest mean (M = 4.50, SD = 0.56), described as “Agree”. This means that participants perceived self-response of self-efficacy in hospitality skills confident in applying their hospitality skills in real-life situations. Its SD values were also relatively lower compared to some other items, indicating that the responses to this item were consistent. The results show that participants developed both the technical skills and psychological readiness required for professional practice. According to Bandura (1971). self-efficacy has a positive impact of enhancing individuals’ motivation and persistence to learn. In addition, Tsai et al. (2024) found that those with higher self-efficacy displayed stronger perseverance, greater creativity, and a willingness to take risks, all of which are increasingly sought in service industries.

In contrast, “I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events” obtained the lowest mean (M = 4.40, SD = 0.59), which was defined as “Agree”. Such result suggests that despite being the lowest indicator, students still have substantial abilities in terms of problem-solving, crisis management, and achieving organizational goals in the frame of professional hospitality industry. Yet, the fact that it has been found to be weaker in comparison to other indicators reflects a certain structural weakness in the field. Namely, while academic instruction and designed modules of professional internships adequately prepare students for routinized aspects of the job, they rarely expose them to non-routine crises (e.g., a sudden influx of complaining guests, staffing issues, etc.). In practical terms, it means that to acquire proficiencies in addressing unplanned events, students have to go through a cycle of trial and error. As such, their confidence in performing basic operational tasks is high, yet moderate to low in the case of ambiguous events requiring flexible response and advanced crisis management competencies. The study of Khuadthong (2025) described self-efficacy as an important aspect of hospitality

students' professional skills development, highlighting its relevance to their preparation for the demands of the industry.

Table 4 presents the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' assessment of their readiness for hospitality professional practice. The results revealed an overall mean of 4.49 (SD = 0.39), interpreted as "High", which indicates that the participants perceive themselves as well-prepared to enter the field. Furthermore, the results revealed that participants who exhibited readiness fell within the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" (49.18%), which means that majority of participants possess had a high level of confidence and readiness to enter the hospitality profession. This is supported by the study of Gevana and Tan (2021) which found that hospitality students demonstrated high levels of professional readiness through psychological, behavioral, and emotional preparedness. Their study emphasized that readiness contributes positively to workforce performance and professional growth.

Table 4
Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Assessment of their Readiness for Hospitality Professional Practice

Range	**Description**	**Interpretation**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
4.51-5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High	120	49.18
3.51-4.50	Agree	High	120	49.18
2.51-3.50	Neutral	Moderate	4	1.64
1.51-2.50	Disagree	Low	0	0.00
1.00-1.50	Strongly Disagree	Very Low	0	0.00
	Total		**244**	**100.0**
	Overall Mean		**4.49**	
	Interpretation		**High**	
	SD		**0.39**	

Specific Indicators		**M**	**Description**	**SD**
1	I can apply theoretical knowledge to real work situations.	4.54	Strongly Agree	0.55
2	I can solve work-related problems effectively.	4.50	Agree	0.56
3	I can work under pressure to meet deadlines	4.49	Agree	0.58
4	I demonstrate professional behavior during work-related activities.	4.52	Strongly Agree	0.57
5	I take responsibility for my work outcomes.	4.55	Strongly Agree	0.56
6	I can receive and use feedback to improve my performance.	4.59	Strongly Agree	0.51

Of the specific indicators, "I can receive and use feedback to improve my performance" had the highest mean (M = 4.59 SD = 0.51), which was interpreted as "Strongly Agree".

This indicates that the participants are open to feedback, signifying their strong preparation for a career in hospitality professional practice. The SD values suggest that there is a consensus among the participants to show that they are open to constructive criticism and committed to continuous professional growth. This finding conforms to the observations of Gebbels (2019), that while the hospitality industry places emphasis on technical expertise and task proficiency during recruitment, the current professional practices prioritize the development of broader professional competencies and skills.

In contrast, the lowest mean was observed for “I can work under pressure to meet deadlines” (M = 4.49, SD = 0.58), which was described “Agree”. Although this item received the lowest score relative to the other indicators, still demonstrates that participants generally view themselves as capable of managing workplace stress. Overall, these findings affirm that participants possess the necessary practical readiness and core competencies required for entry-level hospitality practice. Consistently, the finding of Gebbels (2019) shows that the industry has preferred to recruit using competencies and task proficiency or specific technical expertise and job aptitude which is vital in the hospitality industry.

Research Question 5. Do experiential learning engagement and industry support predict students' readiness for hospitality professional practices?

Ho1: *Experiential learning engagement and industry support do not predict students’ readiness to hospitality professional practices.*

Ho2: *Experiential learning engagement does not predict students’ readiness to hospitality professional practices.*

Ho3: *Industry support does not predict students’ readiness to hospitality professional practices.*

Table 5 presents the results of the regression analysis conducted to determine whether experiential learning engagement and industry support significantly predict students’ readiness for hospitality professional practice.

The regression model was statistically significant as evidenced by the F-value of 267.169 with a p-value of .000, indicating that experiential learning engagement and industry support, when taken together, significantly predict students’ readiness for hospitality professional practice. Therefore, Ho1 is rejected. This finding implies that experiential learning engagement and industry support, when considered jointly, provide meaningful information about hospitality students’ readiness for professional practice. It highlights the importance of providing students with opportunities to participate in practical learning experiences and establishing supportive partnerships with industry stakeholders. Hospitality education institutions may therefore continue to strengthen practicum programs, promote active student engagement in authentic workplace activities, and sustain collaboration with industry partners to support students’ preparation for professional responsibilities.

Regarding the individual predictors, experiential learning engagement was found to be a significant predictor of students' readiness, as shown by its β = 0.383, t = 6.989, and p = .000. The positive coefficient (B = 0.348) indicates that an increase in experiential learning engagement corresponds to an increase in students' readiness for hospitality professional practice. Hence, Ho2 is rejected. This implies that students exposed to higher levels of experiential learning activities are more likely to be professionally ready.

Moreover, industry support emerged as a significant positive predictor of students' readiness for hospitality professional practice (B = 0.449), (beta = 0.501), (t = 9.137), (p < .001). Hence, Ho3 is rejected. The unstandardized coefficient indicated that for every one-point increase in industry support, students' predicted readiness increased by 0.449 points, holding experiential learning engagement constant. Meanwhile, the standardized beta coefficient of 0.501 indicated that a one-standard-deviation increase in industry support was associated with a 0.501-standard-deviation increase in readiness, with experiential learning engagement held constant. These results suggest that industry support made a significant and positive unique contribution to predicting students' readiness for professional practice.

This finding is consistent with Nguyen et al. (2023), whose scoping review of 111 research papers highlighted the importance of collaboration between hospitality education institutions and industry partners in preparing work-ready graduates. The review emphasized the value of industry involvement in developing students' industry knowledge, technical skills, and employability. Similarly, Xu et al. (2022) reported that work-integrated learning provided hospitality and tourism students with opportunities to apply classroom knowledge and improve multiple skills through practical industry experiences. These studies reinforce the relevance of industry engagement and workplace learning opportunities in preparing students for professional responsibilities.

For many learners, stepping out of theoretical lectures and entering the real world of a specific industry is initially associated with some level of professional vulnerability. In other words, for Hospitality Management students, the transition from theoretical lessons into real industry practice is frequently associated with uncertainty, but it is gradually substituted with confidence. Collaborating with practitioners allows students to confirm theoretical knowledge, understand industry expectations, and align their practices with the actual demands of guests in terms of hospitality professional practice.

Industry support explains why student narratives frequently highlight the value of mentorship and interpersonal connections. Structural support, which can be manifested in mentoring or academe-industry cooperation, serves as the backbone to help students to develop their competencies. Under the umbrella of substantial professional guidance, students are free from additional stress, assured that there is someone to rely upon. As students understand that their professional growth is supported, they become more confident about the ability to meet industry needs and develop a sense of professional belongingness.

Croft & Wang (2023) further emphasized that experiential learning benefits student's learning. It has been long viewed as the heart of hospitality education because it connects theory to practice and transforms abstract concepts into real-world competence. Likewise, readiness directly correlates with professional practice where enhanced preparedness on On-the-Job or practicum predicts stronger workforce performance and is highly relevant, fostering critical competencies such as technical skills, communication, leadership, and critical thinking, supporting career advancement and job satisfaction (Abad et al., 2025).

Table 5
Regression Analysis of the Influence of Experiential Learning Engagement and Industry Support on Students' Readiness to Hospitality Professional Practice

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.874	.157		5.558	.000
Experiential Learning engagement	.348	.050	.383**	6.989	.000
Industry Support	.449	.049	.501**	9.137	.000
Model Summary R =0.830 R^2 = 0.689 Adj. R^2 = 0.687 F=267.169** p = .000					

*** Significant at the 0.01 level*

Research Question 6. Does self-efficacy significantly mediate the association of experiential learning engagement and industry support on the participants' readiness for hospitality professional practice?

Ho4: *Self-efficacy does not significantly mediate the association of experiential learning engagement on the participants' readiness to hospitality professional practice.*

Ho5: *Self-efficacy does not significantly mediate the association of industry support on the participants' readiness to hospitality professional practice.*

Table 6 presents the Mediation Analysis of self-efficacy on the predictive association of experiential learning engagement on the participants' job readiness for hospitality professional practice. The total effect of experiential learning engagement on readiness for hospitality professional practice was significant (B = 0.6928, SE = 0.0309, t = 22.42, p < .001) indicating that experiential learning engagement positively influences participants' readiness.

When self-efficacy was included in the model, the direct effect of experiential learning engagement on participants readiness to hospitality professional practice remained significant (B = 0.1645, SE = 0.0265, t = 6.199, p < .001). This suggests that experiential learning engagement continues to have a direct influence on readiness even after

accounting for self-efficacy. The indirect effect of experiential learning engagement on readiness through self-efficacy was also found to be significant (B = 0.5283, SE = 0.0388). The bootstrap confidence interval (BootLLCI = 0.4521; BootULCI = 0.6040) does not include zero, confirming that the mediation effect is statistically significant. Therefore, Ho4 stating “Self-efficacy does not significantly mediate the association of experiential learning engagement on the participants’ readiness to hospitality professional practice” is rejected. This indicates that experiential learning activities contribute to the enhancement of students' confidence in their capabilities, which subsequently boosts their levels of professional.

From the students' point of view, this outcome represents their transition from classroom learners to industry professionals. As students go further in their studies and enter the fast-paced environments of hospitality industry with high guest expectations, their prior experiences turn into professional competence. Every experience at the workplace becomes proof of their preparation and makes them realize the importance of their acquired skills.

The said result proves that engaging students in experiential learning activities can increase their self-efficacy, hence raising their readiness to engage in the hospitality professional practice. In addition, Abbasi et al. (2022) noted that self-efficacy enhances essential behaviors which helps an individual remain effective and motivated in the workplace despite challenges. The positive effect of experiential learning engagement on the readiness to hospitality professional practice is mediated by the self-efficacy of the students.

When it comes to the service-oriented sector like the hospitality, self-efficacy serves as an important psychological anchor. By nurturing this self-belief, educational institutions do more than simply impart technical knowledge; they cultivate adaptable practitioners who can maintain high-performance standards under pressure, recover from service disruptions, and transition smoothly into full-time industry roles.

Table 6
Mediation Analysis of Self-efficacy on the Association of Experiential Learning Engagement on the Participants' job Readiness for Hospitality Professional Practice

Effect	B	SE	t	p	BootLLCI	BootULCI	Interpretation
Total Effect (Experiential Learning Engagement → Job Readiness to Hospitality	0.6928	0.0309	22.42	< .001	0.6319	0.7537	Significant

Professional Practice)							
Direct Effect (Experiential Learning Engagement → Job Readiness to Hospitality Professional Practice)	0.1645	0.0265	6.199	< .001	0.1122	0.2168	Significant
Indirect Effect (Experiential Learning Engagement → Self-Efficacy →Job Readiness to Hospitality Professional Practice)	0.5283	0.0388	—	—	0.4521	0.6040	Significant

Furthermore, the indirect effect of experiential learning engagement on readiness through self-efficacy was also found to be significant (B = 0.5283, SE = 0.0388). The bootstrap confidence interval (BootLLCI = 0.4521; BootULCI = 0.6040) does not include zero, and therefore the null hypothesis could be rejected, which implies that the mediation effect is statistically significant. The results suggested that experiential learning engagement positively influenced students' self-efficacy, which in turn predicted their readiness for hospitality professional practice. The indirect effect (0.5283) was much greater than the direct effect (0.1645), indicating that a substantial amount of the impact of experiential learning engagement on readiness to hospitality professional practice was explained by self-efficacy.

Overall, the results demonstrate that self-efficacy mediates the effect of experiential learning engagement on the readiness for hospitality professional practice. Although experiential learning engagement directly contributes to the increased readiness, its largest role is manifested in the growth of students' confidence in the applicability of their knowledge and skills. In other words, the main result of such learning is that students gain motivation in the form of confidence in their capabilities.

In the study conducted by Chavez and Salvacion (2025) supports this conclusion by emphasizing mediator such as self-efficacy enables individuals to use the skills they have

developed more effectively, thereby enhancing their effectiveness. It further shows that readiness for hospitality professional practice is determined not only by the acquisition of competencies through experiential learning but also by the confidence to apply those competencies in real-world professional contexts. That is why self-efficacy complements experiential learning engagement as a critical factor in shaping students' career readiness. The overall findings highlight that experiential learning engagement and self-efficacy work together in developing students' readiness for hospitality professional practice.

Table 7 presents the Mediation Analysis of self-efficacy on the influence of Industry Support on the participants' Job readiness for hospitality professional practice. The results show that the total effect of experiential learning engagement on readiness for hospitality professional practice was found (B = 0.6928, SE = 0.0309, t = 22.42, p < .001), suggesting that experiential learning engagement has a positive impact on participants' readiness for professional practice in the hospitality industry. Students who report higher levels of experiential learning engagement are likely to express greater readiness for professional practice in the hospitality industry.

Table 7
Mediation Analysis of self-efficacy on the influence of Industry Support on the participants' Job readiness to hospitality professional practice

Effect	B	SE	t	p	BootLLCI	BootULCI	Interpretation
Total Effect (Industry Support → Job Readiness to Hospitality Professional Practice)	0.7086	0.0334	21.22	< .001	0.6429	0.7743	Significant
Direct Effect (Industry Support → Job Readiness to Hospitality Professional Practice)	0.1892	0.0265	7.143	< .001	0.1370	0.2414	Significant
Indirect Effect (Industry Support → Self-	0.5194	0.0417	—	—	0.4416	0.6074	Significant

Efficacy → Job Readiness to Hospitality Professional Practice)							

The findings found provide evidence that self-efficacy is an integral mediator between industry support and readiness for hospitality professional practice. A higher proportion of its influence is channeled through enhancement of self-efficacy. This implies that industry support not only offers students professional exposure, mentoring, and learning opportunities but also enhances their confidence in performing hospitality-related tasks effectively. Students who feel they receive greater industry support are likely to have higher self-efficacy which translates to increased readiness for hospitality professional practice. On the decision of the hypothesis, since the indirect effect was significant and the bootstrap confidence interval (BootLLCI = 0.4416; BootULCI = 0.6074) did not include zero, therefore Ho5 stating “Self-efficacy does not significantly mediate the association of industry support on the participants’ readiness to hospitality professional practice” is therefore rejected.

This finding is supported by Liu et al. (2022), who found that career decision-making self-efficacy mediated the relationship between work experience and students’ career expectations. Their study demonstrated that experiential and workplace-related experiences enhanced students’ confidence in making career decisions, which in turn improved their career-related outcomes. Similarly, Alharethi et al. (2025) found that confidence served as a significant mediator between internship experiences and work readiness among hospitality students. Their findings suggest that industry-based learning experiences become more effective in improving readiness when they enhance students’ confidence and perceived capability to perform professional tasks.

Conclusions

The study concludes that readiness for hospitality professional practice is developed through the interplay of experiential learning, industry support, and students’ beliefs in their own capabilities. The participants’ high assessments of experiential learning engagement, industry support, self-efficacy, and readiness suggest that their preparation for professional practice involved more than acquiring technical knowledge and skills. It also encompassed opportunities to apply classroom learning in practical situations, receive guidance from industry practitioners, respond to workplace challenges, and develop confidence in performing professional responsibilities. These dimensions collectively underscore the importance of providing hospitality students with learning experiences that integrate theoretical knowledge, practical application, and professional development.

The findings further establish that experiential learning engagement and industry support are important predictors of readiness for hospitality professional practice, with industry support demonstrating the stronger relative predictive contribution. This emphasizes the value of sustained collaboration between higher education institutions and hospitality industry partners in creating authentic learning opportunities, providing professional mentorship, and familiarizing students with workplace expectations. Although experiential learning provides opportunities to develop and apply competencies, industry support complements these experiences by connecting academic preparation with the actual demands of professional practice. Thus, the preparation of hospitality students requires not only a relevant curriculum and meaningful laboratory experiences but also a supportive industry environment that facilitates the development of work-related competencies.

The role of self-efficacy is evident in the relationship between experiential learning engagement, industry support, and readiness for professional practice. The mediation findings suggest that students' confidence in their capabilities represents an important pathway through which learning experiences and industry support are associated with their perceived readiness. Practical exposure and professional guidance may provide opportunities for students to develop not only their competencies but also their belief in their ability to perform effectively in workplace situations. Consequently, professional preparation should address both the development of actual skills and the strengthening of students' confidence in applying those skills. Self-efficacy therefore represents an important consideration in understanding how external learning opportunities and support relate to students' readiness for professional practice.

The findings also offer theoretical insights into the development of hospitality students' professional readiness. Ecological Systems Theory helps explain how the interaction between educational institutions and industry environments shapes students' learning opportunities and professional preparation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Social Learning Theory provides a perspective on how observation, modelling, mentorship, and practical experiences may contribute to learning and confidence development (Bandura, 1971). Meanwhile, Social Cognitive Career Theory explains the relevance of self-efficacy beliefs in students' career-related development and anticipated professional performance (Lent et al., 1994). Together, these theoretical perspectives support an understanding of readiness as a developmental outcome shaped by the interaction of environmental opportunities, learning experiences, and students' beliefs about their capabilities rather than as a quality determined solely by technical competence.

In a nutshell, the study concludes that preparing hospitality students for professional practice requires an integrated approach that combines experiential learning, meaningful industry engagement, and deliberate support for self-efficacy development. Higher education institutions may strengthen this preparation by aligning laboratory instruction and practicum experiences with industry expectations, fostering sustained partnerships with hospitality establishments, and providing mentoring and feedback opportunities that help students recognize and build on their capabilities. Through such approach, hospitality education can better support students in translating academic learning into

professional competence and developing the confidence needed to navigate the changing demands of the hospitality industry.

Recommendations

Considering the findings that experiential learning engagement and industry support contribute to the improvement of hospitality students' professional practice through the enhancement of self-efficacy, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Educational institutions are encouraged to continuously enhance experiential learning activities and laboratory subjects by incorporating interactive, collaborative, and authentic hospitality scenarios. They are also encouraged to integrate structured reflection and constructive feedback mechanisms into these learning experiences to strengthen students' critical thinking, adaptability, problem-solving skills, self-efficacy, and readiness for hospitality professional practice.

2. Hospitality industry partners are encouraged to strengthen and formalize their collaboration with academic institutions through structured mentorship programs, workplace immersion, and resource sharing. They are also encouraged to provide consistent guidance and authentic workplace experiences to help students understand industry expectations and develop the competencies required for professional practice. Furthermore, regular communication and consultation between industry stakeholders and educators are recommended to ensure that curricula remain responsive to evolving industry demands and that students are adequately prepared for their future professional roles.

3. For curriculum developers, the findings may serve as a basis for reviewing existing curricula to determine how experiential learning and industry collaboration are incorporated into hospitality education. Consideration may also be given to opportunities for strengthening partnerships between academic institutions and industry stakeholders to promote equitable access to professional learning experiences across campuses. In addition, curriculum developers may explore the integration of reflective activities and other self-efficacy development strategies to help students recognize their capabilities and better understand how their learning experiences and industry support relate to their readiness for hospitality professional practice.

4. For educational leaders, consideration may be given to prioritizing institutional resources and initiatives that support experiential learning and strengthen partnerships with the hospitality industry. Possible areas of consideration include the improvement of training facilities, faculty development, and the provision of industry-linked learning opportunities. Educational leaders may also consider developing institutional guidelines that facilitate sustained school–industry collaboration and support students' preparation for professional practice. These

efforts may be aligned with institutional priorities and the broader objectives of SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth.

5. For future researchers, further studies may explore additional factors associated with students' readiness for hospitality professional practice, including socioeconomic background, personality traits, institutional culture, and technological competencies. Longitudinal and comparative research across hospitality institutions and geographical regions may also provide a broader understanding of how students' professional readiness develops across different educational and industry contexts. Moreover, future investigations may examine other potential mediating or moderating variables to deepen the understanding of the mechanisms through which experiential learning engagement and industry support relate to students' readiness for professional hospitality practice.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The authors certify that informed consent was obtained, and the respondents were informed of their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. The respondents' anonymity was maintained. Data Privacy was secured. The respondents' well-being was maintained. No conflict of interest exists in the pursuit of this study. Plagiarism was firmly avoided. Neutrality in interpreting the findings was ensured. The results were used purely for research.

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