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To cite this article: Charalampos Giousmpasoglou (22 Oct 2025): Reclaiming Hospitality Education: A Critical Reflection, Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education, DOI: [10.1080/10963758.2025.2578541](https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2025.2578541)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2025.2578541>



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Published online: 22 Oct 2025.



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Reclaiming Hospitality Education: A Critical Reflection

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a critical reflection on the current state and future of hospitality education, grounded in the philosophical orientation of Biesta and Säfström's Manifesto for Education. It argues that hospitality education is currently under existential pressure from managerialist logics, academic elitism, and the erosion of its vocational roots. Rather than merely diagnosing the symptoms, this paper speaks for hospitality education. It reconceptualizes the field as an educational space invested in the formation of professional identity and freedom, not only employability. Drawing on a century of educational practice and contemporary pressures within and beyond the Global North, it offers ten propositions as a roadmap to realign hospitality education with its educational interest: the cultivation of the student as a hospitable subject. Through this critical reflection, a reframing of hospitality education that resists instrumentalism and reclaims its unique identity is advocated.

KEYWORDS

Hospitality education;
experiential learning;
curriculum development;
academic subject snobbery;
managerialism

Introduction

Hospitality education has evolved over more than a century in response to the growing complexity of the global hospitality industry. From its origins in dedicated hotel schools in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, hospitality management education has expanded into universities worldwide (Giousmpasoglou & Marinakou, 2024). Yet this expansion has been accompanied by persistent debates about the appropriate balance between vocational training and academic rigor, and the status of Hospitality Management as an academic discipline (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). In recent years, concerns have been raised that hospitality programmes may be losing relevance and attractiveness. The existing literature (e.g. Baum, 2019; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2019) indicates that despite increasing demand for skilled hospitality professionals, both employers and educational institutions struggle to attract sufficient student talent, suggesting the current model of hospitality education is faltering. At the same time, there is criticism that many hospitality degrees have drifted toward generic business education at the expense of practical skills, reflecting a form of academic subject snobbery that devalues applied fields (Jones, 2013). These issues are compounded by growing managerialism in higher education, expressed as the application of business management principles and cost-cutting measures in university decision-making, which

often threatens resource-intensive programmes like hospitality management (Sigala, 2021).

In the tradition of Biesta and Säfström (2011), this paper does not simply describe hospitality education; it seeks to speak for it. Today, the field faces two major threats: academic snobbery, which questions its intellectual legitimacy, and managerialism, which reduces it to cost-efficiency metrics and narrow employability goals. Together, these forces silence its educational voice. In response, this paper adopts a manifesto-inspired critique not to prescribe reform, but to disrupt, provoke, and reclaim an educational discourse for a discipline at risk of erasure. Speaking educationally, as Biesta and Säfström (2011) argue, means foregrounding the question of freedom not as mere choice, but as a relational, demanding freedom that enables students to come into subjectivity. At its best, hospitality education provides such a space: an encounter with service, responsibility, and otherness (Lynch et al., 2011). Yet these qualities are increasingly overshadowed by business integration, funding imperatives, and hierarchical academic norms.

This critical reflection examines the past, present, and future of hospitality education. It traces the field's historical development over the last century, explores how curricula have evolved to address industry needs, and interrogates the impact of academic elitism and managerial ideologies within higher education. Looking ahead, it considers calls for a renewed emphasis

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on the classic Swiss hotel school model and the revival of standalone institutions as a way to realign education with industry practice. The paper concludes by summarizing key insights and offering theoretical implications, practical recommendations, and directions for future research. Through this analysis, it argues for redefining hospitality education's identity to strengthen its relevance for both academia and industry.

Discussion

A Century of Hospitality Education

Hospitality management education traces its roots to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the rapid growth of hotels and tourism created a need for trained professionals. The world's first hotel school was founded in 1893 in Switzerland by Jacques Tschumi, *the Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL)* in response to a booming hospitality industry serving wealthy travelers. Early curricula in these pioneering institutions were firmly oriented toward practical training: students studied foundational subjects like arithmetic and languages, but most importantly applied their knowledge through hands-on practice in real hotel operations. This Swiss hotelier model emphasized mastering hotel functions (front office, food and beverage service, housekeeping, etc.) alongside basic business skills like bookkeeping (EHL, n.d.).

Across the Atlantic, a different approach to hospitality education emerged in the early 20th century. In 1922, *Cornell University* launched the world's first four-year *Hospitality Management* degree programme, at the urging of hotel industry leaders who sought greater professionalism in hotel management (*Cornell Nolan School of Hotel Administration*, n.d.). The American model of hospitality education that developed at Cornell and subsequently in other universities took a broader academic scope than the Swiss model. Whereas Swiss programmes remained specialized in hospitality operations, the American approach integrated a wider range of business and management subjects such as marketing, accounting, human resources, and economics, alongside hospitality-specific courses. This divergence gave rise to two distinct educational pathways: one centered on intensive practical and operational training, primarily adopted by Swiss and other European hotel schools; and another that positioned hospitality within a broader business education framework, as commonly seen in North American universities. Culturally, the two models also differed: the Swiss model stressed precision, tradition, and service excellence rooted in European fine hospitality culture,

while the American model put greater emphasis on customer service, entrepreneurship, and the needs of a diverse, mass-market hospitality context (Giousmpasoglou & Marinakou, 2024).

Post-World War II, hospitality and tourism grew into global industries, prompting a proliferation of hospitality management programmes worldwide (Figure 1). By the latter half of the 20th century, dozens of universities and colleges in Europe, North America, and beyond had established hospitality or hotel administration courses. Despite this growth, hospitality education remained largely vocational in orientation through the 1960s and 1970s, focusing on producing practically skilled graduates for an expanding industry (Baum, 2019). It was not until the 1980s that hospitality management began to gain recognition as an academic discipline worthy of theoretical study and research.

A landmark moment came in 1981 when a special issue on tourism education in the *Annals of Tourism Research* catalyzed scholarly interest in hospitality and tourism education (Ayikoru et al., 2009). The establishment of academic journals, research conferences, and professional bodies (such as the *International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education*, ICHRIE) in the 1980s and 1990s further solidified hospitality management as a field of study. Since then, the domain has matured with hundreds of degree programmes across the globe, from two-year diplomas to postgraduate degrees, often with diverse specializations (e.g. finance, marketing and human resources management).

By the 21st century, hospitality programmes had expanded well beyond their European and American origins, establishing a strong presence in Asia, the Middle East, and other regions alongside the globalization of the hotel industry (Giousmpasoglou & Marinakou, 2024). Notably, one of the world's top ten hotel schools is based in Hong Kong, *The School of Hotel & Tourism Management (SHTM)*, while other highly regarded institutions, such as *The Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management* in the UAE, have also gained international recognition.

Furthermore, several reputable hospitality education institutions are located in South America and Sub-Saharan Africa, reflecting the diversity of the field beyond the Global North. In South America, Argentina and Brazil offer notable programmes. The *Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA)* in Argentina is widely recognized as a leading public university with a strong academic reputation, including its hospitality-related courses (González Forero & Villegas Cortés, 2023). In Brazil, a range of quality hospitality programmes exists, although international recognition



Figure 1. Life in hotel schools. Source: <https://stratharchives.tumblr.com/>; <https://www.hotelschool.nl/>; <https://www.ehlgroup.com/en/about-ehl/milestones>; <https://alumni.cornell.edu/cornellians/100-years-hospitality/> (all pictures in public domain under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence).

varies across institutions (Barbosa & Oliveira, 2019). In Sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa stands out for its accredited programmes and institutional diversity (Mireku et al., 2025). *The International Hotel School* is well regarded and offers qualifications accredited by the *Council on Higher Education*. Leading universities such as the *University of Pretoria* and the *University of Johannesburg* also provide bachelor's degrees in Hospitality Management, alongside other specialized institutions committed to combining academic rigor with industry relevance.

Despite its global expansion, the history of hospitality education has been characterized by tension between its practical/operational industry-driven roots and the pressures of academia (Lashley, 2015). As hospitality programmes entered mainstream universities, they often sought to elevate their academic credibility by adopting more theoretical content and rigorous research, sometimes at the expense of practical training (Morrison & O'Gorman, 2008). Even so, hospitality education's vocational heritage continued to shape expectations both from students, who often enroll seeking industry-relevant skills, and from employers, who value graduates that can be effective in operational roles from day one (Jones, 2013). This dynamic has sparked continued debate within the subject. Although hospitality education has existed for over a century, its formal

recognition as an academic discipline only began in the 1980s. Its strong vocational orientation and close ties to industry have consistently raised questions about its academic legitimacy. As a result, hospitality education finds itself navigating a dual identity, striving to balance academic rigor with practical relevance.

The historical journey of hospitality education, from distinctive hotel schools to comprehensive university departments, sets the stage for examining these current challenges. The next part explores how hospitality curricula have evolved and what the industry now requires from graduates, highlighting a potential misalignment between curriculum design and industry needs that may be contributing to the decline in student interest.

Curriculum Requirements

A core issue in contemporary hospitality education is ensuring that the curriculum equips graduates with the knowledge and skills that the industry demands (Griffin, 2021). The hospitality industry is inherently service-oriented and operational, requiring a mix of technical competencies (in areas like food and beverage management, lodging operations, and event management) and soft skills such as communication, cultural awareness, customer service mind-set, and teamwork (Baum, 2015). Over time, curricula have expanded to

also include strategic management capabilities (marketing, finance, human resource management, etc.), reflecting the growing complexity of hospitality enterprises. The challenge for hospitality programmes is to balance these practical and theoretical elements in a way that produces “work-ready” graduates with both practical know-how and academic understanding (Lee et al., 2022).

Historically, the Swiss hotel school model set a high standard for curricula that tightly integrate theory with practice. Students in such programmes spend significant time in practical training environments (campus hotels, training restaurants, internships at hospitality companies) to apply in practice what they learn in the classroom. This model persists in some of the world’s top-ranked hospitality schools (Giousmpasoglou & Marinakou, 2024) and is credited with producing graduates who have a deep professional ethos and familiarity with industry realities. By contrast, as hospitality programmes migrated into university business schools, curricula in some institutions shifted toward a more generic business education. In extreme cases, certain hospitality degrees have essentially become business administration programmes with token hospitality modules added on. This dilution can leave graduates without the specialized skills or hands-on experience that set hospitality education apart. Jones (2023) identified a growing divide within hospitality education programmes. On one end of the spectrum are courses that provide in-depth training in hospitality operations and ownership, closely aligned with the traditional hotel school model. On the other end are programmes that resemble general business degrees, offering minimal hospitality-specific content. Employers have expressed concern that these academically skewed programmes contribute to a widening skills gap, as graduates often lack the practical competencies expected by the industry.

By the 2010s, signs of strain in hospitality education began to surface in certain regions. In the United Kingdom, for example, hospitality programmes faced declining enrollment and institutional restructuring. The number of university hospitality courses in the UK fell from 142 in 2014 to 127 in 2018, and some long-established programmes were downsized or threatened with closure (Jones, 2019). Glasgow Caledonian University withdrew its hospitality degree offerings, and even leading institutions like Bournemouth University and Oxford Brookes University indicated intentions to close their hospitality management courses by the end of the 2010s, denouncing this way their vocational backgrounds as polytechnics. These developments alarmed many educators and industry

practitioners, given that the UK hospitality sector employs a significant workforce and relies on a pipeline of qualified graduates (Ali et al., 2020). Similar challenges have been noted in other countries (Hsu & Li, 2021), raising the question: What is causing hospitality education to falter in attracting students and institutional support, despite the continued growth of the hospitality industry globally?

Recent studies highlight that the evolution of hospitality curricula has followed diverse trajectories across non-western contexts. For example, in Asia, programmes in Hong Kong and Singapore have increasingly integrated technology, sustainability, and entrepreneurial modules alongside traditional operational courses (Sharma & Munjal, 2023). Similarly, in the Middle East, institutions such as the Emirates Academy have adapted curricula to combine global standards with local cultural and service expectations (Areepattamannil, 2024). Across these regions, a common challenge persists: achieving a balance between theoretical frameworks and hands-on practice. These trends suggest that the debate extends far beyond the US-Swiss dichotomy and reflects a broader tension between academic and vocational relevance on a global scale.

While the global hospitality industry demands graduates with strong analytical and managerial skills, employers simultaneously expect proficiency in service delivery, which remains difficult to replicate in university environments (Stangl et al., 2024). Alexakis and Jiang (2019) argue that curriculum requirements for effective hospitality education, as recognized by both academic and industry stakeholders, should encompass competencies that reflect the needs of the modern hospitality sector. Table 1 summarizes the key components and required competencies of a well-rounded hospitality management curriculum. Each element reflects the evolving demands of the industry and highlights the importance of integrating both practical and theoretical learning. These components are essential in preparing graduates to succeed in a dynamic, service-oriented global environment, equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary for career progression and long-term industry engagement.

In summary, an effective hospitality management curriculum must be diverse and multifaceted, blending practical training with academic knowledge. When well-designed, such a curriculum produces graduates who not only understand theories of management and hospitality concepts but can also apply them on the job from their very early career stages (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). In addition, industry collaborations play a crucial role in keeping curricula

Table 1. Curriculum components in hospitality management programmes.

Operational Skills & Technical Knowledge	Core training in hotel and restaurant function e.g., front office, housekeeping, F&B) delivered through labs and simulations. Prepares students for immediate entry-level roles.
Management & Business Acumen	Covers business areas tailored to hospitality such as finance, marketing, HR, and strategy; crucial for managerial career progression.
Soft Skills & Emotional Intelligence	Emphasises interpersonal and leadership skill like communication, empathy, and problem-solving, developed through practical experience.
Internship & real-world Experience	Hands-on industry placements help students apply theory to practice, influencing career commitment and employability.
Contemporary & Global Topics	Includes areas like emerging technologies, sustainability, and global trends to equip graduates for a changing hospitality landscape.

relevant and up-to-date: advisory boards of industry professionals, accreditation standards (such as those by the *Institute of Hospitality* in the U.K. or *ACPHA* in the U.S.), and joined projects (such as Knowledge Transfer Partnerships), all help ensure that what is taught in the classroom aligns with the skills needed in hospitality businesses (Wang et al., 2018). However, achieving and maintaining this balance is not easy. Financial pressures and academic trends have led universities to cut back on the more expensive or resource-intensive aspects of hospitality programmes, such as training restaurants, demo kitchens, or internship support, in favor of the cost-effective classroom-based teaching of general concepts (Baum, 2015). The following part examines how academic subject snobbery and managerialist policies in higher education have contributed to this shift, and the repercussions for hospitality education.

Academic Subject Snobbery and Managerialism in Hospitality Education

Hospitality management, as an academic subject area, has often struggled against a perception of being “less serious” or intellectually lighter than other well-established disciplines such as business administration and marketing. This perception is a form of academic subject snobbery, a bias that values certain fields of study over others simply due to their subject matter or methodological approach (Becher & Trowler, 2001). In universities, there is a tendency for faculty in traditional disciplines (like pure sciences, economics, or literature) to regard vocational or professionally oriented programmes with a degree of condescension. Hospitality programmes, with their roots in vocational training, have frequently been on the receiving end of such attitudes. As Martin and Sorensen (2014, p. 64) note, snobbery in academia can be based on degrees and disciplines, and although often unspoken, it “*can have damaging effects on morale, research and public image*” of those subject areas being belittled. In the context of hospitality, subject snobbery can manifest in various ways: from the allocation of resources and faculty

positions to the recognition of research outputs and the career progression of academics.

Undoubtedly, one of the most significant challenges facing hospitality education has been the integration of hospitality departments into broader business schools or management faculties. While integration into a business school can provide hospitality programmes with administrative support and academic legitimacy, it can also dilute their distinct identity (Lugosi and Jameson, 2017). Hospitality departments often find themselves competing for resources with traditional management departments (e.g. finance, marketing and HRM) that may have higher status within the business school hierarchy. In pursuit of administrative efficiency or institutional prestige, university decision-makers have, in some cases, merged independent hotel schools into larger business faculties (Morrison, 2018). For instance, the renowned *Scottish Hotel School*, established in 1944, was absorbed by the *Strathclyde Business School* in 2009, while *Cornell’s* esteemed *School of Hotel Administration* followed a similar path, merging with its business school in 2016. Such restructuring sometimes comes with shifts in priorities: curricula may be adjusted to fit a broader business curriculum, and faculty hiring might favor candidates with generic management research profiles over those with industry experience. Hospitality academics have reported feeling that publishing in hospitality-specific journals or focusing on industry-applied research is less valued in promotion and tenure decisions compared to publishing in mainstream management journals (Giousmpasoglou & Marinakou, 2024). This kind of internalized snobbery pressures hospitality scholars to orient their work toward broader business or social science conversations, potentially at the expense of addressing practical industry problems through applied research.

Subject snobbery also influences strategic decisions by university management. Under the ethos of *managerialism*, many universities today operate with a corporate mind-set, emphasizing cost efficiency, revenue generation, rankings, and research metrics (Stolz, 2017). Programmes that are expensive to run or that do

not align with high-prestige research areas can become targets for downsizing. Unfortunately, hospitality management programmes often fall into this category for several reasons. First, delivering a high-quality hospitality programme typically requires smaller class sizes for skills-based courses, and practical training facilities such as training kitchens, student-run restaurants, or hotel labs (Lashley, 2015). These are resource-intensive and may not generate direct revenue, making them look unprofitable or expensive to operate. Second, hospitality as a field does not attract large external research grants compared to sciences or engineering, which means from a research income perspective it may seem less impactful (Tribe, 2010). Third, in academic rankings and evaluations (such as national research assessment exercises), hospitality is a relatively niche field that might not score as highly as larger disciplines, affecting a university's incentive to invest in it (Ottenbacher et al., 2009). The combination of these factors can make hospitality programmes vulnerable when university executive teams and decision makers apply strict business criteria to academic programmes.

A vivid example of the tension between managerialist decision-making and the pedagogical needs of hospitality education is the case of Oxford Brookes University in the UK. In 2020, the university announced the closure of its on-campus training restaurant, a central feature of the *Oxford School of Hospitality Management* curriculum. The decision was officially justified on the grounds that the facility was incurring an annual financial loss of approximately £280,000. However, this figure was calculated without attributing any portion of student tuition income to the restaurant's educational function (Lake, 2019). The move was met with strong opposition from experienced hospitality educators and industry professionals, who accused the university of a cynical misrepresentation of the facility's value. They argued that had tuition revenue been appropriately allocated, the financial deficit would have been significantly reduced or eliminated. More critically, they questioned the logic of assessing a proven and pedagogically vital teaching facility solely on the basis of short-term financial performance. Unlike practical components in other disciplines, such as engineering laboratories or architecture studios, the training restaurant was treated as a cost center rather than a core academic asset. This disparity suggested an underlying bias, reflecting a broader tendency to undervalue the practical training elements essential to hospitality education.

This incident is emblematic of a broader trend. When subject snobbery and managerialism converge, hospitality education can suffer a double impact: lack of respect and lack of resources. The outcome, as seen in many UK

universities, is programme closures or a retreat to purely classroom-based teaching, which in turn further diminishes the distinctiveness and appeal of the hospitality degree (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). It is a vicious circle: the less practical and industry-relevant a programme, the easier it is for critics to label it irrelevant or low-value, reinforcing snobbish attitudes and justifying more cuts. It is therefore argued that the managerialist agendas turn students into future revenue units rather than human beings seeking meaningful development. A hospitality education that forgets its educational interest becomes an uncritical training regime or an academic imitation of business studies.

Biesta and Säfström (2011) warn against tying education too closely to either “what is” (the status quo) or “what is not yet” (idealized futures). Hospitality education sits uncomfortably in this tension. Programmes that adapt entirely to current university norms risk becoming generic business degrees with minimal relevance to industry practice. Conversely, those that nostalgically cling to a vocational past may overlook the critical and reflective demands of higher education. A meaningful hospitality education inhabits the space between “what is” and “what is not,” honoring its vocational heritage while critically engaging with evolving industry and social realities. This dilemma is not unique to hospitality. Fields such as teacher education (Goodwin et al., 2023) and nursing (Benner et al., 2009) also struggle with the question of whether professional preparation is best achieved through academic institutions or workplace-based models (e.g. apprenticeships). Similar tensions have arisen through the Bologna Process, where harmonization of European higher education has often led to the absorption of vocational disciplines into generic academic programmes (Vucaj, 2015). These cross-sectoral parallels add weight to the hospitality case.

Institutions that have resisted the managerialism and academic subject snobbery trends, illustrate the advantages of valuing hospitality education on its own terms. A notable example is the *Edge Hotel School* in England, established in 2012 through a partnership with the University of Essex. The school offers a distinctive model in which students pursue an academic degree while gaining hands-on experience by working in a fully operational country-house hotel (the *Wivenhoe House*), which functions as their training environment (Jones, 2013). The concept behind this initiative was to emulate the high standards of leading European hotel schools, such as those in Switzerland, and to address concerns about the growing theoretical orientation of hospitality education at the expense of practical training. The model was well received by the industry, which

viewed it as a meaningful return to the foundational principles of hospitality education, combining applied learning with academic rigor. The Edge Hotel School demonstrates that, with the right vision and investment, it is possible to uphold academic excellence while also offering immersive, practice-based education that produces graduates respected for their competence and job readiness.

In summary, academic subject snobbery has contributed to hospitality education being undervalued in some higher education circles, and managerialist policies have often operationalized this bias through budget cuts and programme restructurings. However, the value of a well-rounded hospitality education combining theory and practice, is strongly affirmed by industry outcomes and student success stories. The next section discusses future directions for hospitality education, arguing that to meet both academic and industry expectations, the subject area should reclaim some of the features of the classic hotel school model and possibly reorganize itself outside of traditional business faculties. This includes embracing an identity that is proudly vocational and academic, rather than trying to fit a mold imposed by other disciplines.

Reclaiming Hospitality Education: A Roadmap

The discussion has critically explored the major challenges confronting contemporary hospitality education, including the misalignment between curricula and industry expectations, the enduring influence of

academic subject snobbery, and the structural implications of managerialist policies within higher education. It has further highlighted the pressing need for educational models that integrate academic rigor with practical relevance. To respond to these challenges, this paper advances ten guiding propositions (Figure 2) presented as a roadmap for reimagining the future of hospitality education. These are not intended as prescriptive solutions, but as thought-provoking principles, articulated in the spirit of Biesta and Säfström's (2011) Manifesto for Education. While the principles outlined are not entirely new, variations of which have been proposed by passionate advocates over the past four decades, their consistent implementation has been hindered. Despite broad consensus within the hospitality academic community on the urgency of these actions, meaningful reform continues to be obstructed by entrenched managerialism, academic elitism, institutional short-sightedness, leadership deficiencies, and a persistent lack of subject-specific understanding.

Building on these insights, the following sections examine future directions for hospitality education, articulate the theoretical and managerial implications of this critical reflection, and outline key priorities for future research.

Future Directions

Hospitality education stands at a critical juncture, facing both existential challenges and unprecedented opportunities (Sigala, 2021). A recurring theme throughout this

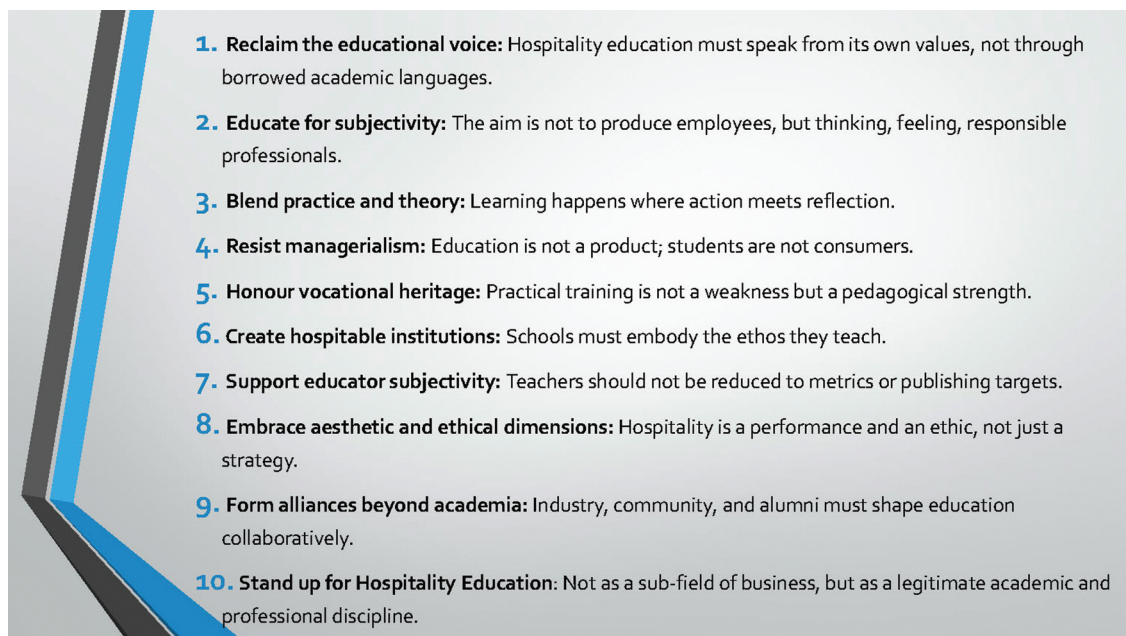


Figure 2. A roadmap for the future of hospitality education.

critical reflection is the need to realign educational practices with the evolving demands of the hospitality industry. To remain relevant, programmes must balance academic rigor with practical relevance, embed innovation, and cultivate a distinct identity rather than being subsumed under generic business schools.

One clear recommendation is to draw inspiration from the Swiss hotel school model, which integrates immersive, practice-based learning with academic depth. This approach has sustained institutions such as *EHL* in Switzerland and *Hotelschool The Hague*, whose graduates enjoy global recognition and strong employment outcomes. These programmes demonstrate that rigorous theoretical foundations and hands-on experience can coexist, producing graduates capable of strategic thinking and operational excellence (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017).

Universities should consider establishing or partnering with industry to create practical training environments such as student-operated restaurants, simulation labs, or campus-based hotels, that serve as living laboratories. These facilities allow students to apply classroom learning to real operational challenges, improving job readiness and employer satisfaction (Solnet et al., 2007). It is argued that recommitting to practical training does not imply abandoning academic rigor. On the contrary, theory provides the analytical tools necessary for graduates to progress into leadership roles. Innovative funding models, such as revenue-generating teaching hotels (e.g., Cornell's *Statler Hotel*), joint ventures, or industry sponsorship for equipment and facilities, can offset costs and strengthen partnerships (Wang et al., 2018).

Curriculum content must remain dynamic and responsive to evolving market demands. Emerging priorities such as sustainability, digitalization, data analytics, and leadership in a post-pandemic context are shaping the competencies required of future hospitality leaders (Griffin, 2021). To enhance both employability and academic value, programmes should incorporate industry-recognized certifications (e.g., HACCP, CHIA) and adopt case-based teaching methods rooted in real-world scenarios. Sustainability and resilience should serve as foundational pillars of hospitality education. Graduates will increasingly be expected to address complex environmental, social, and financial challenges while managing disruptions such as pandemics and climate change. To prepare students for this reality, sustainability principles must be embedded across all core courses, complemented by initiatives that promote ethical decision-making and inclusive practices. Such an approach aligns with the values of a socially conscious generation of students and future leaders (Berjozkina & Melanthiou, 2021). Achieving this level of curricular agility requires

strong collaboration with industry advisory boards to ensure alignment with current and future skill needs (Jones, 2019).

Furthermore, programmes should maintain robust research literacy and critical thinking components while ensuring that these are consistently tied to hospitality practice (Rosenkranz, 2022). Case-based learning, problem-based projects, and applied research collaborations with industry partners represent effective strategies for achieving this integration. In addition, the pandemic accelerated digital adoption, opening new pedagogical possibilities. While experiential learning remains central, blended learning models, virtual simulations (e.g., HOTS business simulation), and AI-driven tools can complement hands-on training (Dogru et al., 2025). These technologies enhance engagement, enable risk-free decision-making practice, and provide flexibility for learners unable to access physical facilities. Hospitality education must also cater to lifelong learning needs by offering modular, flexible programmes for working professionals. Micro-credentials in niche areas such as boutique hotel management or sustainable gastronomy, alongside executive education, can expand the field's reach and relevance (Solnet et al., 2016).

Another bold recommendation concerns governance. Hospitality programmes embedded in generic business schools often suffer from misaligned priorities and resource constraints. Granting these programmes greater autonomy, or reestablishing standalone hotel schools, can enhance their ability to deliver specialized curricula and secure the infrastructure necessary for experiential learning. Standalone schools, such as those in Hong Kong, Macau, and historically at Cornell, have cultivated strong academic and industry reputations, partly due to their ability to sustain a distinctive culture that values both practical excellence and scholarly inquiry (Giousmpasoglou & Marinakou, 2024). Where creating independent schools is not feasible, forming global alliances offers an alternative. Networks like the Institut Lyfe's Alliance demonstrate the value of cross-institutional collaboration for sharing best practices, fostering mobility, and amplifying the visibility of hospitality education worldwide. Such alliances can strengthen the field's collective voice and counteract perceptions of marginality within academia.

Conclusion and Implications

The past, present, and future of hospitality education provide fertile ground for both scholarly reflection and practical innovation. From its origins in the modest hotelier schools on the shores of Lake Geneva in the late 19th century to today's global network of diverse programmes,

hospitality education has evolved significantly (Giousmpasoglou & Marinakou, 2024). Yet, it now stands at a critical crossroads. To remain relevant and evolve, it must embrace its distinctive strengths while addressing systemic challenges that have contributed to its marginalization within higher education (Baum, 2006).

The future depends on the sector's ability to reaffirm its deep connection to a dynamic global industry and its unique capacity to integrate practical training with rigorous academic learning (Ladkin, 2011). This integration should not signal a retreat from scholarship but rather a commitment to cultivating graduates who combine critical thinking with operational expertise, research literacy with leadership capability. A renewed emphasis on the hotel school ethos coupled with greater autonomy from generic business faculties, offers a pathway to innovation, curricular agility, and industry alignment (Griffin, 2021).

The coming decades should aim for a renaissance of this model: producing graduates who are not only professionally competent but also adaptable, ethical, and visionary leaders capable of navigating disruption and shaping the future of hospitality (Berjozkina & Melanthiou, 2021). By daring to innovate while staying true to the core values of hospitality – excellence in service, cultural awareness, and human connection – educators and industry leaders can ensure that hospitality education does more than survive; it can thrive as a global benchmark for blending theory, practice, and passion in the service of an ever-changing world.

Theoretical Implications

This critical reflection reinforces the enduring relevance of experiential learning theories (Kolb, 2014) in vocationally oriented higher education. The success of the Swiss model illustrates the value of pedagogies that integrate concrete experience with reflective observation. By challenging the false dichotomy between academic and vocational education, hospitality provides a compelling case for pluralistic conceptions of knowledge that value practical intelligence alongside abstract reasoning (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). It also contributes to debates on curricular alignment with professional competencies (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2019). Furthermore, it is argued that constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996) remains central: learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessments must cohere around the goal of producing graduates who combine operational competence with strategic insight. Finally, the discussion of institutional positioning highlights the importance of organizational diversity in higher education (Huisman et al., 2015). Standalone hospitality schools exemplify how specialized academic units

with distinct missions can thrive within universities, provided governance structures support differentiation rather than homogenization.

Managerial Implications

This critical reflection paper offers important insights for university leaders, hospitality school directors, and industry stakeholders. A major risk is the tendency to manage hospitality programmes exclusively through financial metrics, a perspective often described as the “accountant approach.” While cost efficiency matters, this view ignores the strategic value of hospitality education, which enhances employability, institutional reputation, and industry partnerships. Although such programmes may not generate significant research income, they function as institutional flagships (Baum, 2006). University decision-makers should adopt a long-term perspective, recognizing benefits such as alumni success, brand equity, and potential industry funding for training facilities and events. The closure of Oxford Brookes University's training facility illustrates how short-term cost-cutting can damage reputation. Effective governance requires vision, entrepreneurial thinking, and inclusion of academic voices, alongside budgetary frameworks that support high-cost, high-impact disciplines (Griffin, 2021). Hospitality school leaders must prioritize advocacy and innovation. Demonstrating relevance through graduate employment rates, alumni achievements, and employer satisfaction is essential (Ladkin, 2011). Leaders should also embrace entrepreneurial strategies, such as fundraising and partnerships for sponsorships, guest lectureships, and scholarships.

Industry has a critical role in sustaining talent pipelines. Employers should provide structured internships, engage on curriculum advisory boards, and contribute as guest lecturers or project sponsors (Baum, 2006). Initiatives like case competitions and real-world projects align graduate skills with industry needs (Rosenkranz, 2022). Where gaps persist, businesses should co-create bridging programmes and internships (Wang et al., 2018). Finally, accrediting bodies and policymakers must recognize experiential learning as integral to quality standards. Funding models should avoid disadvantaging high-cost fields like hospitality, which deliver significant social and economic value (Berjozkina & Melanthiou, 2021).

Future Research Directions

Future research should explore comparative outcomes between graduates of traditional hotel school models and management-oriented programmes to assess their

impact on career progression, performance, and industry engagement. Identifying persistent skills gaps, focused on leadership, service excellence, analytics and sustainability, through industry-informed studies will further align curricula with evolving market needs.

The issue of academic subject snobbery within higher education warrants deeper examination. Qualitative and survey-based research could reveal how hospitality as a discipline is perceived and what institutional dynamics contribute to its marginalization. Case studies of programme closures or strategic investments would also provide evidence on the long-term consequences of managerialist decision-making for enrollment, reputation, and student outcomes.

Additional inquiry should focus on factors influencing students' decisions to enter or leave hospitality education, including field perceptions, outreach effectiveness, and the role of internships in shaping career intentions. The pedagogical potential of technology, such as virtual simulations and online learning tools, also merits evaluation, particularly for replicating experiential learning in resource-constrained contexts. Finally, longitudinal analyses of hospitality curricula across diverse regional and cultural contexts could track shifts in content and priorities, offering insights to guide best practices for integrating sustainability, digital innovation, and practical learning into future programmes.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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