

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN BACHELOR IN PROFESSIONAL
HOSPITALITY EDUCATION: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Tara Jang Thapa* for the degree of *Master of Philosophy in Educational Leadership*, presented on *8 May 2026*, entitled *Experiential Learning in Bachelor in Professional Hospitality Education: A Narrative Inquiry*.

APPROVED BY

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This study explores students' experiences during their Bachelor in Professional Hospitality (BPH) program. Bachelor degree in professional hospitality colleges, the institutional setup for enhancing students' practical learning. Experiential learning in educational institutions, especially in hospitality, helps students better understand how the hospitality industry works in the real world.

The main purpose of the study was to understand how students experience learning through practice and how they make meaning of their academic and industry exposure. The research was based on the personal narratives of BPH students.

I employed a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to explore the following research question: How do students narrate their experiences of Experiential Learning in Bachelor's in Professional Hospitality education, and what meanings of educational relevance of experiential learning in higher educational professional studies do we draw from these narratives? The study included six students of two colleges (College A, located in Kathmandu, and College B at Kavrepalanchok) in Bagmati province from diverse social, economic, and geographical backgrounds. For data collection, I conducted face-to-face, unstructured interviews with students and direct observations of the classroom and the premises for their hands-on training. Meanings were drawn using criteria such as transcribing, coding, categorizing, and identifying themes from students' narratives.

I identified seven different themes that emerged from the participants' stories. They were: (1) Early experiences and inclinations; (2) Aspiration of hospitality education, (3) Curriculum and pedagogies, (4) Experiencing resources and facilities, (5) Experiences with academic supports, (6) Experiences as an intern and as an early career professional, and (7) Practical applications of the learning.

This study's findings show practical work-based learning approaches in college, including learning-by-doing, student-centered learning, and collaborative learning. Likewise, this study also indicates that students improve their skills by developing subject-specific skills, such as communication, problem-solving, time management, teamwork, cooperation, collaboration, personal skills, and entrepreneurial skills through experiential learning in hospitality education. But for it to work properly, colleges and hotels need to work collaboratively, provide adequate facilities, employ effective pedagogical practices, and offer strong support to students. The study does not only talk about the problems raised at the beginning. It also explains how students face those problems in real life and what lessons can be learned from their experiences.

The findings of this study highlight implications for theory-to-practice, policymakers, educational leadership, and future learners and research scholars who implement and design experiential learning in hospitality education.

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8 May 2026

Tara Jang Thapa
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शोध सार

शैक्षिक नेतृत्वमा दर्शनशास्त्रको स्नातकोत्तर उपाधिका लागि तारा जंग थापाको शोधप्रबन्धको शीर्षक “व्यावसायिक आतिथ्य शिक्षामा स्नातक तहमा अनुभवात्मक सिकाइ : एक संकथन” २५ वैशाख २०८३ मा प्रस्तुत गरिएको थियो।

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उप. प्रा. श्रीकृष्ण वाग्ले, पीएचडी
शोध निर्देशक

यो अध्ययनले नेपालका व्यावसायिक आतिथ्य व्यवस्थापनमा स्नातक तह (बीपीएच) अध्ययनक्रम अन्तर्गत विद्यार्थीहरूले आफ्नो शैक्षिक यात्रामा प्राप्त गरेका अनुभवहरूलाई अन्वेषण गरेको छ। व्यावसायिक आतिथ्य व्यवस्थापनमा स्नातक तह कार्यक्रम व्यावहारिक सिकाइलाई सुदृढ बनाउने संस्थागत संरचना हो। विशेषतः आतिथ्य शिक्षा क्षेत्रमा अनुभवात्मक सिकाइले विद्यार्थीहरूलाई व्यावसायिक आतिथ्य शृंखलाको गहिरो बुझाइलाई विकास गर्न सहयोग पुऱ्याउँछ।

यस अध्ययनको मुख्य उद्देश्य विद्यार्थीहरूले अभ्यासमार्फत सिकाइलाई कसरी अनुभव गर्छन् र आफ्नो शैक्षिक तथा औद्योगिक अनुभवबाट कसरी अर्थ निर्माण गर्छन् भन्ने बुझ्नु थियो। यो अनुसन्धान स्नातक तह (बीपीएच) विद्यार्थीहरूको व्यक्तिगत अनुभव र कथनहरूमा आधारित थियो। मैले गुणात्मक कथनात्मक अनुसन्धान विधि प्रयोग गर्दै निम्न अनुसन्धान प्रश्नको अन्वेषण गरेको छु : आतिथ्य व्यवस्थापनमा स्नातक तह (बीपीएच) शिक्षामा अनुभवात्मक सिकाइका सन्दर्भमा विद्यार्थीहरूले आफ्ना अनुभवहरू कसरी वर्णन गर्छन्, र यी कथनहरूबाट उच्च शिक्षामा अनुभवात्मक सिकाइको शैक्षिक सान्दर्भिकताका कस्ता अर्थहरू निकाल्न सकिन्छ ? भन्ने अध्ययनमा बागमती प्रदेशका दुई कलेज काठमाडौँमा अवस्थित कलेज “ए” र काभ्रेपलाञ्चोकमा रहेको कलेज “बी”) का विभिन्न सामाजिक, आर्थिक तथा भौगोलिक पृष्ठभूमिका छ जना विद्यार्थीहरू समावेश गरिएको थियो। तथ्यांक सङ्कलनका लागि विद्यार्थीहरूसँग प्रत्यक्ष असंरचित अन्तर्वार्ता तथा कक्षा र व्यावहारिक तालिम स्थलहरूको प्रत्यक्ष अवलोकन गरिएको थियो। विद्यार्थीहरूको कथनहरूको प्रतिबिम्बका आधारमा ट्रान्सक्रिप्सन, कोडिङ, वर्गीकरण तथा विषयवस्तुहरू पहिचान गर्ने प्रक्रियाबाट अर्थहरू निकालिएका छन्।

मैले सहभागीहरूको कथनबाट सात वटा फरक विषयवस्तुहरू पहिचान गरेको छु : (१) प्रारम्भिक अनुभव र रुचि, (२) आतिथ्य शिक्षाप्रतिको आकांक्षा, (३) पाठ्यक्रम र शिक्षण विधि, (४) स्रोतसाधन र सुविधाहरूको अनुभव, (५) शैक्षिक सहयोगका अनुभवहरू, (६) प्रशिक्षार्थी (इन्टर्न) तथा प्रारम्भिक पेशागत अनुभव, र (७) सिकाइका व्यावहारिक प्रयोगहरू।

यस अध्ययनका निष्कर्षहरूले कलेजमा प्रयोग हुने व्यवहारिक तथा कार्यआधारित सिकाइका विधिहरू, जस्तै गरेर सिक्ने, विद्यार्थी केन्द्रित सिकाइ, तथा सहकार्यात्मक सिकाइलाई देखाएका छन्। त्यसैगरी, आतिथ्य शिक्षामा अनुभवात्मक सिकाइमार्फत विद्यार्थीहरूले सञ्चार, समस्या समाधान, समय व्यवस्थापन, टोलीमा काम गर्ने क्षमता, सहकार्य, व्यक्तिगत सीप तथा उद्यमशीलता जस्ता विषयगत र व्यवहारिक सीपहरू विकास गरी आफ्नो क्षमता सुधार गरेको पनि अध्ययनले देखाएको छ। तर यसलाई प्रभावकारी रूपमा सञ्चालन गर्न कलेज र होटलहरूले आपसी सहकार्यमा काम गर्नुपर्छ, पर्याप्त सुविधा उपलब्ध गराउनुपर्छ, प्रभावकारी शिक्षण पद्धति अपनाउनुपर्छ, तथा विद्यार्थीहरूलाई आवश्यक सहयोग प्रदान गर्नुपर्छ।

यस अध्ययनका निष्कर्षहरूले सिद्धान्तलाई व्यवहारमा रूपान्तरण गर्ने प्रक्रिया, नीतिनिर्माता, शैक्षिक नेतृत्व, तथा आतिथ्य शिक्षामा अनुभवात्मक सिकाइ कार्यान्वयन र डिजाइन गर्ने भावी विद्यार्थी तथा अनुसन्धानकर्ताहरूका लागि महत्वपूर्ण संकेत प्रदान गरेका छन्।

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तारा जंग थापा
उपाधि उम्मेदवार

२५ वैशाख २०८३

This dissertation, entitled *Experiential Learning in Bachelor in Professional Hospitality Education: A Narrative Inquiry.*, was presented by *Tara Jang Thapa* on 8 May 2026.

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I understand that my dissertation will become a part of the permanent collection of the library of Kathmandu University. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work, and it has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree at any other university.

.....

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8 May 2026

DEDICATION

This work is profoundly dedicated to my facilitators of Kathmandu University School of Education (KUSOED), my family (Father, mother, maternal uncles and aunts, spouse, daughter, daughter-in-law, son, son-in-law, granddaughter, brother, and sister), my students, friends, my research participants, and their colleagues who have been part of my life, to whom I am always indebted. It is because of their effort and guidance that I was able to complete my dissertation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

APA	American Psychological Association
BHM	Bachelor of Hotel Management
BPH	Bachelor's in Professional Hospitality Management
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CTEVT	Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training
EL	Experiential Learning
ELT	Experiential Learning Theory
F&B	Food and Beverage
FO	Front Office
GATE	Global Academy of Tourism and Hospitality Education
GM	General Manager
HE	Hospitality Education
HK	Housekeeping
HM	Hotel Management
HMTTC	Hotel Management & Tourism Training Center
HR	Human Resource
HRM	Human Resource Management
KU	Kathmandu University
KUSOED	Kathmandu University School of Education
KUSOM	Kathmandu University School of Management
MOEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MPhil	Master of Philosophy
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
NATHM	Nepal Academy of Tourism and Hotel Management
NOREC	Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OOM	One-On-Many
OOO	One-On-One
RPL	Recognition on Prior Learning
SEE	Secondary Education Examination

SLC	School Leaving Certificate
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TU	Tribhuvan University
TV	Television
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UGC	The University Grants Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
WBL	Work-Based Learning
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I have discussed how I am personally motivated by the topic of my research, which sparked my interest. As I introduce the research title, I connect it to my lived experiences, which I further explore through a problem statement, the study's rationale, the study's purpose, and the research question that guides the study and delimits its scope.

Setting the Scene

I was born in a hilly village of Sindhuli. However, I studied in Ramechhap at my maternal uncle's home until high school. I worked for about 2 years after completing the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) as a Primary school teacher in my neighboring district, where I studied through the high school level. Afterward, I came to Kathmandu from Sindhuli to pursue further studies. In search of a better career, I worked at a non-star hotel as an entry-level staff member and became a manager at the same property after 2 years. In 1989, I completed a captain training program at the Hotel Management and Tourism Training Center (HMTTC). At the same time, I was working and studying together at Tribhuvan University (TU). I had done an internship as a captain at one of the five-star hotels as a course requirement. At the same time, although I was an intern, I worked as a supervisor and supportive staff member. I experienced how the staff behaved towards interns. I remember those days, blending theoretical and practical experience, and the way evaluation was conducted. I came to know about the hotel industry, from non-star to five-star hotels in Nepal and abroad. Additionally, as an accidental academic leader (transitioning from a hotelier to an academician), I have gained approximately nine years of teaching experience in Hospitality Colleges. Correspondingly, the University Grants Commission (UGC) stated that there are over 77 hospitality management colleges in Nepal; to strengthen professional education in hospitality, it should be led by individuals with academic rigor and industry expertise. Therefore, this study is based on my role as an MPhil scholar in educational leadership, my prior hospitality experience, and an instructor lens.

The Context of Experiential Learning in Hospitality Education

Experiential Learning (EL) is an educational process in which students gain knowledge, real-life experiences, and the opportunity to actively participate and to transform theory into day-to-day work. EL's key aim is to provide practical situations where individuals can actively apply and demonstrate their understanding of leadership and decision-making roles. Brennen (2017) mentioned that EL offers students the opportunity to practice and apply their knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a minimum-risk environment. This helps them develop a more practical understanding of mission, vision, values, and goals. Croft and Wang (2023) stated that experiential learning should align with current industry trends to enhance students' learning. Experiential learning in hospitality studies encompasses institutional requirements, including social experiences, creative innovation, and engagement with society. Professional hospitality education highlights the teaching and learning modalities across various hospitality fields. Similarly, graduates are expected to be prepared for managerial roles across various sectors or to specialize within a specific industry. Furthermore, students learn better when they conduct practical work and receive proper guidance in a real field, which helps hospitality students learn in a significant way.

Equally important, competing in the national and international hospitality sectors requires skilled and competent leaders (Bhattarai, 2025). It represents a pioneering, innovative, student- and industry-focused, hands-on/apprenticeship model in hospitality education. KUSOM's concept for the Bachelor in Professional Hospitality (BPH) program is to provide opportunities to industry professionals who are currently underrepresented due to various challenges. Correspondingly, students pursue more theoretical knowledge in the first and second semesters, and in the remaining semesters, they gain hands-on practical, research, and theoretical knowledge in industry and at the college. After completion of the program, they are eligible for an academic credential and industry-required skills.

Accordingly, studies have established that work-based learning, whether hands-on or apprenticeship, has been widely regarded as a vocational approach in higher education. Maheshwari (2011) predicted that practical education aims to empower learners by shifting from the traditional focus on historical and social heritage to meet the future needs of both learners and the industry. I admire that education, a social good, is constantly evolving, so it should be inquired about and

confirmed through new experiences. Since “Life is not conventional, and there is a stable need for enhancement,” this phenomenon equally implies hospitality education. Along with this, the most crucial idea, EL in-hospitality education, is the best integration of theory, practice, and production, in which social experience is integrated through active, creative activities performed by students in the real world. The application of EL in hospitality education reveals the efficiency of accepted methods (Azar et al., 2020). Similarly, the combination of knowledge and hands-on skills helps students make meaningful connections, integrate pedagogy and practical sessions on the college’s premises under the supervision of mentors/facilitators, and exposure to events and internships (Sebby & Brown, 2020). Moreover, the BPH program, EL integrates formal and informal learning in the classroom and in field visits, for example, through internships and externships. This is; therefore, I believe that EL is based on real-life activities, which is important in the long term. Subsequently, the fusion of hand, head, and heart is paramount in this process, nurturing social competence and essential life skills (Grigor & Frentzos, 2021).

Similarly, when it is infused with Eastern philosophy, it offers a distinctive pedagogical framework that incorporate hands-on practice with the values of mindfulness, harmony, and interconnectedness; based in traditions for example Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, experiential learning in hospitality education, when infused with Eastern philosophy, offers a distinctive pedagogical framework that integrates hands-on practice with respect of mindfulness, harmony, and being connected. Sharma and Monteiro (2016) described that, in eastern philosophy, hospitality education leadership emphasizes being present in the moment, cultivating internal awareness, and acknowledging the nature of human interactions. These principles align with the core of EL, which holds that learning occurs through knowing, being, and doing (Kolb, 1984). In hospitality education, service, empathy, and play are facilitated as mediators.

Statement of the Problem

Hospitality colleges face many challenges in experiential learning due to mismatches in curricula, advances in technology, globalization, resource constraints, and the need to adopt modern teaching methods (Dillette & Sipe, 2018). Nursyazana et al. (2017) highlighted that academic institutions, industry experts, and policymakers need to resolve challenges.

Nepal faces a critical “brain drain” issue, necessitating a focus on “brain gain,” where skilled professionals and academics leave the country for better opportunities abroad due to a lack of emphasis on experiential (hands-on) teaching and learning. I started the question myself: Why can we not create quality education in our country? Why are graduates going abroad for study and internships? Why are we unable to provide plenty of opportunities? What are the various factors that skilled and knowledgeable human resources are flying abroad and are unable to retain? How can we improve the quality of hospitality education, taking note of accessibility, affordability, and adaptability for students? Experiencing these questions, I noted, a few of the questions resolved from the “Hospitality Leadership Symposium 2024,” organized by KUSOM, as I participated, the speakers' voices; they were focusing on gaps such as research, academia, and industry collaboration, the mindset of students learning, and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), as well as other factors in professional hospitality education.

Usually, students experience challenges maintaining a balance between academic needs and industry practice, at the same time, physiological and psychological stress in social environments, which can impact their learning and well-being. Furthermore, the current trend among students and researchers is to move to another country, in search of professional education and job opportunities (Joshi, 2023). Although there has been a rapid increase in hospitality education institutions, a notable difference exists in that students pursuing degrees lack competency. Similarly, the expenses of hospitality education pose a considerable challenge for the average Nepali. From my personal and professional experience, I have found that teaching methods vary from one college to another, and a few academic institutions lack the required resources and infrastructure. Given its innovation, the BPH program remains relatively unfamiliar to many. Moreover, the curriculum varies across universities; some also offer international programs (Thapa, 2018a).

As an MPhil scholar, a hospitality college facilitator, and an experienced hotelier, I intended to explore the experiences and stories of BPH students in Bagmati Province, Nepal. Many hospitality students are going abroad for higher education. The ongoing trend of skilled personnel, professionals, and intellectuals leaving for better opportunities internationally may continue, and a sustained decline in educational quality may hamper global competitiveness. The hospitality education, pursuing a degree without the required skills, diverse expenses, and limited access in

remote areas, exacerbates educational inequalities. It is observed that a lack of publicity, awareness, and details about the BPH may lead to a slower adoption rate and potentially inefficient implementation of an important educational program.

EL is a crucial pedagogical strategy in professional educational programs and plays an important role in students' knowledge development (Maier & Thomas, 2013). Christou and Chatzigeorgiou (2020) highlight the importance of hands-on training in hospitality education, which focuses on the practical application of theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. Cooper et al. (2004) stated that meaningful learning increases student involvement and helps students acquire more skills; learners maintain industry-based, hands-on learning by applying philosophical knowledge to mastery. Likewise, in the hospitality education field, Lin et al. (2017) stated that the implication of intertwining theoretical learning with practical exposure is particularly evident in professional education, such as hospitality management. However, when applying this concept in Nepal, despite the existence of an undergraduate hospitality program, BPH, followed by hands-on learning, there has been limited empirical research to assess the effects of EL on students' learning experiences and its impact on leadership workspaces.

The global hospitality industry requires 21st-century skilled human resources with soft skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018), within a framework of sustainable, high-quality education (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017). In our country (Nepal), a significant implementation gap is observed, with the program failing, which fails to be implemented in the classroom. Despite the design of the learning-by-doing professional program, the BPH, a lack of industry-academia collaboration, resource shortages, and conventional teaching compromise the development of real competence (Joshi & Yadav, 2021). The failure of educational leadership to adapt global standards to local realities, as Subedi (2023) noted, results in a skills mismatch, high educational costs, and an increasing "brain drain" as students seek better opportunities abroad for hospitality education and the job market. Seeing continuous development for a competency-based curriculum facing a hurdle, a gap between hospitality policy and reality. Academic and practical should be in tune with the preferences and needs of the hospitality industry.

To keep an eye on publicity for experiential learning, especially the BPH program's publicity, is not done in a down-to-earth way. For example, in one conversation, one of the medical doctors asked me where I work, my reply was at the hospitality college, and to the BPH students, he was surprised and again asked how it is possible in a hospitality college Bachelor in Public Health (BPH), so because of a lack of advertisement and publicity, the program could not reach everywhere.

Hence, the main concern of this study is that experiential learning in hospitality education in Nepal is inconsistently or ineffectively applied, even though it is known to be important for preparing skilled graduates for the industry. While programs like BPH focus on hands-on learning, gaps exist between what is planned in the curriculum and practice in industry–academia collaboration, limited resources, teaching methods, leadership challenges, and opportunities after graduation.

In summary, the problem (gap) of this study is that BPH students experience learning in this program, but lack access to real stories of learning experiences from students enrolled in the BPH program.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore (and draw meaning from) how students narrate their prior learning experiences, inclination toward hospitality education, and experiential learning experiences at the Bachelor in Professional Hospitality (BPH).

Research Questions

- How do students narrate their experiences of Experiential Learning in Bachelor in Professional Hospitality education?
- What meanings of educational relevance of experiential learning in higher educational professional studies do we draw from these narratives?

Rationale of the Study

EL plays an important role in global hospitality education, connecting theory and practice and fostering students' development in teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking through real-world practice. This approach motivates and enhances knowledge retention for the demands of the hospitality field, including internships, externships, fieldwork, group discussions, and hands-on applications.

During the learning process, students need to be better aligned with the hospitality industry, which may help them become more attached to the industry or

provide the much-needed knowledge and experience within the educational setting. It is the responsibility of post-secondary institutions and hospitality management departments to make such arrangements so that the learning process helps hospitality students succeed after graduation (Chhabra et al., 2022). Additionally, this study is appropriate for those seeking a career in hospitality. Firstly, this study helps me, as well as undergraduate students in a BPH, improve experiential and socio-cultural learning in hospitality education. Secondly, the study, to some extent, helps textbook authors (if applicable) and curriculum developers to incorporate diverse levels of experiential learning, especially in Bachelor's programs in hospitality education.

During the learning process, students need to be better aligned with the hospitality industry, which may help them become more attached to the industry or provide the much-needed knowledge and experience within the educational setting. It is the responsibility of post-secondary institutions and hospitality management departments to make such arrangements, ensuring the learning process helps hospitality students succeed after graduation (Chhabra et al., 2022).

Experiential learning in hospitality education provides a holistic understanding of the philosophy of educational leadership while enabling students to reflect, discuss, and explore the foundational, along with the emergent, educational leadership theories, practices, and issues, to establish their own leadership practices and experiences within the theoretical discourse of educational leadership and build their capacity to conceptualize and analyze. This research is therefore justified in its focus on experiential learning as a means to help students establish leadership practices and experiences within the broader theoretical discourse of educational leadership. This is essential to make future educators, policymakers, academic leaders, and hospitality professionals who can contribute meaningfully to institutional development and education quality.

In this regard, the rationale of this study is evident in its focus on students' actual learning experiences. It helps minimize the theory-practice gap in hospitality education in Nepal.

Delimitations of the Study

As a scholar engaged in research, I established boundaries and delimitations and consciously included and excluded specific elements. Delimitations arose from my specific choice of experiential learning in hospitality education for this study.

The study targeted BPH students from two colleges: one in Kathmandu and another in Kavrepalanchok, Bagmati Province, Nepal. There are various sectors in the hospitality industry and hospitality colleges; however, for those doing externships, internships, on-the-job training, and jobs in the hotel industry, BPH Colleges in Bagmati Province were delimited for data collection to cover stories and experiences of experiential learning in hospitality education based on the knowledge obtained from students' narratives.

By exploring students' narratives, it includes 1) their prior learning experiences, 2) inclination to education, and 3) experiential learning experiences at the Bachelor in Professional Hospitality program, while excluding broader institutional factors or experiences their inclination toward hospitality education, and their experiential learning within the Hospitality education program. Experiential learning theory and socio-cultural learning theory constituted the theoretical framework for the investigation, while alternative theories, such as constructivism theory, could have been examined in connection with the study.

The study delimits its scope to exploring students' prior learning experiences, interest in hospitality education, and experiential learning experiences in the BPH program, and to examining (and evaluating) the curriculum content and institutional policies of the BPH program is beyond the scope of this study.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study consists of six chapters. Chapter I sets the scene for the study, highlighting the problem statement, rationale, purpose, research question, and delimitations. Chapter II presents a literature review of experiential learning, hospitality education, Kolb's experiential learning, and Vygotsky's social-cultural learning theory. In addition, an empirical review, hospitality education policy, and theoretical referents on the necessity of theories, the research gap, and the theoretical framework figure are highlighted. Chapter III presents the methodology adopted in the study, including the philosophical foundation, research paradigm, study approach, study sites and participants, participants' profiles, collection of participants' stories, meaning-making, quality standards, and ethical considerations.

Chapter IV discusses students' experiential learning, highlighting seven significant themes: early experiences and inclinations; aspirations in hospitality education; experiences with resources and facilities; experiences with academic supports; experiences as an intern and as an early-career professional; and practical

applications of the program. Chapter V discusses the meaning-making of experiential learning in hospitality education for students, highlighting how prior experience and career aspirations shape their learning experience; that an internship can seem challenging but offers manifold opportunities; and the need to balance theory and practice. Chapter VI brings the dissertation to a close, reflecting on the process and significance of the study and on the implications for theory-into-practice in hospitality education, policymakers, curriculum developers, educational leadership, and future learners and research scholars. It includes what's next in educational leadership.

Chapter Summary

This chapter, by setting the study's scene, explained in detail the context of experiential learning in hospitality education. Subsequently, a chapter presented the problem statement, research questions that guided the study. The study also discussed the study's rationale and delimitations. Finally, it outlined the dissertation's structure in detail. Based on the study's purpose, rationale, and research questions, I will present the literature review and a theoretical framework in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature relevant to the field of study addressed in my narrative inquiry on experiential learning in hospitality education. This chapter discusses the basic concepts of experiential learning, the research area, relevant evidence studies, hospitality policy, theoretical guidelines, a brief justification of Kolb's experiential learning theory and Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory, research gap, and the theoretical framework.

Experiential Learning

Theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom can only augment the theoretical dimensions of hospitality education, highlighting skills gaps and mismatches (Kayes & Kayes, 2021). Students may have underdeveloped skills necessary for success in future endeavors if they are not given opportunities to apply their expertise in contexts beyond traditional curricula norms. Classroom-based learning in hospitality education limits the real-world practice experiences of theoretical knowledge, passive learning through lectures, provides fewer opportunities for skill development, and fosters dependence on memorization rather than promoting (Xu et al., 2023). However, they contend that effective learning should be within meaningful activities, specific contexts, and cultural settings. Given the nature of this setting, it is essential to anticipate experiential learning in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to integrate classroom-based theoretical knowledge with work.

EL is an engaging learning process that uses hands-on practice and reflection-in-action to connect theories and skills learned in institutions with the world for better outcomes. It is the combination of knowledge and hands-on skills that helps learners to make meaningful learning, integrating pedagogy and teaching (Ellerby, 2018). According to students, they gain knowledge and skills from mentors and apply them in the real world of work. This way, students can link what they study in class with what they do at work, and they understand hospitality service better by doing it themselves.

In the lecture on experiential learning, Swami Vivekananda, cited by Kalgi et al.(2023), emphasizes the value of knowledge and skill acquisition as an asset in an organization's pursuit of human capital, which is the primary and most likely the only source of competitive advantage. "Reflection-in-action theory" is influenced by cognitive emotions (Marathe & Sen, 2021). External and internal mechanisms monitor, evaluate, and modify the emotional influence to achieve goals in teaching and learning. One-on-one (OOO) and One-on-Many (OOM) are the fundamental principles of effective teaching and learning in experiential education, which revolves around hands-on, immersive experiences.

Experiential learning is learning through practice. The effectiveness of this thought process is determined by the learners' willingness to engage and participate in the learning experience. Experiential learning is a way for students to gain practical experience applying concepts learned in the classroom to real-world situations. Focusing on the learner's cognitive processes, the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is an appropriate theory for educational studies. It can be used to evaluate the fit between students and learning opportunities (Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning theory is relevant to this study on instructors' and students' experiences in practice in hospitality education, as it relates to learning through experience. Work-based learning (WBL) happens in a real workplace. Students gain real-world experience there and learn how to apply their classroom knowledge in actual work (Bhattarai, 2025; Thapa, 2023).

In EL, the mentor plays a significant role in learners' growth for soft skills, also called generic skills. This facilitation enables learners to acquire hard skills, such as professional and academic competencies, by engaging in real-world work environments (Holzer & Lerman, 2014). Similarly, students are given opportunities to gain practical experience in authentic work settings and engage in entrepreneurial endeavors within these professional contexts (Subedi et al., 2023).

Turesky and Gallagher (2011) assert that diverse experiences have contributed to students gaining more knowledge in line with industry requirements, highlighting the need to be purposeful and reliable in hands-on training. Roberts (2003) described several essential concepts in Dewey's experiential learning theory that are central to the philosophy of experiential learning education. Similarly, Kelly (1997) clarifies that experiential learning goes beyond mere "fieldwork" or "praxis," although it is the foundation for these approaches. EL is the "hands-on learning experience reflecting

with doing, and doing with reflecting.” For this determination, BPH students are assigned to national and international internships (Curry, 1990). Furthermore, curriculum design, instructional methods, assessment, and guidance are aspects of teaching and learning crucial for students' long-term growth in EL. The persistent problems in measuring and identifying relevant learners' characteristics include the application of learning style theory in teaching and learning.

EL activities should be incorporated into both formal and informal education. An educational system may also enrich its teaching and learning with non-formal, experiential, education-based activities, or, why not, informal ones. Experiential learning involves lifelong, continuous learning, and we firmly believe that “practicing learning according to real life, being part of experience, of trying is a social skill and necessary, until the end of time (Chhetry et al., 2024).

As hospitality management programs vary, so too do the quality and nature of the experiential learning components they offer. Feedback from both the hospitality industry and post-secondary institutions suggests a need for proper integration between the hospitality industry and educational programs to refine the scope and content of both theoretical and experiential learning components offered to students. “To meet the needs of the rapidly changing hospitality industry, educators must continually investigate and identify the essential competencies demanded by the industry and revise the curriculum to meet these needs” (Sisson & Adams, 2013 p.131), thereby achieving the much-needed integrated educational outcomes.

The concrete experience (Curiosity to learn/Diverging) involves learners directly engaging in personal experiences, relying on emotions, and encountering real-world situations, such as hands-on experiments and practical activities (Kemouss et al., 2024). In this phase, students practice according to industry standards, including food preparation, table setting, making reservations, and making beds. The learners should not be rushed as they need the time to observe, reflect, improve, and practice. The facilitator needs to ensure that they also take time to deliver/demonstrate the skills. Trainers must ensure they are well prepared with the resources available to learners and have tested the skills to be delivered.

Reflective observation (Muscle Memory/Assimilating) of learning occurs when students repeatedly practice a movement or task. Motor learning is a process in which learning happens through repeated practice and reflection on experiences, fostering introspection and critical thinking, and they analyze outcomes and consider

different perspectives (Kilag et al., 2024). While doing so, the learners will take the opportunity to reflect on what they are doing, e.g., preparing the meals; they need to reflect on the correct ingredients and quantities. Also, if they have been shown how to organize a meal in a certain way, they will reflect on what they have learned and incorporate it into their own practice. It is about them recalling what they have been taught by the experienced, industry-qualified trainer and incorporating this into their practical tasks. The learners will reflect on their new skills, assess how well they are using them, and identify any improvements needed.

The Abstract conceptualization (Mastery/Converging) phase occurs when students perform self-analysis and improve their skills. They analyze the meal's preparation by reflection and seek to enhance it. The students transition from concrete experiences to abstract thinking, creating theories and concepts based on reflection and organizing information to form suggestions (He et al., 2022). In the same way, abstract conceptualization follows reflective observation, wherein the students generate a new idea. This phase represents the learning derived from the experience.

Active experimentation (Innovative Execution/accommodating) is the phase in which students implement their innovations and test what they have learned (Morris, 2020). Following Morris, for the facilitator, this is an opportunity for the students to practice their skills (Owens, 2020). During the learning phase, hospitality students will practice and perfect their meal preparation skills by applying abstract concepts to new situations, making predictions, and refining their understanding through practical experimentation.

Significantly, all phases form an iterative learning process, where movement through them contributes to effective and comprehensive learning. Also, hospitality education is about the senses (seeing, smelling, touching, tasting, and hearing), making EL a crucial element in skill development.

Benefits of Experiential Learning in Hospitality Management Education

There are many benefits for students who are involved in experiential learning activities, including personal, academic, professional, and career-related outcomes. Furthermore, EL in-hospitality education emphasizes job opportunities after or during the academic journey. Moreover, Lee (2008) stated that most students who come to their program as hesitant and confused freshmen leave as leaders with grace, confidence, and a bright future. EL enables hospitality students to understand how they personally fit into the industry, helping them not only secure employment but

also discover career paths that will engage them in the long term, facilitating retention and the development of industry leaders.

Moreover, the benefits to students who participate in experiential learning, specifically, outcomes that address both hard and soft skills, are the most essential. Furthermore, the need to develop and address a specific set of skills in response to industry demands is a primary reason why incorporating hospitality management programs under the broader umbrella of hospitality administration programs would be highly challenging. Thus, the placement of students in various hospitality industries as “trainees” has become an academic requirement (Lee, 2008), enabling them to gain the necessary work experience to supplement their theoretical training. Additionally, experiential learning in hospitality education programs has seen a growing emphasis on “soft skills,” for example, communication, teamwork, resiliency, adaptability, problem-solving, technology, and time management. The experiential learning perspective has been shown to effectively enhance these skills in students. Therefore, greater adoption of these approaches further fosters the employability of graduates of these programs.

Challenges of Experiential Learning in Hospitality Management Education

The hands-on knowledge students gain through their EL influences their theoretical experience. Over time, the goal has been to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical education. The “academic” and the “vocational” were meant to exist in conversation and to be mutually constitutive; neither was meant, within the framework of cooperative education/experiential learning, to be acquired in isolation. Indeed, in hospitality management education, a well-integrated, well-designed experiential learning curriculum is both academically and practically worthwhile; nevertheless, educators need to know if and why experiential learning remains valid from an industry perspective. According to the Lee (2008) the curriculum design, perceptions of hospitality management professionals regarding students who fulfilled their experiential learning requirements in hospitality establishments, should be incorporated, but the design of the curriculum needs to incorporate the perceptions of hospitality management professionals regarding students who fulfilled their experiential learning requirements in hospitality establishments. This has been achieved only to a limited extent. While the industry's occupational nature lends itself well to experiential components, as seen in many hospitality management courses, these approaches can sometimes be disconnected from industry changes. Furthermore,

this emphasizes the essential nature of an approach designed in dialogue with sector representatives and regularly revisited and updated. Moreover, new theoretical curricular designs need to be consistently integrated with experiential learning approaches, ensuring that these are embedded throughout the coursework, including the business and marketing aspects.

Higher education administrators and instructors are under pressure to provide more effective and efficient services, in general and in the hospitality education sector in particular. According to Lyu et al. (2016), their research indicates that teaching serves as an essential vehicle for achieving institutional goals of increased effectiveness, efficiency, and enhanced student learning. Hence, educators are always looking for ways to make their educational initiatives more effective. However, institutions and industry place less emphasis on how students acquire knowledge. Moreover, learning is a collective work. The outcome of student and teacher activity in the learning atmosphere (Asrifan et al., 2025). Similarly, the key to effective education is understanding the range of student learning styles and designing instruction and resources that directly address individual learning needs. Romanelli et al. (2009) found that learning styles are thoughtful features, perceptual, and physiological behaviors that provide relatively consistent indicators of how learners perceive, interact, and respond to the learning environment. This directly underscores the need for studies in hospitality management education that fully consider current students' experiences and how they understand the knowledge associated with a specific course outcome.

Professional Hospitality Education

Hospitality Education (HE) is the study of hospitality. It provides a level of active thinking and practical knowledge. It is based on a practice-based education that incorporates institutions and industry. It differs from conventional hotel management education by focusing on continuous learning and routine work. Also, Mekouar et al. (2023), in their article, they described that the study examines how students understand their supervisors' views on education and whether those supervisors support them in completing their studies.

HE is where students gain skills and competencies through courses in various subject areas, including the four pillars of sectors. Consequently, the hospitality curriculum prioritizes subjects according to the industry's apparent importance, which reflects the industry's ever-changing needs (Gursoy & Swanger, 2004). It will be

helpful and vital to obtain students' perceptions to ascertain the effectiveness of EL in their academic careers, general readiness, retention, and success in real-world hospitality sector settings (Purcell & Quinn, 1996).

Hence, Hospitality Education Programs are where students develop skills and competencies through courses in various subject areas. Therefore, the hospitality curriculum should prioritize subject areas based on how important students found experiential learning practitioners to be. This priority must be regularly updated to reflect the continuously changing needs of the industry (Gursoy et al., 2013).

Empirical Review

An empirical review means learning from past research about how students learn in hospitality education. Studies show that students understand better when they learn by doing, such as through internships, practical classes, and real-life projects. These activities help students improve their skills, become more active learners, and better prepare for future jobs, rather than classroom teaching. A recent study by Alharethi et al. (2025) found that experiential learning helps hospitality students develop both soft and hard skills. In soft skills, they learn how to solve problems, think positively, build confidence, work under pressure, manage time, and adapt. In hard skills, they will be independent for the physical work and day-to-day activities. The educational approach in the experiential learning process at the hospitality colleges is fundamentally based on experiential learning (Thapa, 2023).

Kolb (2015) explained that learning happens in a learning cycle: students' first experience, then think about it, understand it, and apply it again in real life. In the same way, Vygotsky (1980) stated that students learn better when they interact with teachers, friends, and supervisors/mentors. Studies in hospitality education also show that practical learning helps students build confidence, communication skills, and problem-solving ability (Busby, 2003). Many students feel there is a gap between what they learn in college and what is needed in real jobs (Jackson, 2013). This happens because of fewer practical classes, a weak connection between college and industry, and poor guidance during internships. Lave and Wenger (1991) stated that students learn more when they are involved in real working environments. Overall, these studies show that learning by doing, thinking, and practicing again helps students become skilled and confident, but it needs proper support, planning, and a real-world connection (Shrestha, 2021a).

Listening falls short of the clarity achieved through vision, sight is surpassed by the richness of experiential understanding, and authentic learning surpasses both. Experience and academia have an intimate relationship with each other in the EL process, as in Dewey (1986) integrating college, student, and employer roles is crucial for all throughout EL to navigate the industry's mission, vision, and goals. Moreover, in Nepal, the growth of hospitality colleges and the industry has been remarkable, leading to a substantial number of students interested in pursuing hospitality-related courses and jobs (Shrestha, 2021b).

Bhattarai (2021) found that significant steps are needed to address problems inherent in Experiential Learning and in millennial teachers' efforts to engage students in a high school context. Due to varying learning experiences with technology, learners have different approaches and expectations.

Subedi et al. (2023) described how students gain business knowledge and skills from the various practices, including mentorship, internships, and classroom activities. They also learn by interacting with people, problem-solving, handling events, participating in workshops, going on field visits, engaging in group discussions, conducting research, and gaining international exposure. Learning outcomes encompass the development of students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. This study points out that future technological advancements will further influence the processes and methods of experiential learning (Wu & Yang, 2025).

The students develop wisdom linked to past experience and apply it in the real world of work. They understand service better when they interact with guests, developing empathy and professional behavior (Sheth et al., 2024). EL helps them see their abilities through trying new ideas and practicing in the real world (Lockitt, 2024). They learn how to respect different cultures when they interact with people from different backgrounds. Implementing experiential learning in hospitality education enables students to acquire simple and complex skills through hands-on, actively engaging learning experiences, enabling them to learn through experience.

Sharma (2025) found that the culture of hospitality is resilient and adaptable, facing both opportunities and challenges, by offering recommendations for tourism planning, promoting gender equity, and preserving cultural heritage. Monaghan et al. (2017) found that graduates' perceptions of their experiential learning are crucial for equipping them with essential skills for their future professions. Common experiential learning modalities in agricultural education encompass teaching farms, internships,

research experiences, and part-time employment (Coker et al., 2017; Monaghan et al., 2017; Stirling et al., 2017).

Students also become stronger and more flexible when they face and manage difficult learning situations, learn through experience, reflection, and social interaction. Hospitality education is skill-based, and therefore, its effectiveness is visible in the way it gives place to field-based, real learning experiences

Hospitality Education Policy

Constitution of Nepal 2015, clause 31, subclauses 1 and 2, state that every citizen has the right to gain education (Constituent Assembly Secretariat [CAS], 2015). The Higher Education Commission Plan (HECP) 2018 has established a policy to address all communities, with a focus on education. CTEVT Acts 1988, and The Kathmandu University Act, 1991 also intended to empower the resources that address the education needs of all citizens at all levels of the country (Nepal Law Commission [NLC], 1988).

The curriculum generally focuses on management and commercial courses (Thapa, 2018b). The center point of learning through experience, most lecturers on "Teaching Methods" believe that focusing on more than theoretical learning is preferable. They also emphasize that experiential learning leads to improved student achievement. Chickering (1977) described experiential learning as the process wherein an individual changes their judgments, feelings, knowledge, or skills through active participation in and experiencing an event. "Despite the rapid growth of hospitality education, the current hospitality education system emphasizes the need for a skilled human resource to address the industry's requirements" (Lyu et al., 2016, pp.296-315). More precisely, Biswakarma and Dhakal (2023) found that challenges, for example, a lack of learning resources, limited participation of concerned authorities, and less focus on faculty development, hamper effective implementation. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2023) emphasizes education as key to achieving quality education and encourages the design of curricula that support EL with sustainability, digital skills, and inclusiveness.

The European Skills Agenda 2020 and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) highlighted skills development, apprenticeship and internship, and transitional recognition of qualifications to unify hospitality training across the region. The policies encourage the development of human resources and the provision of

quality service. Similarly, South Asian countries, such as Sri Lanka and Bhutan, highlight the combination of competency-based and cultural hospitality education.

Theoretical Referents

In this section, socio-cultural learning theory and experiential learning theory in hospitality education are discussed. Here, I have chosen these theories because they help me construct meaning and reality through interaction with participants whose diverse backgrounds, assumptions, and experiences contribute to that construction. This study uses Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Learning Theory (1978) as its theoretical referents because, together, they explain how Bachelor in Professional Hospitality (BPH) students learn through doing activities and interacting with others.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

EL involves generating knowledge by transforming experiences. According to McLeod (2024), in experiential learning theory, the development of new concepts is prompted by engaging in new experiences, thereby entering a continuous learning phase. The fundamental principles of EL theory are widely used by educators in higher education who employ experiential methods (Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

Mentors help students' learning by planning. This technique is clearly outlined in the program, encouraging them to reflect after each piece of work. Creating a friendly group environment, students can learn from each other and try new and creative ideas. As far as learning phases are concerned, learning occurs within a social environment (Gavillet, 2018). Knowledge is gained through social constructs and based on personal experiences (Coulson, 2023). According to Croft and Wang (2023) EL in HE provides industry requirements on the effectiveness of implemented EL methodologies. It is widely applied in hospitality education and the hospitality industry, and is often more effective than traditional classroom learning.

Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Learning Theory

Vygotsky (1978) explained that Socio-cultural learning theory holds that learning is primarily a social process shaped by cultural context, language, and interaction with others. He further mentioned that individuals first acquire knowledge through social interaction and internalize it through a culturally mediated process. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is a concept introduced by Vygotsky that posits that learners gain knowledge and skills through collaboration and guidance rather than on their own. When learners engage in collaboration, group activities,

support from teachers, friends, and tools, they will gradually become competent. Equally, another part of learning is language, which plays a major role in the learning process as a communication tool and a means of organizing thought. Without doubt, in hospitality education, this theory helps in EL by highlighting guidance, practice, and contextual environments that support learners' development in professional and personal competencies through continuous engagement in service (Daniels, 2016).

The lens that an individual (BPH student) chooses to view the scope of society forms as a classroom. Sociocultural theory studies human society and social behavior through social interaction and social phenomena (Chirkov, 2020). Hence, a sociological perspective is a perspective on hospitality students' behavior and its connection to society, through experiential learning experiences and societal (e.g., classroom/industry) relationships in the process of experiential learning in hospitality education.

To sum up, learners build skills by working with others, receiving guidance, engaging with peers, and taking part in meaningful activities that reflect the real hospitality industry. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory explains that learning occurs through social interaction, particularly when students work with mentors, seniors, and experienced people within the ZPD (McLeod, 2025). With the help, for instance, guidance and step-by-step support (Scaffolding), learners gradually learn on their own. This enhances the learners' understanding through interaction, listening, memorization, and practice in EL.

Why Kolb and Vygotsky: Justification for Theoretical Referents

This study uses Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Learning Theory as its main theories because, together, they clearly explain how Bachelor in Professional Hospitality (BPH) students learn through doing activities and interacting with others. Kolb's experiential learning theory cycle explains that different learning happens in phases. Learners cannot learn in one time. It contains four phases: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In hospitality education, these are evident in students' experiences, such as internships, industry placements, and practical training. For example, when a student handles a problem with a guest, it is a concrete experience that he/she learns from mentors or seniors. After that, the student thinks about what went right and what went wrong; this is reflective observation. Then the student understands and makes a new idea or way to handle such situations,

which is abstract conceptualization. After that, the student uses this new idea in future work, which is active experimentation. In this way, students understand their experiences better and improve their professional skills through the learning process (He et al., 2022).

Kolb's learning cycle primarily focuses on how an individual learns by reflecting on their own experiences, while Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory views learning as a process that occurs through social and cultural interaction. A key idea in Vygotsky's theory of development is the ZPD, which means students can learn better and do more when they get guidance, support, and work together with more experienced people.

Students share feedback from managers during service practice, which helps them complete tasks they could not do on their own. Vygotsky also emphasizes the importance of language, interaction, and cultural tools, which aligns with the multicultural and service-based nature of hospitality, where learning occurs naturally through social and cultural experiences (Daniels, 2016).

Hence, in this dissertation, Kolb's and Vygotsky's theories are used together to demonstrate that EL is important for individual learning. Kolb's theory stated that students learn by doing, reflecting on their experiences, trying again, implement in an innovative way. Vygotsky's theory demonstrates that learning occurs from interaction with teachers, mentors, peers, and culture. Additionally, when combined, these theories provide a strong framework for understanding and analyzing the students' narrative explained in this study. From an educational leadership perspective, this means the course and learning place should be planned so students can learn individually and together in groups, with mentors' support and respect for culture. In this way, leader can help hospitality students learn not only technical work, but also how to adjust in different situations, talk properly with others, and continue learning in their life, which is needed in different situations, talk properly with others, and continue learning in their life, which is needed in real work.

Research Gap

I reviewed various literature studies on experiential learning in hospitality education. While reviewing earlier studies, I found several research works. After reading those dissertations and scholarly works, I learned that various studies on experiential learning had been undertaken in quantitative papers. Fewer studies explore experiential learning among higher education students in subjects other than

hospitality management education. This is a gap in the study. Furthermore, in my literature review, Thapa (2018a) highlighted that Kolb's experiential learning cycle process needs to be studied; in Nepal's context, it seems less focused, and insufficient attention has been devoted to researching students' perceptions and experiences. This research gap overlooks the valuable insights that students can offer, thereby impacting the overall understanding of their expectations and aspirations. But no effort is evident in conducting academic studies to explore BPH students' career aspirations and real learning experiences.

In various research analyses, there has been less focus on qualitative research in Nepal. Along the same lines, in my personal and professional experience, teacher development programs are also given less priority. Furthermore, the current curriculum appears to fall short of providing a balanced blend of theoretical knowledge and hands-on skills essential to industry performance (Thapa, 2018b). The essential bridge between academic study and lived experiences is the experiential learning component of the curriculum.

Likewise, different teaching methods and standards are applied across colleges, which may result in varying quality of education in hospitality. Regarding diverse teaching methods that affect the uniformity and quality of the educational experience, they can influence students' preparation for future roles in the industry. Compared to other topics, the limited emphasis on research within hospitality education is notable (Lau, 2023). The essential bridge between academic study and lived experiences is the experiential learning component of the curriculum.

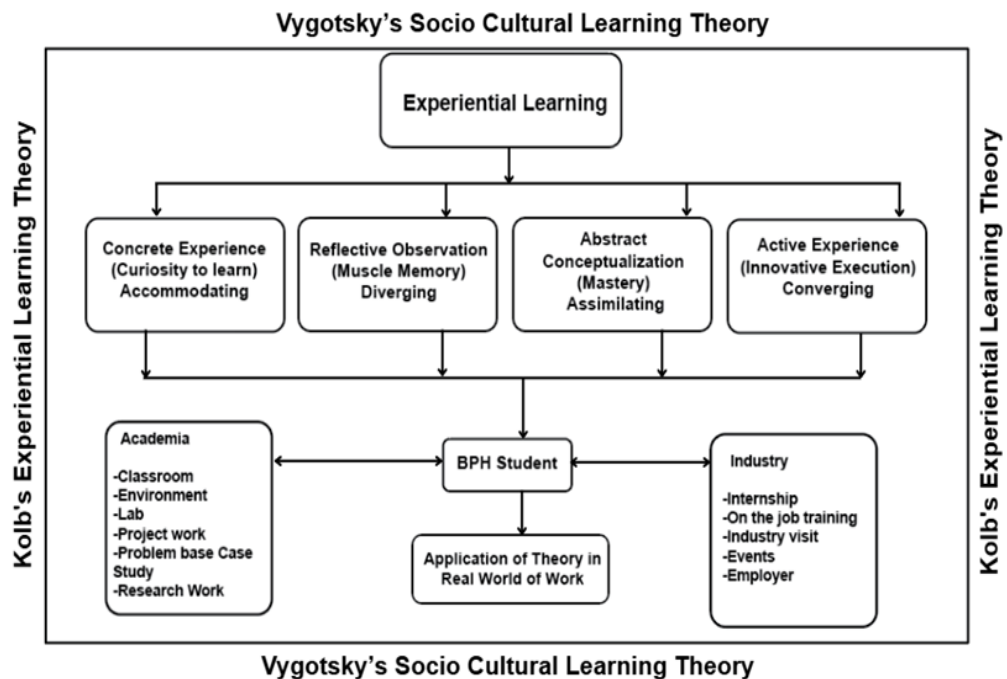
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is supported by key literature reviews, such as empirical reviews, hospitality education policy, and theoretical guidelines. A theoretical framework serves as the basis for the study, using existing theories to understand and explain the research problem. It also helps the researcher to see and interpret students' experiences in a meaningful way (McGregor, 2018). In this study, the empirical review focuses on prior research on experiential learning in hospitality education, demonstrating how students learn more effectively through practice and experience. Hospitality education policy explains the rules and guidelines that shape how hospitality programs like BPH are designed and implemented. The theoretical guidelines are based on Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory and Kolb's

experiential learning theory, which explain that students learn through social interaction, reflection, and real-life experience.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework of Experiential Learning



Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory holds that learning is primarily a social process shaped by cultural context, language, and interaction with others. It is a crucial element alongside Kolb's experiential learning theory (Hussain et al., 2022). Academia will act in both roles as a source of knowledge, providing guidance through a classroom environment, lab experience, project work, problem-based case studies, and research. Furthermore, the industry will provide students with internships, on-the-job training, industry visits, events, and employment as a foundation for hands-on knowledge. Moreover, BPH students adopt this theory as enthusiastic knowledge, utilizing it in their practical day-to-day professional work.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive literature review defining experiential learning and sociocultural learning theory. I reviewed different literature related to my research question. I persuasively presented my interpretation, which aligned with the goal of my research, in the literature review, and I discussed how I used theoretical

guidelines in my study. Based on the research gap identified in this chapter and the theoretical framework presented, I discuss the research methodology in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

This chapter sets the stage for the entire methodological procedure by exploring the stories of students engaged in experiential learning in hospitality education in Bagmati Province. This chapter presents the philosophical foundation, in which I discuss the study's ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Furthermore, I explained the research paradigm and design, narrative inquiry as research design, study sites and participants, participants' profiles, collection and management of participants' stories, interpretation, and meaning-making. Similarly, I have described the research area, quality standards, and ethical considerations.

Philosophical Assumptions

I conducted this study to explore students' experiential learning experiences and unique perceptions of the world. The reason behind my interest in seeing the world through the eyes of various participants and engaging with their diverse experiences is a huge motivator for me. It is important to gain a comprehensive understanding of each participant's detailed perspectives, as the situation in which they functioned, the facilities to which they had access, and the socio-cultural and economic environments in which they were immersed would all influence their points of view.

Ontological Assumption

Antwi and Hamza (2015) defined ontology as the researcher's framework for outlining facts and reality. According to my research problem, the truth is in students' feelings, capturing their experiences and views. I collected different views from the students. It dealt with open-ended questions such as, "What is there that can be known?" or "What is the reality? To obtain the subjective reality. Therefore, this study's ontology is subjective and multi-reality, encompassing students' personal experiences and feelings (Cohen et al., 2002). The lived experiences of hospitality students pursuing experiential learning in hospitality education are subjective and constructed through their personal experiences.

Furthermore, in my research, the ontological stance affirms that students' experiential learning cannot be captured through a single, absolute truth, but rather through multiple accounts of how they perceive and interpret their experiences in

hospitality education. The responses emerge from students' subjective perspectives. Moreover, by applying narrative inquiry, the research centered on individual truths, acknowledging that hospitality students' experiences of internships, service encounters, and classroom learning are personally meaningful and socially constructed. Therefore, the ontological assumption of this study is subjective, and multiple realities are essential in comprehending how students make sense of their experiential learning journeys.

Epistemological Assumption

According to Bryman (2003), epistemology is the theory of knowledge, focusing on the nature of creating knowledge. According to the subjective ontology, I created rapport, closeness, commitment, and emotional attachment with the participants to gain insights into their individual realities. Furthermore, this research acknowledges that knowledge is co-constructed through the interaction between the participants and me. The stories shared by the participants were interpreted in relation to the broader context of experiential learning in hospitality education and the hospitality industry, and the knowledge generated was situated within these specific social and cultural contexts.

Axiological Assumption

Creswell (2013) outlined that axiology reflects researchers' and participants' values. I maintained closeness, emotional attachment, and informal interaction; the questions and answers were evaluated as good or bad, and they framed the topic in a way that involved their emotions. It reflected my values and those of the participants; hence, there was no uniform experience, so I adapted to accomplishing my research in a value-laden manner. Additionally, this research values participants' personal experiences and stories as central to understanding their experiential learning. My values are internalized, and I made efforts to approach the study with reflexivity and an open-minded stance.

Research Paradigm and Design

This study employed narrative inquiry within an interpretive research paradigm to explore students' experiential learning narratives in hospitality education. The research followed a paradigm that focused on understanding participants' behavior and experiences from the perspective of hospitality education. The interpretive paradigm recognized that reality is socially constructed and that individuals' experiences shape their understanding of the world. As such, this study

aimed to understand the personal and contextual factors that motivated hospitality graduates to become leaders in the real industry.

Narrative Inquiry as Research Design

Narrative inquiry is the study of experiences of a phenomenon as told through stories. It is a design for the study of human lives, conceived as a way to honor lived experiences as a source of important knowledge and understanding (Clandinin, 2022). Hence, it is distinct from the more generic terms ‘narrative’ or ‘narrative study’. It is concerned with experience and is grounded in Kolb’s experiential learning theory and Vygotsky’s socio-cultural learning theory in hospitality education (Haydon & Van der Riet, 2017; Wei, 2023). Furthermore, Narrative inquiry exhorts “experience as a storied phenomenon” (Clandinin, 2022). Thus, it can be described by its two components: The first is narrative, meaning the story being told, and the second is inquiry, representing a systematic examination or analysis using narrative to study how humans experience the world and make meaning from their experiences.

The Students' narratives in this study would be comprehensive beliefs associated with specific research and practical applications (Willis et al., 2007). Furthermore, the research design was guided to explore students' learning experiences through unstructured interviews, which would reveal their stories, experiences, knowledge, and opportunities (Davis & Johnson, 2017). There was interactive storytelling, which was collaborative between the participants and me (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

As a narrative inquiry researcher, I shared my experience with participants(students), my childhood, academic journey, how I entered the academic field, my experience during my higher education journey, relationship with managers and supervisors at the time of working in hotel, what plan I do have in future, personal career growth in detail, and interviewed them to explore their narrative freely during formal or informal settings.

As a narrative inquiry, it is based on the stance that through our stories, we construct our identities and “ways of knowing” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). As narrative inquiry is one of the best ways to reflect on experience, this methodology is well-suited to insights into how particular experiences influence BPH students. In the narrative inquiry process, initial interviews with each participant were conducted in a separate phase. Secondly, I developed the stories and completed the third phase of meaning-making.

Ontologically, narrative inquiry is a continuous working with and from a transactional or relational space (Riessman, 2008). The underlying assumption in the narrative inquiry design is not that stories are documented faithfully. The inherent relational centrality of narrative inquiry is that the researcher is committed to the process of storing and restoring with the participants. This space of co-creation between participants and the researcher allows for a complex, time, space, and culturally situated story.

Nonetheless, in practice, a working understanding of the interactions it describes is more complex. Narrative research is associated with using individual life stories as the primary data source and concerns narratives of the ‘self’ as a position from which the researcher can produce social critique and advocacy (Riessman, 2008). It is a methodology through which researchers comprehend others’ representations of the world around them from the stories those interviewed chose to share (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). A narrative inquiry is an examination of a story told, as well as of how the story is captured and analyzed. In a narrative, “attention shifts to [recalled] detail” (Riessman, 2008, p.12).

In this study, the narrative inquiry was used to capture students’ experiences of experiential learning in hospitality education through interviews (Creswell, 2013), thereby developing personal stories of students’ understanding and use of experiential learning in hospitality education. Interviewing, recording, and analyzing students’ reflections concerning their learning experiences in BPH provides insight. The experience-centered approach, a focus taken on retelling experiences as a student that is recalled as highly motivational, is used in this study to support students’ experiences as personal “truths”. There is no ‘cookie-cutter’ or singular right way to conduct a narrative inquiry study. Narrative inquiry is developed on a range. “At one end of this spectrum is the ‘pure’ narrative, a story told without explicit references to theories or research findings; the other end becomes the ‘pure’ academic essay, with references to theory but remains without the narrative itself” (Goodall, 2008, p.61).

Study Sites and Participants

My study explored the experiences of students studying the Bachelor in Professional Hospitality (BPH) program. The sites(colleges) for my research were purposefully selected from two hospitality colleges in Bagmati Province. College “A” (pseudonym), located in Kathmandu, and College “B” (pseudonym), located in Kavrepalanchok, used pseudonyms to keep their names confidential. These two

colleges were chosen because both provide the BPH program in the province. The colleges focused on understanding students' real experiences in depth, exploring different kinds of experiences, and on students' willingness to engage with the study. Both colleges run the BPH program under Kathmandu University (KU). They are located in different places and have different learning environments. This helped to compare how students learn from their experiences in different settings.

Both colleges offer a four-year (8 semesters) program with 120 credit hours; each semester is equal in credit hours. Each semester combines theory and practical learning, while the 8th (final) semester focuses on internship and research. Here, the course's teaching modality, with different learning outcomes, helps students gradually build the knowledge and practical skills required in the hospitality industry. The program includes both classroom study(theory) and real lab work (practical). Practical subjects such as Food and Beverage (F&B), Front Office (FO), Housekeeping (HK), and Food production are taught through theory, practice, demonstrations, and lab work in real settings in the college premises and in the real hospitality industry, through learning by doing. The program also includes an internship of about 3 years, during which students work in the real hospitality sector while engaging in theory simultaneously. This helps them develop real job skills and understand the working environment, as well as academic credentials.

There are a few differences between the colleges. At College "A" in Kathmandu, students have more opportunities to visit hotels and gain practical knowledge, as many hospitality businesses are located there. College "B" is in Kavrepalanchok. Both colleges follow the same modality according to KU: the same course and credit system, internship, face-to-face class, and virtual classes. However, this college has fewer hotels and training facilities. So, students might get less practical exposure.

I maintained the site for participants for their convenience, including those inside and outside the hospitality industry, primarily hotels. According to Dahal et al. (2024) qualitative research, it usually concentrates on a limited participants or even a carefully chosen example that might necessarily limit the study's purpose. I purposively selected six participants (three female and three male) for interviews to analyze how these individuals make sense of their experiential learning experiences while pursuing an undergraduate degree in professional hospitality education. Purposeful participant selection was used to obtain narrative inquiry research on

experiential learning in hospitality education. The participants were selected based on the following criteria for purposeful participant selection: voluntary participation, equal gender representation, willingness to share experiences, diverse geographic locations, and at least 1.5 years of learning experience.

Participants' Profile

In narrative inquiry research, there is no strict number of participants; even a single person can be included, though a small, purposive sample is typically used. Many studies involve one to six participants, focusing on in-depth exploration of individual stories and lived experiences (Carlsen, 1991). So, I selected six students (three girls and three boys) from Bagmati province who were interviewed regarding their experiences of experiential learning in professional hospitality education in the BPH program. The participants I have selected are from the 7th and 8th (final) semesters of the BPH program. Therefore, their views are based on deeper and more complete experiences, which makes their evaluation more reliable, and they have already gone through significant stages of the program. They had already completed most of the curriculum, including practical training, internships, externships, field visits, research, and real-world industry exposure.

This section describes the participant's profile, outlining their background. It is also the researcher's interpretation of the participants based on my impression of them during my long engagement in the interview sessions. Their names have been substituted with pseudonyms to protect participants' identity and their right to confidentiality (Allen & Wiles, 2016). I believe that a detailed description of participants in the research helps provide information about their personalities and how they construct stories to present their experiences. They are significant in this study because they represent a variety of educational aspirations, family backgrounds, and personality types, as well as unique ways of perceiving meaning-making experiences. In addition, participants are from diverse sectors and reflect distinctive academic journeys and motivations for careers in hospitality workspaces. Their stories reveal resilience, determination, and adaptability as they provided hard skill and soft skill challenges. The table shows their profile:

Table 1*Participants' Demographic Information*

S.N.	Pseudonym	Place of Origin	Family Background	Educational Journey	Current Status	Aspiration
1	Yangchen, the Secret Girl	Dolakha	Parents were initially farmers; later, vegetable vendors in Ason. Father worked briefly in India and returned due to illness.	SLC, +2 in Hotel Management. Now studying in the 7 th semester of the BPH program	Studying and working at Hotel Sheraton (pseudonym)	Childhood fascination with luxury hotels, desire for professional growth and stability, inspired by family struggles
2	Aparajita, an undefeated girl	Bhaktapur	Middle-class family; father, a retired official and music instructor at KU; youngest of three siblings; strong family support	+2 in Business Management. Now studying in the 8 th semester (final semester) of the BPH program	Studying and working at Four-Season Hotel (pseudonym)	Desire for a dynamic career with opportunities for creativity and interaction; encouraged by family support
3	Sadhika, and Achiever	Nala Kavre	Farmer and shop. Middle-class family.	+2 in HM. Studying in the 7 th semester of the BPH program	Studying and working at Eastern Villa, Resort (pseudonym)	Determination to transition from village life to professional hospitality; self-reliance and passion for service
4	Utkrishta, best boy	Lamjung	Farming family; later started a family hotel in Bandipur;	+2 in General Management; TAFE III certificate. Now	Studying and working in Hotel Moxy (Pseudonym),	Early exposure to hospitality through family business; interest

			financial struggles during schooling	studying in the 8 th semester (final semester) of the BPH program		in professional hotel management
5	Pragun, a straightforward boy	Panchkhal, Kavre	Father (pension holder) passed away when Pawan was eight; mother managed the household and farming.	+2 in Hotel Management. Now studying in the 7 th semester of the BPH program	Studying and working at Hotel Manang (pseudonym)	Career ambition in housekeeping; aspiration to become a GM and an entrepreneur
6	Tshering, Long-term goal setter	Mustang	Weak financial background; low community awareness of education; parents prioritized schooling for children, except the eldest sister	+2 in Business Management. Now studying in the 8 th semester (final semester) of the BPH program	Studying and working in Hotel Thamel (pseudonym)	Interest in tourism and hospitality as a means for economic upliftment, inspired by the cultural heritage of Mustang

Collection and Management of Participants' Stories

According to Hurst et al.(2015), before data collection, I obtained a recommendation letter from the university, secured consent, gained access to the venue, spent time with the relevant participants, and established rapport. An unstructured interview was conducted to collect data, derive information, and construct the students' narratives (Burrell, 2009). Open-ended interview guidelines(as shown in Appendix I) were prepared for data collection on students' experiences, practices, and challenges regarding theory and practice (Bowen, 2009). The fieldwork was conducted over a specific period during the study. I conducted unstructured interviews with participants using interview guidelines, and each lasted 40 to 60 minutes. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, which allowed me to better understand their experiences. During the interviews, I used note-taking and audio recording to collect information. I also wrote reflections after each interview to remember important points and feelings shared by the participants.

Thereafter, in managing the data, I restored their stories and reflected on their experiences through analysis. I then categorized their reflections and developed seven themes (As shown in Appendix II), through which I constructed meaningful interpretations. Each theme discussed in Chapter 4, Experiential Learning Experiences, highlights different experiences of the students' academic journey.

Meaning Making

Meaning-making is a process in which individuals or groups share their experiences to understand what is happening in their real-life phenomena. This is an important component of qualitative narrative inquiry research. As a researcher, I tried to understand students' experience stories (Hartog et al., 2020). Participants reflected on their life events and connected them to their broader life experiences, which helps them create new meaning. It is a combination of three aspects: 1) evaluation,2) agency, and 3) scope. Experiences are evaluated either positively or negatively, depending on their short or long-term goals (Misajon, 2001). Another aspect, agency concerns individuals' perceptions of themselves as active contributors or passive recipients of experiences (Kruizinga et al., 2013). And the scope is which represents whether the meaning of an event is situational, existential, or spiritual (Scherer-Rath et al., 2012). Students stated their experiences with challenges and opportunities during their learning experiences, workplace stress, difficulties with guest handling due to language, and financial difficulties through value, linking to agency, and

situating their significance. By the time over, initially feeling like a negative or difficult experience framed as meaningful for personal growth, professional identity, and future career development.

Additionally, narrative meaning is understood through the interpretation of experiences, sense-making of data, building knowledge, contextualization, reflection, learning, and sharing stories. Students in my study have engaged in various experiential learning such as internships, practical training, externships, and on-the-job experiences. From a narrative inquiry perspective, students' stories illustrated how learning is constructed within a specific time (the internship), place (hospitality settings and colleges), and sociality (interaction with mentors, seniors, and guests), which are the common sites of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2022).

The meaning-making process in this study can be understood from the collaborative viewpoints of David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Learning Theory. These two theories connect well in professional hospitality education because students learn not only through personal practice but also through working and interacting with others. At the same time, they differ in a few aspects of the learning process because Kolb explains learning from the individual perspective, while Vygotsky explains learning from the social perspective. Kolb gives more importance to personal experience and reflection, while Vygotsky focuses more on communication, collaboration, and cultural context, with the support of teachers, mentors, friends, and the surrounding environment. Therefore, combining both theories provides a more comprehensive understanding of students' experiential learning experiences in professional hospitality education, where students learn not only by doing and reflecting, but also through collaboration, mentorship, and participation in real hospitality environments.

The meaning-making applied to the qualitative data analysis, which involved an interpretive approach to data management, relied on students' experiential learning experience in professional hospitality education (Briggs et al., 2012). Students understand their learning by thinking about their own experiences and what they learned from them. First, their stories were written and read many times. Then, important ideas were picked (coding) from the experiences of experiential learning. Similar ideas were grouped together, and by reflecting on these groups, four meaning-making themes were developed (As shown in Table 3). Each theme discussed its

understanding of students' experiences in experiential learning in hospitality education in Chapter V.

Quality Standards

Quality standards must be maintained as an imperative criterion across all research that applies various techniques (Timonen et al., 2024). The view of Guba and Lincoln (1994) includes a list of standards for estimating the reliability of an interpretive study (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). They further claimed that a study of supreme nature possesses features, i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Insisting that a study meets a quality standard when researchers sincerely and diligently try to approach the truth, the findings apply to people in various circumstances, and the procedures and methods are thoroughly disclosed (Dahal, 2022). Moser and Korstjens (2018) cited the exact definition of Guba and Lincoln and provided additional clarification on each term; i.e., as they defined it, credibility is the confidence that the findings represent plausible information and a correct interpretation of participants' views. In accordance with the author's clarifications, I recorded and transcribed the interview to avoid ambiguity. Also, the requirements for interpretive research are authenticity, rationality, criticality, and reflexivity. Hence, as a researcher, I ensured the integrity of the research from start to finish. Beginning from the literature review, I extensively reviewed the documents to complement the study and followed the proposed research design. Regarding the efficient execution of credibility, I engaged in critical self-reflection about myself as a researcher, including my biases, i.e., my interactions with participants, and how they influence participants' answers to questions (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

I vividly remember the suggestions from the proposal selection committee to keep these three things in mind as a narrative inquirer. Additionally, I have made an effort to maintain the trustworthiness of the research as the narrative inquirer.

Reflexivity

Narrative inquirers cannot subtract themselves as they are a part of the research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Researchers' position in the research is not negligible. I began narrating my experience. In this process, my life event was presented chronologically in the context of the study. Likewise, I included the reflection in the data interpretation phase. At the same time, I made a participant reflection on the collected data. The participant's decision to reveal such data was closely reflected. As an interpretive researcher, engage in closer observation of

participants' key points as they adopt the story. Furthermore, the characters make gaps, silences, and tension throughout the stories, which are sensitively studied.

My interest in this research stems from my previous experience in hotels, and as a teaching faculty member at a hospitality college, I am positioned as an insider in this study. I had to reflect on the personal experiences I demonstrated, how I initially developed an interest in experiential learning in professional hospitality education, and critically analyze how my perspective has been influenced. My role as an insider researcher in this study influenced me, as I understood and interpreted participants' experiences. Having worked in the hospitality industry and taught hospitality students for several years, I shared common experiences, language, and understanding with the students. My positionality helped me in remaining reflexive throughout the study. It also helped me build good relationships, trust, and open communication with the participants. At the same time, I remain mindful of my own experiences and beliefs to reduce personal bias and understand students' experiences in a fair and balanced way.

Trustworthiness

Along with temporality, sociality, and spatiality, trustworthiness is crucial for legitimacy and credibility, which can be improved through consistent methods, openness, and reflection in qualitative research (Ahmed, 2024). Hence, I was careful as a researcher while collecting data from the in-depth interviews, and tallied it with my field observations.

Common Places of Narrative Inquiry

Common places of narrative inquiry require exact, accurate, and topological limits of place or categorizations of the place where the interview was conducted (Green & Glasgow, 2006). In this study, hotels and colleges were familiar places. The place always has a strong bond with one's memory and experiences. Being a narrative inquirer, I valued the place. It may influence the inquiry process, which is situated in temporality. Linking places to my participants' experiences helped create a sense of flow in the stories. In doing so, the intensity of the confession of experiences increases. The research was conducted over a specific period and updated according to the participant's time, experience, story, and how it occurred, affecting the whole research. The research also considered the historical, demographic, geographical, cultural, and social contexts of the phenomenon under study (Clift et al., 2021).

Spatiality

The research considered the physical space in which the phenomenon is

studied. The environment also influenced how the participants experienced research. My research is on students' narratives, so I considered the impact of the physical environment on participants' practices. I conducted the research over a specific period, considered participants' social context, and maintained the physical space where the phenomenon under study occurred to ensure the accuracy and significance of the collected narratives without hampering them (Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

Temporality

Clandinin (2006) indicated that the past, present, and future influence people. The interconnection between the more profound knowledge becomes apparent as the researcher examines the connections between all these elements (Haydon & Van der Riet, 2017). As a narrative inquirer, I was mindful of students' lived experiences and actions. I concentrated on comprehending the narratives of all events, i.e., past, present, and future, and how their perception and experience have transformed with time. It was vital to understand how past events have influenced their understanding of current policies and their perception of the future implementation status.

Sociality

Similarly, I was also cautious not to overlook the element of sociality and mindful of the social and personal situations of the research participants. The relational aspect of narrative inquiry is the connection between participants and researchers, highlighted by the sociality dimension (Kutsyuruba & Stasel, 2023).

Hence, I established a good rapport with the participants and, rather than quick interviews, I engaged them for a long time to gain their confidence. The process demanded connecting the social conditions, events, and experiences throughout the investigation and comprehending individual feelings and aspirations.

Ethical Considerations

The ethics of the research relationship permeate every facet of the research process (Josselson, 2007). I followed all the ethical considerations in the study. It is embedded that the researcher who studies others' lives to generate knowledge has an ethical duty to maintain their confidentiality and to obtain participants' free, informed consent, without coercion or unfair pressure. It means they were well informed about what they had entailed and reassured that it would not affect them. I obtained written consent. I explained ethical considerations to the participant. I built rapport with participants. I provided comprehensive and accurate information about the study so they could decide whether to participate. I maintained the privacy of their stories and

adhered to the no-harm principle in my ethical considerations. I adhered to KUSOED's ethical guidelines. I used the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition for citations and references, and I gave proper credit to all authors.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the research methodology applied in the study. It discussed the philosophical assumption that guided the research approach, focusing on the qualitative method to present an extensive understanding of the topic. It also described who participated in the study and how they were purposefully selected, along with the tools and methods used for data collection, which were outlined, and the perception of the study tools to ensure effective information gathering. The procedures for data collection and analysis were detailed. The quality standards of the study. Ethical considerations were highlighted to guarantee that the study upheld moral norms and protected participants' rights. In Chapter IV, I discussed students' experiences through narrative inquiry.

CHAPTER IV

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

This chapter presents the findings (narratives) related to the main research questions: How do students narrate their experiences of Experiential Learning in Bachelor in Professional Hospitality education? What meaning can we make from these experiences? The findings are presented by narrating students' experiential learning experiences in hospitality education, focusing on their learning journey and profiles. Through unstructured, in-depth interviews with six students from BPH colleges in Bagmati Province, insights were gathered into how they navigated learning within the BPH programs. The students' narratives and my experiences as a researcher were analyzed for the thematic interpretations. Their responses regarding their understanding of Experiential Learning (EL) in the hospitality education context have been carefully analyzed. Also, as mentioned in the methodology chapter of this study, the interviews were transcribed and studied to ensure accurate interpretation of the meanings conveyed, following the qualitative narrative inquiry research method. The following table shows the key themes of experiences:

Table 2

Emerging Themes of Experiential Learning Experiences

Theme	Sub Theme
Early Experiences and Inclinations	
Aspirations of Hospitality Education	
Curriculum and Pedagogies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Content of the Curriculum b) Teaching Modality c) Assessment Modality d) Affordability of the Program
Experiencing Resources and Facilities	
Experiences with Academic Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Experiences with Teaching Faculties b) Experiences with Mentors c) Experiences with Administrators
Experiences as an Intern and as an Early Career Professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Experiences as an Intern

b) Experiences as an Early Career
Professional

Practical Applications of the Learning

Early Experiences and Inclinations

Participants' early experiences and inclinations of the participants would support understanding of their aspirations in hospitality education. Their experiences differ; some were, and others were less so. Participants shared how their journeys, from childhood to adulthood, were shaped by factors such as geographical relocation, family background, financial status, work opportunities, and the pursuit of education. Many described the contrast between their initial expectations and the realities they encountered along their career paths.

Yangchen reflected with a bachelor's degree in professional hospitality. She was born in the hilly region of Dolakha, Nepal. She described her family's background, that her parents were farmers. As circumstances changed, Yangchen's father went to India in search of work, a common path for many Nepalese at the time. Unfortunately, he had to return due to illness (a chest condition), which brought him back to Nepal. Her family faced a remarkable challenge for their day-to-day logistics. Upon his return from India, Yangchen's parents worked for low wages in construction. Despite her parents' hardship, she pursued an academic degree through a scholarship. Following a year's gap, she enrolled in BPH. She proudly and happily shared:

My name is Yangchen (Pseudonym). I am from Dolakha and currently work at the Hotel Sheraton(pseudonym). I was born in Dolakha and grew up in Narayanthan. . My family background is kisan (farmers). We came to Narayanthan from Dolakha. I worked as a Kisan here. Gradually, we shifted from Narayanthan to Ason. My parents used to sell vegetables on the footpath at Ason. After some time, my buba went to India for a job. Unfortunately, my buba returned to Nepal due to an illness (a spot on his chest). In this way, we were growing. At that time, managing daily expenses for lodging and food was difficult. When Buba returned from India, my parents worked in construction as laborers for very low wages and long hours.

Another participant, Aparajita, sees herself as lucky. Because she is the youngest in her family, she was born and raised in Bhaktapur and moved to

Kathmandu after the 2015 earthquake. At present, she is studying in a BPH program. As the youngest child, she grew up with her father, mother, elder brother, and elder sister. She described her childhood as fun and playful, filled with love from her family, who gave her a level of freedom that not every child enjoys. She explained:

My name is Aparajita. I work at Four Seasons Hotel in Thamel. I was born and raised in Bhaktapur, but after the earthquake, I now live in Kathmandu. I am currently enrolled in a BPH course. I am the last child in a family: I have dad, mom, elder brother, elder sister, and myself. My childhood was very fun and naughty. Still, my family loves me a lot and gives me freedom; only a few people will get like this.

Regarding our financial background, my father is a retired official; now, he works under KU as a music instructor at Tripureshowr. We are a middle-class family. My parents value money. They used to buy whatever I wanted. So, there have not been any financial difficulties since childhood. I started my schooling in Bhaktapur while living there; after shifting to Kathmandu, I completed my remaining studies till +2. In +2, I studied Business Management.

After the earthquake in 2015, I now live in Kathmandu. I am the last child in my family. My childhood was very fun and naughty. Still, my family loves me a lot and gives me freedom. Regarding our financial background, my father is a retired official; currently, he works at KU as a music instructor in Tripureshowr. We are a middle-class family. There have been no financial difficulties since childhood. I started my schooling in Bhaktapur while living there; after moving to Kathmandu, I completed my remaining studies up to +2.

Sadhika studied at Samata School in Nala until she completed her SEE and +2 in HM from CTEVT. Sadhika's journey from village life to the hospitality industry demonstrates her hard work and independence in her further studies. She shared:

My name is Sadhika. I work at Eastern Villa Resort. Our family has six members. I studied at Samata School until the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) in Nala. I have completed +2 (Diploma in Hospitality Management) from the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) from Banepa. I am pursuing a BPH course from Banepa. My work relates to learning by doing. I worked before joining this course. I

was supposed to do an internship while studying for my diploma, so when I did that, I got to work in the same resort. Our main income source is farming, and farming manages most of our expenses. My father also had a small retail shop in Kathmandu. My mother is a housewife, and she manages all the expenses. My brother is preparing to go abroad and work in a restaurant. I am working and studying simultaneously. We are not from a higher family class, so doing our studies and day-to-day expenses wasn't easy. So, I studied in public schools such as the renowned Bamboo School Samata. My parents and I managed the expenses of the diploma course; at that time, I also used to teach tuition and work in the same institute. With my bachelor's degree, it was difficult to join because the fee structure was beyond our family's capacity; however, I convinced my family members that I could manage it. I had dared to dream and work also. I negotiated with the college to pay a fee in installments and a scholarship at my convenience, so I am paying the fee accordingly and other day-to-day expenses. So, our financial background is very difficult.

Sadhika's educational journey from childhood to adolescence demonstrates that she clearly understands the value of learning by doing and of not being financially dependent on others. Prior experience helped to demonstrate practical skills and knowledge. During her diploma studies, she completed an internship at a resort and later secured a job there. Her experience proves that with determination, hands-on learning, and a willingness to learn, they will be successful in the future amid economic difficulties.

Another participant, Utkrishta, is originally from Lamjung. Because of his father's job and the search for better education, his family moved to Chitwan. He enjoys playing football and meeting new people. Utkrishta studied in Chitwan up to class 4, then moved to Pokhara, where he completed his studies from class 5 to +2. Like others, he dreamed of opportunity abroad, where he felt pressure in Nepali society, as many youths were moving abroad. Keeping his dream and the youth trend in mind, he started preparing for this. He completed a TAFE Certificate III course, hoping it would help him move overseas. He shared his experience by saying:

I was born in Lamjung. I grew up in Chitwan. Now, I work at Hotel Crystal(pseudonym). We are a family of four. I studied till class 4 in Chitwan, and the remaining education was pursued in Pokhara from class

5 to +2. My major subject was general management in +2. During the pandemic, I operated a small café near our hotel; at that time, I used to work at my hotel and operate the café. My daddy was a hotelier, so he opened a family hotel in Bandipur. In childhood, I worked at our hotel and studied together. We are from a middle-class family. Now I am working at Hotel Thamel in Kathmandu.

Pragun was born in Panchkhal Kavre and studied Hotel Management. He experienced difficulties after his father's death. He shared:

Our main source of income is farming and a pension. After my father's death, my mother struggled to manage everything. Managing fees and day-to-day expenses was quite difficult throughout my schooling. However, it was managed. I did not compare with other children and did not put any pressure on my mother, even though I was a child. I was a very good student in school with good grades, so I got a scholarship, which helped me manage my financial burden. In my bachelor's, it was quite difficult to pay the fees even though I got some scholarships and paid them in installments; now, I am working, learning, earning, and managing my expenses.

Pragun became mature by not comparing his situation with other children and by not putting extra pressure on his mother during hard times. He did well in his studies and earned scholarships, which helped reduce the cost of his education.

Another participant, Tshering (Pseudonym), was born in Mustang, a remote mountain area where people have limited financial resources and limited awareness of education. Even though daily life was difficult, Tshering's parents strongly wanted their children to study. Tshering shared his experience with both sadness and happiness. suffering daily lie

He and his siblings studied with the help of Lama Guru (Buddhist Monk). Tshering shared his story with both sadness and happiness.

I am from Mustang. I came to Pokhara for +2 study. Lama Guru helped for my study. He collected funds from various individuals and organizations in Nepal and abroad to support those deprived of education due to financial constraints. I studied Business Management as a major subject in 12th grade, and now I am pursuing a BPH course. Now, I am learning by doing and learning with earning. I am working in Hotel Thamel, so it is now maintained and has undergone significant changes.

Aspiration of Hospitality Education

Raghu and Prasad (2025) stated that aspirations are important for studying. It encourages and motivates students' development. Furthermore, Yangchen shared her personal experience, Yangchen explained:

When we (Buba and I) traveled there, Buba used to show us and say this was a 5-star hotel, Taragaon (Hyatt Regency). At that time, the public was familiar with Taragaon rather than Hyatt (Emotional laugh). At that time, I thought this was like a palace and how it would be a hotel; Buba continuously convinced me this was a 5-star hotel, Tara (short form of Taragaon) then. I was eager to work and thought I could go to this place (emotional laugh). So, I chose HM in +2. After completing my +2, I wondered which college I would join for further studies. In the meantime, I was counseled by the college administrator and thought that the fee was beyond our capacity would rather study in this college. Immediately, I thought I would study in a public college. But I couldn't join a public college. The admission date was over. After that, I searched for a hotel management college and found College A, which provides an undergraduate degree in professional hospitality. I met with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of that college, counseled and explained the course. He emphasized that this course modality is suitable for you because it is affordable for those working and not getting the opportunities, and is financially sound for higher education. It is under KUSOM, and this program is a learning-by-doing program: when we do, we will also learn. He convinced me, and I joined BPH.

Likewise, Aparajita, a straight and honest participant, unfolded experiences without hesitating, which was not her choice/interest. Despite having no background/interest in hospitality, as she had pursued business studies in +2, her father asked her mother to convey the information, anticipating less resistance from her. Aparajita narrated:

At first, I was not interested in studying hospitality. Because I studied business management. My father worked at KU, and he knew the BPH program. And my father told my mother to convince me. College is far from my home. But I joined college.

Aparajita's reflection demonstrates that decision-making relies on parents, as proved by her emotional expression. The logistical challenge of the college's distance

from her home further contributed to her reluctance. It is necessary that the counseling session at college shows a positive way. Following the counseling session, Aparajita made her turning point as she mentioned in her narrative. Counseling session introduced to the counselor's unique "learning by doing" and "learning and earning" pedagogical approaches.

Sadhika expressed both worry and excitement, and her family managed until secondary-level expenses. Nonetheless, she was facing various challenges. However, she wanted to continue her further study. She explained that after completing SEE, she wanted to study either Nursing or Hotel Management. She shared her experience:

After my Diploma, I was influenced by myself because after completing SEE, my interest was to join Nursing or Hotel Management. To join Nursing, my family could not manage all the costs, so I thought my family could manage the cost of my Diploma in HM, which was my hobby in cooking, and an affordable cost. I joined a Diploma in Culinary Arts. One of my friends also encouraged me to take this course.

Her words show that her decision came from both self-interest and family situation. She did not completely give up on her dreams; instead, she adjusted them according to her reality. Her love for cooking became the turning point. At the same time, her friend's encouragement gave her emotional support and confidence to choose hospitality. She shared, "I was supposed to go to Kathmandu or Banepa. I could not go to Kathmandu because of financial issues and the destination." This shows that even when geography and money create barriers, it is an aspiration of one's own self, a family member, and a compulsion, as she is strong.

Utkrishta, the next participant, shared that he was inspired by his father, who was both a hotelier and an entrepreneur in his early days, and that he was pursuing a degree in hospitality education. Moreover, he explained that his father's career served as an example to him and provided practical skills to meet the demands and opportunities in hospitality management. He stated:

My dad inspired me because he is a hotelier and an entrepreneur. I checked the website. I liked the slogan of BPH learning by doing. It was necessary for me. So, I joined this course. Likewise, our hospitality business influenced me in Hospitality education.

Utkrishta narratives show that the EL highlight appealed to him, leading him to apply to the program. It is particularly effective in professional/personal fields,

including the hospitality sector, and daily personal work, and analytical and practical competence.

Another participant, Pragun, noted that the hospitality profession offers better career opportunities with valuable experience in a professional environment. Pragun demonstrates:

I used to cook food at home in my childhood. I saw there was no professional cook in society. The hospitality industry is growing rapidly. Considering my current situation, grabbing an opportunity in this industry is easy. At the same time, one of my relatives, a hotelier, influenced me. Moreover, when I checked the course structure, I thought this course was fit for me, so I joined the BPH course.

Tshering said that his journey into hospitality education was inspired by his maternal uncle, who worked for the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). At first, he was not very interested in cooking, but because he was hardworking, he decided to study a Diploma in Culinary Arts in Pokhara. Tshering joined the BPH program because of the feasible structure. He highlighted:

My maternal uncle suggested to study this course. He is working at WWF. He counseled me about hospitality management course. At the same time my growing interest in hospitality, I studied a Diploma in Culinary Arts in Pokhara. At an early age, I was not interested in cooking. But my hard work showed me the opportunities. Australian Certificate Level III course and an exchange program are examples. It was supported by NOREC. I showed my skills in Newari and Vietnamese cuisines. After returning from Vietnam, I shared my culinary knowledge in my village, and was inspired for more academic growth. After that, I searched for further study options. I found the BPH course college A, and I joined in that college for bachelor degree in hospitality management. I linked this with my dream of running a hotel in Mustang.

Curriculum and Pedagogies

As part of the interview process, participants were asked questions about the curriculum and pedagogy, as well as about their interpretation of experiential learning in the BPH course. Their responses indicated that a well-designed program was key to students' success and engagement in hospitality education. The theme of the Curriculum carried great depth as it outlined how experiential learning, hospitality

education, the assessment model, class modality, and fee structure play an essential role in influencing industry collaboration opportunities and ultimately career success. The participants described the impact of curriculum and pedagogies within experiential learning. They explained how these opportunities helped them develop the competencies necessary to acquire both theoretical and practical knowledge. Participants in the interview shared primarily positive experiences, as it transformed their classroom learning into experiential laboratories.

The participants reflected on how their experiences of the professional hospitality program related to the techniques used to apply theoretical knowledge to the practical applications. With this theme, encapsulate the participant's insight into how educational opportunities within an undergraduate professional hospitality education program enabled them to acquire the skill set desired for positions ranging from entry-level to managerial upon completing their academic endeavors.

Content of the Curriculum

Participants shared that the BPH program covers not only classroom-based theory teaching and learning but also practical training in colleges and industry. Along with four major operation subjects (Food production, F& B, HK, and FO), students also study marketing, Human Resources Management (HRM), Financial Accounting, Research, Consumer Behavior, Life Skills, and Service Experience. However, after completing an internship and working in hotels, they gradually realized the value of those subjects in real-world work. They experienced that the course teaches step by step from the basic level and helps students improve their knowledge, skills, confidence, and professional understanding.

At the same time, participants also shared concerns about the curriculum. A few of the participants of my research narrated their experiences; a few of the subjects are repeated, which feels uninteresting. They also experienced that the FO practical classes had fewer practical compare other operational subjects. Many students suggested adding a foreign language, especially French, because many hospitality terms are used in French in hotels and restaurants. Some participants felt unhappy because they were told during admission that foreign language classes would be included, but later they were not properly provided. Students from non-management backgrounds found subjects like Finance and Research difficult at first because they were new to them.

Yangchen, a participant in this study, emphasized that the BPH course contents are linked to different aspects of transforming to self and community. She concluded that the curriculum will be crucial in building competence from entry-level to higher positions. Yangchen shared:

In my experience, our curriculum is very good. All knowledge is included, for example, the four pillars of the hospitality industry and marketing. HR and finance. In the initial semester, I was wondering whether I was wasting time and why these subjects teach life skills. I thought we were familiar with all of these and could watch them on YouTube; however, when I started my internship, I realized that the curriculum is the basis of learning, and everyone should know it. So, the curriculum is best from the basic to the managerial level.

She appreciated included all subjects. At the same time, she has given a different view. Aparajita explained:

This is also a bit bitter to me. At first, I had not any experienced HM. I wondered how and what this is. In my experience, I couldn't understand because I felt like I had to work everywhere, such as HK, FO, F&B, and Kitchen. So, all the subjects are fine. However, I suggest increasing the practical time on the Front Office practical, which might be a technical issue. I experienced a foreign language, basically French, and others are necessary in the BPH program.

Sadhika found that the course aligns with industry demands and supports professional growth. She mentioned:

The curriculum is well-suited for those who aspire to be professionals. This course is new to everyone. The level and number of subjects are acceptable. The subjects are simple, yet detailed in content; this course will teach you how to grow professionally. It is from the basic level to the manager level. All the subjects are used in real fields; we experienced even things we did not know we could learn from this course. The curriculum is outstanding, and the topics are also relevant to the profession. However, one thing I would like to add is an international language, besides English, in our course. In my personal experience in the hotel industry, most of the terminology is in the French language. Similarly, there is no technology literacy subject. Therefore, if the French

language as a foreign language and technology literacy subjects are included in our course, it would be beneficial to Hospitality students. We have interacted with the college management, but the issue remains unresolved. I am satisfied.

Utkrishta stated that the teaching method is suitable. His comparison with international friends strengthens the curriculum. He stated:

The curriculum focuses on learning by doing. It is effective and fit for our country. This course makes us ready and provides the right direction for our future in the hospitality field. In this course, we do get real industry experience. If the Bachelor in Hospitality Management (BHM) curriculum were structured like BPH, it would greatly improve hospitality education in the country. The life skills subjects are particularly useful. This subject helps in time management, stress, and a positive attitude in daily life.

Pragun's narrative disclosed how the curriculum fosters leadership, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills essential for becoming a manager. According to him, the curriculum is prepared for real-world managerial responsibilities. Pragun highlighted:

I found that this course focuses on the basic and professional levels. To be a successful manager, all the elements included in the curriculum, such as Marketing, Operations, Life skills, and Service experience, are necessary. From these subjects, we can develop our personal and professional growth. This course focuses on how to prepare for a manager. Moreover, this course focuses on problem-solving, critical thinking, and leadership skills. I have examples which I experienced, I apply problem solving skills at hotel. This was taught by our teacher in class.

Tshering highlighted the course's content. He mentioned that the content is balanced between theory and practice, particularly the integration of online and face-to-face modalities, which helped him manage time effectively. Tshering expressed:

The curriculum ranges from basic to professional and is industry-relevant. All subjects are fine. But 1, 2 subjects repeated. I talked with my friends he was saying all subjects are good in BPH.

Subjects can vary, from basic to managerial, in undergraduate education. The participants also faced the same challenges; they came from diverse academic,

demographic, family, and socio-cultural backgrounds. In this regard, a few participants expressed their own experiences. Yangchen expressed that there would be challenging subjects in different courses, from foundation to undergraduate level, varying according to students' strengths, and she considered giving up the program; however, she became accustomed to it and continued studying. One participant shared her experience with a challenging subject. Yangchen expressed:

I experienced the research subject as challenging because it was my first time studying it, and it was outside my previous academic field. However, it became easier due to my mentor's guidelines and support. We were supposed to work and study in the middle, so I was about to give up.

Hence, students' stories and experiences demonstrated that the BPH curriculum is vigorous, professionally aligned, and grounded in experiential learning. Sadhika shared her experience; experiential learning is a teaching model that empowers students to implement theoretical knowledge in the real industry. Sadhika explained:

All the experience I have gained by being here, particularly through the internship program, enables me to learn more about the back-of-the-house to the front-of-the-house issues and things like that. I tend to be very open-minded, so I would have to say that as opposed to changing my opinion, I have gained an idea, which is that this is a great program.

Similarly, Utkrishta, Tshering, and Pawan mentioned that experiential learning helped transfer classroom knowledge into hands-on practice across multiple processes and multitasking in the high-powered kitchen setting. Utkrishta shared, 'I experienced, I got more strength for the kitchen when I say cooking, how can I deal with food?'

Aparajita initially misunderstood the BPH acronym as Bachelor of Public Health, a common misconception, but after orientation, she realized the course's value in providing both academic credentials and practical experience. She emphasized that, unlike other hospitality students who may go abroad only as interns, BPH graduates can enter as employees due to their early and continuous industry exposure. With surprise, Aparajita stressed:

I experienced, unknowingly, this course and thought it was about Public Health because most people used it; after explaining it, I realized it was about

Professional Hospitality. According to the quote mentioned in the course, “Learning by Doing” was the figure; that is, the main thing.

Students’ narratives from their experience show that the BPH program in Nepal is close to international standards, but also easy to study in our own context. From what they shared, this program is international in scope and focuses on learning by doing. Students not only study theory but also get real-world experience, so they can go directly to jobs, not just internships. This program helps them become professionals, learn practical skills, and consider starting their own business. So, the BPH program in Nepal matches the international standards.

Overall, the BPH curriculum combines theory and practice. Although some subjects were difficult at first, students later realized their importance during internships and hotel work. They found that the course helps to develop their professional skills, confidence, leadership, and problem-solving abilities from the basic to the managerial level.

Teaching Modality

The BPH program combines blended modality, face-to-face, and virtual. In the first and second semesters, the modality is face-to-face, aligning theory and practice in the college. They also complete internships in real workplaces. The program offers various activities (guest lectures, field work, workshops, project work, internships, externships, events) to support learning by doing. Furthermore, the BPH teaching modality develops leadership, professionalism, entrepreneurial, self-awareness, and critical thinking competencies, and is well-suited for early-career professionals. Participants emphasized that their experience with the BPH program in Nepal aligns with international standards and is relevant to the local context.

Yangchen found that virtual classes are less effective because of the difficulty of staying attentive amid work commitments. On the other hand, she experienced that physical classes are better than virtual ones because of peer discussions, group work, and direct interaction with mentors. Yangchen expressed:

I experienced that online classes are not useful. In online classes, many students are not attentive because they are tired or on duty. Physical classes are more effective than virtual. In physical classes, students are more attentive in peer discussion, group work, and direct interaction with the teacher. But some of my friends do not even attend class for various reasons. They must repeat the semester because of low attendance. We have a few friends

repeating the semester. Online classes do not work in a few subjects, for example, accounting. I experienced conducting these subjects very difficult, and it would be better. The class schedule needs flexible virtual and face-to face.

Aparajita's experienced about the class modality of the BPH program as a combination of virtual and physical. She honestly shared her experience about teaching modality. Online classes are not very effective, especially for students who work till late. They feel tired and may even fall asleep in early morning classes. Although online classes are easy to join before going to work, many students attend just to mark their attendance, not to learn. She believes physical classes are better because students can pay closer attention and participate more actively. She narrated her experiences.

Honestly, online classes are ineffective. Sometimes, we will join the class and get upset because we reach home at midnight and class at 7am. We unknowingly fall asleep, and class has ended. But, on the other hand, this is easy to learn because the class is in the morning for one hour, and after that we can go to work. In my experience, physical classes are more effective than online classes. In online classes, students will join just for attendance purposes.

Sadhika also had the same experience as others. She mentioned that the virtual class was ineffective due to a lack of direct interaction, resulting in one-way communication from the teacher. She observed that many students, including herself, were inactive and attended only to meet the attendance. Sadhika explained:

In my experience, virtual classes are less effective for communication and direct interaction. It was one-way communication. Some students needed to be more active. They used to join just for attendance. They join but turn off the video and sleep, but some students were very active and learned. Even sometimes I made the same mistake. Physical class is better than virtual class.

Utkrishta acknowledged the experience of teaching modality. Virtual online and physical classes have some benefits, but physical classes work better because students can interact directly and get quick feedback. He feels students are less active in online classes, especially when they have work and early classes. However, online classes are better for practical subjects like F&B, HK, FO, and food production.

Utkrishta stated:

Both online and physical classes have their benefits. Still physical classes more effective because students can interact with teacher and receive immediate feedback. After receiving feedback, everyone is more attentive. However, the effectiveness also depends on student's interest in online or physical. In my experience both modalities are fine.

Pragun shared his experience about class modalities. Physical classes, especially in the first and second semesters, were more effective because of active participation, interaction, and peer learning. In the program, student engagement in online classes declined. Many students join only for attendance. Pragun described:

My experience with class modalities, in the first and second semesters, we had physical classes. In college there was theory class in the classroom. For practical we have done in real practical place. Physical classes are more effective because they encourage attentiveness, interaction, and learning with friends. Online classes are often for attendance purposes only. However, it is beneficial for balancing learning with work.

Assessment Modality

Regarding assessment modalities, students generally appreciated the approach adopted by their institution and the University. Aparajita acknowledged the suitability assessment modality. She stated her experience:

We are working and studying. It is difficult to manage time for both. So, we have to be mindful of the submission of assignments and duty hour at the working field.

Pragun emphasized, appreciating the understanding shown by faculty and management, noting the assessment modality. Pragun revealed his experience:

Assessment modality is very nice, which combines internal assignment and the university exam. We are experiencing challenges. Managing time is difficult because of duty, class, and assignments. However, everybody (teacher, college management, industry management) understands our problem, and we will manage accordingly, so I feel it is easy to submit and attend the exam. The way that KUSOM is following for assessment is very good.

The students' reflections on the assessment modality were appreciated.

Affordability of the Program

The participants in this study found that the fee structure for the BPH course is more affordable than that of other hospitality education courses. A few of them

explained that the fee structure is designed with the student's accessibility in mind, making it feasible even for those from modest economic backgrounds.

Pragun pointed out that, unlike other Hospitality Management (HM) programs, where students mostly attend theoretical classes and rely heavily on parental financial support, in contrast, the BPH program adopts a "learn and earn" model. This provides students with opportunities to learn and earn from the third semester onwards, starting with an internship, enabling them to pay their fees in installments and gradually cover both tuition and personal expenses. According to Pragun, the course makes it affordable and sustainable in both personal and professional terms. He pointed out:

Compared to other courses, our College B course fee structure is less than theirs; it is affordable and easy to pay. After enrollment, students will work, learn, and earn, so it is easy to pay and no burden to parents; for example, from semesters III, we will start to earn; if we earn 5K, we will pay a certain amount in installments, and gradually we will cover all the fees and other expenses. In other HM courses, they have more theoretical classes and hardly work and earn, so they need support from their parents. So that this course is affordable.

Tshering expressed a balanced perspective by viewing the fee structure through two lenses. While acknowledging that the BPH course is cheaper than other HM programs, he also noted that the first semester can feel financially demanding due to the requirement of daily physical classes. Even though it is offset in the remaining semesters when the program transitions to a hybrid model (a combination of one-day physical classes and short online sessions) that allows students to engage in internship/on-the-job training, this shift makes it easier to manage their finances.

Tshering explained:

I experienced the fee structure differently. I compared with other HM colleges, it is affordable because in the first and second semester, everyday physical classes so it is cheaper. Now, once a week, physical classes and the remaining days, one-hour online classes are internally expensive. However, it is affordable and reasonable because we can learn and earn.

Experiencing Resources and Facilities

Resources and facilities play an important part in teaching and learning within academic institutions, in the industry, and in day-to-day experiences in society and at

home. A lack of appropriate resources and facilities hampers the learning of individuals or groups in real-world, day-to-day work. Therefore, well-equipped facilities and resources simulate a professional environment and help students develop hard skills and soft skills in experiential learning in hospitality higher education.

In hospitality education, hands-on experiences such as table setting in F&B service, guest check-in in FO, HK, and vegetable cutting in food production require specific infrastructure, tools, and equipment; to maintain students' teaching-learning procedures, resources and facilities directly influence. If learners gain knowledge in under-resourced institutions, their experience might fall short of expectations, leading to frustration, limited exposure, and lower confidence than peers with access to modern equipment and technology.

All the participants in this study, who have extensive experience, shared their insights on the resources available in their respective institutions and industries. These students narrated their personal experiences accumulated over the years. Additionally, I outlined the students' experiences with the available resources and facilities. Furthermore, combined their experience in detail regarding the resources and facilities provided by their institutions and during industry placements. Their experiences shaped not only their technical skills but also their confidence, adaptability, and readiness for real-world hospitality work.

Yangchen expressed her experience regarding practical labs at college. She was happy with the individual tools and ingredients, housekeeping equipment, particularly the marble polishing machine, and the front office lab, which are well-designed. Nonetheless, she suggested that adding a few more industry-based tools and equipment would be better for students' learning outcomes. Yangchen highlighted:

The college provided sufficient equipment, tools, and teaching materials. The kitchen was well-equipped with individual utensils and ingredients. For the housekeeping practical college has real rooms, public area, cleaning chemicals, F&B outlets, and heavy machines with a heavy marble polisher may be new for a few of the industry staff. F&B (service and production) and front office labs are according to industry standards. The classrooms are well furnished with smart technology. The library has all requirement resource access. Overall, all the facilities are adequate. However, incorporating a few more industry-standard tools and equipment would further enhance learning and practical experience.

Similarly, Aparajita also appreciated the learning resources available at the college, as Yangchen did. Contrarily, she mentioned the complementary meal provided negatively as a resource. She expressed mixed feelings:

In experience, everything is very good. The classroom has the necessary equipment and a fully furnished seating arrangement. Similarly, in the kitchen, service, and housekeeping, sufficient facilities are provided, and only the front office needs to add more labs for practicals. Another facility regarding meals, my suggestion would be to increase portion sizes and decrease oil and spices. Our class starts in the morning. The breakfast portion is small and has a lot of oil and spices. We are suffering from gastritis.

Sadhika shared an analytical view. She has mixed feelings about resources for her academic journey; she felt college provided fewer ingredients, equipment, and library resources. However, few facilities are provided in FO. She reflected:

In my experience, the college has a lack of required facilities and resources. This will be impacted in our learning. The practical classes suffered from insufficient equipment and ingredients, and a small space. There is a lack of relevant library resources. Housekeeping practicals would benefit if they were done in the college premises and a furnished room despite relying on a hotel. Equipments were shortage in practical.

Utkrishta appreciated the facilities provided by the college. He experienced the internship, which made him realize the importance of facilities. His only suggestion was to increase front office practical time. Utkrishta reflected:

We are very lucky that the college provides all the facilities for both theory and practical classes. The classrooms have smart technology, CCTV, computer lab, library, indoor and outdoor games, for practical training, for housekeeping training, a well-furnished room, a public area, for front office reception, for F&B service restaurants, and for kitchens, and a bar.

Pragun shared mixed experiences. He experienced that the college provided all the facilities required for learning. At the same time, he mentioned that there were many challenges, even though facilities were available; they were not enough, including limited equipment, small practical spaces, and a lack of resources in the library. Pragun acknowledged:

In my experience, college has resources for learning. For HK, we went to the hotel for the practical, which was not effective because of a big group of

students at the same time. In the kitchen equipments and ingredients are limited, so we were unable to do our practical properly, and in F&B, it was also not very effective. The practical place for the kitchen and F&B service practical was small. In FO practical also there was small desk and not proper set up. The library does not have sufficient learning resources, such as books. In my experience, need to improve the facilities for practical classes.

Tshering also felt that the college met industry standards in many ways, from small tools to heavy machines. However, like others, he suggested increasing practical time in the front office and improving lab use. He also compared his college with others and felt relatively fortunate. Tshering exclaimed:

I experienced that all the facilities are provided, like learning materials, well-furnished classrooms, laboratories, library, and meals from the college, according to industry requirements and needs of learning, from small tools to heavy machines. However, it needs to give more attention to practical time and laboratories in FO. I have interacted with college friends, and they mentioned that facilities are limited.

Experiences with Academic Supports

The mentor (instructor) is like the North Star shining in the night, guiding travelers in the darkness. This kind of guidance is best rooted in the students' mature awareness. Students pursuing experiential learning in hospitality have a crucial role in effectively combining theory and practice. Instructors are those who bring the curriculum to life in the classroom and workshop and inspire students to achieve their learning objectives. That is why teachers can be said to be the center of teaching and learning activities, regardless of the school setting. In technical and vocational institutions, instructors are expected to be academically and professionally sound. Compared to finding general subject teachers, finding technical instructors is more challenging. Thus, retaining qualified and talented faculty in colleges is crucial.

Experiences with Teaching Faculties

Participants shared diverse experiences with their faculty members. Many of them appreciated teachers who were both academically qualified and had industry experience. Yangchen reflected a few teachers did not deliver the content properly. Sometimes they showed negligence or agreed with students even when the answers were wrong. She also mentioned that some faculty members were not strict in following KU's rules and regulations. Still, she appreciated those teachers who shared

real industry stories and examples related to the subject, which made learning more meaningful. Yangchen shared:

I have so many experience to faculty; most of them are experienced in academics and industry; however, some of them do not have the skill how to teach with sound knowledge even though he/she has industry experience, good personalities, and manage nicely in the industry, we could observe from his/her attitude and behavior, but when they were teaching, we felt they do not have any teaching skill, like negligence, whatever student said he/she agreed even though that was wrong. Even our faculty members are not very strict about following the rules and regulations posed by KU. Some faculty members shared their stories and examples related to that subject.

Aparajita shared that her mentors were qualified and well-versed in the curriculum. They were prepared and willing to help students. Even though the course content changed frequently, teachers did their best to adapt. She mentioned that, before starting a new topic, instructors would review previous lessons in physical classes. She felt that teachers were supportive and courageous in handling both learning and change alongside students. Aparajita stated:

Most of the faculty are very good. They know what they need to teach and are always prepared for us. It becomes challenging for the faculty to fully understand the subject. So, while we are working and learning, the teachers are also learning with us. They revise the previous topics in physical classes and then start the next one.

Sadhika explained that until the fourth semester, faculty members were generally effective and provided meaningful classroom experiences. However, she noticed differences in faculty competence. Sadhika revealed:

I experienced, until the fourth semester, that faculty members were generally effective. But we noticed differences in subject knowledge. A few of the teachers were competent and very nice, and a few of them did not meet. It made us question how faculty members are selected and how management guarantees the qualified faculty/instructors. A few faculty seemed, they are starting teaching after graduation immediately. They have not experience in the industry.

Pragun affirmed, “Teachers are very positive. Most of them are competent in their skills and knowledge, and a few are just satisfactory,” which reflects a

generally favorable but slightly varied perception of teaching quality among students.

Utkrishta stated his experience that most of the faculty were competent. However, a few of them appeared as newly graduated and less experienced in teaching. He presented an example of a teacher who taught for 4 months even though he could not teach the subject clearly, leaving students confused. Therefore, students made a complaint to management about the teaching style of a particular faculty then replaced by another. Utkrishta explained:

Many faculty members are qualified, but some look like they recently graduated and do not have much teaching experience. For example, one teacher taught us for four months, but we did not understand what he was teaching. So, we talked to the management, and the faculty member was changed.

Tshering mentioned that most teachers were competent and qualified. On the other hand, it was observed that a few teachers neglected their responsibilities and assumed students were only there to earn a degree, so they did not put enough effort into teaching. Tshering revealed:

In my experience, most faculty members are competent and qualified. They teach by giving examples from hotels and assigning research work. Even when we did not know certain subjects, the teacher explained them clearly. But a few teachers neglect the class. They think students are coming only to get a degree, so they do not put enough effort into teaching.

Overall, students' narratives highlight that faculty support plays a key role in shaping their learning experience. Qualified, skilled, prepared, and industry-expert faculty increase practical understanding and encourage significant involvement.

Experiences with Mentors

Mentors/supervisors are important for students' academic learning journey. Three participants shared meaningful stories about the support, mentorship, and encouragement they received during their academic and experiential learning journey. Mentors who motivated students, recognized their potential, and facilitated hands-on learning had a significant impact on students' self-efficacy and professional aspirations.

Experiences with mentors differ from student to student and mentor to mentor in college and the real industry. Yangchen had precious experiences in which her

mentors, including senior managers and even the owner, offered encouragement, flexibility, and valuable support in the industry. She was urged to gain experience abroad and return to contribute to Nepal's hospitality industry. Even though she did not experience any problems with her mentors, some of her friends faced problems. Yangchen shared:

I experienced lucky myself. I got support from the CEO, managers, seniors, and same level friends. My seniors helped me for study and job. I was motivated by them. Their encouragement and aspiration played a key role in my career growth. All interns or employee do not get opportunities like me. Some friends faced difficulties, such as not getting exam leave or support from their supervisors. Their positive behavior encouraged me more continuously.

Their support, along with help from friends, teachers, and mentors, helped me grow. Some of my friends did not get this kind of support. The encouragement from my mentors and a hotel owner inspired me to work hard and build my career

Similarly, Pragun reported being positively recognized by his supervisors and offered a job because of his commitment and skills.

I received more support from my supervisor and seniors for learning and doing; they never harassed me. I was taught in all departments; they acknowledged my skills, hard work, and diligence, so I was offered the job. However, I was challenged to learn in FO due to insufficient practice and knowledge in college. In summary, the environment was good for learning, doing, and earning. However, not everyone has the same environment as those doing internships.

Conversely, Utkrishta remembered an earlier experience where supervisors provided little guidance, leaving learning to peer interns. His experience improved only after he transferred to a different hotel, in which direct mentorship from the chef enhanced his theoretical and practical understanding.

In the first hotel where I interned, I worked in a big team with more than 25 members; at that time, even though I could not talk to each other, I was just told to do this or that; I did that knowingly or unknowingly, and instead of being taught by the supervisor, I was taught by the senior intern. After completing my internship, I shifted to another hotel. The chef taught me theory and practicals in the hotel, so I have learned a lot; it was the reason for direct reporting and communication with my supervisor(chef).

The workplace learning is most effective when teaching supervisors act as intentional mentors rather than passive overseers. The presence or absence of this mentorship significantly influences how students translate classroom knowledge into practical competence.

Experiences with Administrators

Administrators' supporting role is a significant element shaping learners' perceptions of their institutional environment in professional hospitality education, just as it is in other courses. Yangchen experienced positive and negative support from academic administrators. She described some of them as helpful and cooperative, and others as not. Yangchen described:

They provide information about exams, class routine, and opportunities. They are helpful. But few are emotionally disturbed and they don't know to manage. They are not cooperative. For example, we plan one event and proposal given for help. It was neglected from one administrator but another administrator accepted and cooperated. As a result, we may become demotivated and discouraged. Our other friends also expressed the same (Aggressive): our administrators do not care for us.

Aparajita shared her experiences with college administrators, mentioning that they are interactive, approachable, and practical communicators. She linked with the consistency of delivery of information delivery. However, she also figured out that despite their efforts, recurring issues such as scheduling errors and assessment issues still affect the administrative process. Aparajit stated:

I experienced, they are very good, interactive, and eye for detail. There is no lack of communication, depending on how much we grab from the administration. We should know they have delivered all the information and communication on time. However, sometimes, countless errors occur, such as scheduling the classes and assessments.

Consistently supportive college administrators played a vital role in students' overall academic journey. They support from different angles, such as financial (to pay fee installments), sharing job opportunities in the industry, and communication about events like conferences, seminars, and workshops, as well as assessment schedules. Sadhika felt happy with the inspiring, motivating, empowering, and encouraging role of administrators in enabling students to participate in "learning by doing" and "earning while studying." However, she also faced personal challenges

due to noticeable discrepancies between students from different economic backgrounds. Sadhika mentioned:

All of them are very helpful, and take it positively. Because of that, we are here. Helpful, providing information and communicating about job opportunities, and events that are motivating. We are learning by doing and learning and earning at the same time. But there are a few discrepancies between rich and poor students (my experience).

Utkrishta also, like other participants, also shared that the administrators are helpful and welcoming and maintain open communication with students regarding their suggestions, feedback, and grievances. Utkrishta shared:

The administrators support us and will inform and communicate everything to us. They regularly interacted with us about how we are doing and how we have challenges in the industry working environment. They will take care of us and allow us to contact them directly.

Not all administrators are the same. They have different strengths and weaknesses depending on the administrator. Pragun expressed his view on college administrators, stating that while administrative communication is generally timely, he finds the overall support from administrators lacking. He also pointed out that often, the lack of support from some administrators during internships or events results in student demotivation. Despite these challenges, Pragun mentioned that students need to follow management's guidance regularly and respectfully:

I want to say that administrators should be like parents. If I have to say, they were not very supportive. They do not feel students need to have meal when they are in college, it was an example, we were in class, but there was no breakfast. When we asked, their reply was not satisfactory. They were supposed to be interactive with students about their internship, however there is not. When we plan for any event, there is countless support; there are so many examples that we become demotivated. However, we do not go beyond management's instruction and authority. Besides this, information and communication are delivered on time.

Similarly, Tshering noted that college administrators are professional and up to date, often providing timely information and updates. Consequently, students need to follow up regularly, even though administrators are expected to deliver efficient services. Tshering suggested that administrators engage more proactively with

students, particularly regarding their academic progress and personal challenges.

Tshering noted:

My experience about administrators, if they are not professional there will be challenge to all. In general, college administrators are professional and up-to-date. They are fine; they will provide information on time and update accordingly. However, some of them are knowledgeable, and some of them are acceptable. Sometimes, messages are delivered late, and there is confusion about management, so from time to time, we are supposed to knock them, though they were supposed to give the best service to students. Administrators need to interact with students regarding their progress and challenges.

The narratives reflect that curriculum design, organizational resources, and human relationships within the learning ecosystem shape effective EL. To enhance academically and personally, these roles must be delivered with care, consistency, and professionalism. Conversely, inconsistencies and neglect in any of these domains can limit the transformative potential of experiential learning.

Experiences as an Intern and as an Early Career Professional

Participants shared different experiences about internships and real work. Majarocon et al. (2024) noted, in hospitality education, internships connect theory and practice, enabling students to apply their learning in real hotel settings

Experiences as an Intern

The internship program provides students the opportunity to learn and work across different departments in the hotel and hospitality industry. It is an important step for their future job. Students go to the real industry, learn by doing, and improve their skills. They also understand how the industry works.

Yangchen explained:

In my first semester, I studied both theoretical and practical classes, and in the second semester, I began my internship at Hotel Thamel (pseudonym), starting in the housekeeping department. Because of my hard work and dedication, I was transferred to front office. After few months I got job offer. I accepted that offer because I suppose to expenses as student. I worked one year at there. After my one-year experience in that hotel, I got the opportunity to work in Hotel Sheraton(pseudonym), which was my dream. I was experiencing challenges, but I committed for continuous as student and real industry exposure.

Similarly, Utkrishta experienced different learning environments in two hotels. At the initial phase of the internship, interaction with supervisors was very limited, and his learning was peer-led and task-oriented. In the second, he received direct instruction from the chef, which enriched his experience of receiving constructive feedback and mentorship. Utkrishta affirmed:

In the internship, I experienced challenges like long hours, a lack of orientation, unequal behavior, and no stipend. Theoretical which gained in the college, it did not match in the hotel. Exhaustion from classes, night shifts, and assignments added experience pressure.

Aparajita experienced several obstacles in the internship. Because of difficulties, she discontinued her internship at the same organization. Aparajita stated:

I did only six-month internship. I experienced many challenges. There were limited opportunities. I work basic job. We interacted with supervisors, but it was not solved. Different weather, lack of accommodation, and limited stipend I experienced. We were assigned to a certain department without asking/choice and given poor treatment by the staff. It was promised to provide remuneration by the hotel. We received a small amount as a stipend. For that, we struggled a lot. My home and hotel were far apart, so the expenses were very high. It was hard to manage. Finally, I left the internship at that hotel.

Sadhika had done an internship in only one industry for various reasons, such as facilities, job opportunities, and financial reasons. She expressed a strong desire to create a more nurturing and respectful learning environment for future interns in her workplace. Sadhika narrated:

I got many opportunities, but I missed. Besides many opportunities, I have done only one because of the monetary, promotion in job, manageable time, and meals. After completing a five-month internship, I was promoted to staff, working across core departments with a focus on food and beverage service. At first, I experienced humiliation from seniors. I struggled with tasks because I was not enough trained. I experienced in the kitchen. As intern there was very basic tasks such as peeling, cleaning. There was very little opportunity to learn.

Utkrishta also experienced more or less challenges as other. Utkrishta illustrated:

I did a six-month internship in one hotel and got a year-long apprenticeship in another industry. I worked long hour, night duty, and misbehavior from senior staff.

Next participant, Pragun, completed a one-year internship and gained knowledge across the hotel's main departments. He faced many challenges throughout internship, including applying theoretical knowledge to practical situations. Pragun revealed:

I did one year internship in one hotel. I covered four pillars of the hotel. When I tried to apply to another hotel, I was offered a job on the same property where I was doing the internship. I was thinking of working in another hotel; however, I was compelled to start a job because of my financial status, the facility provided by the hotel, the college and working distance, and team spirit and cooperation. At the same time, we were receiving very little stipend (1k-5k) and facing financial difficulties. My friends also faced the same challenges when we interacted with each other.

Tshering completed internships at three different hotels. He is experienced in all departments. Moreover, he noted that challenges vary from one hotel to another, with smaller or non-star hotels facing greater difficulties and fewer learning opportunities than those in star-rated hotels. Tshering narrated:

I have done an internship in three different hotels and have basic knowledge of all departments, but I am continuously in the kitchen because I have more experience in it. Our course it is a "Learning by Doing" tagline. We had to work and study; firstly, this was a challenge because of time management and unfamiliarity with the real world. The balance between working and classes: sometimes duty and class time will be at the same time; there is a greater chance to be absent in class and sometimes late on duty, so it wasn't easy. In addition, I was paid a very small amount(2K) during the internship, which was not motivating, and it wasn't easy to manage finances. The next challenges were scolding by senior staff and not getting transportation facilities. The challenges depend on the category of the hotel. There will be more challenges in small restaurants and non-star hotels because the interns will not get proper facilities, focusing only on tasks, treating interns, and

personal growth. In contrast, the intern will get all the facilities in star hotels and face fewer challenges.

Looking at students' narratives, this reflects the importance of an internship, depending on the hotel-to-hotel and accessibility. They experienced numerous challenges. They emphasized time and stress management. Staff's behavior towards interns varies from one establishment to another.

Experiences as an Early Career Professional

Students have opportunities for early career experience during or upon completion of an internship. Early career experience is an opportunity and a transition. From the students' reflections, they highlighted different challenges and opportunities that depend on student to student. There is a clear distinction between an intern and an early career experience. In their early careers, they have to take on more responsibilities, build their confidence, and develop self-awareness.

Yangchen recalled, "I did not experience any challenges as an intern. Because I was diligent, dedicated." She experienced that personal commitment and academic readiness can facilitate the transition from learning environments to professional practice.

Aparajita experienced balancing professional and personal time management. Challenges in the beginning days, for instance, food and beverage presentation, restaurant setup, and guest handling. Aparajita wondered:

I am experiencing a time management challenge because I cannot spend time with my family; I work and study all day, become exhausted, and have no personal life. However, I have become independent and happy. I can manage my expenses myself, so there is no need to ask my parents, which is the good part. When I started working the first day, I was not familiar with all the practicals. For example, when the chef made a food presentation, I spoiled the food when serving the guests. The chef yelled at me. The guest whom I was serving was observing the scenario. He apologized on behalf of the chef since I was new. In this case, the guest could be observing where we were from.

Sadhika highlighted an experience similar to that of other students. The difference between an intern and an early career experience. Her experience shows the psychological, personal, and professional development encountered in real life under pressure. Sadhika realized:

I am experiencing more challenges in job rather than intern. The workload is increased, and I have to work more supervisory roles than as an intern. There is no excuse if I make mistakes. Responsibility has increased, and I need to handle trainees and junior staff. So, I feel the real world of work after becoming an employee. Enhancing technology work, personality growth, and time management are challenges being employees. It was fine in the first semester because we concentrated only on studying; now we had to work and study, so we had limited time, and we had to prepare reports and most of the work at the same time; the result of all of these, sometimes we were about to become distracted, depressed, and exhausted so the workplace will not be effective.

Similarly, Utkrishta made a point of increasing responsibilities and challenges in self-esteem. His challenges reflect the formal education setup and workplace-based learning in an industry learning atmosphere. Utkrishta conveyed:

Now we have more responsibility. Work depends on our designation, and there will not be any excuses like an intern. Self-confidence is another challenge because we are not perfect in every aspect, so we fear this. Another challenge is time management for study and work; we have to attend the class as per the hotel's duty roster, and we cannot compromise on duty. For example, this week, I have duty on my day off, so I cannot attend the theory class. I missed so many classes because of this. Likewise, it is the submission of assignments. We will be busy with online classes, face-to-face classes, and duty, so we have a lack of time to do the assignments.

Pragun explained the same challenges as other friends experienced. Pragun noted:

I have different experiences between being an intern and being an employee. When I became an employee, I experienced challenges, such as time and stress management. Furthermore, responsibilities have been increased to meet the goals, vision, and mission. Relationships and cooperation with other departments have been improved. The workload has increased, and they need to work more if there is a lack of manpower with extra duty hours.

Tshering experienced fewer personal challenges. Nevertheless, working at a newly opened hotel required multitasking, maintaining hygiene standards, and working more hours. Tshering reported:

I am not experiencing many challenges as an employee because I have worked in various hotels and am familiar with related tasks. Employee responsibilities have been increased, and there is more ownership and hard work. I work in an opening hotel. We had to work long hours. In the same time, we suppose to complete many works together. Maintaining hygiene was a challenge.

The narratives of students' internship experiences show that experiential learning enhances independence, personal and professional development, and skill development. It also uncovers them to the bitter truth realities of professional hospitality environments. Balancing study, work, and well-being is a notable challenge, underscoring the need for support and practice during the shift from student to professional.

Practical Applications of the Learning

Students' stories about their future show that learning by doing has helped them make clear plans to work in the hospitality industry. Different experiences in hotel management, event planning, aviation, finance, and hospitality consulting have opened doors and given them good opportunities. They said that their personal development in this field has helped them understand their own growth (Jackson, 2015; Kolb, 1984;). Through these experiences, students gained customer service, leadership and management, industry and technical knowledge, language and communication, emotional intelligence and stress management, networking and career advancement, training and education, career growth, and the ability to handle diverse situations.

Experiential learning has been transformative for students, helping them in various ways. Through this internship, they can earn, learn about the hospitality industry's rules and regulations, and acquire valuable skills. Sadhika shared, I was experiencing difficulties in work and study. But I became normal to it and could apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations.

Participants' stories show that moving from classroom and practical learning to a full-time job helped them clearly understand how course content is used in real work. Students said their academic knowledge gave them a strong base to face work

challenges. For example, what they learned about food and beverage service, hotel operations, and hospitality etiquette helped them understand what is expected in the workplace.

Yangchen experienced that studying and working in hospitality transformed her perseverance, initiative, and practical learning. Yangchen laughed and expressed her experience:

The life skills subject helped me for soft skills. This program has improved my weaknesses. I have realized that hard work, self-motivation, and grabbing opportunities are key to success. Once, I was planning to enter the hospitality field, but now, I see a vast scope and have committed to tourism and social work(laugh).

Participants like Yangchen and Aparajita found that initial academic knowledge helped them manage critical situations, even when mistakes occurred. Aparajita recalled her experience before joining the BPH program and now:

I changed my personal and professional life. I become more confident, disciplined, and focused on the goal. I experienced a change before 2021 and now. For example, I keep my home clean because I learned in college. Though emotional challenges like anger can momentarily overpower learned theories, I now manage emotional challenges.

Sadhika's shift from intern to early experience and leadership responsibility illustrates the practical application of professional theories taught in the classroom. Sadhika highlighted:

In my experience, promotion in the workplace can be achieved through education and hard work. It is easy to deal with customers, and there are many job opportunities. After completing our course, we can get senior-level jobs because of our academic and practical knowledge. The life skills subject in the course was very helpful. I will do yoga and long breathing. If I become stressed, I keep quiet and keep working. In this case, I read "Gita" every day. I read one page of Gita, which is helping my personal development. After returning from abroad in five years, I planned to operate my own tourism business, utilizing my experiences and skills. In the long term, I will be a successful entrepreneur.

Sadhika believes, from her narratives, that study and work help promote opportunities and lead to other professions within and across industries nationally and

internationally. Through the BPH course, particularly the life skills subject, she enhanced her communication skills, adopted Nepali cultural practices in guest service, and developed time and stress management skills. She applied strategies taught by her teachers, such as yoga, breathing exercises, and reading the Bhagavad Gita (a Holy book of the Hindus), to manage stress and support her personal growth.

Utkrishta, another participant, found that the BPH program is an exemplary direction for those interested in the hospitality field, offering academic and practical experience within a cost-effective framework. Utkrishta expressed:

In my experience, the BPH program is fine. Those who like to join HM, this program is the best. It can save time because we will get academic and experience certificates when we complete it. So, this is the best course at an affordable cost within our country. I have experience in publicizing it inside and outside the country.

Tshering, who had prior experience and worked across different industries, found it easier to apply academic knowledge in real-world settings. These experiences support the idea of a “reflective practitioner,” where past work experience helps a person apply, adjust, and improve what they have learned. Implementing course content in real-world jobs improved students’ professional skills and helped them better understand their studies. Tshering laughed and shared:

After I joined BPH, I changed. The life skills subject helped me with soft skills such as motivation, stress management, time management, and a positive attitude; the HK subject helped me maintain cleaning and hygiene; and the culinary subject helped me prepare meals in my professional and personal life, “घरमा खाना बनाउने” (Preparing food at home). Laughed. So, I will apply theory to practice in the real world of work. In the short term, I will be a Chef de Partie; in the long term, I will be an entrepreneur applying my experience in the tourism industry.

Participants’ narratives highlight how theoretical concepts introduced in academic sessions became a practical necessity for almost all students upon entering full-time roles. Experiential learning in the BPH program has changed their professional capabilities, personal growth, and life outlooks. Moreover, their experiences reflect a shared belief that success in the hospitality industry is rooted in building strong foundations, continuous learning, and ethical practice. The

experiential learning journey, shared by all participants, creates a clear picture of personal and professional change through the BPH program, following the “Learning by Doing” approach.

Chapter Summary

This chapter answered the study’s research questions by presenting the stories and experiences of BPH students. From the students’ narratives seven themes of experiential learning in hospitality education were identified and discussed: 1) Early Experiences and Inclinations, 2) Aspirations for Hospitality Education, 3) Experiencing Curriculum and Pedagogies, 4) Experiencing Resources and Facilities, 5) Experiences with Academic Supports, 6) Experiences as an Intern and as an Early Career Professional, and 7) Practical Applications of the Learning. Each theme shows different student experiences and how these contribute to their professional growth and understanding of the hospitality industry.

CHAPTER V

MEANING MAKING

This chapter presents the meaning-making of themes that emerged from participants' narratives, interpreted through the lenses of Kolb (1984) experiential learning theory and Vygotsky (1980) social constructivist theory, focusing on students' experiential learning experiences in the Bachelor in Professional Hospitality (BPH) program in Nepal. Furthermore, composed of the narratives of the six participants and grounded in established educational theories, it explores how prior experiences, internships, the availability of learning resources, and the balance between theoretical and practical education shape their learning experiences. Similarly discusses reflections derived from field experiences by critically linking them with relevant findings from previous studies, thereby strengthening the theoretical and empirical grounding of the analysis.

Moreover, the students' narratives are rare instances and are stories immersed in social, economic, institutional, and emotional circumstances. These stories are best understood through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimentation, and Social Constructivist learning, which views learning as co-constructed in social and cultural settings. The narratives are critically engaged to illuminate how experiential learning functions in hospitality education in the Nepali context, based on the research question, "How do students narrate their stories of experiential learning in the Bachelor in Professional Hospitality Program and what meaning can we make from these experiences?" Students understand their learning by thinking about their own experiences and what they learned from them. The following table shows the meaning-making themes from the analysis of students' experiences:

Table 3*Themes of Meaning Making*

Theme
Students' Prior Experience and Career Aspirations Shape Their Learning Experiences
Internship Seems Challenging but Offers Manifold Opportunities
Resources Enhance Experiential Learning Engagement
Need for Balancing Theory and Practice

Students' Prior Experience and Career Aspirations Shape Their Learning Experience

Participants' narratives reveal that students' prior experiences and career aspirations are crucial to EL, particularly in professional education. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) assumes that prior experiences are crucial, serving as concrete experiences that are necessary for reflection and conceptualization, which are essential components of the learning process. Knowles et al. (2005) reflected that andragogy emphasizes that adults lead the way in life experiences, which form a rich resource for learning and self-directed education (Loeng, 2020). This understanding is reflected in some of my participants' stories. For example, Yangchen's early experiences selling vegetables and working as a barista made her independent, and her perseverance led her to study professional hospitality education. As well as Sadhika's prior experience teaching children due to her family background, she was inspired to pursue further study in the BPH. Additionally, Utkrishta, raised in a family hotel business and working alongside his father, had an intrinsic understanding of service dynamics and demonstrated confidence and inspiration throughout his BPH journey.

Participants' narratives are supported by Azhenov et al. (2023), those who argue that early experiences guide students' educational choice pathways and future goals. The experiences of participants act as concrete experiences in Kolb (1984) the model and as socially mediated learning contexts in Vygotsky (1980) theory. Bandura (1978) reinforced the importance of acknowledging learners' prior experience in hospitality education to reflect the aspirations that are co-constructed through social

influences and personal history. The strong evidence from students' narratives aligns with the research question by demonstrating how they believed EL, where influence and aspiration meet opportunity. They are pursuing their academics with expectations, resilience, and built learning that builds from hands-on practice, relationships, and personal drive, all through a lens of social perspectives.

Kolb's ELT also begins with concrete experience, suggesting that past encounters form the basis for reflective learning. For example, Yangchen's trajectory—from selling vegetables on the streets of Kathmandu to becoming a Barista and eventually joining the BPH program represents not only a series of "concrete experiences" but also her negotiation of meaning within her sociocultural constraints. Her early experiences reflect what Vygotsky calls the Zone of Proximal Development [ZPD](Mufid & Muassomah, 2025), where learning occurs through guided support from family and social institutions (e.g., academia, hostel, sponsorship, Barista training). Sadhika completed basic cooking training prior to joining the BPH program. She joined mainly to formalize her skills and build a proper career. Her friends' problems and financial difficulties also affected her dreams and plans. Utkrishta grew up in a family that runs a hotel, so he had early experience in hospitality. Because of this background, he wants to promote Nepali hospitality worldwide. His goal comes from both what he has seen in real life and what he hopes to achieve in the future.

These students' stories show that their learning is not confined to classrooms. It is connected to their life experiences and social surroundings (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Their interests and identity as hospitality students are shaped by their past experiences and their future dreams (Sfard, 1998). This also supports Tinto's (2012) idea of student integration, as explained by Chrysikos et al. (2017), who state that a student's background and personal effort affect how they engage and continue their studies. Utkrishta's family hotel experience also shows how growing up in a business environment can support formal education and make learning easier to understand.

The BPH program's responsiveness to such diverse prior experiences affirms the critical importance of learner-centered pedagogies in professional education. Hence, students' experience and career aspirations shape their learning.

Internship Seems Challenging but Offers Manifold Opportunities

An internship provides a key element of situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Kolb (1984) identifies this phase as active experimentation, where

learners apply theoretical knowledge in real-world industry, transforming abstract concepts into concrete skills. Furthermore, participants noted that internships are a transformative learning experience; however, they can also have emotional and physical impacts. Moreover, the internships serve as transformative spaces where students learn by doing, reflecting, and interacting with professionals, thereby confirming both Kolb's experiential framework and Vygotsky's notion of ZPD, in which learning is scaffolded by those more experienced.

Students gained confidence by applying their skills in real-world settings and receiving feedback from workplace mentors (Hafizd & Kahar, 2025). Internships are a transition space (Meyer & Land, 2005), where students gradually move into professional roles. Many students described internships as both difficult and transformative (Brodsky et al., 2024).

Moreover, internships are an important element of the situated learning theory, in, which holds that learning is situated within authentic contexts, where students apply their knowledge in real environments, transforming abstract concepts into concrete skills (Bury & Iwasaki, 2018). Tshering emphasized that real-world kitchen experiences enabled him to apply classroom knowledge in high-pressure environments, preparing him for industry expectations. Along the same lines, Yangchen recounted that during her internship, she gradually realized that small life skills are also very important. Before, she did not give them much value, but later, especially during job interviews, she came to see that these skills had real meaning and helped a lot. Pawan experienced improvement in attention to detail in the workplace through an internship. Aparajita also stated that her experience working as an intern in the salon helped her develop socio-emotional skills (Martinsone et al., 2025) and adapt to different situations effectively. An internship is the active experimentation phase of Kolb's experiential learning theory. Students gain practical internship, industry, and real-world experience through practice (Mokhtar & Fauzi, 2019).

Furthermore, Bandura (1978) added that self-efficacy means the confidence a learner has in their own ability. In this study, students like Pawan demonstrated greater confidence as learners in real-world situations and received guidance from workplace mentors. This helps them apply theory to practice (Bury & Iwasaki 2018), such as Tshering, who shared that working in a real kitchen helped him apply

classroom knowledge in a busy, stressful environment, which prepared him for industry expectations.

Similarly, students face challenges. The experiences illustrate how students, through internships, learn and encounter opportunities that provide grounds for social interaction, resilience, and initiative, fostering growth in the face of difficulties as well. Even though the program focuses on learning by doing, students experience challenges with time management, balancing between work and study, and adaptation to a real work environment. In the internship, they gained knowledge and skills. They got opportunities to interact with various people, which helped them become stronger in any circumstances (Vo et al., 2022). Additionally, students described their internships as turning points where theory is put into practice, skills are refined, and their identities as hospitality professionals begin to take shape. Stress is a complex and multifaceted term with interpretations that vary depending on the nature of professional and personal work, such as internships or early career experience.

From a learning perspective, internships involve “doing” and “trying out” ideas in real situations (Kolb, 2015). Even with these difficulties, students said they became more confident and independent. This shows that learning through experience helps build important personal and professional skills needed for future leadership in hospitality (Fuller & Unwin, 2003). So, even though internships are challenging, they are important learning experiences.

Resources Enhance Experiential Learning Engagement

The elements of effective experiential learning environments are woven with resources that facilitate the stages of “concrete experience” and “active experimentation” as delineated in (Kolb, 1984) the learning cycle. Wurdinger and Carlson (2009) stated compellingly that adequate resources significantly enhance learner engagement and foster the development of practical competencies, elevating the educational experience to new heights. For the knowledge and skills resources play a vital role in real-world settings, which meet the industry requirements and standards (Passarelli & Kolb, 2023). According to students’ narratives, practical and theoretical resources improved their learning outcomes. Furthermore, resources and facilities such as model kitchens, training restaurants, housekeeping labs, front-office simulators, and even real-world exposure such as internships in hotels, from the physical foundation for experiential learning.

Participants toted the importance of resources and facilities across departments in enhancing learning opportunities. Yangchen highlights the implications of resources during theory in college, such as the correct use of chemicals applied in an internship that helped her and trained staff who were untrained theoretically (Millar et al., 2010). Participants reflected that the good kitchen, front office, lab, and internship place greatly helped their learning. When tools meet industry standards, students learn better. Yangchen said during her internship, because she knew how to use things properly, like chemicals, she was better than others who did not have training. Some students were happy with the resources, but some were not satisfied. Spadafora and Downes (2020) mentioned learning improves better when proper support (scaffold) is provided.

According to Wurdinger and Carlson (2009), EL strengthened when learners engage with tools and settings that reflect real-world conditions. Additionally, participants noted that kitchen labs, guest rooms, the front office, and internships are better in star-rated hotels than in non-rated hotels. The BPH program, with its strong industry tie-ups, fulfills this condition more effectively than other theory-driven hospitality courses, as reported by multiple participants, including Utkrishta and Tshering. Additionally, the excess of quality resources does not imply redundancy; instead, it ensures that failure redundancy is avoided. It provides multiple touchpoints where learners can practice, fail safely, receive feedback, and improve hallmarks of robust experiential education.

Furthermore, as in Vygotsky's ZPD, students learn better when they receive guidance and support from mentors, peers, and groups. Resources and facilities also encourage them to gradually learn to work independently. Adding the value of teamwork and working together in a practical lab, such as F&B, FO, HK, and Kitchen, they accomplish the learning goals and generate new ideas. Similarly, students learn well when they solve problems together with the teacher, seniors, and friends using proper tools.

Hence, theoretical knowledge became meaningful when applied in a practical context, using the right tools and resources effectively. Nevertheless, more importantly, it is social interaction, correcting a senior, that fosters a new professional identity. These reflections show that well-resourced environments act as scaffolds (Wood, 2012), enabling learners to perform tasks they could not manage

independently. The authenticity of the learning environment supports deep learning and reflective practice (Moon, 2004).

Similarly, participants reported that the BPH course, with a strong industry relationship and hands-on practical training, effectively meets students' learning outcomes, rather than focusing solely on theory. Nevertheless, more importantly, it was her social interaction, correcting a senior, that fostered a new professional identity. This aligns with authentic engagement with tools in real-world settings, coupled with reflective interaction, which results in deep learning.

Finally, participants strongly emphasize the importance of tools, labs, and materials in explaining how they engaged more confidently in practical tasks when adequately resourced. This concept is connected to Kolb's experiential learning theory and Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning, in which tools and the environment provide support that helps students learn. Participants reflected on their experiences and learned more when the setting and facilities looked like a real workplace. This makes it easier for them to use theory in real work and feel more confident.

Need for Balancing Theory and Practice

Spadafora and Downes (2020) highlighted that the benefit of theoretical knowledge is scaffolded within the real practice-based experiences that empower and encourage students to acquire a significant understanding of EL. Pragnun and Tshering expressed that specific subjects (e.g., Human Resource Management) were immediately applicable, and other subjects (e.g., Front Office operations) required more flexible time management. Yangchen successfully applied her theoretical financial knowledge in interviews, highlighting the curriculum's alignment with real-world tasks.

Aparajita said it is better to study difficult subjects in the first and second semesters and then easier subjects, since they are engaged in internships. When students are free from internship pressure, but feel online classes are not good for practical subjects, face-to-face classes are needed. This shows that theory and practice should go hand in hand to prepare students for real jobs (UNESCO, 2017).

This idea comes from experiential and constructivist learning theories (Vygotsky, 1980). When teachers support learning step by step and give practical experiences, students can build their own understanding through active participation (Van De Pol et al., 2010). In different subjects, the use of theory varies. For example, subjects such as Human Resource Management can be applied directly to real-world

situations.

According to David Kolb, learning is a cycle. First, students understand ideas (thinking), and then they try them in real situations (doing). Social constructivist theory also holds that learning should align with students' real-life needs and environments. Utkrishta also experienced the disconnection between college and industry.

Students' reflections reveal a gap between classroom and industry expectations, suggesting that curriculum design must harmonize theoretical input with practical demands. Hence, achieving a balance between theory and practice is not only pedagogically sound but also an ethical obligation in professional education. It recognizes students not as passive recipients but as co-constructors of knowledge, striving for relevance, application, and competence in a dynamic field.

Similarly, experiential learning is most applicable if personalized, purpose-driven, and foundationally situated. Most participants' views are that the BPH program, which they experienced as needing foreign-language integration, better alignment with internships, and more practical sessions early on, demonstrates a forward-thinking model of hospitality education aligned with both national needs and international standards. Participants consistently emphasized the need to align theoretical content with practical application, a core principle in both Kolb's experiential learning cycle and constructivist pedagogy. For example, Yangchen described how her understanding of profit-and-loss theory helped her during a real job interview. This illustrates the transfer of abstract conceptualization Kolb(2015) into active experimentation. Such concerns reflect Vygotsky (1980) insight that the timing and structure of instruction matter, especially when learners are juggling cognitive and emotional loads. Furthermore, participants advocated that these views align with learning theory (Knowles et al.,2005), which emphasizes learner autonomy, relevance, and immediacy of application.

Hence, achieving a balance between theory and practice is not just pedagogically sound. It is an ethical obligation in professional education. It recognizes students not as passive recipients but as co-constructors of knowledge, striving for relevance, application, and competence in a dynamic field.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, meaning-making from the students' narratives aligned with the research question, four themes emerging from this analysis underscore critical

principles of experiential learning. The clear themes are (1) Students' prior experience and career aspirations shape their learning experience, (2) Internship seems challenging but offers manifold opportunities, (3) Resources enhance experiential learning engagement, and (4) Need for balancing theory and practice. All the themes highlighted in detail align with Kolb's experiential learning theory and Vygotsky's social culture theory.

CHAPTER VI

REFLECTION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents the reflection, conclusion, and implications for the researcher's key stakeholders. I have explained this study's focal area. Since I am always seeking to improve the quality of experiential learning in hospitality education, I want to learn more about students' experiences and their connections across all development domains. From the start of my teaching career in hospitality education, I have always sought the best approach to teaching hospitality students. I found it is crucial to apply experiential learning theories, as they are widely recognized as best practices by many theorists, researchers, and national and international educationists. Hence, I revealed the underlying realities of pursuing an undergraduate education in the hospitality industry.

Reflection

Reflecting on my MPhil journey, the entire research process has provided me with an exponential learning curve. I was born in a remote hill village in Sindhuli, central Nepal. I grew up with diverse struggles. As a child, I had no plan; I always wondered about my learning. When I entered higher education, I was not sure which subject or field to choose because there were no mentors. My family background is farming, so finances were also a problem. I did not clearly know my interest, my aim, or my place in the hospitality field. Later, as a hotel worker and teacher, I saw many students learning through their real experiences in hospitality education.

During my studies, I was not sure which subject or field to choose. I did not clearly know my interest, my aim, or my place in the hospitality field. Later, as a hotel worker and teacher, I saw many students learning through their real experiences in hospitality education. Through my personal experience and interactions with students, I became intrigued by experiential learning in hospitality education. Hence, I chose my research topic. As I progressed through my MPhil, I became quite scared of research and was about to give up on my higher education. However, with my professor's motivation and encouragement, I continued my studies despite struggling to prepare a dissertation proposal for the defense. After struggling in defense, I became a procrastinator and was late in completing this research. I became interested

in qualitative research methods (especially the narrative approach) and began to shape my research purpose to utilize them.

There are a few key realizations and lessons of this journey henceforth. Firstly, conducting qualitative research requires patience, energy, and ample study to examine the underlying issue. The researcher needs to be prepared to do justice to the design. Secondly, the researcher must be clear on the choice of paradigm. While examining the interpretive paradigm in qualitative research, the researcher must remain constantly mindful of the interplay of subjectivity. Thirdly, the discussion should do justice to the data collection method and the qualitative strands while providing triangulation.

Furthermore, during my dissertation proposal defense, I experienced frustration and self-doubt, which significantly disrupted my research progress for nearly 3 three months. At this time, it was marked by emotional turbulence as I began to question my academic abilities, my defense circumstances, and the direction of my studies. In qualitative research, proposal defense is common, and the researcher becomes deeply involved in the process and may feel emotionally affected by real-life stories. My recovery was slow, but my professor consistently supported me, like a “more knowledgeable person” in Vygotsky’s idea of learning support. Even after getting motivation back, I again faced a delay in work, because of fear of failure, pressure to perform well, and frustration. This is still continuous.

Intriguingly, these personal experiences mirrored the essence of experiential learning that I explored among BPH students. Furthermore, I experience a process similar to Kolb’s experiential learning theory, which involves a cyclical process of concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Similarly, my emotional breakdown, reflection, reconceptualization, and fresh approach represent this cycle. To mention, these challenges and realizations serve as an inspiration for future growth/opportunities when critically reflecting on any circumstances faced.

My research journey became my own lived experiences as students reflected on their experiences. It helped me to understand experiential learning in general and in hospitality education, to dive into professional hospitality. Additionally, the theoretical framework developed from this research sheds light on how experiential learning and socio-cultural learning theory are implemented in research and hospitality education for learners.

From my experience as a hotelier with a Master's degree in Hotel Management and a teaching role in a hospitality college, my initial research interest naturally inclined toward student satisfaction—an area closely related to service delivery and customer experience, concepts familiar within the hospitality industry. Hence, upon pursuing an MPhil in Educational Leadership and a keen interest in academic research in education, my perspective shifted significantly for the finding of students' satisfaction level in hospitality education. I am motivated to reflect critically on how learning occurs in hospitality education, particularly within the Bachelor in Professional Hospitality (BPH) program, which is a relatively new course and academic offering in Nepal.

To provide professional service in hospitality as a second home of customers (as said), the essence of the BPH program with a distinctive emphasis on 'learning by doing', 'earn while you learn' approaches, and collaboration between hospitality education institutions and industries as a fruitful ground for exploring students' experience from the traditional classroom to a contemporary learning model learning atmosphere. Emphasizing further, by comparing the real phenomenon of students learning in the classroom with hands-on training in different methods (Internship, externship, fieldwork, group discussion, research), I aim to explore students' perceptions. I felt that a satisfaction survey alone would not capture the complex, transformative, and deeply personal nature of students' academic journey. So, the shift in my research aligns with the growing recognition in educational leadership that student opinion and experience need to be highlighted, particularly in professional education contexts. Collecting the narratives of my participants and synthesizing the literature of hospitality education, I noticed that Hospitality education, by nature, is experiential, heavily relying on applied learning, practice-based assessment, and reflective internships.

Importantly, my research journey from an industry to student satisfaction to a scholarly inquiry into students' narratives illustrates a personal transformation parallel to those I observed in my participants, including me. It highlights the essentials of hospitality education research through students' real opinions, specifically the perspectives of BPH students which are rarely documented. Following the need for research on the topic, I identified a research gap, and initial research interest focused on student satisfaction through a survey. Furthermore, my interest turned to a narrative inquiry research design to explore the stories and experiences of students

who follow Kolb's experiential learning and Vygotsky's sociocultural learning, which provide extensive, practice-based cognitive learning in society, with the slogan "learning by doing".

To summarize the research journey, this study has identified multiple avenues for exploring students' experiences in the Bachelor in Professional Hospitality program in Nepal.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiential learning journey of BPH students from Bagmati Province and showed how practice-based learning strongly supports both their academic progress and professional growth. The students' stories revealed that their family backgrounds, financial situations, past experiences, and future goals greatly influenced how they learned and progressed in their studies. Many of them faced challenges such as financial difficulties, family responsibilities, and limited early exposure to the hospitality industry. For students, learning was not limited to the classroom. They learned best by doing—through internships, kitchen practice, fieldwork, on-the-job training, and job placements. These experiences helped them gain confidence, improve practical skills, and connect theory to real-world situations. As students reflected on their experiences, applied what they learned, and tried again in practice, their understanding gradually improved.

From the stories collected in in-depth, unstructured interviews with students, the qualitative narrative inquiry research sheds light on how EL in-hospitality education is both a pedagogical tool and an essential transformative procedure. Students' narratives provided valuable insights into how EL shapes their learning and prepares them for jobs in the industry. The findings uncovered students' early experiences, family background, and personal interests. They encountered and made sense of EL and studied the BPH program course. While the students acknowledged the importance of industry-required curricula, they also expressed doubt, inconsistent faculty involvement, limited practical experience (e.g., Front Office), a lack of assured subjects (such as foreign language support), and administrative gaps.

Faculty members, supervisors, administrators, family members, and sponsors all played influential roles either as motivators, mentors, or decision-makers. Students also positioned themselves as co-creators of their learning, exercising agency, and they navigated financial challenges, academic pressures, and career uncertainties.

Bringing together the overall study findings and discussions, the study claims that EL is essential to providing hospitality students with industry-relevant skills, promoting transformative growth, and nurturing reflective, resilient, adaptive, and competent professionals linking practices with contextual realities and lived experiences to improve educational effectiveness and support lifelong learning.

This study explored how Bachelor in Professional Hospitality (BPH) students experienced experiential learning in hospitality education. At the beginning of the study, several concerns were raised regarding the gap between theory and practice, limited resources, weak industry–academia collaboration, different teaching methods, and the growing trend of students seeking opportunities abroad. Through students' narratives, the study found that these challenges persist; however, the research also revealed that experiential learning provides important opportunities for students' personal, academic, and professional growth.

The findings show that students learn effectively when they engage in practical activities such as internships, lab work, field visits, teamwork, and real workplace experiences. These experiences helped students develop communication skills, confidence, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, time management, and professional behavior.

Therefore, this study shows that practical learning in hospitality education is very useful and important for students. But for it to work properly, colleges and hotels need to work collaboratively, provide adequate facilities, employ effective pedagogical practices, and offer strong support to students.

Overall, the study does not only talk about the problems raised at the beginning. It also explains how students face those problems in real life and what lessons can be learned from their experiences. The study concludes that students can become more prepared for future jobs when classroom learning and practical work are properly connected and supported by colleges, industry, and related authorities.

Implications

This section has explained to whom this research can help, support, and have an impact. I believe this study has significant implications for many stakeholders in the education field, particularly for the theory-to-practice, policymakers, curriculum developers, and future learners and researchers in hospitality education. I hope my research study is quite plausible. In contrast, the study influences all enthusiasts interested in exploring experiential learning in hospitality education.

After completing my MPhil dissertation, I am always eager to share my research process and findings with my colleagues, research participants, industry and academic institutions, policymakers, educational leaders, and research scholars. This process would help to enhance understanding of experiential learning in hospitality education. As I reflected on students' narratives, I realized that experiential learning is a crucial strategy in the BPH program.

Implications for Theory into Practice in Hospitality Education

The findings of this study provide strong support for applying Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Learning Theory in hospitality education. Furthermore, the narratives of BPH students showed that EL is a method of instruction and a transformative process that helped students develop technical competence, self-confidence, and career motivation. It is believed that the experiential learning cycle was evident in the stories of participants who engaged in practical training such as kitchen work, barista duties, front-office work, and internships in a hospitable environment. Notably, participants recalled their initial experiences working in different departments during their internship, which helped them understand the importance of speed, hygiene, and teamwork. At first, students were overwhelmed, but through reflection and guidance from senior staff, they adjusted their learning path day to day, improved their approach, developed better time management, and continued to work in the field. This aligns with Kolb's cycle: they had a concrete experience, reflected on it, developed conceptual understanding, and then experimented with new behaviors in her subsequent placement.

Moreover, Kolb focuses on the learning process, and Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory emphasizes the social nature of learning. The idea of ZPD recommends that individuals can learn more effectively with support from a "more knowledgeable other." Among BPH students, many participants asserted that faculty members, mentors/supervisors, family members, and friends played crucial roles in their growth. Without guidance, students are stuck at the level of repetitive task completion. This shows that when teachers or mentors guide students. They learn better through experience within their ability. So, Vygotsky's idea of learning works well when there is proper support, like good mentorship, inclusive teaching, and sufficient learning resources.

Implications for Policy Makers and Curriculum Developers

Policymakers and curriculum developers support the mainstreaming of work-integrated learning across all higher education institutions offering hospitality management programs. Another key point to assert is the recommendation to Recognize Prior Learning (RPL) and to offer flexible pathways for students with industry experience, alongside continuous formal education.

Similarly, Policymakers and curriculum developers should ensure that all colleges offering hospitality education include real-world learning (internships) in the standard hospitality industry, not in the non-rated sector, as part of the curriculum. They should also accept students' prior experience and RPL, and offer flexible study options so that those already working in this field can continue their education easily. Moreover, policies should emphasize equity by encouraging rural access, gender inclusion, and support for low-income students, and by providing subsidies and scholarships.

Furthermore, curriculum developers need to incorporate course content aligning with experiential learning pedagogical approaches. Students come to hospitality with their own interests, aspirations, and future dreams, and they best by doing and reflecting on their experiences. They faced challenges, including a lack of facilities, but academic support and internships helped them learn step by step and gain confidence. Hence, the program should focus on learning by doing, reflecting, and support so that all students can learn, incorporating Kolb's and Vygotsky's learning theory.

Students should get a chance to do work, think about it, understand it, and try again. Learning should be simple and fit all kinds of students and their situations. In class, they should also learn life skills, how to understand feelings, how to lead, and learn from real-life examples. This makes learning useful. Academic supporters should check periodically whether the language class, computer training, and exam system are good and useful for both local and overseas work. Recognize the dual role of internship programs in workforce development and social responsibility, especially in empowering students from disadvantaged contexts.

Implications for Educational Leadership

This study, based on students' learning-by-doing in hospitality education experiences, identifies key points for those who lead and manage education. Furthermore, from the theoretical guidelines, educational leadership in hospitality

education needs to move beyond abstract theoretical instruction and integrate practical, real-world experiences. The hospitality model demonstrates that learning-by-doing through simulations, industry immersion, role play, and live projects enhances leadership skills such as decision-making, communication, resilience, and adaptability. Moreover, it discusses the value of reflection in the learning process. Simultaneously, leadership should include reflection in learning. Students should know themselves, check their own work, listen to friends' feedback, think carefully, and understand their feelings.

In professional hospitality education, students learn and work in teams, engaging with diverse cultures. This helps them lean into the team and value each other. Similarly, they learn, complete, and accomplish projects, receive mentorship from mentors/teachers or seniors, and share culture. This prepares them to work and lead in different hospitality sectors. Professional hospitality work is also service work, so students must be honest, kind, and responsible to be ready leaders who think carefully about the industry's mission and goals. Therefore, educational leadership can draw on these principles to support leaders who balance organizational objectives with broader social and ethical responsibilities.

The findings of proponents highlighted that creating context is indispensable for developing authentic practice and practical knowledge in hospitality education. Furthermore, the concepts of *savoir* (knowing), *savoir-faire* (knowing how to do), and *savoir-être* (knowing how to be) address the professional competencies that align with experiential and sociocultural learning theories, with critical implications for educational leadership. Therefore, this study may be helpful to educational leadership for incorporating the relationship between industry and academia to enhance the learning environment. To summarize, experiential learning in hospitality education provides valuable insights for educational leadership. It emphasizes the development of practice-based, reflective, problem-solving skills, as well as the collaboration and contextualization of relevant principles that equip students to meet the challenges in a global context.

Implications for Future Learners and Research Scholars

The narratives show that students can be empowered as the main learning component. Students are expected to be encouraged to reflect regularly on their learning processes, challenges, and aspirations as they seek opportunities to apply

classroom knowledge through internships, events, competitions, or community service.

Additionally, this study is highly beneficial for future learners and research scholars seeking knowledge through experiential learning in hospitality education. They can improve their skills, and knowledge, then apply them through experiential learning, spending much time and effort. This will enable them to develop valuable skills and competencies that can be applied in various professional or personal pursuits.

With this, they have also focused on the transformation of EL in daily work division, personally and professionally. According to renowned proponents of learning theories, students learn best when theory is integrated with hands-on practice, critical reflection, and social interaction. Narrative interpretations show that internships, real-world problem-solving, mentorship, and reflective learning develop technical skills and build confidence, identity, and resilience. This is, therefore, a challenge, for instance, self-well-being, emotional stress, lack of faculty support, and exploitative internships also emerged. Based on the findings, it is suggested that hospitality education should adopt a student-centered rather than teacher-centered, cognitive, contingent, inclusive, and comprehensive model. This has important implications for educators, institutions, industry partners, and policymakers to design supportive, reflective, and practice-based learning environments that value students' voices and lived experiences. Moreover, it provides insight into the under-researched field of experiential learning, particularly among learners and research scholars in hospitality education.

What Next?

As a scholar of educational leadership and a researcher on experiential learning in hospitality education, I have examined the problem statement, rationale, and research gap, and have generated new knowledge from the perspective of an experienced hotelier and facilitator, which I apply in teaching and learning. After completing my MPhil dissertation, I am always keen to share my research process and findings with educational leadership, policymakers, industry professionals, academicians, and research scholars. This process would help to enhance understanding and the use of experiential learning in hospitality education. I suggest that hospitality education should be tailored to students' levels of understanding. We need to teach hospitality education to strengthen students' understanding through

experiential learning. More importantly, when students encounter challenges in experiential learning within a specific field, they should employ different strategies. Academically, I will continue my journey in educational leadership through facilitating and pursuing further studies. Based on the study's findings, I will continue doing in-depth research on experiential learning in hospitality education.

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APPENDICES

Interview Guidelines

Guidelines

- 1) Start with a general conversation and be comfortable.
- 2) Build trust and a friendly connection.
- 3) Ask them to share their experiences.
- 4) Share your experiences.
- 5) Say things like “What happened next?”
- 6) Ask questions that need more than yes or no answers.
- 7) Conduct interview in natural atmosphere
- 8) Ask for more experience.
- 9) Ask more about interesting experiences.
- 10) Understand participants’ emotional and meaning.
- 11) Be patient and listen carefully, even to participant responses beyond the topic.
- 12) Use verbal and non-verbal gestures to motivate for further elaboration.

Unstructured, Open-Ended Interview Guidelines

- 1) May I have your introduction?
 - Would you mind providing your family background?
 - What motivated you to choose this field of study?
 - Who influenced you to study in BPH?
 - Were you involved in any field before joining this course?
- 2) How are you experiencing the curriculum and teaching modality?
 - How are you experiencing the curriculum content?
 - Would you like to suggest adding or removing any subject from the course?
 - Which methods do you prefer (theory, practice, group work, discussion, and hands-on learning in industry)?
 - How is the accessibility (family background, monetary, and geography) of this program?
 - How is the teaching modality?
 - How are you experiencing the assessment process?
 - What would you like to suggest about curriculum and teaching methods?

3) What kind of facilities and materials are available in your college?

- F&B service, F&B food production, front office, housekeeping, library (digital, physical).
- How are you experiencing the conditions of teaching and learning resources?
- How do you get materials to practice?
- In your experience, what is lacking?

4) How are you experiencing academic administrators?

- How did your administrators, peers, teachers, or mentors motivate you?
- Can you share a specific example?
- How did they cooperate with you?
- How did it influence your motivation?
- Can you share a specific instance where an instructor's motivation significantly impacted your learning experience?

5) What are the challenges and opportunities did you experience during experiential learning?

- How did you deal with this?
- What skills did you learn?
- How did these experiences help your learning?

6) How was the balance between theory and practical work?

- How has it affected your learning and preparedness for your career?
- What else? Tell more.
- Which one was more applicable in real work of life in your experience?
- How did this balance affect your learning and career readiness?
- More examples?

7) In your point of view, how has the BPH program improved?

- What are the activities or resources?
- In your experience, how will it help future learners and researchers?
- Any more suggestions?

8) What remaining experiences would you like to share that I did not cover?

- Anything else?

Sample of Coding, Categorizing, and Thematizing

Theme 1: Early Experiences and Inclinations

<p>Yangchen (Pseudonym)</p> <p>Early Experiences and Inclinations</p>	<p>My name is Yangchen (Pseudonym). I am from Dolakha and currently work at the Hotel Sheraton(pseudonym). Although I was born in Dolakha, I grew up in Narayanthan. My childhood started there. My family has four members: Aama(mummy), Buba (daddy), my brother, and me.</p> <p>Family Background</p> <p>My family background includes my parents being Kisan (farmers). We shifted from Dolakha to Narayanthan, and my parents used to do Kisan here. Gradually, we shifted to Ason. My parents used to sell vegetables in the footpath. After some time, my buba went to India for a job; like my buba, many Nepalese used to go to India for jobs. Unfortunately, my buba returned to Nepal because of his illness (Spot in the chest). In this way, we were growing. At that time, managing daily expenses for lodging and food was difficult. When Buba returned from India, my parents worked in construction as laborers for very low wages; at that time, there was no right to speak as there is now. I was residing in a hostel called Buddha Academy (Pseudonym) with the help of sponsorship and completed SLC from a public school in Bansbari. After SLC, I studied +2 with a Hotel Management subject at the British Gurkha School, which is located in Chakrapath. After a one-year gap, I joined the BPH Course.</p> <p>Working Experience Before Joining BPH</p> <p>Because of low income, it was not easy to get by day-to-day. At the same time, I started selling vegetables transported from Mulpani to support my parents and cover my academic expenses (Proudly laughing); in that way, I became semi-independent in my expenses. None of the parents wants their children to work instead of studying. How can we provide facilities like others so they do not suffer as we do? However, I convinced them I would work, which</p>
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	<p>would support them once I had started working. I used to work (vegetable sales) and study simultaneously. My work was continuous, and I got the opportunity to pursue a Barista trainee. After completing my Barista trainee, I was offered a Barista job, which I accepted and worked till I joined the BPH course.</p> <p>Personal Strengths and Weaknesses</p> <p>My strength is my learning habits. I am interested in learning anything, and if somebody shows me a way, I can do it. The BPH course is showing me the way, and I am following that.</p> <p>When discussing my weaknesses, I overthink things that are unrelated to me. For example, if the glass is broken, I think about why and how it happened. Overthinking sometimes helps, but it also hampers me, making me weak.</p>
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