



Exploration of Soft Skills and Perceived Career Readiness Among Hospitality Management Students

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Abstract

This study examined the soft skills and perceived career readiness of 249 Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM) students at West Visayas State University – Himamaylan City Campus during Academic Year 2024–2025. Using a quantitative descriptive research design, the study explored variations in soft skills and readiness across sex, year level, and socio-economic status. Data were gathered through a validated and reliable Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results indicated that students, regardless of demographic profile, demonstrated high levels of soft skills and perceived themselves as ready for employment. The most dominant soft skills were self-motivation and direction, teamwork spirit, willingness to learn, leadership, conflict management, and time management. A statistically significant strong positive correlation was found between soft skills and career readiness, suggesting that students who possess higher soft skills feel more prepared for the workplace. These findings affirm the institution's inclusive learning environment and effective curricular strategies in enhancing students' professional competencies. The study supports continued integration of soft skills training in academic programs and provides baseline data for institutional improvements, industry alignment, and further research.



Keywords: Soft Skills, Career Readiness, Hospitality Management, BSHM Students, Employability, Higher Education, Quantitative Research

1. Introduction

Soft skills are inclusive, generic competencies that extend beyond academic abilities, encompassing leadership, teamwork, communication, positive values, and lifelong learning (Chan, 2020). These skills are crucial across various industries, allowing individuals to effectively collaborate, lead, and adapt in diverse environments. In the hospitality sector, students must possess essential soft skills such as communication, customer service, interpersonal abilities, problem-solving, time management, adaptability, attention to detail, emotional intelligence, and leadership (Karam, 2022). These competencies are vital for career readiness, defined as the ability to function effectively in dynamic work environments. With rapid technological changes and uncertain employment trends, career readiness has become a strategic objective for higher education institutions, integrating skill development into curricular and co-curricular activities. Industry support is also critical in nurturing students' confidence and preparing them for entry-level roles (Jackson, 2019).

In the Philippine context, employability concerns persist. The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) reported a drop in employment rates from 32% in 2014 to 28% in 2015 during job fairs, while the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Human Resources Development Foundation Inc. (PCCI HRDF) cited a gap between graduates' practical skills and industry expectations. To address this, graduates must demonstrate adaptable, transferable skills, compelling higher education institutions (HEIs) to provide relevant and hands-on training (Gevana & Tan, 2021). In Negros Occidental, a local university recognized the importance of soft skills such as collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, leadership, and self-regulation in enhancing employability. These skills were found to be consistently developed regardless of gender or program (Calfodoro, 2023). However, low confidence may hinder the acquisition of employer-valued attributes. There remains no existing study focusing on the soft skills and career readiness of Hospitality Management students at West Visayas State University – Himamaylan City Campus. This research thus aims to address this gap and serve as a basis for program intervention.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Super's Developmental Self-Concept Theory and Carver and Scheier's Control Theory. Super's theory outlines career development across life stages—Growth, Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance, and Decline—emphasizing that individuals' self-concepts and career aspirations evolve with maturity and experience. For Hospitality Management students at West Visayas State University – Himamaylan City Campus, the Exploration and Establishment stages are critical, making it essential to assess the alignment between their soft skills—such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving—and their emerging career goals.

Complementing this, Control Theory (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Ramaprasad, 1983) highlights the role of self-regulation in behavior, where individuals monitor and adjust their actions to meet goals. In this context, it explains how students develop soft skills through feedback, reflection, and adjustment processes. Together, these theories provide a framework for examining how students' evolving self-concepts and self-regulatory behaviors influence

their perceived career readiness, offering insights into how educational programs can effectively support career preparation in the hospitality sector.

Conceptual Framework

This study explored the soft skills and perceived career readiness of Hospitality Management students at West Visayas State University – Himamaylan City Campus using a descriptive research design. The conceptual framework positions sex, year level, and socio-economic status as independent variables potentially influencing the dependent variables—students’ soft skills and perceived career readiness. It is hypothesized that no significant differences exist in soft skills and career readiness across demographic groups. However, the framework considers the possibility that female students may demonstrate different interpersonal development, fourth-year students may exhibit higher readiness levels, and students from higher socio-economic backgrounds may have more opportunities for skill development. The relationships among these variables are illustrated by directional lines in the framework, representing their interconnected roles in shaping student outcomes.

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Paradigm of the Study

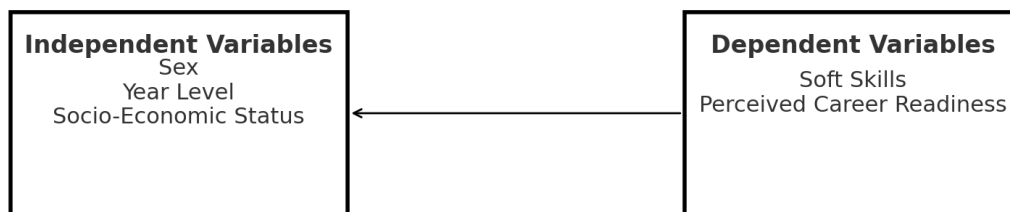


Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study Showing the Relationship between the Independent and the Dependent Variables of the Study

Statement of the Problem

The objective of this study is to Explore the Soft Skills and Perceived Career Readiness among Hospitality Management Students of West Visayas State University Himamaylan City Campus.

1. What is the level of soft skills of Hospitality Management students when taken as a whole and when grouped according to:
 - a. Sex
 - b. Year Level
 - c. Socio-Economic Status?
2. What are the top five dominant soft skills possessed by the Hospitality Management students?
3. What is the perceived level of career readiness of the students when taken as a whole and when grouped according to:
 - a. Sex



- b. Year Level
 - c. Socio-Economic Status?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the students' level of soft skills and their perceived career readiness?

Hypotheses

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H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the level of soft skills and perceived career readiness of Hospitality Management students when grouped according to sex, year level, and socio-economic status.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between the level of soft skills and the perceived career readiness of Hospitality Management students.

Significance of the Study

This study provides baseline data relevant to stakeholders in hospitality education and industry. For **industry partners**, it offers insights into key soft skills valued in professionals, aiding in recruitment aligned with both technical and interpersonal competencies. **Academic institutions** can use the findings to refine curricula and teaching strategies that enhance soft skill development and student employability. For **Hospitality Management students**, the study raises awareness of the importance of soft skills in boosting career readiness. Lastly, for **researchers**, it contributes to literature on non-technical competencies and informs future investigations on integrating soft skills into educational programs.

2. Review of Related Literature

Soft skills—such as communication, adaptability, leadership, and emotional intelligence—are foundational to career readiness in both technical and service-oriented industries. These interpersonal competencies complement academic knowledge and enable individuals to navigate complex work environments with confidence. As highlighted by Succi and Canovi (2020), emotional regulation, creativity, and critical thinking are increasingly valued across sectors for their role in promoting innovation and resilience. In the hospitality industry, where customer service is central, soft skills directly impact guest satisfaction and team efficiency (Giannotti, 2024). The integration of these skills into educational curricula prepares students not just for employment but for long-term professional advancement.

Recent studies emphasize the widening gap between academic preparation and industry expectations. While technical proficiency remains important, many graduates enter the workforce lacking the interpersonal skills necessary to meet employers' standards (Ngoepe & Theron, 2023). To address this, institutions must embed soft skills development within both curricular and co-curricular programs. Aprilita and Pritasari (2024) found that soft skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability are pivotal in improving recent graduates' career readiness. Furthermore, experiential learning methods—such as internships, mentorships, and project-based learning—serve as effective strategies to close this skills gap and ensure a smoother transition from education to employment.

Demographic factors, including sex and year level, also influence soft skills development. For example, Acevedo et al. (2022) found that female students often exhibit greater appreciation for and improvement in communication, teamwork, and time management. Meanwhile, Saman and Wirawan (2024) emphasized that students in higher academic levels, particularly those with strong psychological capital, are more likely to exhibit enhanced soft skills. This progression reflects increased exposure to professional experiences and maturity over time. Nonetheless, Moser and Schwartz (2021) argue that gender-based differences are minimal when learning environments offer equal opportunities for all students.

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Socio-economic status further affects students' access to resources that foster soft skills. Students from higher-income families often participate in extracurricular activities such as volunteer work, internships, and leadership programs, which cultivate essential interpersonal competencies (Davis & Smith, 2019). In contrast, students from low-income backgrounds may face barriers that limit these opportunities, such as financial constraints or lack of access to enrichment programs (Brown & Green, 2020). Despite these disparities, Li, Zhang, and Zhou (2023) suggest that individual motivation and the quality of the educational environment can mitigate the effects of income gaps, reinforcing the importance of inclusive educational strategies for soft skills development.

3. Methodology

This study utilized a **quantitative descriptive research design** to examine the soft skills and perceived career readiness of BSHM students at West Visayas State University – Himamaylan City Campus during A.Y. 2024–2025. A total of 249 respondents from first to fourth year were selected using **stratified random sampling**, ensuring equitable representation across sex, year level, and socio-economic status. Data were collected through a **researcher-adapted structured questionnaire** divided into three parts: Part I gathered demographic information (age, sex, year level, socio-economic status); Part II contained 45 Likert-scale items assessing soft skills such as communication, adaptability, teamwork, leadership, and time management; and Part III comprised 20 Likert-scale items measuring career readiness, including students' confidence in handling job responsibilities and preparedness for workplace demands. The instrument was validated by three field experts using the **Good and Scates Criteria**, with revisions made based on their feedback. To assess internal consistency, a **pilot test** involving 40 non-participating students was conducted, yielding high reliability coefficients ($\alpha = 0.922$ for soft skills; $\alpha = 0.926$ for career readiness), supporting the instrument's robustness (Muasya & Mulwa, 2023). Data collection involved an orientation session, followed by two weeks of survey administration via Google Forms and printed copies. For data analysis, **mean and standard deviation** were used to measure the central tendency and variability of responses. The **Mann-Whitney U Test** assessed differences across binary groups (e.g., sex, socio-economic status), while the **Kruskal-Wallis H Test** was employed for comparisons among year levels. These non-parametric tools provided insights into potential group differences and helped evaluate the influence of demographic variables. The study also used predefined interpretation scales: soft skills and career readiness were rated as "Strongly Agree" or "Highly Ready" (4.31–5.00), "Agree" or "Ready" (3.51–4.20), and so forth, down to "Strongly Disagree" or "Not Ready" (1.00–1.50). These methods allowed for a comprehensive and statistically grounded analysis of the data, ensuring valid conclusions regarding students' readiness for the hospitality industry.

4. Results and Discussions

Table 1. Distribution of the Respondents

Category		F	%
Sex	Male	43	17.27%
	Female	206	82.73%
Year Level	First Year	45	18.07%
	Second Year	69	27.71%
	Third Year	64	25.70%
	Fourth Year	71	28.51%
Socio-economic Status	Low	144	57.83%
	High	105	42.17%

Table 1 presents the distribution of the 249 respondents in terms of sex, year level, and socio-economic status. The majority were **female** (82.73%), while only **17.27%** were male. In terms of **year level**, the highest proportion of respondents came from the **fourth year (28.51%)**, followed by **second year (27.71%)**, **third year (25.70%)**, and **first year (18.07%)**. Regarding **socio-economic status**, **57.83%** of the students were from **low-income households**, while **42.17%** belonged to the **high-income group**. This demographic breakdown reflects a predominantly female population with greater representation from upper-year students and a majority from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of the Level of Soft Skills of the Respondents When Taken as an Entire Group and When Classified According to Sex, Year Level and Socio-Economic Status

	Category	N	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
Sex	Male	43	4.13	.28	High
	Female	206	4.13	.27	High
Year Level	First Year	45	4.02	.18	High
	Second Year	69	4.04	.30	High
	Third Year	64	4.14	.27	High
	Fourth Year	71	4.28	.23	High
Socio-Economic Status	Lower Income	144	4.11	.26	High
	Higher Income	105	4.15	.29	High
Total		249	4.13	.27	High

Table 2 reveals that the Hospitality Management students at West Visayas State University – Himamaylan City Campus demonstrated a consistently **high level of soft skills** across all demographic groups. Both male ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.28$) and female ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.27$) respondents reported equal proficiency, indicating that sex did not significantly influence soft skills development. This aligns with Moser and Schwartz (2021), who found minimal gender differences when training opportunities are equally provided, though Siddiky (2020) noted the influence of

extracurricular involvement in shaping skill variation. Soft skills also improved with academic progression, as shown by increasing means from first-year ($M = 4.02$) to fourth-year students ($M = 4.28$). This trend supports Saman and Wirawan (2024), who linked higher academic standing with greater psychological capital and exposure to industry-related experiences. Additionally, socio-economic status showed minimal influence, with both low-income ($M = 4.11$) and high-income ($M = 4.15$) students reporting high soft skill levels. While Brown and Green (2020) argued that limited resources can hinder skill acquisition, Li et al. (2023) emphasized that personal motivation and educational context may offset economic disparities. These results affirm that the institution fosters an inclusive learning environment where soft skills are developed consistently, supporting the integration of these competencies across the academic curriculum.

Table 3. Top Five Dominant Soft Skills Possessed by the Respondents

Soft Skill	Mean	Rank
Self-Motivation and Direction	4.39	1
Teamwork Spirit	4.33	2
Willingness to Learn	4.30	3
Leadership Skill	4.17	4
Conflict Management	4.16	5
Time Management	4.16	5

Table 3 highlights the top five dominant soft skills demonstrated by Hospitality Management students at West Visayas State University – Himamaylan City Campus. The highest-rated skill was **Self-Motivation and Direction** ($M = 4.39$), indicating students' strong intrinsic drive and goal orientation, supporting Succi and Wieandt's (2019) emphasis on its role in fostering accountability and proactive behavior. **Teamwork Spirit** ($M = 4.33$) followed, reflecting collaborative competence essential in service settings (Giannotti, 2024). **Willingness to Learn** ($M = 4.30$) ranked third, showing students' adaptability and growth mindset, consistent with Touloumakus (2020). **Leadership Skill** ($M = 4.17$) came fourth, suggesting confidence in decision-making and team guidance, aligning with Karam's (2022) assertion of its importance in hospitality roles. Tied for fifth were **Conflict Management** and **Time Management** (both $M = 4.16$), indicating students' capacity to handle interpersonal issues constructively (Young, 2019) and manage tasks efficiently in fast-paced environments (Succi & Canovi, 2020). Overall, the results suggest that students possess a well-rounded set of soft skills crucial for success in the hospitality industry.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of the Perceived Career Readiness of the Respondents When Taken as an Entire Group and When Classified According to Sex, Year Level and Socio-Economic Status

	Category	N	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
Sex	Male	43	4.20	.27	High
	Female	206	4.20	.26	High
Year Level	First Year	45	4.08	.26	High
	Second Year	69	4.16	.24	High
	Third Year	64	4.25	.28	High
	Fourth Year	71	4.27	.22	High
Socio-Economic Status	Lower Income	144	4.19	.25	High
	Higher Income	105	4.21	.27	High
Total		249	4.20	.26	High

Table 4 shows that Hospitality Management students at West Visayas State University – Himamaylan City Campus reported consistently **high levels of perceived career readiness** across sex, year level, and socio-economic status. Both male and female students had identical mean scores ($M = 4.20$), suggesting no sex-based difference in perceived readiness, aligning with Moser and Schwartz (2021), though differing from Aziz et al. (2024), who found females more appreciative of career-preparation factors. Career readiness increased with year level, from first-year ($M = 4.08$) to fourth-year ($M = 4.27$), reflecting growing confidence as students progressed, a trend supported by Parker et al. (2021) and Saman and Wirawan (2024), who emphasized the influence of experiential learning and psychological capital. Regarding socio-economic status, both low-income ($M = 4.19$) and high-income ($M = 4.21$) students felt equally prepared, aligning with Li et al. (2023), who highlighted motivation and academic environment over income, though contrary to Brown and Green (2020), who associated low income with limited readiness opportunities. Overall, the findings underscore that students perceive themselves as workforce-ready regardless of demographic differences.

Table 5. Relationship Between Soft Skills and Perceived Career Readiness of the Respondents

Spearman's rho	Soft Skills	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.645**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	249	249
	Perceived Career Readiness	Correlation Coefficient	.645**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	249	249

A **Spearman's rank-order correlation** was conducted to examine the relationship between soft skills and perceived career readiness among Hospitality Management students. As shown in **Table 5**, the analysis revealed a statistically significant **strong positive correlation** ($r = .645$, $p = .000$), indicating that students with higher levels of soft skills tend to report greater career readiness. This result suggests that the development of soft skills—such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving—is closely associated with students' confidence in facing workplace demands. This aligns with Aprilita and Pritasari (2024), who emphasized that soft skills help bridge the gap between academic training and practical employment success. Ariyanto et al. (2021) further supported this, highlighting how soft skills foster professionalism, self-assurance, and effective interaction in diverse environments. Likewise, Succi and Canovi (2020) affirmed the essential role of interpersonal competencies in ensuring long-term employability, particularly in hospitality, where communication and teamwork are vital.

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5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The study concludes that Hospitality Management students of West Visayas State University – Himamaylan City Campus possess a high level of soft skills and perceive themselves to be career-ready, regardless of sex, year level, or socio-economic status. The top five soft skills identified—self-motivation and direction, teamwork spirit, willingness to learn, leadership skill, and time and conflict management—highlight the effectiveness of the institution's academic and training programs. The strong positive correlation between soft skills and perceived career readiness confirms that students who develop these competencies are more confident in their transition to professional roles. These results affirm the institution's inclusive practices, which support holistic student development across diverse demographic profiles.

Recommendations

It is recommended that industry partners use the findings to align recruitment and internship programs with students' demonstrated strengths, fostering greater academic-industry collaboration. Academic institutions should maintain and enrich soft skills integration in teaching and learning strategies, ensuring continued emphasis on employability competencies. Students are encouraged to engage proactively in soft skills development through practical learning experiences, which contribute to their career preparedness. Lastly, researchers are advised to replicate and extend the study in different contexts, incorporating additional variables such as internship exposure or academic performance to deepen understanding of factors influencing employability outcomes.

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