



Exploring Event Participation of Hospitality and Tourism Management Students at Aerospace University

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Abstract

This case study aims to explore the participation of Hospitality and Tourism Management students in school events. Creswell's steps for data collection and analysis were applied in this research, with a semi-structured interview guide used to gather insights. All interviews were conducted face-to-face on campus. Participants included eight full-time students studying Hospitality and Tourism Management. During data analysis, several themes emerged: 1) Personal and Educational Growth of Students, 2) Challenges Faced, 3) Instructor Support and Accessibility of Information, 4) Recommendations and Solutions, and 5) Practical Experience and Industry Connections. The study revealed valuable insights that contribute to enhancing participation within the Hospitality and Tourism Management department. Data showed both commonalities and differences, indicating areas for improvement. The results affected students' willingness to participate in school events, with some finding these events beneficial for personal growth, while others saw participation as a challenge or as an interference with personal time. Overall, adjustments to school events could help better engage all students in the Hospitality and Tourism Management department. Future research on this topic will employ quantitative methods.

Keywords: *participation, events, hospitality and tourism management*

Introduction

Events and activities within educational institutions serve as transformative experiences, shaping character and imparting essential life skills to teenagers and young adults (Staff, 2023). These activities go beyond extracurricular involvement; they play a critical role in laying the foundation for future societal contributions. Recognizing student engagement as a key factor in academic success has fueled an interest in boosting engagement across all educational levels (Williams & Whiting, 2016).

Sutton (2021) describes student engagement as the binding force behind every aspect of learning and growth, emphasizing its significant impact. Beyond enhancing the enjoyment of learning, student engagement has profound effects on academic achievement, fostering a stronger connection with the educational institution, and supporting students' social and emotional well-being. Student involvement in events and activities aligns with the university's mission to foster comprehensive development. In the field of aerospace education, responsibility for event planning and participation lies not only with the institution but also with students at various educational stages. Early engagement by students, as highlighted by Ward et al. (2019), underscores the role of meaningful participation in continuous growth.

A challenge arises as students, balancing tight schedules, often prefer leisure activities that they find enjoyable. This preference brings into question the effectiveness of school events compared to personal activities, like socializing with friends (Bhanvadia, 2019). Kelly (2019) notes the importance of creating inviting and safe environments to support active student participation.

Researchers observed that students, despite recognizing the value of school events, may opt for alternative activities due to a lack of perceived enjoyment. This prompted research to uncover underlying motivations and challenges, laying the foundation for a Program Enhancement Plan. This plan seeks to address identified issues and foster a learning environment where students willingly invest in activities that contribute to their overall development. By aligning student interests with the known benefits of participation, the plan aims to ensure students not only excel academically but also enjoy the enrichment that school events provide.

Research Question/ Objectives

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of Hospitality and Tourism Management students participating in school events?
2. What challenges do Hospitality and Tourism Management students encounter in participating in school events?
3. What potential strategies can the administration explore to address the challenges faced by Hospitality and Tourism Management students in school events?
4. What plan can be proposed to increase Hospitality and Tourism Management students' participation in school events as an outcome of this study?

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative approach, which suited the need to capture participants' voices and gain an in-depth understanding of the research topic (Creswell, 2013). The following sections detail the research design, setting, sampling, data collection, analysis, and measures for trustworthiness.

Research Design

The primary objective of this study was to examine Hospitality and Tourism Management students' participation in school events. A single-case study approach was applied, allowing an in-depth exploration of how factors such as student feedback, incentives, and scheduling influenced their involvement in school activities. This approach also allowed for flexibility in adjusting data-gathering and analysis methods based on emerging themes. According to Yin (2003), a case study design is suitable when: (a) the study aims to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) the researcher cannot control participants' behavior; (c) contextual conditions are relevant to the topic; and (d) the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined.

Participants/Respondents

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who could provide valuable insights into the research question (Creswell, 2013). The sample included full-time Hospitality and Tourism Management students, with eight to fifteen individuals selected. The department head recommended students who met specific criteria: officially enrolled in the Hospitality and Tourism Management program for the 2023-2024 academic year, with prior attendance at school events, and preferably English-speaking.

Instruments

A semi-structured interview guide created by the researchers facilitated in-depth, face-to-face interviews. Some interviews were recorded with consent, and additional notes were carefully taken. Fifteen participants from the Hospitality and Tourism Management program provided detailed insights into student engagement in academic events within this field.

Procedure

The qualitative data collection process focused on identifying emerging patterns from structured interviews with Hospitality and Tourism Management students. Emphasis was placed on how school events affected student involvement in the program. The researchers carefully planned the data collection, recording and transcribing interviews while ensuring participant anonymity. Ethical standards were rigorously followed, with permission granted by the institution. Open-ended questions allowed participants to freely express their perspectives, with recording devices and note-taking capturing critical details for later analysis. This thorough data collection approach provided nuanced insights into the influence of school events on students within Hospitality and Tourism Management.

Data Analysis

Data analysis adhered to Creswell's (2012) seven-phase method: 1) selecting cases, 2) securing permissions, 3) maintaining confidentiality, 4) timely data collection, 5) accurate recording of interviews, 6) reviewing field notes with participants, and 7) coding and organizing data systematically. These steps ensured a comprehensive examination of how school events impacted Hospitality and Tourism Management students.

Results

After analyzing the transcript from the in-depth interview on "Case Study of Hospitality and Tourism Management Students' Participation in School Events at Aerospace University," researchers identified the following themes: 1) Personal and Educational Growth of Students; 2) Challenges Faced; 3) Instructor's Support and Communication and Information Accessibility; 4) Recommendations and Solutions; and 5) Practical Experience and Industry Connections. Below are their significant insights:

Theme 1: Personal and Educational Growth of Students

Education is a multifaceted process that reaches beyond classrooms, books, and examinations. Although academic knowledge is essential, education's real value lies in how it cultivates students' personal development. The intertwined relationship between personal and academic growth is vital to creating well-rounded, resilient, and adaptable individuals.

When asked about personal and educational growth, Participant 1 shared:

"During Aerodays last year, I served as an SSC counselor, which inspired me and broadened my perspective. In our hospitality course, we have a subject on MICE, so understanding large-scale events like concerts was beneficial. This event helped me develop skills for organizing and managing big events, which will be useful in my future career."

Participant 2 echoed similar sentiments:

"Participating in school events enhances education, fosters personal growth, and provides skills and connections that can positively impact academic and career paths."

Participant 3 explained:

"I usually join school events if they interest me or attendance is mandatory. For instance, I participated in the Aerodays fun run and performed during the orientation week, which helped me overcome stage fright and step out of my comfort zone."

Participant 4 shared her transformative experience:

"In December 2022, I joined a dance competition for the Mardi Gras Festival, marking a major shift for me as a more carefree student. I connected with new people, overcame anxiety in large groups, and made new friends, enriching both my academic and personal life."

Similarly, Participant 6 described his most memorable experience:

"The acquaintance party was particularly meaningful. It boosted my confidence and allowed me to make new friends."

Participant 7 reflected:

"My time in school events like Aerodays and IAU's Top Model helped me represent my team and gain confidence. It also broadened my network, allowing me to meet people from different courses."

Participant 8 noted:

"The Aero Days pop jazz activity was unforgettable, especially since we won. It improved my communication skills."

Participant 9 added:

"I find events like Intramurals and the acquaintance party valuable as they give us a break from studies and encourage interaction, building confidence essential in hospitality and tourism."

Lastly, Participant 5 commented:

"Participating in school events has added value to my university experience, aligning academics with practical learning, creating a sense of community, and fostering personal and professional growth."

As Bradley (2023) states, in life's journey, personal growth and transformation are fundamental, and education often plays a significant role in this, cultivating skills, knowledge, and perspectives that contribute to personal development.

Theme 2: Challenges Faced

Education, though transformative, is not without its challenges. Students of all ages encounter various obstacles that test their resilience, determination, and adaptability. Addressing these challenges is essential to creating an empowering educational environment.

When discussing challenges, Participant 1 mentioned:

"Our department often feels sidelined, with limited exposure. During events, we're divided into small teams, which limits bonding. As part of the SSC, I often had to organize and facilitate events, preventing me from fully participating."

Participant 2 highlighted:

"Scheduling conflicts and academic workload hinder me and my peers since some events overlap with classes, and instructors don't offer incentives."

Participant 7 expressed:

"The main issue for me is the timing, as I live far away."

Participant 5 remarked:

"Scheduling conflicts make participation difficult, as events can overlap with classes or exams."

Participant 8 noted:

"Communication and coordination issues among team members can be challenging, requiring teamwork and adaptability."

Participant 4 supported this:

"Scheduling conflicts and workload make it harder when these two coincide."

Participant 6 pointed out:

"Lack of support and poor time management, along with conflicting schedules, are challenging."

Participant 3 added a personal note:

"As an introvert, it was hard initially to approach people, especially without knowing anyone."

Finally, Participant 9 shared:

"A major challenge for hospitality and tourism students is planning events that are engaging and managing school work simultaneously."

A University of British Columbia study (2023) highlights that students face numerous priorities, impacting their learning and overall well-being. It's essential to support students in managing these challenges.

Theme 3: Instructor's Support and Communication and Information Accessibility

Instructors' roles extend beyond teaching; they support students, foster effective communication, and ensure information accessibility, which collectively creates a productive learning environment.

When discussing support, Participant 1 suggested:

"Activities affect education if there's no exemption for students attending events. Improved communication between administration and teachers could help students avoid having to choose between events and class."

Participant 6 agreed:

"Better communication between admin and instructors could prevent students from missing events or classes."

Participant 4 disclosed:

"My peers and I experience a lack of support from instructors, which limits our full participation."

Participant 5 noted:

"Workloads and scheduling conflicts limit students' ability to join university events."

Participant 3 emphasized:

"Lack of connection with other students and scheduling conflicts affect participation."

Participant 2 observed:

"Barriers like scheduling and distance reduce engagement, suggesting that flexible schedules and better event communication could improve involvement."

Participant 8 mentioned:

"I participate in events with incentives for grades."

Participant 7 added:

"It's motivating when incentives are given, yet most HATS instructors don't offer them."

Participant 9 concluded:

"While it doesn't impact me much, improving event communication, incentives, and flexible schedules could enhance participation."

As Alfie Khon (2018) noted, intrinsic motivation—doing something for its own sake—is essential for high-quality achievement and can be undermined by external rewards.

Theme 4: Recommendations and Solutions

Navigating education's challenges requires solutions that empower students to succeed. Key recommendations address ways to support students through flexible scheduling, improved communication, and instructor support.

Participant 4 recommended:

"The school can boost engagement by gathering student feedback and making small changes to support involvement."

Participant 8 echoed:

"Open communication, flexible event schedules, and a supportive community can help students engage more."

Participant 2 suggested:

"Flexible scheduling, online options, and calendar coordination could help HATS students participate more in school events."

Participant 6 recommended:

"Flexible schedules and regular communication with instructors can assist students in managing event participation."

Participant 3 suggested:

"The administration can improve HATS students' event participation by partnering with other departments."

Participant 1 advised:

"The administration should provide flexible scheduling, and HATS facilities need maintenance."

Participant 7 added:

"Incentives from teachers would encourage participation."

Participant 5 recommended:

"Flexible event scheduling could accommodate students' diverse schedules."

Participant 9 noted:

"Creating a centralized communication platform and offering flexible scheduling could improve the experience for HATS students."

According to Conboy & Fonseca (2008), listening to students offers valuable insights for addressing academic challenges.

Theme 5: Practical Experience and Industry Connections

The role of practical experience and industry connections is vital in education, enhancing students' understanding and preparation for the professional world.

Participant 5 highlighted:

"Collaborations, networking, and practical training improve participation and engagement, especially for hospitality students."

Participant 3 agreed:

"Hands-on experience and industry connections play a crucial role in student involvement."

Participant 2 added:

"Collaborating with industry professionals inspires students and prepares them for their careers."

Participant 1 noted:

"Industry partnerships help prepare students, with some reaching out for additional training."

Participant 6 mentioned:

"Industry collaborations equip HATS students with skills for hospitality and tourism careers."

Participant 7 suggested:

"Industry-sponsored projects could provide hands-on experience."

Participant 9 affirmed:

"Yes."

Participant 8 shared:

"Industry partnerships, events, and mentorships can keep students engaged."

Participant 4 concluded:

"Real work assignments keep students engaged and skilled."

As an article on virtual internships (2023) explains, gaining practical experience is essential in today's competitive job market, with virtual internships offering hands-on remote opportunities..

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the following conclusions were derived:

This study set out to thoroughly investigate the influence of student participation in university events, specifically focusing on Hospitality and Tourism Management students. Through qualitative analysis and in-depth interviews, the research examined how involvement in these events impacts personal development, academic growth, the challenges faced, instructor support, and connections with the industry.

Several key themes emerged as essential for understanding the importance of student involvement in university events. These themes included Personal and Educational Growth, Challenges Encountered, Instructor Support and Communication, Recommendations and Solutions, and Practical Experience and Industry Connections. Each theme highlighted different dimensions of student participation, emphasizing its wide-ranging impact within an academic setting.

The study contributed meaningfully by uncovering the complex relationship between student engagement and both personal and academic development. It reinforced the value of extracurricular involvement in fostering a holistic educational experience. Moreover, the findings underscored the need for supportive frameworks, enhanced communication, and collaborations with the industry to boost student participation and prepare students for professional roles.

Practically speaking, the study pointed to the need for creating more inclusive, communicative, and adaptable environments within educational institutions. This requires strengthened support systems, improved communication between faculty and students, and stronger links between academia and industry to provide students with relevant experiences and networks essential for their future careers.

Some limitations in this study might include a relatively narrow sample size or a focus on a single department within the university, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the study may not have fully captured all possible challenges or solutions, suggesting the need for further exploration.

Future research could broaden the scope by including a wider range of students or comparing the experiences across different university departments. Longitudinal studies that track the impact of student participation in events on career paths could offer valuable insights. Furthermore, evaluating the effectiveness of implemented strategies and deepening the understanding of academia-industry dynamics could enhance our comprehension of student engagement in higher education.

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