

Compliance, Quality Assurance, and Innovation Practices in Hospitality Management Programs: A Multiple-Case Study of HEIs in Panay Island

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ABSTRACT

The increasing demand for globally competitive hospitality education has compelled higher education institutions (HEIs) to strengthen compliance systems, quality assurance mechanisms, and innovative academic practices. This study explored the compliance practices, quality assurance systems, innovation initiatives, challenges, and sustaining strategies among Hospitality Management programs in selected HEIs in Panay Island, Philippines. Using a qualitative multiple-case study design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and field observations involving administrators, quality assurance officers, faculty members, and program coordinators from selected institutions. Thematic analysis and cross-case synthesis were employed to identify emerging themes and institutional variations.

Findings revealed that compliance and quality assurance practices were institutionalized through structured governance systems, periodic curriculum review, faculty capability development, strategic industry partnerships, and digitalized documentation systems. Institutions also demonstrated innovation through technology integration, experiential learning, simulation-based instruction, and industry-responsive curriculum enhancement. Despite these advances, HEIs continue to experience challenges related to documentation workload, infrastructure upgrading, resource limitations, and faculty workload. The study further revealed that collaborative leadership, stakeholder engagement, and a culture of continuous improvement significantly contribute to sustaining compliance and achieving higher accreditation outcomes.

The study contributes to hospitality education management literature by providing a contextualized understanding of institutional practices within Philippine HEIs. The findings may serve as a framework for strengthening compliance systems, sustaining quality assurance initiatives, and promoting innovation in hospitality education.

Keywords: compliance, quality assurance, innovation, hospitality management, higher education institutions, multiple-case study, Panay Island

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a critical role in preparing globally competitive graduates capable of responding to the changing demands of industries and society. In the hospitality and tourism sector, the demand for highly competent graduates has become increasingly important because of globalization, technological advancement, changing customer expectations, and intensified industry competition. Consequently, Hospitality Management programs are expected not only to comply with regulatory standards but also to continuously improve instructional quality, institutional systems, and innovative practices to remain relevant and competitive.

In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) serves as the primary regulatory body responsible for ensuring the quality and relevance of higher education programs. CHED policies, including outcomes-based education frameworks, curriculum standards, faculty qualifications, and institutional

accreditation requirements, significantly influence the operational and academic practices of HEIs offering Hospitality Management programs. Compliance with these standards has become a strategic priority among institutions seeking academic recognition, program sustainability, and competitive advantage.

Quality assurance has likewise become an essential component of higher education management. Contemporary quality assurance systems emphasize continuous improvement, stakeholder engagement, evidence-based evaluation, and institutional accountability. Hospitality Management programs, in particular, require quality assurance systems that address academic instruction, laboratory facilities, industry immersion, experiential learning, research productivity, extension activities, and internationalization initiatives.

Innovation has also emerged as a major driver of institutional competitiveness in higher education. HEIs increasingly adopt digital learning platforms, simulation technologies, flexible learning systems, industry-based pedagogies, and international collaborations to enhance learning experiences and improve graduate employability. In hospitality education, innovation extends to curriculum design, practical training, sustainability initiatives, and student engagement strategies.

Despite these developments, many HEIs continue to encounter challenges in sustaining compliance and quality assurance initiatives. Financial constraints, limited infrastructure, documentation burden, faculty workload, technological adaptation, and rapidly changing industry expectations remain significant concerns among Hospitality Management programs. These challenges become even more pronounced among regional institutions operating within varying resource capacities and institutional contexts.

Although several studies have explored quality assurance and compliance in higher education, limited research has specifically examined Hospitality Management programs in the Philippine setting using a qualitative multiple-case approach. There remains a need to understand how HEIs operationalize compliance, sustain quality assurance mechanisms, and promote innovation within their unique institutional environments.

Specifically, this study aimed to:

1. Examine compliance practices among Hospitality Management programs in selected HEIs;
2. Identify quality assurance mechanisms employed by participating institutions;
3. Explore innovation practices implemented in Hospitality Management education; and
4. Determine the challenges and sustaining strategies associated with compliance and quality assurance.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Compliance in Higher Education

Compliance in higher education refers to the adherence of institutions to policies, standards, legal requirements, and academic regulations established by governing bodies and accreditation agencies. In the Philippine context, CHED establishes policies governing curriculum standards, faculty qualifications, learning outcomes, facilities, and institutional governance. Compliance ensures that institutions maintain minimum standards necessary for academic legitimacy and educational quality.

The implementation of outcomes-based education significantly transformed higher education compliance systems in the Philippines. Institutions are required to align curriculum design, instructional delivery, assessment methods, and student outcomes with industry competencies and professional standards. Recent studies emphasize that compliance contributes to institutional sustainability, accountability, and public trust (Busetto et al., 2020; Nassaji, 2020).

Quality Assurance in Hospitality Education

Quality assurance refers to systematic processes intended to ensure continuous improvement in academic programs, institutional systems, and educational outcomes. In hospitality education, quality assurance encompasses curriculum relevance, faculty competence, laboratory adequacy, industry immersion, and graduate employability.

Recent literature highlights that institutionalized quality assurance systems contribute to organizational consistency, continuous improvement, and institutional effectiveness (Braun & Clarke, 2021). External accreditation also encourages institutions to establish evidence-based evaluation systems, strategic planning mechanisms, and performance monitoring procedures.

Digital transformation has likewise become an important component of quality assurance systems. Institutions increasingly utilize digital platforms to improve documentation, reporting efficiency, and communication processes (Chan et al., 2020).

Innovation in Hospitality Management Programs

Innovation in higher education pertains to the adoption of new pedagogical approaches, technologies, institutional practices, and learning systems aimed at improving educational quality and organizational effectiveness. In Hospitality Management programs, innovation includes technology-enhanced instruction, simulation-based learning, flexible delivery systems, and experiential learning activities.

Industry partnerships likewise contribute significantly to curriculum responsiveness and practical competency development. Recent studies emphasize that stakeholder engagement and industry collaboration strengthen graduate employability and curriculum relevance (Braik et al., 2023; Mendoza et al., 2023).

Challenges in Sustaining Compliance and Quality Assurance

Despite the importance of compliance and quality assurance, HEIs continue to experience various institutional and operational challenges. Studies identified documentation burden, limited financial resources, infrastructure deficiencies, and faculty workload as major barriers in sustaining accreditation and quality assurance initiatives (Baum, 2021).

Institutions address these challenges through collaborative leadership, faculty capability development, digitalized documentation systems, strategic planning, and continuous internal assessments. These strategies contribute to institutional resilience and organizational sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to explore compliance, quality assurance, and innovation practices among Hospitality Management programs in selected HEIs in Panay Island. Multiple-case analysis was appropriate because the study sought to understand institutional practices across different organizational contexts while identifying similarities, variations, and emerging patterns.

The qualitative approach enabled the researchers to capture the lived experiences, institutional realities, perceptions, and strategic practices of participants involved in Hospitality Management education. The use of multiple cases strengthened analytical depth and enhanced the credibility of the findings.

Participants and Research Setting

The study was conducted among selected public and private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Panay Island offering Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM) programs. The participating institutions were selected purposively based on the following criteria: (1) recognition by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to offer Hospitality Management programs;

(2) active engagement in accreditation and quality assurance processes; (3) implementation of institutional innovation practices related to hospitality education; and (4) willingness to participate in the study.

A total of fifteen (15) participants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in compliance management, accreditation activities, curriculum implementation, quality assurance systems, and innovation initiatives within their respective institutions. The participants included Hospitality Management program heads, quality assurance officers, faculty members, college deans, and internship or industry linkages coordinators.

Participants were selected because of their professional experience, institutional responsibilities, and active participation in academic planning, accreditation preparation, policy implementation, and quality assurance monitoring. The inclusion of both public and private institutions with varying accreditation statuses and institutional classifications enabled the study to gather diverse and contextually grounded perspectives regarding compliance, quality assurance, and innovation practices among Hospitality Management programs in Panay Island.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, institutional document analysis, and field observations. Interview guides were developed based on the objectives of the study and relevant literature on compliance, quality assurance, and innovation.

Institutional documents reviewed included accreditation reports, quality assurance manuals, curriculum documents, strategic plans, and faculty development records. Field observations examined facilities, laboratories, learning environments, and institutional practices relevant to Hospitality Management education.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved. Ethical clearance was secured prior to data collection, and confidentiality, voluntary participation, and anonymity were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study.

Data Analysis

The study employed a hybrid qualitative data analysis approach integrating thematic analysis and multiple-case synthesis. Data analysis followed the six-phase thematic analysis framework of Braun and Clarke (2021), which included: (1) data familiarization, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) report writing and interpretation.

Interview transcripts, field notes, and institutional documents were read repeatedly to achieve data immersion and familiarization. Significant statements and meaningful units related to compliance practices, quality assurance mechanisms, innovation initiatives, institutional challenges, and sustaining strategies were systematically identified and assigned initial codes. Open coding was initially conducted to capture emerging concepts from the data, followed by axial coding to organize related codes into broader categories and themes.

Within-case analysis was first performed to examine the unique institutional practices and contextual realities of each participating HEI. Subsequently, cross-case synthesis was conducted to identify convergent themes, institutional variations, recurring patterns, and shared experiences across cases.

To enhance analytical rigor and trustworthiness, coding consistency was reviewed through peer debriefing and iterative comparison of coded transcripts and thematic categories. Triangulation across interviews, institutional documents, and field observations further strengthened the credibility and dependability of the findings.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The study ensured credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through triangulation, member checking, audit trail maintenance, thick description, and peer debriefing.

Detailed documentation of coding procedures, thematic development, analytical memos, and audit trail records strengthened the dependability and confirmability of the study. Peer examination and iterative thematic review were likewise conducted to minimize researcher bias and improve interpretive consistency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Institutionalized Compliance Systems

Structured Governance and Accreditation Culture

The findings revealed that participating HEIs institutionalized compliance through structured governance systems, strategic planning mechanisms, and collaborative administrative processes. Most institutions established dedicated quality assurance offices responsible for accreditation preparation, compliance monitoring, and documentation management. Participants emphasized the importance of aligning institutional operations with CHED policies, accreditation standards, and industry requirements. Compliance activities were integrated into annual operational plans, faculty performance evaluation systems, and curriculum management procedures. One participant shared: “Compliance is already part of our institutional culture. Every department understands the importance of documentation, quality standards, and continuous monitoring.”

The findings support recent literature asserting that institutionalized quality assurance systems enhance organizational consistency, continuous improvement, and institutional effectiveness in higher education settings (Busetto et al., 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Cross-case analysis revealed that private institutions demonstrated more advanced digital documentation systems, while public institutions exhibited stronger community-based extension integration in compliance activities.

Theme 2: Curriculum Enhancement and Industry Alignment

Experiential Learning and Outcomes-Based Education

The study found that participating institutions regularly conducted curriculum reviews to ensure alignment with industry demands, hospitality trends, and CHED standards. Stakeholder consultations involving industry practitioners, alumni, students, and faculty members significantly influenced curriculum enhancement. Institutions emphasized experiential learning, competency-based instruction, and outcomes-based education in curriculum implementation. Laboratory activities, internship programs, and simulation exercises were integrated into instructional delivery to strengthen practical competencies.

The findings are consistent with recent studies emphasizing that industry collaboration and stakeholder feedback mechanisms significantly enhance curriculum relevance, practical competency development, and graduate employability in hospitality education (Braik et al., 2023; Mendoza et al., 2023).

Theme 3: Faculty Development and Professional Competence

Capability Building and Professional Growth

Faculty capability development emerged as a critical component of compliance and quality assurance. Participating institutions regularly conducted seminars, workshops, industry immersion activities, and faculty development programs to improve instructional competence and accreditation preparedness. Several institutions encouraged faculty members to pursue graduate studies, research engagement, professional certifications, and participation in academic conferences. One participant explained: “Faculty development is necessary because accreditation standards continue to evolve. We need to ensure that our instructors remain academically and professionally updated.”

The findings indicate that faculty competence significantly influences institutional readiness for accreditation and quality assurance implementation.

Theme 4: Technology Integration and Educational Innovation

Digital Learning and Simulation-Based Instruction

Innovation practices among participating institutions focused heavily on technology integration and digital learning systems. Institutions adopted learning management systems, virtual simulations, online assessment platforms, and digital documentation systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated technological adaptation and encouraged institutions to redesign instructional delivery mechanisms. Faculty members developed digital instructional materials, virtual demonstrations, and flexible learning activities to sustain educational continuity.

Simulation laboratories and practical training facilities were likewise enhanced to provide industry-based learning experiences. Institutions recognized that technological innovation improves learning accessibility, operational efficiency, and instructional effectiveness.

The findings align with contemporary literature emphasizing the growing role of digital transformation in hospitality education and quality assurance systems (Chan et al., 2020).

Theme 5: Industry Partnerships and External Collaboration

Stakeholder Engagement and Employability Enhancement

The study revealed that industry collaboration significantly contributes to institutional quality assurance and innovation. Participating HEIs established partnerships with hotels, restaurants, tourism establishments, and hospitality organizations for internship placement, curriculum consultation, and professional training.

Industry engagement improved students' practical exposure and enabled institutions to remain responsive to labor market expectations. Collaborative activities included guest lectures, immersion programs, industry certification training, and joint research initiatives. Participants emphasized that strong industry linkages improve graduate employability and institutional reputation.

Theme 6: Challenges in Sustaining Compliance and Innovation

Documentation Burden

Participants identified extensive documentation requirements as one of the most challenging aspects of accreditation and compliance processes. Faculty members often balance instructional responsibilities with extensive preparation of reports, evidence, and accreditation documents.

One participant stated: "The documentation process is very demanding. Preparing evidence for accreditation requires time, coordination, and continuous monitoring."

Resource Constraints

Limited financial resources and infrastructure deficiencies also affected institutional capacity to upgrade facilities, procure equipment, and implement technological innovations. Some institutions experienced difficulties sustaining advanced laboratory facilities and digital learning systems because of budget limitations.

Faculty Workload and Burnout

Faculty members involved in accreditation and quality assurance activities frequently experienced increased workload and administrative stress. Participants emphasized the need for workload balancing, administrative support, and recognition systems to sustain faculty motivation and engagement.

Theme 7: Strategies for Sustaining Quality Assurance

Collaborative Leadership and Continuous Improvement

Institutions employed various strategies to address compliance and operational challenges. These strategies included collaborative leadership, continuous faculty capability development, internal audits and mock accreditation activities, digitalization of documentation systems, strategic planning, and strengthened stakeholder engagement.

The findings suggest that institutions with collaborative organizational cultures and proactive leadership are more capable of sustaining compliance and innovation initiatives.

CONCLUSIONS

The study demonstrated that compliance, quality assurance, and innovation are interconnected dimensions that significantly influence the effectiveness and sustainability of Hospitality Management programs in higher education institutions. Participating HEIs in Panay Island institutionalized compliance and quality assurance through structured governance systems, curriculum enhancement mechanisms, faculty development initiatives, stakeholder engagement, and digitalized institutional processes.

The findings further revealed that innovation has become an important strategic response to changing educational and industry demands. Technology integration, experiential learning, industry collaboration, and flexible instructional approaches enabled institutions to strengthen academic delivery and improve graduate preparedness.

Despite these positive practices, institutions continue to encounter challenges related to documentation burden, resource limitations, infrastructure upgrading, and faculty workload. Nevertheless, collaborative leadership, strategic planning, stakeholder participation, and continuous improvement culture emerged as essential factors in sustaining institutional quality and accreditation readiness.

The study contributes to hospitality education management literature by providing a contextualized understanding of institutional compliance and innovation practices within regional Philippine HEIs.

This study focused only on selected higher education institutions (HEIs) in Panay Island offering Hospitality Management programs. While the multiple-case approach provided rich contextual insights into institutional compliance, quality assurance, and innovation practices, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all higher education institutions in the Philippines or in other international contexts due to variations in institutional resources, governance structures, accreditation experiences, and educational environments.

In addition, the study primarily involved institutional stakeholders such as administrators, quality assurance officers, faculty members, and program coordinators. The perspectives of students, alumni, employers, and industry practitioners were not extensively explored, which may limit the comprehensiveness of the findings regarding educational outcomes and industry responsiveness.

Although purposive sampling was employed to ensure the inclusion of participants with direct involvement in compliance and quality assurance activities, the study recognizes that qualitative findings are inherently context-bound and interpretive in nature. Nevertheless, methodological rigor was strengthened through triangulation, member checking, document analysis, peer debriefing, and cross-case synthesis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Higher education institutions should strengthen digital quality assurance systems to improve documentation efficiency, monitoring processes, and institutional reporting.

Institutions should continue investing in faculty capability development through advanced studies, industry immersion, research engagement, and international exposure.

Hospitality Management programs should strengthen partnerships with industry stakeholders to ensure curriculum responsiveness and improve experiential learning opportunities.

Institutional administrators should develop sustainable workload management systems and recognition programs to support faculty members involved in accreditation and compliance activities.

Policymakers and accreditation agencies should provide contextualized support mechanisms for regional HEIs facing financial and infrastructure constraints.

Future researchers may conduct comparative studies involving larger institutional samples and mixed-method approaches to further examine the relationship between compliance, innovation, and educational outcomes.

Future studies may expand the scope of investigation by including Hospitality Management programs from other regions in the Philippines and international higher education institutions to enable comparative analysis and improve the transferability of findings across educational contexts.

Researchers may also incorporate the perspectives of students, alumni, employers, and hospitality industry stakeholders to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of educational quality, curriculum relevance, graduate preparedness, and industry responsiveness.

Future research may further utilize mixed-method or longitudinal research designs to examine the long-term impact of compliance systems, innovation practices, and quality assurance initiatives on institutional performance and graduate employability.

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