

IMBALANCE BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE TRAINING OF HOSPITALITY PERSONNEL IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: Amid the rapid growth of tourist flows and the transformation of the hospitality industry, Uzbekistan faces a significant challenge — the mismatch between academic training and market demands. This study analyzes university curricula, student observations, and international models (Switzerland, USA), revealing systemic problems: an overemphasis on theory, weak digital integration, lack of simulation-based training, and limited ties with the industry. Based on regulatory documents (Resolution No. PP-269) and statistical data (an increase in staff turnover to 22% in 2024), recommendations for modernization are proposed: implementation of a modular system, integration of PMS systems, student exchange programs, staff rotation between franchise hotels, expanded partnerships, and enhanced government support. The results of this research can be used in the development of national standards for hospitality workforce training.

Keywords: hospitality service; service quality; practical training; PMS systems; dual education; staff shortage; tourism in Uzbekistan; brand standards; educational reforms; hotel management

Introduction

In the context of limited resources and the pursuit of sustainable economic growth, tourism has become one of the key sectors capable of generating revenue with relatively low investment. This is especially relevant for countries with rich cultural and natural heritage, such as Uzbekistan. The hospitality industry, being a central element of the tourism infrastructure, directly influences guests' impressions and the national image. According to the State Committee for Tourism, more than 5.2 million foreign tourists visited Uzbekistan in 2023, which is 18% more compared to the previous year. Meanwhile, as estimated by BusinesStat[1], the volume of the hotel services market nearly doubled — from 2.6 to 4.8 million overnight stays.

However, the rapid development of the sector is accompanied by systemic challenges: insufficient accommodation capacity, a shortage of skilled personnel, and inconsistent service quality. According to the Uzbekistan Hotel Association, up to 40% of graduates of specialized universities do not meet the basic requirements of the industry, including English language proficiency, knowledge of PMS systems, and customer service skills. Despite the availability of tourism and hotel management programs, most universities retain an imbalance between theoretical instruction and practical training. Educational courses are often based on outdated sources, mainly Russian textbooks, which do not reflect current realities of the global hospitality business. Practical training is usually limited to a two-month internship at the end of the program, which does not allow students to reinforce their knowledge in real conditions. According to the Ministry of Higher Education, only 6 out of 18 universities offering tourism programs have active agreements with hotel chains.

The relevance of this study is determined by the need to align educational programs with the real needs of the hospitality industry. Support for reform is reflected in the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PP-269 dated July 18, 2024[2], according to which a



dual education model will be introduced starting from the 2024/2025 academic year: 80% theory / 20% practice in the 1st year, 50/50 in the 2nd year, and 30/70 in the 3rd year. This creates opportunities for integrating practice-oriented modules, simulation training, and mentorship. International experience confirms the effectiveness of such approaches. In Switzerland, a dual system is used in which students combine theoretical classes with paid internships in hotels. In the United States, emphasis is placed on the case method and participation of industry experts in the educational process. These models demonstrate a high level of graduate adaptation to industry requirements and can be adapted to the context of Uzbekistan.

This article aims to identify the causes of low effectiveness in hospitality personnel training in Uzbekistan and to formulate recommendations for universities, hotels, and government bodies. The goal is to propose practice-oriented solutions that will contribute to the development of qualified specialists prepared for the challenges of the modern hospitality industry.

Methodology

This study relies on a qualitative and partially quantitative approach aimed at identifying the causes of the gap between theoretical and practical training of personnel in the hospitality sector of Uzbekistan. The methodology includes the following stages:

1. Analysis of Educational Programs

A content analysis of the curricula of six universities offering tourism and hospitality management programs was conducted. The following aspects were assessed:

- the share of practice-oriented courses;
- the presence of modules on PMS systems (OPERA, Fidelio);
- the use of brand standards of international hotel chains;
- the existence of partnerships with industry organizations.

2. Empirical Observations

Based on personal learning experience and interaction with instructors and students, several recurring problems were identified:

- dominance of theoretical material;
- absence of simulation-based training;
- weak connection with the industry.

3. Comparative International Analysis

A review of foreign personnel training models was carried out:

- Switzerland — dual system (theory + paid internship);
- USA — case-based learning, participation of industry experts, simulation laboratories.

Sources include educational resource platforms (GlobalDialog, StudyUSA, GrantStudy) and official university websites.[3][4]

4. Analysis of Regulatory Documents

Key documents regulating personnel training were examined:

- Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PP-269 dated July 18, 2024 — implementation of the dual education model;[2]
- Tourism Development Strategy until 2030;[5]
- Statistical reports of the Ministry of Higher Education and the State Committee for Tourism.[6]

The methodological framework is aimed at identifying systemic inconsistencies between academic content and industry needs, as well as formulating recommendations for the modernization of the educational process.

Results



The analysis of educational programs, student observations, and comparison with international models of hospitality personnel training in Uzbekistan has revealed a number of systemic issues hindering the development of professional competencies.

- **Limited Practice-Oriented Training Component**

University curricula show a prevailing emphasis on theoretical disciplines, while practical training is usually limited to short-term internships at the end of the course. This prevents students from consolidating knowledge in real conditions and developing stable service skills. In most cases, there are no simulation modules that replicate front desk operations, booking procedures, or guest interaction.

- **Insufficient Digitalization of the Educational Process**

Only a few universities include training in PMS systems (e.g., OPERA, Fidelio), despite their central role in modern hotel operations. Students do not gain a systematic understanding of digital management tools, which reduces their readiness for employment, especially in chain hotels.

- **Gap Between Academic Content and Industry Standards**

Educational materials are often based on outdated sources that do not reflect current business requirements. Brand standards, case-based training, and real service scenarios are largely absent from the curriculum. As a result, graduates lack basic customer service skills, do not understand hotel structures, and are unprepared for real guest interactions.

- **International Models as Benchmarks for Reform**

The comparative analysis shows more effective approaches in countries with developed hospitality industries:

- In Switzerland, students combine theoretical study with paid hotel internships, which strengthens applied skills and professional resilience.

- In the United States, the case method and engagement of practicing hotel managers ensure relevance of knowledge and the development of critical thinking.

- **Regulatory Framework as a Driver for Change**

Presidential Decree No. PP-269 dated July 18, 2024[2] provides for the introduction of dual education, creating conditions for integrating practice into the academic environment. However, at the time of the analysis, only 6 out of 18 universities had active agreements with hotel chains, limiting students' access to real professional experience.

Discussion

The results confirm the existence of a systemic gap between academic training and practical requirements in the hospitality industry of Uzbekistan. The dominance of theoretical instruction, lack of digital tools, and weak industry integration hinder graduates' professional adaptation.

- **Causes of the Mismatch**

Institutional inertia in universities maintaining traditional teaching approaches prevents the adoption of practice-oriented models. Only 2 out of the 6 reviewed universities teach PMS system usage, and practical training accounts for less than 20% of instructional time. The absence of simulation-based learning and limited practical experience among instructors restricts the development of applied competencies.

- **Consequences for the Industry: Turnover and Retraining**

According to EY HR Club, staff turnover in the hospitality sector in Uzbekistan increased by 7% in 2024 despite growing recruitment. Employers are forced to retrain graduates, which raises operational costs and lowers efficiency. In the context of increasing tourist inflow — more than 5.2 million foreign visitors in 2023 — demand for qualified personnel is becoming critical.



- **International Models as a Guideline**

Switzerland's dual education system and the U.S. case-based approach demonstrate successful integration of practice and theory. These models show high employment rates — up to 92% of graduates within six months of graduation.

- **Potential for Reform**

Presidential Decree No. PP-269 introduces a phased dual model (80/20 in year 1, 50/50 in year 2, and 30/70 in year 3), forming a regulatory basis for practical learning. However, insufficient partnerships with hotels remain a major limitation.

- **Recommendations**

To address the identified issues, the following measures are proposed: • introduction of modular practice-oriented courses;

- creation of simulation laboratories equipped with PMS systems;
- involvement of industry practitioners as instructors;
- expansion of partnerships between universities and hotels;
- state-level monitoring of training quality.

Comparative Analysis of Hospitality Workforce Training Models

Criterion	Uzbekistan (2023–2024)	Switzerland	USA
Model Type	Theory-oriented	Dual system (theory + paid practice)	Case-based model + industry expert participation
Share of Practical Training	~20% (mainly at the end of the program)	Up to 50% starting from the first year	Practical training integrated through case studies and internships
PMS Systems in Curriculum	Present in 2 out of 6 universities, irregular	Mandatory component	Used in simulation laboratories
Simulation-Based Training	Not implemented	Present (labs, training simulators)	Present (digital simulations, role-playing exercises)
Instructor Background	Practical professionals involved	hotel seldom	Faculty with industry experience
Graduate Employment Rates	Low; employers must retrain graduates	Up to 92% within six months of graduation	Often practicing hotel managers deliver courses
Government Support	Presidential Decree No. PP-269 (dual model introduction)	Systemic support at the canton level	Up to 85% within six months of graduation
			Partial support through grants and industry partnerships

Conclusion

This study identified systemic misalignments between academic training and the actual needs of the hospitality industry in Uzbekistan. The predominance of theoretical coursework, insufficient digitalization of learning, limited access to simulation environments, and weak university–industry collaboration reduce graduates' readiness for professional work.

Against the backdrop of growing tourist inflows (over 5.2 million foreign visitors in 2023) and increasing staff turnover (up to 22% in 2024), the hospitality sector faces an urgent demand for qualified personnel. International experience (Switzerland, USA) demonstrates the effectiveness of practice-oriented learning models, active industry engagement in educational processes, and structured governmental support.



To improve training quality and ensure sustainable development of the hospitality sector in Uzbekistan, it is recommended to:

- Introduce a modular learning system with regular alternation of theory and practice;
- Integrate PMS systems and hotel brand standards into academic curricula;
- Establish simulation laboratories in universities to replicate real service processes;
- Involve practicing hotel professionals in teaching and case development;
- Expand partnerships between universities and hotel chains, including joint internships;
- Organize student exchange programs with regions and countries with developed hospitality industries;
- Encourage staff rotation among hotel franchises and branches for skill enhancement;
- Provide government support through funding, quality monitoring, and the creation of a national collaboration platform for universities and the hospitality sector.

The comprehensive implementation of these measures will align academic training with real market needs, enhance graduate competitiveness, and support sustainable development of Uzbekistan's hospitality industry.

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