

The Factors Affecting Hospitality Students Not Choosing Hospitality Sector for their Career Progression

Study on Myanmar Based Hospitality Students

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Research Method - Qualitative

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Abstract

This study investigates the critical factors influencing the career choices of hospitality students in Myanmar, specifically addressing why many with formal hospitality education opt not to pursue careers within the sector. Myanmar's hospitality industry, once a burgeoning contributor to the national economy, now confronts significant challenges in attracting and retaining skilled professionals, a situation profoundly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing socio-political instability following the February 2021 coup, including the recent activation of the national conscription law in February 2024. This research employs a qualitative, interpretivist approach, utilizing a case study design focused on Myanmar-based hospitality students, recent graduates, industry professionals, and academic staff. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, aiming to explore the complex interplay of economic, social, educational, and personal factors shaping career decisions. Key findings reveal that a confluence of low remuneration, demanding working conditions, limited career progression, significant personal security concerns heightened by the conscription law, and a misalignment with personal aspirations for work-life balance are primary deterrents driving graduates away from the local industry, often towards overseas employment. By identifying these primary deterrents and understanding student perceptions within the current volatile context, this study aims to provide actionable recommendations for educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and policymakers. These recommendations centre on fostering collaborative strategies to improve working conditions, enhance career development pathways, align educational curricula with industry and student needs, and address the profound desire for stability and security, ultimately aiming to mitigate the 'brain drain' and foster a sustainable pipeline of motivated talent for the future recovery and growth of Myanmar's hospitality sector.

1.1 Background of the Study

Myanmar's hospitality sector, a pivotal engine for economic growth and employment prior to 2021, now stands at a critical juncture. Once mirroring the vibrant tourism trajectory of the ASEAN region—fueled by enhanced air connectivity, visa openness, and a growing regional middle class (ASEAN Secretariat, 2024)—the industry showcased substantial promise. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) reported that travel and tourism contributed USD 4.9 billion to Myanmar's GDP in 2019, representing 4.9% of the total GDP (WTTC, 2019). This expansion naturally spurred a significant demand for skilled hospitality professionals, leading to an increase in formal hospitality education programs designed to meet this burgeoning need.

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However, this upward trajectory was catastrophically interrupted. The global COVID-19 pandemic triggered unprecedented disruptions, decimating international travel and inflicting severe economic damage, particularly on the labor-intensive hospitality sector which saw millions of job losses worldwide (UNWTO, 2020). Compounding this, the profound socio-political shifts within Myanmar since February 2021 have plunged the sector into further uncertainty, creating an environment where its very viability and attractiveness to new talent are critically undermined. International tourist arrivals, a key barometer of the sector's health, plummeted from 4.3 million in 2019 to an estimated 160,000 in 2022 (World Bank, 2023), starkly illustrating the crisis. This dramatic downturn not only erodes the sector's economic contribution but also directly impacts livelihoods, forces business closures, and critically, jeopardizes the future talent pipeline. Even before these recent crises, global and local studies (Richardson, 2010; MCES, 2018) highlighted persistent challenges within the hospitality industry, including perceptions of low pay, long and unsociable working hours, and limited career progression, which historically deterred entrants. The current confluence of these pre-existing issues with acute instability and, most recently, the activation of a national conscription law in February 2024, creates an exceptionally challenging landscape for young individuals considering their careers. This study, therefore, emerges from an urgent need to understand why, despite the availability of formally educated hospitality students, the sector faces a severe 'brain drain,' with many choosing alternative paths.

1.2 Research Problem & Justification

Despite the Myanmar hospitality industry's significant potential and past contributions to the national economy (WTTC, 2019), the sector faces a critical and pressing challenge: a noticeable trend where individuals receiving formal hospitality education do not subsequently pursue careers within the industry. This phenomenon, often characterized as a 'brain drain', represents a substantial loss of trained talent and hinders the sector's ability to meet service demands and achieve sustainable growth. The problem is further compounded by the prevailing socio-political instability, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and specific security concerns within the country (ILO, as cited in proposal),

The decision by hospitality graduates to seek opportunities outside the sector appears to be driven by a complex interplay of factors, creating a multifaceted problem. These contributing factors, acting as pressures or deterrents, can be broadly categorized as:

- **Economic Factors:** Concerns regarding low starting wages, long working hours, perceived limited opportunities for career advancement, and job security compared to other industries.
- **Social Factors:** Negative perceptions of the industry's status, societal or family expectations regarding career paths, and the overarching impact of the current security situation, including potential fears related to conscription.

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- **Educational Factors:** Questions about the adequacy and relevance of hospitality education programs, the availability and quality of practical training or internships, and the effectiveness of career guidance services.
- **Personal Factors:** Individual aspirations, differing career goals, lifestyle preferences incompatible with industry norms, and risk aversion in an uncertain environment.

The urgency and relevance of investigating this complex interplay of factors are underscored by insights gathered from preliminary validation interviews with key stakeholders:

- **Industry Perspective:** Mrs. Sanda Win, a General Manager at an international hotel in Yangon, confirmed the consistent challenge in "attracting and retaining young, talented individuals," noting that many graduates perceive sectors like IT or finance as offering "better salaries and career prospects." She also highlighted the deterrent effect of "long working hours and irregular shifts" and the significant impact of the "prevailing security situation and the COVID-19 pandemic," emphasizing the need for improved work-life balance, competitive compensation, and a supportive environment.
- **Educational Perspective:** Ms. Hnin Lei Lei Paing, Managing Director of a vocational school, echoed these concerns, stating that students express anxieties about "long-term stability and career prospects," further exacerbated by "security concerns and post-pandemic" impacts. She stressed the need for stronger "industry-academia collaborations" for practical experience and the crucial role of "career guidance and counseling services" to help students make informed decisions.
- **Graduate Perspective:** Ms. Wai Wai Kyu, a hospitality graduate now working in marketing, provided a direct account, citing "long working hours and low starting salaries" as key reasons for leaving the sector. She noted that pursuing careers with "better growth potential and a more stable work environment" was a common aspiration among her peers, with some using their education primarily to emigrate. Her experience reinforces the call for "improving the overall working conditions" to retain young talent.

These perspectives collectively highlight a significant disconnect between hospitality training and industry employment in Myanmar. Therefore, this study is justified in its aim to systematically identify and analyze the multifaceted factors contributing to this 'brain drain', providing a crucial understanding needed to develop effective strategies for attracting and retaining the skilled workforce essential for the hospitality sector's future.

Validation Interview Summary

Interviewee	Key Theme/Concern	Summary of Insights
Mrs. Sanda Win General Manager, International Hotel,	Talent Attraction & Retention	Consistently difficult to attract/retain young talent. Graduates often perceive better salaries/prospects in other sectors (IT, finance). Long/irregular hours are a deterrent.

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Yangon		Security situation & COVID impact exacerbate issues. Need for better conditions & development exists.
Ms. Hnin Lei Lei Paing Managing Director, Vocational School, Yangon	Student Stability & Training Concerns	Students express concerns about long-term stability and career prospects in the industry, worsened by security/post-pandemic issues. Need for stronger industry-academia links for practical training and better career guidance is crucial.
Ms. Wai Wai Kyu Hospitality Graduate (now Marketing Executive)	Working Conditions & Alternatives	Personal decision driven by low starting pay and long hours. Peers shared similar views, seeking better growth/stability or emigration. Highlights the need for improved overall working conditions (salary, flexibility, benefits) to retain young talent.

1.3 Research Gap

While research exists concerning the broader challenges within Myanmar's hospitality industry and workforce, a specific gap remains regarding the initial career decisions of formally educated hospitality students. Existing studies have shed light on important related areas, as summarized below:

Summary of Related Existing Research

No.	Researcher(s) / Institution	Topic / Title	Summary
1	Phu Pwint Nyo Win Aung (Yangon University of Economics)	Employee Retention in Myanmar Hotel Industry	This study primarily focuses on understanding and addressing the critical issue of employee retention within the Myanmar hotel industry.
2	World Bank Group	A Growing Crisis: Work, Workers, and Wellbeing in Myanmar	The study focuses on the significant challenges facing the Myanmar workforce and the broader implications for the country's economic and social development.
3	J.S. Perry Hobson & Roberta Leung	Hotel development in Myanmar: Politics and the human-resources challenge	The study focuses on the interplay between political factors and the challenges faced by the hospitality industry in Myanmar, particularly in terms of human resources.

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1.4 Research Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the multifaceted factors deterring hospitality students and recent graduates in Myanmar from choosing or remaining in the local hospitality sector, particularly within the prevailing challenging socio-economic and politico-security context.

The specific objectives of this study are:

- To identify and comprehensively analyze the economic, social, educational, and personal factors, including the impact of the current politico-security situation and conscription law, that deter hospitality students and recent graduates in Myanmar from entering or sustaining careers within the local hospitality sector.
- To critically evaluate the perceived role and effectiveness of hospitality education and training programs in Myanmar in preparing graduates for industry realities and influencing their career choices, thereby understanding its contribution to or mitigation of the 'brain drain'.
- To develop contextually relevant and actionable recommendations for educational institutions, hospitality industry employers, and policymakers, aimed at addressing the identified challenges and fostering a more sustainable supply of skilled and motivated hospitality professionals in Myanmar.

1.5 Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following key questions:

- What are the primary economic factors, such as low wages, long working hours, and limited career growth opportunities, that deter hospitality students from pursuing careers within the Myanmar hospitality industry?
- To what extent do social factors, including negative perceptions about the industry, family expectations, and the influence of the prevailing security situation (including the fear of conscription), impact the career decisions of hospitality students?
- How do educational factors, such as the adequacy of hospitality education programs, the availability of practical training and internships, and the quality of career guidance and counseling services, influence the career choices of hospitality students?
- What are the personal aspirations, career goals, and lifestyle preferences that lead hospitality students to pursue alternative career paths outside the hospitality sector?
- How has the 2021 coup and the subsequent political and security instability impacted the perceptions and career aspirations of hospitality students?
- What are the specific challenges faced by the hospitality industry in attracting and retaining young talent in the current context?

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- What strategies can educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and policymakers implement to address the challenges faced by the Myanmar hospitality industry and ensure a sustainable supply of skilled hospitality professionals?

1.6 Rationale & Justification

This research holds significant importance due to the critical role the hospitality sector plays, or has the potential to play, in Myanmar's economic landscape and the severe implications of the current workforce challenges. Understanding why formally trained hospitality students are not entering the sector – the "brain drain" phenomenon – is crucial for several reasons:

- **Addressing a Critical Bottleneck:** The lack of skilled professionals entering the industry directly hinders its capacity for service delivery, quality improvement, and growth. Identifying the root causes of this reluctance is the first step toward developing targeted solutions.
- **Informing Stakeholders:** The findings of this study are intended to provide actionable insights for key stakeholders. Educational institutions can use the results to refine curricula, enhance practical training, and improve career guidance. Industry employers can gain a better understanding of graduates' expectations and concerns, informing recruitment strategies and efforts to improve working conditions. Policymakers can use the data to develop supportive frameworks that encourage talent retention within this vital sector.
- **Aiding Industry Recovery:** Myanmar's hospitality sector is navigating a period of significant disruption. Addressing the fundamental challenge of securing a skilled workforce is essential for the industry's recovery and resilience in the face of ongoing economic and socio-political uncertainty. This research aims to contribute knowledge that can support this recovery process.
- **Ensuring a Sustainable Skilled Workforce:** Beyond immediate recovery, the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of Myanmar's hospitality industry depend on a consistent pipeline of motivated and qualified professionals. This study seeks to contribute to building that sustainable workforce by understanding and addressing the factors that currently divert talent away from the sector.

In essence, this research is justified by its focus on a timely, critical, and under-explored problem with direct practical relevance for the future health and potential of a key economic sector within the specific context of contemporary Myanmar.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

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The research acknowledges potential limitations inherent in this study, as noted during the proposal stage:

- **Potential for Bias:** As a qualitative study relying on interviews and focus groups, there is potential for researcher bias in data interpretation and participant bias in responses, although measures will be taken to ensure objectivity and triangulation where possible.
- **Limited Generalizability:** The findings derived from a specific case study context (Myanmar hospitality students) and potentially a limited, purposively selected sample may not be directly generalizable to all hospitality students in other regions or contexts. The focus is on in-depth understanding within this specific setting.
- **Time and Resource Constraints:** Like most academic research, this study operates within specific timeframes and resource limitations, which may affect the scope of data collection (e.g., number of participants, duration of engagement) and the depth of analysis achievable.

1.8 Research Significance

1.8.1 Academic Significance

The primary academic contribution lies in addressing the identified research gap concerning the initial career choices of hospitality graduates in Myanmar. By focusing specifically on the factors influencing *why* formally trained students opt out of the sector, particularly within the complex post-2021 socio-political and economic environment, this research adds nuanced understanding to the broader literature on hospitality workforce development, career choice theory, and human resource challenges in developing economies facing instability. It moves beyond general retention studies to explore the critical pre-entry decision-making phase.

1.8.2 Practical Significance

The practical significance of this research is substantial. By achieving its objective to identify key deterrents and develop recommendations, the study aims to provide tangible value to stakeholders:

- **For Educational Institutions:** Findings can inform curriculum reviews, the development of more effective internship programs, and the enhancement of career counseling services to better align training with industry realities and student aspirations.
- **For Hospitality Employers:** Insights into graduates' perceptions, expectations, and concerns can guide the development of more attractive recruitment strategies, onboarding processes, and working conditions (addressing issues like pay, hours, career paths, and work environment) to combat the "brain drain."

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- **For Policymakers:** The research can provide evidence-based information to support the formulation of policies aimed at strengthening the hospitality workforce pipeline, improving industry standards, and ultimately aiding the recovery and sustainable growth of this vital sector for Myanmar's economy.

Ultimately, the practical goal is to contribute knowledge that helps bridge the gap between hospitality education and industry employment, fostering a more robust and sustainable talent pool for the sector's future.

1.9 Overview of Research Design and Methodology

To address the aforementioned research objectives and delve into the complex, nuanced experiences of individuals, this study employs a qualitative research paradigm. Specifically, an interpretivist philosophy has been adopted, acknowledging that social reality is constructed and understood through the subjective experiences of participants (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). A case study research strategy focuses on the contemporary phenomenon of career choice diversion within its real-life context – the Myanmar hospitality sector post-2021. This approach is justified as it facilitates an in-depth investigation into the 'why' and 'how' behind career decisions, capturing rich descriptive data essential for understanding this multifaceted issue. Primary data will be gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with current hospitality students, recent graduates (both within and outside the sector), industry professionals, and academic staff. Thematic analysis will be utilized to identify and interpret key patterns and themes emerging from the data.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter undertakes a critical and systematic review of existing academic literature pertinent to understanding the multifaceted factors influencing the career choices of hospitality students, with a specific and crucial focus on the contemporary context of Myanmar. The review aims to establish the theoretical and empirical foundations for this study, further delineate and substantiate the research gap identified in Chapter 1, and provide a comprehensive overview of current knowledge related to the key variables under investigation: economic, social, educational, and personal factors, all profoundly shaped by the prevailing politico-security environment.

The scope of this review encompasses an analysis of:

- Global and regional hospitality industry workforce challenges, including pervasive issues related to career perceptions and talent retention.
- Established theories of career choice and development that offer frameworks for understanding individual vocational pathways.
- Specific factors empirically identified in previous research as influencing career decisions within the hospitality field.
- The limited yet significant existing research pertaining to Myanmar's unique socio-political and economic environment and its impact on the hospitality sector and its workforce.

This chapter will not merely summarize existing studies but will critically evaluate their relevance, methodologies, and findings, assessing their applicability to the current Myanmar context. By synthesizing these diverse strands of literature, this review will systematically highlight the specific lacunae in current understanding that this dissertation seeks to address, particularly concerning the initial career decisions of formally educated hospitality students in a nation undergoing profound crisis. Ultimately, this critical synthesis will provide a robust justification for the research questions and the methodological approach adopted in subsequent chapters.

2.2 Critical Evaluation of Existing Studies

This section delves deeper into the academic landscape surrounding hospitality careers, evaluating relevant theories and empirical findings to contextualize the present study and further highlight the existing research gap.

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2.2.1 Global Hospitality Workforce Challenges & Career Perceptions

The hospitality industry globally faces persistent challenges in attracting and retaining talent. Literature frequently points to negative perceptions surrounding careers in the sector, often linked to demanding working conditions. Common issues cited include relatively low starting pay compared to other industries, long and often unsociable working hours (including shift work, evenings, and weekends), perceptions of limited career progression opportunities, and high levels of work-related stress (Richardson, 2010; Gebbels et al., 2022; Omar et al., 2016). These factors contribute to high employee turnover rates and a phenomenon sometimes described as 'brain drain', where skilled individuals, including formally trained graduates, leave the sector for perceived better opportunities elsewhere (Leal-Solís et al., 2024; Öncü et al., 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues, leading to widespread job losses and potentially altering career expectations among new entrants regarding job security and flexibility (Shrestha et al., 2023; Kong et al., 2021). While these global trends provide a backdrop, their specific manifestation and weighting within the unique context of Myanmar require investigation.

2.2.2 Theories of Career Choice

Understanding why individuals choose certain career paths involves considering established theoretical frameworks. Person-Organization (P-O) fit theory, for instance, suggests that individuals are more likely to choose and remain in careers and organizations that align with their personal values, personality, and goals (Judge & Bretz, 2002). This implies that a perceived mismatch between a graduate's values (e.g., work-life balance, desire for stability) and the perceived nature of hospitality work could deter them from entering the sector. Career Construction Theory emphasizes the role of personal agency and how individuals actively construct their careers based on their life themes, interests, and adaptability in navigating vocational tasks and transitions (Savickas, 2002). This perspective highlights the importance of individual aspirations and how students interpret their experiences (including education and internships) in shaping their career narratives. Furthermore, factors like perceived risk – encompassing economic, social, or even physical safety concerns – can significantly influence career decision-making, particularly among university students weighing different options (Kwon & Kim, 2016). These theories provide lenses through which to analyze the interplay of factors influencing Myanmar hospitality students.

2.2.3 Factors Influencing Hospitality Career Choices

Building on theoretical frameworks, empirical studies identify specific factors influencing career choices in hospitality:

- **Economic Factors:** Salary expectations, benefits, and perceived long-term financial security are consistently highlighted as crucial (Richardson, 2010; Fatima Abrahams et al., 2015). The comparison with earning potential in other sectors is often a key consideration.

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- **Social Factors:** The social status or image of the industry, influence from family and peers, and alignment with cultural norms play a significant role (Ahmed & Bhatti,; Yusoff et al., 2011). Negative stereotypes can act as powerful deterrents.
- **Educational Factors:** The quality and relevance of hospitality education, including the effectiveness of practical training, internships, and exposure to the industry, are critical in shaping attitudes and preparedness. Effective career guidance is also vital (Ms. Hnin Lei Lei Paing, validation interview).
- **Personal Factors:** Intrinsic interest in the field, personal values, desired work-life balance, personality traits, and individual career aspirations are fundamental drivers (Korir, 2012, as cited; Lee et al., 2020).

While these factors are widely recognized, their relative importance and specific nature within the contemporary Myanmar context remain underexplored.

2.2.4 The Myanmar Context

Applying these general concepts to Myanmar requires considering the specific local environment:

- **Economic and Workforce Situation:** The World Bank Group highlights significant challenges facing Myanmar's workforce, impacting wellbeing and development. This broader economic pressure likely influences salary expectations and perceptions of job security across all sectors, including hospitality.
- **Political Instability and its Impact:** Political instability is known to negatively affect tourism through decreased arrivals, revenues, and increased operational costs (Ivanov et al., 2017). Research by Hobson & Leung specifically links political factors to HR challenges in Myanmar's hotel development. The ongoing instability since 2021 likely heightens perceived risks (Kwon & Kim, 2016) and impacts students' views on long-term career stability within a tourism-dependent sector. Security concerns, including the possibility of conscription, add another layer of complexity unique to the current situation.
- **Hospitality Sector Specifics:** Studies within Myanmar, though limited, point to existing issues. Aung's work on employee retention suggests challenges in keeping staff, while Hobson & Leung identify HR difficulties linked to the political landscape. These studies focus on existing employees or development challenges, not specifically on the initial choices of new graduates entering (or not entering) the workforce.

2.3 Review of Empirical Literature

This section summarizes key empirical findings from previous studies that have investigated factors influencing career choices, particularly within the hospitality sector and related contexts. These findings provide an important empirical backdrop for the current qualitative exploration, highlighting established relationships and areas where further in-depth understanding is needed.

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- **2.3.1 Findings on Economic Factors** Empirical studies consistently highlight economic considerations as significant determinants of career choice in hospitality. Research indicates that relatively low starting pay, perceptions of limited long-term financial security, and comparisons with earning potential in other industries are crucial factors influencing individuals' decisions to enter or remain in the sector (Richardson, 2010; Fatima Abrahams et al., 2015). Studies on global hospitality workforce challenges frequently point to demanding working conditions, including long and often unsociable hours, as contributing to high employee turnover (Richardson, 2010; Gebbels et al., 2022; Omar et al., 2016).
- **2.3.2 Findings on Social Factors** Empirical evidence suggests that social influences and perceptions play a notable role in shaping career choices within hospitality. The social status or image of the industry, along with influence from family and peers, can significantly impact individuals' decisions (Ahmed & Bhatti,; Yusoff et al., 2011). Negative stereotypes associated with hospitality careers can act as powerful deterrents for potential entrants.
- **2.3.3 Findings on Educational Factors** Empirical research underscores the importance of the quality and relevance of hospitality education and training. Studies indicate that the effectiveness of practical training, internships, and exposure to the industry are critical in shaping students' attitudes and preparedness for hospitality careers (Ms. Hnin Lei Lei Paing, validation interview; Lee et al., 2020; Noe, 2017). Effective career guidance is also empirically linked to helping students make informed decisions and navigate career pathways.
- **2.3.4 Findings on Personal Factors** Empirical studies identify various personal factors that influence career decisions in hospitality. Intrinsic interest in the field, alignment with personal values, desired work-life balance, personality traits, and individual career aspirations are fundamental drivers (Korir, 2012, as cited; Lee et al., 2020). Research also suggests that perceived risk, which can encompass economic, social, or even physical safety concerns, can significantly influence career decision-making, particularly among students evaluating different options (Kwon & Kim, 2016).
- **2.3.5 Findings on Contextual Factors (including Politico-Security)** Empirical evidence, particularly from studies in regions experiencing instability, highlights the impact of broader contextual factors on the hospitality sector and its workforce. Political instability is empirically linked to decreased tourism and increased operational costs for businesses (Ivanov et al., 2017). Research specific to Myanmar has noted the interplay between political factors and human resource challenges in the hotel sector (Hobson & Leung). Studies on employee retention in Myanmar's hotel industry also suggest existing workforce issues (Aung). While empirical work on the direct impact of acute political and security crises on student career choices is limited, the existing evidence indicates that such contexts introduce significant challenges for the industry and its potential workforce.

2.4 Synthesis and Remaining Gaps

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This chapter has critically reviewed the existing academic literature relevant to understanding the factors influencing career choices in the hospitality sector, drawing upon both theoretical frameworks and empirical findings. The theoretical perspectives, such as Person-Organization Fit and Career Construction Theory, provide valuable lenses for understanding the subjective processes by which individuals evaluate potential career paths and construct their vocational identities. The review of empirical literature has highlighted that economic factors (low pay, long hours, job insecurity), social factors (industry image, family influence), educational factors (training quality, guidance), and personal factors (aspirations, values, risk aversion) are widely recognized determinants of career decisions in hospitality across various contexts.

- Furthermore, the literature review has specifically examined the limited but important research pertaining to the Myanmar context, which indicates existing challenges within the hospitality workforce and the impact of political factors on the sector.
- However, despite this existing body of knowledge, a critical research gap persists. While we understand *that* these factors can influence career choices, there is a significant lack of in-depth, qualitative understanding of *how* these factors are perceived and *interact* within the unique and highly challenging contemporary context of Myanmar. Specifically, there is a gap in understanding the lived experiences and subjective interpretations of hospitality students and recent graduates in Myanmar, particularly concerning the profound impact of recent socio-political instability, economic downturn, and the activation of the national conscription law on their career decision-making processes.
- Existing empirical studies, often quantitative in nature, may identify correlations between factors and career outcomes but do not fully capture the nuanced 'why' behind these relationships or the complex interplay of multiple factors from the perspective of the individuals experiencing them. The specific weight and nature of influences like fear related to conscription, the desire for security in a volatile environment, and the strategic use of hospitality education as a pathway to overseas opportunities are not adequately explored in the current literature.
- Therefore, this study is designed to fill this critical gap by employing a qualitative approach to delve deeply into the subjective realities of Myanmar-based hospitality students and graduates. By exploring their narratives, this research aims to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of the multifaceted factors influencing their career choices, thereby extending the existing theoretical and empirical knowledge base and offering valuable insights for stakeholders in Myanmar's hospitality sector.

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Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction to the chapter

This chapter outlines the methodology employed to investigate the factors affecting hospitality students in Myanmar choosing not to pursue careers in the sector. As established in Chapter 1, the research aims to explore complex perceptions, motivations, and experiences within a specific, challenging context. Therefore, a Qualitative research approach was selected as the most appropriate strategy for this study.

The justification for this choice rests on the nature of the research questions, which seek to understand the 'why' and 'how' behind career decisions rather than simply quantifying trends. Qualitative methods are particularly well-suited for exploring subjective experiences, uncovering the nuances of individual perspectives, and understanding phenomena within their natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This approach allows for in-depth data collection through methods like interviews and focus groups, enabling the researcher to capture rich, descriptive data about participants' reasoning, feelings, and the meanings they ascribe to factors such as economic pressures, social influences, educational experiences, personal goals, and the prevailing socio-political climate. Such depth is essential for addressing the research objectives and providing contextually grounded insights, which might be missed by quantitative approaches focusing on numerical data and statistical analysis.

3.2 Identification of Variables

The following table outlines the key variables identified for this study, based on the conceptual framework developed in the proposal.

Variable Type	Variable Name	Description / Key Sub-Factors
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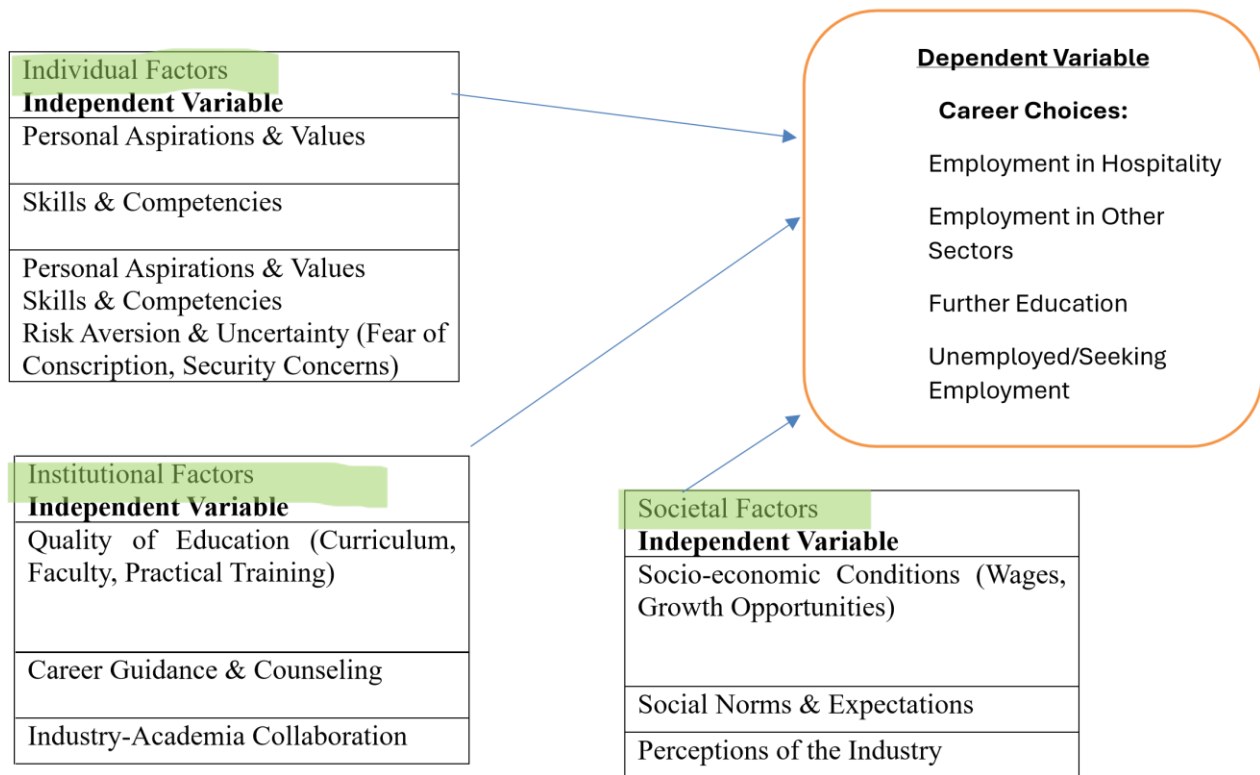


Dependent Variable	Career Choices	The outcome variable represents the specific career path chosen by hospitality graduates after completing their education. This includes options such as employment within the hospitality sector, employment in other sectors, pursuing further education, or being unemployed/seeking employment.
Independent Variables	Individual Factors	Characteristics, perceptions, and motivations inherent to the individual student that influence their career decisions. Key sub-factors include Personal Aspirations & Values, Skills & Competencies, Risk Aversion (including perceptions of security and potential conscription).
	Institutional Factors	Factors related to the educational institutions and the formal hospitality training received. Key sub-factors include Quality of Education (curriculum relevance, faculty expertise, practical training/internships), effectiveness of Career Guidance & Counseling, and the nature of Industry-Academia Collaboration.
	Societal Factors	Broader contextual factors related to industry and society that shape career choices. Key sub-factors include Socio-economic Conditions (wages, career growth opportunities, job security perceptions), Social Norms & Expectations (family influence, industry image/status), and the overarching Political & Security Context in Myanmar.

These variables form the core structure for data collection and analysis, guiding the exploration of factors influencing hospitality graduates' career paths in Myanmar.

3.3

Conceptual framework



3.4 Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1 H1 - 1: Individual factors have a relationship with Career choices H1 - 0: Individual factors have no relationship with Career choices
Hypothesis 2 H2 - 1: Institutional factors have a relationship with Career choices H2 - 0: Institutional factors have no relationship with Career choices
Hypothesis 3 H3 - 1: Societal factors have a relationship with Career choices H3 - 0: Societal factors have no relationship with Career choices

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3.5 Operationalization:

Variable	Definition	Indicators	Measurement
Career Choice	The specific career path chosen by hospitality students after graduation.	1. Employment in the hospitality sector (e.g., hotels, restaurants, resorts, travel agencies) 2. Employment in other sectors (e.g., IT, finance, education) 3. Further education (e.g., postgraduate studies, vocational training) 4. Unemployed/Seeking employment	Self-reported data through surveys and interviews.
Economic Factors	Factors related to the economic aspects of the hospitality industry.	1. Wages: Starting salaries, expected salary growth, comparison with other sectors. 2. Working Hours: Length of workdays, shift work, overtime expectations. 3. Job Security: Perceived stability of employment in the hospitality sector, risk of job loss. 4. Career Growth: Availability of promotions, opportunities for advancement, potential for leadership roles.	Surveys, interviews, literature review on industry wage data, analysis of job postings.
Social Factors	Social influences and perceptions that impact career decisions.	1. Perceptions of Industry Status: Perceived social status of the hospitality industry in Myanmar. 2. Family Expectations: Parental expectations and influence on career choices. 3. Societal Norms: Cultural norms and values related to career choices. 4. Fear of Conscription: Concerns about military service and its impact on career plans. 5. Security Concerns: Perceptions of personal safety and security in the current political climate.	Surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, literature review on social and cultural norms in Myanmar.

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Educational Factors	Factors related to the quality of education and training.	1. Curriculum Relevance: Relevance of the curriculum to industry demands and current best practices. 2. Practical Training: Availability and quality of internships, industry placements, and hands-on training opportunities. 3. Career Guidance: Availability and effectiveness of career counseling services, access to information on career options and industry trends. 4. Faculty Expertise: Qualifications and industry experience of faculty members.	Surveys, interviews with students and faculty, document review (curriculum, training programs), observations of educational facilities.
Personal Factors	Individual aspirations, goals, and preferences.	1. Career Aspirations: Personal goals and ambitions, desired lifestyle, work-life balance preferences. 2. Skills and Interests: Perceived skills and interests, personal strengths and weaknesses. 3. Risk Aversion: Individual tolerance for risk and uncertainty.	Surveys, interviews, focus group discussions.
Political and Security Context	The impact of the current political and security situation on career choices.	1. Perceived Political Stability: Perceptions of political stability and security in the country. 2. Impact of the 2021 Coup: Perceived impact of the coup on the tourism industry and employment opportunities. 3. Concerns about Human Rights: Concerns about human rights violations and the impact on personal safety and well-being.	Surveys, interviews, media analysis, literature review on the political and security situation in Myanmar.
Career Choice	The specific career path chosen by hospitality students after graduation.	1. Employment in the hospitality sector (e.g., hotels, restaurants, resorts, travel agencies) 2. Employment in other sectors (e.g., IT, finance, education) 3. Further education (e.g., postgraduate studies, vocational training) 4. Unemployed/Seeking employment	Self-reported data through surveys and interviews.

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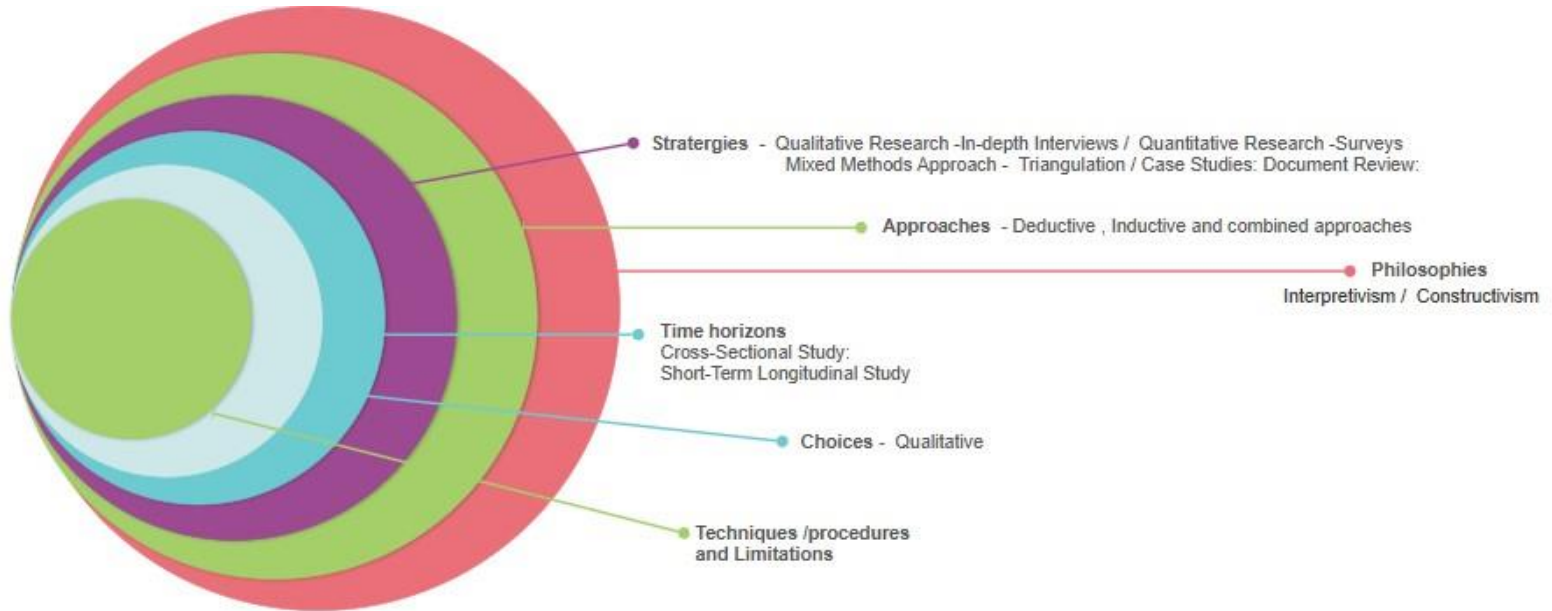
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3.6 Research Design:

3.6.1 Research Onion



3.6.2 Research

The research design is indicated with the research onion as follows:

concept	selection	justification
Philosophy	Interpretivism & Constructivism	Emphasizes understanding subjective experiences, interpretations, and how individuals construct their reality within the specific socio-political context of Myanmar.
Approach	Qualitative	Allows for in-depth exploration of individual perspectives, motivations, and experiences through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.
Strategy	Case Study	Enables in-depth investigation of the specific context of the Myanmar hospitality industry and the interplay of various factors influencing career choices.

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Time Horizon	Cross-sectional	Provides a snapshot of the current situation and perspectives of hospitality students at a specific point in time.
Techniques	Data Collection: In-depth Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, Document Review Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis	Suitable for exploring individual perspectives and identifying key themes and patterns in the data.
Procedures	Sampling: Purposive Sampling Ethical Considerations: Informed Consent, Confidentiality, Ethical Approval	Ensures the selection of relevant participants and ethical conduct of the research and preciseness

Research Methodology and Sample

Aspect	Description
Research Approach	Qualitative
Research Design	Case Study
Data Collection Methods	in-depth Interviews /Focus Group Discussions/ Document Review / survey/ company data
Sampling Strategy	Purposive Sampling
Sample	Hospitality students, recent graduates, industry professionals, academic professionals /
Data Analysis	Historical Overview of Research / Thematic Analysis
Ethical Considerations	Informed Consent, Confidentiality, Ethical Approval
Limitations	Potential for bias, Limited generalizability, Time and resource constraints

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3.6.2 Research Philosophy

This research adopts an Interpretivist and Constructivist philosophy, as indicated in the proposal. This stance is chosen because the study focuses on understanding the subjective experiences, interpretations, and meanings individuals construct regarding their career choices. Interpretivism emphasizes that social reality is understood through the eyes of the participants, while constructivism posits that individuals create their own understanding of the world based on their experiences (Saunders et al., 2019). This philosophy aligns with the goal of exploring the complex, context-dependent reasons behind students' decisions in Myanmar, requiring the researcher to interpret meanings rather than seeking objective truths.

3.6.3 Research Approach

Consistent with philosophy, a **Qualitative** research approach is employed. As justified in section 3.1, this approach is necessary for exploring the depth and richness of participants' perspectives on why they might choose or avoid hospitality careers. It allows for flexibility in data collection and focuses on understanding the 'why' behind observed phenomena, which is central to the research questions.

3.6.4 Methodological Choice

A **Mono Method Qualitative** choice is utilized. This means the study relies solely on qualitative data collection techniques (interviews, focus groups) and qualitative data analysis methods (thematic analysis). This ensures methodological coherence and allows for an in-depth, nuanced understanding derived purely from qualitative insights, rather than attempting to triangulate with quantitative data within the scope of this study.

3.6.5 Strategy

The chosen research strategy is a **Case Study**. A case study approach is particularly suitable for investigating a specific phenomenon (career choices of hospitality graduates) deeply within its bounded, real-life context (Myanmar's current environment) (Yin, 2018). This strategy allows for a detailed examination of the interplay between individual decisions and the complex institutional, societal, political, and economic factors influencing them within this specific setting.

3.6.6 Time Horizon

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This study employs a **Cross-Sectional** time horizon. Data will be collected from participants at a single point in time, or over a relatively short period. This approach provides a 'snapshot' of the current factors influencing career choices among the target group, which is appropriate given the study's objectives and constraints, although it does not capture longitudinal changes in perspective.

3.6.7 Techniques and Procedures

Primary data collection will utilize in-depth, semi-structured Interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Interviews allow for detailed exploration of individual experiences and perspectives, while focus groups can stimulate discussion and reveal shared views or contrasting opinions among participants (e.g., groups of final-year students, groups of recent graduates). Document Review of relevant materials (e.g., educational program outlines, public reports on tourism/economy) may supplement the primary data.

3.7 Research Sampling (Population, Size and Method)

The target population for this study includes several distinct groups within the Myanmar hospitality ecosystem to provide a multifaceted understanding of the research problem. These groups are:

- Current hospitality students (particularly those in their final year of study at relevant institutions in Yangon or other accessible regions).
- Recent hospitality graduates (within, for example, 1-3 years of graduation), including those who entered the hospitality sector and those who pursued careers in other fields or further education.
- Hospitality industry professionals, such as Human Resource managers or operational managers involved in recruitment and familiar with workforce challenges.
- Academic professionals, including lecturers, trainers, or administrators from hospitality training institutions in Myanmar.

A Purposive Sampling method will be employed to select participants. This non-probability technique is suitable for qualitative research as it allows the researcher to deliberately select individuals who possess specific knowledge, experiences, or perspectives crucial to answering the research questions (Palinkas et al., 2015). For instance, the researcher will specifically seek out:

- Final-year students to understand current perceptions and intentions.
- Graduates chose *not* to enter hospitality to explore their reasons directly.
- Graduates who *did* enter hospitality to understand their experiences and challenges.
- Educators gain insights into curriculum, guidance, and student views.
- Industry managers to understand employer perspectives and hiring difficulties.

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The aim is to achieve diversity within the sample across these key groups. While a fixed sample size is not predetermined in qualitative research, the study will aim for a sufficient sample to reach theoretical saturation. This means data collection (interviews/focus groups) will continue iteratively until no substantially new themes, insights, or information related to the research questions emerge from subsequent participants. Based on typical qualitative study sizes and practical constraints, it is anticipated that approximately 15-30 participants might be included across the different groups (e.g., aiming for roughly 5-7 participants from each key group like students, graduates, educators, and managers), but the final number will depend on achieving saturation.

3.8 Data Gathering and Evaluation

Data gathering will primarily occur through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and potentially focus group discussions, depending on participant availability and suitability for group interaction.

- **Interview/Focus Group Guides:** Semi-structured guides will be developed based on the research questions and the variables identified (Individual, Institutional, Societal factors). These guides will contain approximately 10-15 open-ended primary questions designed to elicit detailed responses about perceptions, experiences, motivations, and challenges related to hospitality careers in Myanmar. Probing questions will be used to explore responses further.
- **Procedure:** Interviews and focus groups are expected to last approximately 45-60 minutes. They will be conducted in a location convenient and comfortable for the participant(s), ensuring privacy. With explicit participant consent obtained beforehand (as per section 3.9), sessions will be audio-recorded to capture the nuances of the conversation accurately. Detailed field notes may also be taken during or immediately after each session.
- **Transcription:** Audio recordings will be transcribed verbatim to create accurate text data for analysis.

The primary data evaluation technique will be **Thematic Analysis**, following the systematic, six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. **Familiarization:** Thoroughly reading and re-reading transcripts, listening to recordings, and reviewing field notes to become deeply familiar with the data.
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** Identifying and labelling specific segments of data that appear interesting or relevant to the research questions.
3. **Searching for Themes:** Grouping related codes together to form potential overarching themes that capture patterns in the data.
4. **Reviewing Themes:** Refining the potential themes, checking their coherence, consistency, and distinctiveness, and ensuring they accurately reflect the dataset.

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5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Clearly defining the essence of each theme and assigning a concise, descriptive name.
6. **Producing the Report:** Writing the final analysis, weaving together the thematic narrative with illustrative quotes from participants, and linking the findings back to the research questions and existing literature. This systematic process ensures a rigorous and transparent approach to interpreting the rich qualitative data gathered.

3.9 Ethical Implications and Considerations

Adherence to strict ethical principles is paramount throughout this research, particularly given the sensitive context in Myanmar. Key considerations and procedures are outlined below, mirroring the structured approach in the sample submission:

Factor	Ethical Considerations & Procedures
Participant Recruitment & Selection	Participants will be recruited through appropriate channels (e.g., educational institutions, industry contacts) ensuring no coercion. Selection via purposive sampling will be based solely on relevance to the study, avoiding discrimination.
Informed Consent	A detailed Participant Information Sheet will be provided explaining the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, confidentiality, data usage, potential risks/benefits, and the right to withdraw. Written, signed consent will be obtained prior to any data collection.
Data Collection Procedure	Interviews/focus groups will be conducted respectfully and sensitively. Participants can skip questions or stop at any time. Questions related to highly sensitive political views will be avoided or phrased with extreme caution to minimize risk.
Confidentiality & Anonymity	Identities will be protected. Names and other identifying details will be removed from transcripts and replaced with pseudonyms or codes (if required). Data will be stored securely (password-protected files, locked storage) accessible only to the researcher.
Data Analysis & Reporting	Findings will be reported accurately and fairly, representing participants' views without distortion. Anonymized quotes may be used, ensuring individuals cannot be identified. Care will be taken to avoid reporting information that could inadvertently identify participants or institutions.
Potential Harm Minimization	The researcher will be mindful of the potential for emotional distress when discussing sensitive topics (e.g., career uncertainty, security concerns). If distress occurs, the

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	interview/focus group will be paused or stopped. Information on available support resources will be considered, although potentially limited in the context.
Researcher Positionality	The researcher will reflect on their own background and potential biases and how these might influence interactions and interpretations, striving for objectivity.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

Research Objectives

This study is driven by the overarching goal of deeply understanding and addressing the workforce challenges confronting Myanmar's hospitality sector. To achieve this, the following specific research objectives have been formulated:

To comprehensively identify and critically analyze the multifaceted range of economic, social, educational, personal, and prevailing contextual factors (including the current socio-political landscape and security considerations in Myanmar post-2021) that significantly influence the perceptions and ultimate career path decisions of hospitality students and recent graduates, thereby providing an in-depth understanding of the 'brain drain' phenomenon from this vital sector. This involves exploring both deterrents from entering the hospitality field and motivators towards alternative career paths.

To critically evaluate the perceived role, relevance, and effectiveness of existing hospitality education and vocational training programs in Myanmar from the perspectives of diverse stakeholders (including students, graduates, educators, and industry employers). This objective aims to assess how well these programs prepare graduates for the realities of the industry, address their career aspirations, and potentially contribute to or mitigate the 'brain drain,' focusing on aspects like curriculum design, practical training opportunities, industry-academia collaboration, and the provision of career guidance.

To develop a coherent set of evidence-based, contextually sensitive, and actionable recommendations specifically tailored for key stakeholders in Myanmar. These stakeholders include educational institutions, hospitality industry employers and associations, and governmental/policy-making bodies. The recommendations will focus on strategic interventions designed to enhance the attractiveness of hospitality careers, improve the alignment between education and industry needs, address the identified deterrents, and ultimately foster a sustainable pipeline of skilled and motivated professionals for the long-term recovery, growth, and development of Myanmar's hospitality sector.

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4.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter transitions from the methodological framework outlined in Chapter 3 to the presentation and rigorous analysis of the primary data collected for this research. The central aim of this study is to delve into the multifaceted factors influencing the decisions of hospitality students in Myanmar to either pursue or eschew careers within the hospitality sector, particularly in light of the current socio-economic and political climate. To achieve this, a qualitative research approach was adopted, employing in-depth, semi-structured interviews and, where appropriate, focus group discussions. These methods were chosen for their efficacy in capturing the rich, nuanced perspectives and lived experiences of the participants.

Data were gathered from a purposively selected sample, encompassing key stakeholders within Myanmar's hospitality ecosystem. The planned distribution of interviews across these stakeholder groups, as outlined in the methodology and refined through preliminary considerations, is detailed below:

Planned Interview Distribution for This Study

Respondent Group	Planned No. of Interviews/Participants	Notes
Current Hospitality Students (Final Year)	4-6	From vocational schools and/or university programs in Yangon.
Hospitality Trainees (Currently on Internship/Practical Training)	2-4	Actively engaged in industry training placements, providing insight into early career experiences.
Recent Hospitality Graduates (Employed <i>in</i> Hospitality Sector)	3-5	Within 1-3 years of graduation, offering perspectives on current industry realities.
Recent Hospitality Graduates (Employed <i>Outside</i> Hospitality/Further Study)	3-5	Within 1-3 years of graduation, detailing reasons for choosing alternative paths.
Hospitality Given Up Individuals (Left the sector after starting)	2-4	Worked in hospitality post-graduation but subsequently changed careers, highlighting push factors.
Hospitality Industry Professionals (e.g., HR . associations, Managers, General Managers)	3-5	With experience in recruitment, retention, and workforce management in Myanmar's hospitality sector.
Academic Professionals	2-4	Offering insights into

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(Lecturers/Trainers from Hospitality Institutions)		curriculum, student aspirations, and industry linkages.
External Job Seekers (Not specifically targeting hospitality)	2-3	Individuals with general employability skills actively seeking work, providing an external viewpoint.
Total Anticipated Participants	21-36	The final number will be contingent on achieving theoretical saturation for key research themes.

The rich narrative data obtained through these interactions, detailing their perceptions, motivations, challenges, and aspirations, were meticulously transcribed and subsequently subjected to a systematic thematic analysis. This analytical process, guided by the principles articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006), involved several iterative stages of familiarization, coding, theme development, and refinement, ensuring that the emergent themes accurately reflect the participants' collective voice and directly address the core research questions.

This chapter will, therefore, commence with an anonymized profile of the study's *actual* participants to provide context to the findings. Following this, the main body of the chapter will be dedicated to a detailed presentation and in-depth analysis of the key themes that emerged from the data. Each theme will be elucidated with supporting verbatim extracts from the participant narratives, offering authentic insights into the factors at play. The analysis will aim to unravel the complexities of these factors, exploring their interrelationships and their collective impact on the career trajectories of hospitality graduates in Myanmar.

4.2.1 Current Hospitality Students (CSH)

This sub-group comprised five final-year students from various hospitality and tourism management programs in Yangon. Their perspectives provide insights into current aspirations, concerns, and the factors influencing their imminent career decisions.

Code	Name	Age	Gender	Program of Study	Institution Type	Key Concerns/Observations Expressed
CSH1	Thida Aung	21	Female	Abroad job Preparation course	Vocational School	Initially enthusiastic about the industry; now hesitant due to current uncertainties and lack of family connections in the sector or to perceive a foreign job. Considering alternative service roles.
CSH2	Min Htet	22	Male	Diploma in food and Beverage	Public University	Completed one hotel internship; primary concerns are job security post-graduation and perceived low starting salaries in hospitality

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						compared to other fields. Furthermore, coming from a government-backed education program, keen to understand the likelihood of being hired by private hotel groups.
CSH3	Su Myat	20	Female	Diploma in Housekeeping	Private Vocational	Passionate about customer service; however, influenced by peers highlighting better growth and work-life balance in digital marketing and e-commerce.
CSH4	Aung Kyaw	23	Male	Barista	Private Vocational	Actively seeking overseas employment or further study opportunities, viewing local hospitality prospects as limited, unstable, and heavily impacted by current events.
CSH5	Phyu Phyu	21	Female	Diploma in Hospitality (Event Management Focus)	Private Vocational	Considering the current circumstances in Myanmar, including the conscription law, exploring job-oriented training programs focused on sectors with strong demand in overseas employment markets, such as hospitality and skilled trades (blue-collar jobs), could offer a practical route for seeking opportunities abroad.

4.2.2 Hospitality Trainees (HT)

This sub-group consisted of 4 students who were, at the time of the interviews, undertaking internships or practical training placements as part of their hospitality education. Their experiences offer a real-time glimpse into the initial encounters with the industry and how these shape perceptions and intentions.

Code	Name	Age	Gender	Program of Study/Institution	Internship Details (Department, Hotel Type, Duration)	Key Concerns/Observations Expressed During Internship
HT1	Zin Mar	20	Female	Diploma in Hospitality, Private Vocational Center	F&B Service, Airport Avenue Hotel (6 months)	Found the work pace very demanding ("eye-opening"); learning significant practical skills but observed high staff turnover and heard complaints about long shifts from permanent staff.
HT2	Myo Thant	21	Male	Bachelor's in English, Public University	Operations, Local Tour Operator (3 months)	Enjoyed direct customer interaction and learning about tour logistics; concerned by the seasonality of work and the direct impact of political/economic instability on bookings.

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HT3	Ei Mon	19	Female	Certificate in Housekeeping, Vocational School	Housekeeping, Park Royal Hotel (4 months)	Appreciated the structured training and attention to detail; however, was discouraged by senior staff frequently discussing low wages and limited opportunities for advancement.
HT4	Kaung Sithu	22	Male	Diploma in FnB Service Private Institute	Front Office, Business Hotel (3 months)	Gained confidence in communication skills; noted discrepancies between theoretical knowledge from studies and the practical, often stressful, realities of daily hotel operations.

4.2.3 Recent Hospitality Graduates - Employed *in* Hospitality (RGH-In)

This sub-group included 4 individuals who had graduated from hospitality programs within the last one to three years and were currently employed within various segments of Myanmar's hospitality industry. Their perspectives shed light on the realities of working in the sector post-graduation and the factors influencing their continued commitment or potential considerations for leaving.

Code	Name	Age	Gender	Graduated (Years Ago)	Degree/Diploma & Institution Type	Current Role & Sector Segment	Key Experiences/Observations Shared
RGH-In1	Kyaw Zin	24	Male	2	Bachelor's in Hospitality Management, Public University	Front Office Supervisor, Mid-scale City Hotel	Finds the work engaging due to guest interaction but experiences high pressure and demanding shifts. Considers the pay modest for the responsibilities and is passively looking for less stressful, better-paying alternatives.
RGH-In2	Aye Chan	23	Female	1.5	Diploma in Hotel Operations, Private Vocational	F&B Attendant, International Chain Hotel	Values the structured training and brand standards of the international hotel. Happy with shift work and work-life balance due to shift patterns and hopeful for internal promotion
RGH-In3	Thet Paing	25	Male	3	Diploma in Tourism, Private Institute	Assistant Manager, Boutique Heritage Hotel	Passionate about Myanmar's culture and showcasing it to guests. Feels a strong sense of loyalty to the small business but acknowledges the significant financial pressures and limited

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							resources impacting staff morale and benefits.
RGH-In4	Su Wai	24	Female	2	Bachelor's in Event Management, Public University	Junior Event Coordinator, Local Event Company	Enjoys the creativity involved but notes the industry is very volatile and heavily impacted by current events, leading to job insecurity and frequent project cancellations or postponements. But better opportunities overseas and better pay

4.2.4 Recent Hospitality Graduates - Employed *outside* Hospitality/Further Study (RGH-Out)

This sub-group comprised 5 individuals who, despite having completed formal hospitality education within the last one to three years, had chosen career paths outside the traditional hospitality sector or were pursuing further academic qualifications in other fields. Their reasons for these choices are central to understanding the "brain drain" phenomenon.

Code	Name	Age	Gender	Graduated (Years Ago)	Degree/Diploma & Institution Type	Current Role/Field of Study & Sector/Institution	Key Reasons for Not Choosing/Leaving Hospitality or Pursuing Alternative Path
RGH-Out1	Nang Phyu	25	Female	3	Bachelor's in Hospitality Management, Private University	Customer Service Executive, Telecommunications Company	Initially worked as a Guest Relations Officer for 6 months; left due to low starting salary, very long/irregular hours, and perceived limited career growth compared to the tech/service sector. Valued the stability and better work-life balance in her current role. But overseas opportunity is easier to perceive and much higher salary
RGH-Out2	Aung Ko Latt	24	Male	2	Diploma in Hotel Management, Vocational Center	Master's in Business Administration (MBA) Student, Local University	Felt that career progression in the Myanmar hospitality industry was too slow and uncertain, especially given the current economic climate. Age between 18 to 30 in Myanmar has fear of conscription, therefore getting qualified for a better pay outside the country. Pursuing an MBA to broaden career options in more stable sectors

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							like finance or general management.
RGH-Out3	May Thandar	23	Female	1	Bachelor's in Tourism Management, Public University	Administrative Assistant, International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO)	Prioritized job security and a predictable work schedule. Perceived INGO sector as offering more stability and a better work environment compared to the perceived high-pressure and volatile nature of tourism, especially in the current context.
RGH-Out4	Hla Myint	26	Male	2.5	Diploma in Culinary Arts, Private Institute	Owner/Operator, Small Online Food Retail Business	Briefly worked in a hotel kitchen but found the environment overly hierarchical and creatively restrictive with long hours for modest pay. Started an online business for greater autonomy, direct financial returns, and flexibility. Also highlighted after many has left the country the talents of seniors or trainers are minimal.
RGH-Out5	Thuzar Khin	24	Female	2	Bachelor's in Hospitality & Tourism, Public University	English Language Teacher, Private Language Center	Utilized communication skills gained from hospitality studies but found teaching offered more personal satisfaction, better working hours, and perceived greater societal respect compared to entry-level hospitality roles.

4.2.5 Hospitality Given Up Individuals (HGU)

This sub-group consisted of 4 individuals who had completed hospitality education, worked in the sector for a period (typically between 6 months to 2 years post-graduation), and then made a conscious decision to leave for careers in other industries. Their experiences provide direct evidence of the "push" factors contributing to attrition from the hospitality workforce.

Code	Name	Age	Gender	Graduated (Years Ago)	Degree/Diploma & Institution Type	Previous Hospitality Role & Duration	Current Role/Sector	Key Reasons for Leaving Hospitality Sector
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HGU1	Sai Thiha	27	Male	5	Bachelor's in Hospitality Management, Public University	Assistant Front Office Manager (1.5 years)	Operations Manager, Logistics Company	Primary drivers were significantly better salary, comprehensive benefits package, and more regular/predictable working hours. Also cited a clearer career progression path and less day-to-day operational stress in the logistics sector.
HGU2	Khin Sandar	26	Female	4	Diploma in Culinary Arts, Private Vocational	Pastry Chef (approx. 2 years)	Freelance Baker / Online Cake Business Owner	Left due to extreme work pressure, consistently long hours leading to burnout, and pay that did not commensurate with the skill level and effort required. Sought better work-life balance and entrepreneurial control.
HGU3	Pyae Sone	28	Male	6	Diploma in Tourism & Travel, Private Institute	Hotel Sales Executive (1 year)	Real Estate Agent	Found the sales targets in the hotel highly stressful and the industry too vulnerable to external shocks (economic downturns, political instability) affecting income security. Perceived real estate as offering higher earning potential.
HGU4	Myat Noe Oo	25	Female	1	Diploma in Hotel Management, Private University	Management Trainee (8 months)	Marketing Coordinator, FMCG Company	Felt undervalued as a trainee, with limited meaningful responsibilities and slow progression. Was attracted by a more dynamic role in marketing with better perceived growth opportunities and a more "professional" office environment. Also, the government had new rules in place where the conscription rule eligible ages being heavily restricting travelling outside the country for jobs or vacation therefore hospitality

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								sector became less interesting
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4.2.6 Hospitality Industry Professionals (HIP)

This sub-group included [4] seasoned professionals holding managerial or human resource positions within Myanmar's hospitality sector. Their insights are vital for understanding industry perspectives on workforce challenges, recruitment, retention, and the perceived preparedness of graduates.

Code	Name	Age	Gender	Years in Industry	Current Role & Hotel Type/Size	Key Perspectives on Graduate Preparedness & Workforce Challenges
HIP1	Shalinda Rathnayake	45	Male	20+	General Manager, Airport Avenue Hotel(International Brand)	Expressed concerns about the gap between academic knowledge and practical skills of new graduates. Noted increased difficulty in attracting and retaining young talent post-2021 due to economic pressures and desire for stability or overseas opportunities. (Similar to validation interview with Mrs. Sanda Win).
HIP2	May Oo	38	Female	15	Human Resources Director, Hotel Group (Multiple Properties)	Highlighted challenges in managing salary expectations of graduates versus entry-level realities. Observed a trend of graduates using hospitality jobs as a steppingstone or short-term option. Emphasized the need for better soft skills and resilience in new hires. And most of the students enroll on a hospitality course as a gateway of getting a job abroad and not sustaining in the industry.
HIP3	U Zaw Naing	52	Male	25+	Owner/Operator, Small Boutique Hotel (Independent)	Discussed the severe impact of reduced tourism on smaller establishments, making it difficult to offer competitive salaries or extensive training. Noted a greater need for multi-skilled, adaptable staff but struggles to find them.
HIP4	Daw Thinzar	42	Female	18	Training Manager, Resort Hotel (Focus on Luxury Segment)	Believes that while technical skills are taught, there's a need for more emphasis on emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and understanding the high-pressure nature of service excellence. Concerned about the declining interest in long-term hospitality careers.

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4.2.7 Academic Professionals (AP)

This sub-group comprised [Actual Number] educators and administrators from hospitality training institutions in Myanmar. Their input is crucial for understanding curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, student counseling, industry liaison, and their perceptions of the challenges students face and the reasons behind their career choices.

Code	Name	Age	Gender	Years in Academia/Hospitality Education	Current Role & Institution Type	Key Perspectives on Hospitality Education & Student Career Choices
AP1	Dr. Thet Htar	40	Female	15 (10 in Academia)	Head of Department (Tourism & Hospitality entity)	Expressed concerns about aligning curriculum with rapidly changing industry needs and the current economic realities. Noted an increase in students expressing anxiety about future job security in hospitality and greater interest in transferable skills. (Similar to validation interview with Ms. Hnin Lei Lei Paing).
AP2	U Win Bo	35	Male	10 (7 in Academia)	Senior Lecturer & Internship Coordinator, Vocational Training Center	Shared challenges in securing meaningful internship placements for all students due to industry downturn. Observed that students' career decisions are heavily influenced by family expectations, perceived salary levels, and the overall perception of industry stability. While the students may under go a different environment while the reality at work is bit lower than expected
AP3	Daw Myint Zu	48	Female	20 (5 in Academia)	Part-time Lecturer (F&B Management), Public University / Industry Consultant	Believes practical skills are often strong but emphasizes the need for enhanced soft skills, critical thinking, and adaptability in graduates. Concerned that current industry conditions (low pay, long hours) are major deterrents even for passionate students.

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4.2.8 External Job Seekers (EJS)

This sub-group included 4 individuals who were actively seeking employment in the general job market in Myanmar at the time of the interviews. They did not have specific hospitality qualifications or necessarily a primary interest in the sector, providing an external benchmark for how the hospitality industry is perceived by the broader pool of job seekers.

Code	Name	Age	Gender	Highest Education Level & Field	Current Job Seeking Focus (Sectors/Roles)	Perceptions of Hospitality Industry as a Career Option
EJS1	Ko Ko Oo	24	Male	Bachelor's in Business Administration	Marketing, Sales, General Administration	Has not actively considered hospitality due to perceptions of "long, unsociable hours and relatively low starting pay" compared to corporate roles. Views it as a physically demanding sector with limited long-term appeal unless one is "extremely passionate."
EJS2	Ma Thiri	22	Female	Diploma in Office Management	Administrative, Customer Service roles	Seeks "stable employment with predictable hours and a good work environment." Views hospitality as "too demanding and stressful" based on societal perceptions and stories from acquaintances who have worked in the sector.
EJS3	Aung Min	26	Male	High School Diploma, some vocational training (IT)	IT support, Retail, Logistics	Open to customer-facing roles but prioritizes sectors perceived to offer better long-term financial stability, clearer career paths, and opportunities for skill development beyond basic service tasks. Hospitality seems "too uncertain" in the current economic climate.
EJS4	Nilar Win	23	Female	Bachelor's in Economics	Banking, Finance, Research Assistant	Considers hospitality a "fallback option" if other preferred sectors do not yield opportunities. Associates it with "hard work for less recognition" and a less "prestigious" career path compared to finance or international organizations.

4.3 Presentation and Analysis of Findings

This section presents the core findings of the research, organized by key themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of data collected from current hospitality students (CSH), hospitality

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trainees (HT), recent hospitality graduates employed within the sector (RGH-In), recent hospitality graduates employed outside the sector or in further study (RGH-Out), individuals who have given up on hospitality careers (HGU), hospitality industry professionals (HIP), academic professionals (AP), and external job seekers (EJS) in Myanmar. These themes directly relate to the research questions and the independent variables identified in Chapter 3: Individual Factors, Institutional Factors, and Societal Factors. The analysis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of why hospitality students and graduates in Myanmar may choose not to pursue or remain in careers within the hospitality sector, particularly in the current socio-economic and political climate.

Key Themes Emerging from Thematic Analysis

The analysis of interview data revealed several interconnected themes that significantly influence the career decisions of hospitality students and graduates. These are categorized below:

Theme Category 1: Individual Factors

Individual factors encompass personal aspirations, values, perceptions of skills, career growth expectations, risk aversion, and specific personal circumstances, including the fear of conscription, which collectively shape career choices.

1.1 Personal Aspirations, Values, and the Quest for Work-Life Balance

A prominent theme was the divergence between personal aspirations and the perceived realities of hospitality careers. Many participants expressed a desire for roles that offer not only financial reward but also personal fulfillment, a manageable work-life balance, and alignment with their values. The hospitality sector was often seen as falling short in these areas.

- **Desire for Fulfillment and Alignment with Values:**
 - **RGH-Out5 (Thuzar Khin):** Found teaching offered "more personal satisfaction...compared to entry-level hospitality roles."
 - **RGH-Out4 (Hla Myint):** Started an online food business for "greater autonomy, direct financial returns, and flexibility" after finding the hotel kitchen "overly hierarchical and creatively restrictive."
- **Work-Life Balance Concerns:**
 - **CSH3 (Su Myat):** Though passionate about customer service, was "influenced by peers highlighting better growth and work-life balance in digital marketing and e-commerce."
 - **RGH-Out1 (Nang Phyu):** Left hospitality due to "very long/irregular hours" and valued the "stability and better work-life balance" in her current role.
 - **HGU2 (Khin Sandar):** Left a Pastry Chef role due to "extreme work pressure, consistently long hours leading to burnout," seeking "better work-life balance."
 - **EJS1 (Ko Ko Oo):** Perceived hospitality as having "long, unsociable hours."
 - **EJS2 (Ma Thiri):** Sought "stable employment with predictable hours," viewing hospitality as "too demanding and stressful."

1.2 Perceived Career Growth, Skill Utilization, and Future Prospects

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Participants critically evaluated the opportunities for career advancement and skill development within the Myanmar hospitality sector compared to alternatives. A significant number perceived hospitality career paths as slow, uncertain, or less dynamic.

- **Limited or Slow Career Progression:**
 - **CSH4 (Aung Kyaw):** Viewed "local hospitality prospects as limited, unstable."
 - **RGH-Out1 (Nang Phyu):** Perceived "limited career growth compared to the tech/service sector."
 - **RGH-Out2 (Aung Ko Latt):** Felt career progression in Myanmar hospitality was "too slow and uncertain," leading him to pursue an MBA.
 - **HGU4 (Myat Noe Oo):** Felt "undervalued as a trainee, with limited meaningful responsibilities and slow progression."
 - **HIP4 (Daw Thinzar):** Expressed concern about the "declining interest in long-term hospitality careers."
- **Desire for Broader Skill Application:**
 - **RGH-Out5 (Thuzar Khin):** Utilized communication skills from hospitality studies in teaching, a field she found more rewarding.

1.3 Risk Aversion, Security Concerns, and the Impact of Conscription

The prevailing socio-political instability, personal security anxieties, and the specific fear of potential conscription—particularly following the activation of the national conscription law on February 10, 2024, mandating military service for young adults for two to five years—emerged as powerful individual deterrents. These factors are pushing individuals, especially young men and women, towards career choices perceived as safer, more stable, or offering pathways to leave the country to avoid mandatory service.

- **General Uncertainty and Instability:**
 - **CSH1 (Thida Aung):** Became "hesitant due to current uncertainties."
 - **CSH4 (Aung Kyaw):** Actively seeking overseas employment due to local prospects being "heavily impacted by current events."
- **Fear of Conscription and Desire to Leave the Country:**
 - **CSH5 (Phyu Phyu):** Exploring overseas job training "considering the current circumstances in Myanmar, including the conscription law," which is now active and a significant motivator for young people to seek opportunities abroad.
 - **RGH-Out2 (Aung Ko Latt):** Noted the "fear of conscription" (ages 18-30) as a driver for "getting qualified for a better pay outside the country," a fear intensified by the law's activation, making leaving the country a more urgent consideration for many.
 - **HGU4 (Myat Noe Oo):** Mentioned that "the conscription rule...restricting travelling outside the country...therefore hospitality sector became less interesting." The activation of this law makes this sentiment even more acute, as it directly compels service.

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Table 4.3.1: Summary of Key Individual Factors Influencing Career Choices

Sub-Theme	Key Observations from Participants	Representative Participant Groups
Personal Aspirations & Work-Life Balance	Strong desire for personal fulfillment, manageable working hours, and better work-life integration. Hospitality often perceived as demanding with insufficient personal or lifestyle rewards.	CSH, RGH-Out, HGU, EJS
Career Growth & Skill Utilization	Concerns about slow or uncertain career progression within the local hospitality sector. Desire for roles with clear advancement paths and broader skill application.	CSH, RGH-Out, HGU, HIP
Risk Aversion & Security (incl. Conscription)	Heightened risk aversion due to general instability and specific fears related to the activated national conscription law (Feb 10, 2024), leading to a preference for perceived safer/more stable career options, often overseas, to avoid mandatory military service.	CSH, RGH-Out, HGU

Theme Category 2: Institutional Factors (Educational)

Institutional factors pertain to the role and perceived effectiveness of hospitality education and training programs in preparing students for industry realities and supporting their career transitions.

2.1 Perceived Quality, Relevance, and Practicality of Hospitality Education

While foundational practical skills were generally acknowledged, a recurring concern was the perceived gap between academic learning and the dynamic, often challenging, realities of the hospitality workplace. The relevance of curricula and the development of essential soft skills were also highlighted.

Theory vs. Practical Reality Gap:

HT1 (Zin Mar): Found the work pace "eye-opening."

HT4 (Kaung Sithu): Noted "discrepancies between theoretical knowledge from studies and the practical, often stressful, realities of daily hotel operations."

HIP1 (Shalinda Rathnayake): Expressed concerns about "the gap between academic knowledge and practical skills of new graduates."

AP2 (U Win Bo): Observed that "while the students may under go a different environment while the reality at work is bit lower than expected."

Curriculum Relevance and Soft Skills Development:

RGH-Out4 (Hla Myint): Found the hotel kitchen environment "overly hierarchical and creatively restrictive," suggesting a mismatch with creative aspirations possibly not addressed in training.

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HIP4 (Daw Thinzar): Believed more emphasis is needed on "emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and understanding the high-pressure nature of service excellence."

AP1 (Dr. Thet Htar): Concerned about "aligning curriculum with rapidly changing industry needs and the current economic realities."

AP3 (Daw Myint Zu): Emphasized the need for "enhanced soft skills, critical thinking, and adaptability in graduates."

2.2 Effectiveness of Career Guidance, Internships, and Industry Linkages

The adequacy of career counseling, the quality and availability of meaningful internship experiences, and the strength of collaborations between educational institutions and the hospitality industry were identified as crucial. Shortcomings in these areas appeared to affect students' preparedness and inclination towards industry careers.

- **Career Guidance and Managing Expectations:**
 - **CSH2 (Min Htet):** Coming from a government program, was "keen to understand the likelihood of being hired by private hotel groups," indicating a need for clearer career pathway information.
 - **AP1 (Dr. Thet Htar):** Noted an "increase in students expressing anxiety about future job security in hospitality and greater interest in transferable skills."
- **Internship Experiences and Industry Collaboration:**
 - **AP2 (U Win Bo):** Shared "challenges in securing meaningful internship placements for all students due to industry downturn."
 - **HIP2 (May Oo):** Emphasized the need for "better soft skills and resilience in new hires," which internships should ideally foster.

Table 4.3.2: Summary of Key Institutional (Educational) Factors

Sub-Theme	Key Observations from Participants	Representative Participant Groups
Quality & Relevance of Education/Training	Perceived gap between theoretical knowledge and practical industry demands. Need for curriculum updates focusing on current realities, soft skills, and adaptability.	HT, RGH-Out, HIP, AP
Career Guidance & Industry Linkages	Insufficient or ineffective career guidance to manage expectations and navigate career paths. Challenges in securing meaningful internships and a need for stronger industry-academia collaboration.	CSH, AP, HIP

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Theme Category 3: Societal Factors (Including Economic and Politico-Security Context)

Societal factors encompass the broader economic landscape, prevailing socio-cultural views of the hospitality industry, and the overarching impact of Myanmar's current political and security situation. These external forces profoundly shape career decisions.

3.1 Economic Realities: Remuneration, Working Conditions, and Job Security

This was arguably the most dominant and consistently cited theme. Concerns regarding low starting salaries, demanding and often unsociable working hours, perceived lack of adequate compensation for effort, and job insecurity (especially in the current volatile economic climate) were significant deterrents across nearly all participant groups.

- **Low Salaries and Compensation Issues:**
 - **CSH2 (Min Htet):** Primary concern was "perceived low starting salaries in hospitality compared to other fields."
 - **HT3 (Ei Mon):** Discouraged by "senior staff frequently discussing low wages."
 - **RGH-In1 (Kyaw Zin):** Considered pay "modest for the responsibilities."
 - **RGH-Out1 (Nang Phyu):** Left due to "low starting salary."
 - **HGU1 (Sai Thiha):** Cited "significantly better salary, comprehensive benefits package" in his new logistics role.
 - **HGU2 (Khin Sandar):** Left as pay "did not commensurate with the skill level and effort required."
 - **HIP2 (May Oo):** Highlighted "challenges in managing salary expectations of graduates versus entry-level realities."
 - **AP3 (Daw Myint Zu):** Concerned that "current industry conditions (low pay, long hours) are major deterrents."
 - **EJS1 (Ko Ko Oo):** Perceived "relatively low starting pay."
- **Demanding Working Hours and Conditions:**
 - **HT1 (Zin Mar):** Observed "high staff turnover and heard complaints about long shifts."
 - **RGH-Out1 (Nang Phyu):** Cited "very long/irregular hours."
 - **HGU2 (Khin Sandar):** Experienced "extreme work pressure, consistently long hours leading to burnout."
- **Job Security Perceptions:**
 - **CSH2 (Min Htet):** Concerned about "job security post-graduation."
 - **RGH-In4 (Su Wai):** Noted the event industry is "very volatile...leading to job insecurity."
 - **HGU3 (Pyae Sone):** Found the industry "too vulnerable to external shocks...affecting income security."
 - **EJS3 (Aung Min):** Perceived hospitality as "too uncertain" in the current economic climate."

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3.2 Socio-Cultural Perceptions and Industry Image

The societal standing and image of hospitality careers in Myanmar, often influenced by family expectations and cultural norms, played a notable role. For some, hospitality was not viewed as a prestigious or primary career choice.

- **Industry Image and Status:**
 - **RGH-Out5 (Thuzar Khin):** Found teaching offered "perceived greater societal respect."
 - **EJS4 (Nilar Win):** Considered hospitality a "'fallback option'" and associated it with "'hard work for less recognition' and a less 'prestigious' career path."
- **Family and Peer Influence:**
 - **CSH1 (Thida Aung):** Hesitancy linked to a "lack of family connections in the sector."
 - **AP2 (U Win Bo):** Observed that students' career decisions are "heavily influenced by family expectations."
 - **EJS2 (Ma Thiri):** Viewed hospitality as "too demanding and stressful" based on "societal perceptions and stories from acquaintances."

3.3 Overarching Impact of the Political and Security Context (Post-2021)

The profound and pervasive impact of the post-2021 political and security situation, leading to economic decline, a sharp reduction in tourism, and heightened general instability, was a critical societal factor. It exacerbated pre-existing industry challenges and introduced new, significant deterrents to pursuing local hospitality careers. The activation of the national conscription law on February 10, 2024, further intensified these pressures, making the prospect of staying in the country and building a career less appealing for many young adults who now face mandatory military service.

- **Direct Impact on Industry Viability and Opportunities:**
 - **HT2 (Myo Thant):** Concerned by the "direct impact of political/economic instability on bookings."
 - **RGH-In4 (Su Wai):** Noted the event industry is "heavily impacted by current events."
 - **HIP1 (Shalinda Rathnayake):** Noted "increased difficulty in attracting and retaining young talent post-2021 due to economic pressures."
 - **HIP3 (U Zaw Naing):** Discussed the "severe impact of reduced tourism on smaller establishments, making it difficult to offer competitive salaries."
- **Heightened Uncertainty and Desire for Stability (Compounded by Conscription Law):**
 - **CSH1 (Thida Aung):** Hesitancy due to "current uncertainties."
 - **RGH-Out2 (Aung Ko Latt):** Cited the "current economic climate," and the now active conscription law provides a strong impetus for young people like him to leave.
 - **RGH-Out3 (May Thandar):** Prioritized "job security and a predictable work schedule" in an INGO due to the "volatile nature of tourism, especially in the current context," a choice made even more compelling by the desire to avoid the uncertainties associated with the conscription law.

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- **AP1 (Dr. Thet Htar):** Noted student "anxiety about future job security in hospitality," an anxiety undoubtedly amplified by the conscription law's implications for young individuals' futures.

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Table 4.3.3: Summary of Key Societal Factors (Including Economic & Politico-Security Context)

Sub-Theme	Key Observations from Participants	Representative Participant Groups
Economic Realities (Wages, Hours, Security)	Dominant concerns: low pay relative to effort/other sectors, long/unsociable hours, high pressure, and perceived job insecurity, particularly in the current economic downturn.	CSH, HT, RGH-In, RGH-Out, HGU, HIP, AP, EJS
Socio-Cultural Perceptions & Industry Image	Influence of family expectations; industry sometimes perceived as less prestigious, highly demanding, or a "fallback" option. Desire for careers with greater societal respect.	CSH, RGH-Out, AP, EJS
Impact of Political & Security Context Post-2021 (incl. Conscription Law)	Profound negative impact of political instability on tourism, economic conditions, and overall safety/security perceptions. This exacerbates existing issues and creates new deterrents, significantly amplified by the activated national conscription law (Feb 10, 2024) compelling young adults towards military service or seeking escape routes via overseas employment.	CSH, HT, RGH-In, RGH-Out, HGU, HIP, AP

Cross-Cutting Theme: The Allure of Overseas Opportunities

A significant cross-cutting theme, interwoven through individual aspirations, perceived limitations of the local industry (economic, career growth), and the challenging societal context (security, conscription), is the strong and increasing allure of overseas employment. The activation of the national conscription law on February 10, 2024, has transformed this allure into a pressing need for many young adults seeking to avoid mandatory military service. Many participants, across various groups, viewed working abroad—often in hospitality or related skilled trades—as a more viable and attractive path to better income, enhanced stability, personal security, professional development, and critically, an escape from conscription.

Motivations for Seeking Overseas Employment (Heightened by Conscription Law):

CSH1 (Thida Aung): "Considering a foreign job."

CSH4 (Aung Kyaw): "Actively seeking overseas employment or further study opportunities."

CSH5 (Phyu Phyu): Exploring "job-oriented training programs focused on sectors with strong demand in overseas employment markets...as a practical route

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for seeking opportunities abroad," likely with increased urgency due to the conscription law.

RGH-In4 (Su Wai): Noted "better opportunity in overseas and better pay."

RGH-Out1 (Nang Phyu): Stated "overseas opportunity is easier to perceive and much higher salary."

RGH-Out2 (Aung Ko Latt): "Age between 18 to 30 in Myanmar has fear of conscription, therefore getting qualified for a better pay outside the country." The law's activation makes this a direct cause-and-effect for many.

Industry and Academic Perspectives on Overseas Trend:

HIP1 (Shalinda Rathnayake): Noted "increased difficulty in attracting and retaining young talent post-2021 due to economic pressures and desire for stability or overseas opportunities," a trend likely accelerated by the conscription law.

HIP2 (May Oo): Observed that "most of the students enroll on a hospitality course as a gateway of getting a job abroad and not sustaining in the industry," with the avoidance of conscription now being a primary, unstated driver for many.

This powerful pull towards overseas markets suggests that local deterrents are not just pushing individuals away from Myanmar's hospitality sector but are also being compounded by the perceived significant advantages of working internationally, with the avoidance of mandatory military service becoming a paramount concern.

This presentation of findings, structured by key themes and supported by direct participant insights, illustrates the complex interplay of individual, institutional, and societal factors. These elements collectively contribute to the "brain drain" phenomenon, steering many hospitality students and graduates in Myanmar away from careers in the local sector. The subsequent chapter will delve into a deeper discussion of these findings, linking them to existing literature and culminating in actionable recommendations.

4.4 Summary of Key Findings

This section synthesizes the principal patterns and insights that emerged from the thematic analysis of data collected from diverse stakeholders within Myanmar's hospitality ecosystem, as detailed in section 4.3. The findings reveal a complex interplay of individual, institutional, and societal factors that collectively contribute to the reluctance of hospitality students and graduates to pursue or remain in careers within the local hospitality sector, particularly against the backdrop of Myanmar's current socio-economic and political landscape.

The analysis underscores that career decisions are not made in isolation but are profoundly influenced by a confluence of pressures, aspirations, and the overarching environment. Key deterrents from the local hospitality sector and motivators towards alternative paths, especially

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overseas employment, have been clearly identified through the detailed analysis of participant narratives.

The most salient findings are summarized below:

1. Overwhelming Impact of Economic and Politico-Security Context:

- **Economic Hardship & Poor Working Conditions:** A dominant theme across nearly all participant groups was significant dissatisfaction with low remuneration, long and unsociable working hours, and high-pressure environments within Myanmar's hospitality sector. These conditions were frequently cited as uncompetitive compared to other industries and insufficient for a sustainable livelihood, particularly in the prevailing economic downturn.
- **Pervasive Influence of Political Instability and Conscription:** The post-2021 political and security instability has severely undermined the tourism industry's viability and attractiveness. Critically, the activation of the national conscription law in February 2024 has emerged as a paramount factor influencing career decisions for young adults. This law creates widespread fear and uncertainty, significantly amplifying risk aversion and acting as a powerful catalyst for seeking opportunities abroad as a means of ensuring personal safety, avoiding mandatory military service, and finding stability.

2. Divergence in Personal Aspirations and Perceived Career Realities:

- Many participants, particularly students and recent graduates, expressed a strong desire for careers that offer a reasonable work-life balance, opportunities for personal fulfillment, and clear, faster pathways for career progression. The perceived realities of Myanmar's hospitality sector—often characterized by demanding schedules and slow advancement—frequently clashed with these personal values and lifestyle preferences.

3. Identified Gaps in the Educational and Training System:

- While foundational practical skills were generally acknowledged as being taught, a recurring concern was the perceived gap between academic learning and the dynamic, often challenging, realities of the hospitality workplace. Participants highlighted deficiencies in soft skills development (e.g., emotional intelligence, problem-solving, adaptability), the relevance of curricula to current industry needs, the effectiveness of career guidance services, and the robustness of industry-academia linkages, including the quality and availability of meaningful internships.

4. Negative Industry Image and Socio-Cultural Perceptions:

- The hospitality industry in Myanmar is sometimes perceived as having a lower social status compared to other professions. Societal and family expectations can significantly influence career choices, with hospitality not always viewed as a prestigious or primary career option, but rather as a "fallback" or overly demanding field.

5. The Powerful and Increasing Allure of Overseas Opportunities:

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- A significant cross-cutting theme was the strong and growing attraction of overseas employment. This is driven by a combination of "push" factors (local economic hardship, instability, conscription) and "pull" factors (prospect of significantly better salaries, improved working conditions, enhanced career development, greater stability, and personal security abroad). Hospitality qualifications are often viewed strategically as a viable pathway to emigrate and escape the multifaceted challenges within Myanmar.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter transitions from the presentation and analysis of findings (Chapter 4) to a comprehensive discussion of their implications. The primary aim here is to interpret the key findings of this research within the broader context of existing academic literature and the specific socio-economic and political realities of Myanmar. This chapter will critically examine how the identified individual, institutional, and societal factors—particularly economic conditions, the prevailing politico-security environment including the national conscription law, personal aspirations, educational system attributes, and socio-cultural perceptions—interact to influence the career choices of hospitality students and graduates in Myanmar.

The discussion will specifically address how the study's findings align with, diverge from, or extend existing theories and empirical evidence related to hospitality workforce challenges and career decision-making. It will revisit the research objectives and questions posed at the outset of this study, evaluating the extent to which they have been addressed by the research outcomes.

Following this in-depth discussion, the chapter will present a concise conclusion that encapsulates the most significant insights and contributions of the study. Finally, based on the evidence gathered and the subsequent analysis, a series of actionable and contextually relevant recommendations will be proposed. These recommendations will be tailored for key stakeholders, including educational institutions, hospitality industry employers and associations,

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and relevant governmental or policy-making bodies, with the overarching goal of fostering a more sustainable and resilient hospitality workforce in Myanmar. This chapter thus aims to bridge the gap between research findings and practical application, offering pathways to mitigate the "brain drain" phenomenon and support the future development of the nation's hospitality sector.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings presented in Chapter 4 offer a nuanced understanding of the complex factors deterring hospitality students and graduates in Myanmar from pursuing or sustaining careers within the local sector. This discussion interprets these findings by contextualizing them with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, examining their relationship with existing theories, exploring their implications for Myanmar's hospitality sector, addressing the initial research questions, and highlighting any particularly insightful or unexpected outcomes.

5.2.1 Alignment and Divergence with Existing Literature and Theories

The study's findings largely support and extend existing global literature on hospitality workforce challenges. Concerns regarding low remuneration, long and unsociable working hours, and limited career progression opportunities (Richardson, 2010; Gebbels et al., 2022; Omar et al., 2016) were strongly echoed by participants in Myanmar (CSH2, RGH-In1, RGH-Out1, HGU1, HGU2, EJS1). This study confirms that these globally recognized economic deterrents are acutely felt in the Myanmar context, likely exacerbated by the country's current economic downturn. The "brain drain" phenomenon, where skilled individuals leave the sector is not only present but significantly amplified in Myanmar, with a strong pull towards overseas employment (CSH1, CSH4, CSH5, RGH-In4, RGH-Out1, RGH-Out2).

In relation to career choice theories, the findings align well with Person-Organization (P-O) fit theory (Judge & Bretz, 2002). The expressed desire for better work-life balance (CSH3, RGH-Out1, HGU2, EJS2), personal fulfillment (RGH-Out5), and alignment with personal values (RGH-Out4) indicates a perceived mismatch between individual needs and the perceived offerings of the hospitality sector in Myanmar. Similarly, Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2002) is reflected in how participants actively seek to construct careers that offer stability, growth, and, increasingly, safety, often leading them away from the perceived precarity of the local hospitality industry. The "fear of conscription" (CSH5, RGH-Out2, HGU4) introduces a critical dimension to perceived risk (Kwon & Kim, 2016) that is largely unique to the current Myanmar context and significantly extends the understanding of risk factors in career choice beyond purely economic or social concerns found in much of the existing literature.

The influence of social factors like industry image and family expectations was also confirmed (RGH-Out5, EJS4, AP2). However, this study highlights that while these factors play a role, they are currently overshadowed by the more pressing economic and security concerns.

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Regarding educational factors, the perceived gap between theoretical knowledge and practical industry demands (HT1, HT4, HIP1, AP2) and the need for enhanced soft skills (HIP4, AP1, AP3) support existing literature on the importance of relevant and practical hospitality education (Lee et al., 2020; Noe, 2017). The call for better career guidance (CSH2, AP1) also aligns with global best practices.

This research extends existing studies on Myanmar's hospitality sector by providing a contemporary, ground-level perspective from students and recent graduates, specifically focusing on their initial career decisions in the post-2021 and conscription law era. While previous studies noted HR challenges and retention issues, this study pinpoints the powerful "push" factors at the entry-level and the overwhelming "pull" of overseas opportunities as an escape route.

5.2.2 Implications for Myanmar's Hospitality Sector

The implications of these findings for Myanmar's hospitality sector are profound and deeply concerning:

- **Aggravated Talent Shortage:** The sector is facing not just a skills gap but a potential demographic vacuum as young, educated individuals actively choose other industries or, more significantly, leave the country. This will severely hamper service quality, innovation, and growth.
- **Unsustainable Workforce Model:** Relying on a transient workforce that views hospitality as a short-term option or merely a stepping stone to overseas employment (HIP2) is unsustainable for long-term development and quality consistency.
- **Negative Cycle of Decline:** Poor working conditions and low pay lead to talent drain, which further reduces the capacity of the industry to improve standards and invest in its workforce, creating a downward spiral.
- **Erosion of Future Leadership:** The reluctance of graduates to build long-term careers in the sector means a diminished pipeline for future managerial and leadership roles within Myanmar.
- **Increased Operational Costs:** High turnover, continuous recruitment, and training of new staff (who may also leave quickly) will inflate operational costs for businesses already struggling in a difficult economic climate.
- **Damaged Industry Reputation:** The prevailing negative perceptions, if unaddressed, will make it even harder to attract talent in the future, even if broader economic and political conditions improve.
- **Vulnerability to External Shocks:** An industry already heavily impacted by political instability and the pandemic becomes even more vulnerable when its human capital base is insecure and actively seeking exit routes. The conscription law acts as an acute internal shock with severe external consequences for talent retention.

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Without significant and concerted interventions, the Myanmar hospitality sector risks a long-term decline in competitiveness and its ability to contribute meaningfully to the national economy, especially when (and if) tourism demand recovers.

5.2.3 Addressing the Research Questions

The findings of this study provide clear answers to the research questions posed in Chapter 1:

1. Primary economic factors deterring students: Low wages (CSH2, RGH-Out1), long/unsociable working hours (RGH-Out1, HGU2), and limited/uncertain career growth opportunities (CSH4, RGH-Out2) were consistently identified as primary economic deterrents.
2. Extent of social factors' impact (industry perception, family, security/conscription): Social factors, including negative industry perceptions (EJS4) and family expectations (AP2), do have an impact. However, the prevailing security situation and, most critically, the fear of conscription (CSH5, RGH-Out2, HGU4) have emerged as overriding social/contextual factors that significantly impact career decisions, often eclipsing traditional social pressures.
3. Influence of educational factors (adequacy, practical training, career guidance): Educational factors play a notable role. Perceived gaps between theory and practice (HT4, HIP1), the need for more relevant soft skills training (AP3), and insufficient career guidance (CSH2) influence preparedness and inclination towards the sector.
4. Personal aspirations leading to alternative paths: The desire for better work-life balance (CSH3, HGU2), greater personal fulfillment (RGH-Out5), autonomy (RGH-Out4), and more stable and predictable career environments (RGH-Out3) leads students to pursue alternative paths.
5. Impact of the 2021 coup and subsequent instability: The post-2021 instability has profoundly impacted perceptions by creating widespread economic hardship, drastically reducing tourism (HT2, RGH-In4, HIP3), heightening job insecurity (CSH2, EJS3), and fostering a general climate of uncertainty that makes long-term career planning within the local hospitality sector highly unattractive.
6. Specific challenges in attracting/retaining young talent in the current context: Key challenges include uncompetitive remuneration, poor working conditions, the overwhelming desire for overseas opportunities (driven by both economic and security/conscription fears), a perceived lack of growth, and an education system not fully aligned with current dynamic needs.
7. Strategies for stakeholders: (This will be directly addressed in the Recommendations section 5.4, but the findings clearly point towards the need for improved compensation, working conditions, enhanced educational relevance, stronger career support, and collaborative efforts to improve industry image and address safety concerns where possible).

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5.2.4 Unexpected or Particularly Insightful Findings

- **The Dominance of the Conscription Law:** While general security concerns were anticipated, the sheer weight and immediacy of the national conscription law (activated February 10, 2024) as a primary driver for career decisions, particularly the urgent pursuit of overseas opportunities as an avoidance strategy, was a stark and powerful finding. This single factor has reshaped the decision-making landscape for young adults in Myanmar, making it a more critical and immediate concern than many traditional career choice factors. Participants (CSH5, RGH-Out2, HGU4) explicitly linked this law to their career planning and desire to leave the country.
- **Hospitality as an "Escape Route":** The insight that hospitality education and initial job experiences are increasingly viewed not as a pathway into a local career but as a strategic means to acquire skills and credentials for emigration (HIP2) was particularly revealing. This fundamentally alters the traditional understanding of student motivations for entering hospitality programs.
- **Resilience vs. Resignation:** While many expressed disillusionment, there were still individuals (e.g., RGH-In2, RGH-In3) who found satisfaction or remained committed due to passion or specific positive experiences within certain establishments. This highlights that positive micro-environments can exist, but they are increasingly rare or insufficient to counteract the larger negative macro-environmental pressures.
- **External Job Seekers' Perceptions:** The perspectives of External Job Seekers (EJS) provided a valuable external benchmark, confirming that the negative perceptions of the hospitality industry (low pay, long hours, high stress) are widespread within the general job market, making it a less attractive option even for those without specific alternative career paths.

These insights underscore the extreme pressures facing young individuals in Myanmar and the profound impact these pressures have on the hospitality sector's human resources. The situation is not merely about improving traditional aspects of employment but about navigating a complex crisis where fundamental safety and future prospects are at stake for potential employees.

5.3 Conclusion

This research embarked on an investigation into the critical factors influencing the career decisions of hospitality students and recent graduates in Myanmar, with a specific focus on understanding why a significant number, despite formal training, choose not to enter or remain in the local hospitality sector. The study identified a pressing research problem: the "brain drain" of qualified individuals from an industry vital to Myanmar's economy, particularly within the challenging post-2021 socio-political and economic climate, further intensified by the recent activation of the national conscription law.

Adopting a qualitative research approach rooted in interpretivism and constructivism, this study utilized a case study design. Data was meticulously gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with a diverse range of participants, including current

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hospitality students, recent graduates (both within and outside the sector), individuals who had left the industry, hospitality industry professionals, and academic staff. Thematic analysis of the rich narrative data formed the core of the analytical process.

The key findings of this study are stark and compelling. They reveal that the decision to avoid or abandon local hospitality careers is driven by a powerful confluence of factors. These include:

- **Overwhelming Economic Pressures:** Persistently low wages, excessively long and unsociable working hours, and limited perceived opportunities for career advancement were dominant deterrents.
- **Pervasive Politico-Security Concerns:** The profound instability since 2021 has decimated the tourism industry and created an environment of pervasive uncertainty. Crucially, the national conscription law has emerged as an acute and overriding factor, compelling many young individuals to seek overseas employment as a means of ensuring personal safety and avoiding mandatory military service.
- **Divergence with Personal Aspirations:** Many participants expressed a desire for better work-life balance, personal fulfillment, and clearer career progression, which they perceived as largely unattainable in the local hospitality sector.
- **Educational System Gaps:** Deficiencies in curriculum relevance, practical training alignment with industry realities, and effective career guidance were identified.
- **Negative Industry Image:** The sector sometimes suffers from a less prestigious image compared to other professions.
- **The Strong Allure of Overseas Work:** Foreign employment is increasingly seen not just as an opportunity for better economic prospects but as an essential escape from domestic hardships and insecurities.

The significance of these findings is multifaceted. Academically, this study contributes to the understanding of career choice theory and hospitality workforce dynamics within a unique and highly volatile developing country context, particularly highlighting the profound impact of non-economic factors like political instability and conscription on career decisions. Practically, the findings offer critical insights for stakeholders in Myanmar's hospitality sector, underscoring the urgent need for systemic changes to address not only traditional employment concerns but also the overriding safety and security anxieties of potential employees.

This study successfully met its research objectives. It comprehensively **identified** the economic, social, educational, personal, and contextual factors influencing career choices. It critically **evaluated** the role of hospitality education in this dynamic, revealing how it can inadvertently contribute to the "brain drain" if not properly aligned with both student aspirations and dire local realities. Finally, it has laid a robust foundation for the **development of actionable recommendations** for stakeholders, aimed at mitigating the talent exodus and fostering a more sustainable future for the sector.

In conclusion, the "brain drain" from Myanmar's hospitality sector is a critical issue, symptomatic of broader national challenges. It is fueled by a complex interplay of pre-existing

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industry weaknesses and an acute, ongoing crisis. Addressing this requires a paradigm shift from incremental improvements to fundamental, collaborative strategies that acknowledge the profound uncertainties and fears shaping the decisions of Myanmar's youth. Without such interventions, the prospect of retaining and nurturing a skilled local hospitality workforce for the future remains exceptionally challenging.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive findings and discussion presented in this study, the following specific, actionable, and justified recommendations are proposed for key stakeholders. These recommendations aim to address the multifaceted challenges contributing to the 'brain drain' from Myanmar's hospitality sector and to foster a more attractive, supportive, and sustainable environment for its workforce. It is acknowledged that implementing some of these recommendations will be challenging given the current context, but they represent crucial areas for attention.

5.4.1 Recommendations for Educational Institutions (Vocational Schools & Universities)

- **Curriculum Modernization and Relevance Enhancement:**
 - **Action:** Regularly review and update curricula in close consultation with industry professionals (HIPs) and recent graduates (RGH-In, RGH-Out) to ensure alignment with current industry needs, international standards, and evolving guest expectations.
 - **Justification:** Findings (HT4, HIP1, AP1, AP3) indicated a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical realities, and a need for more relevant skills.
 - **Specifics:** Integrate modules on crisis management, resilience, digital literacy in hospitality, sustainability practices, and enhanced soft skills development (emotional intelligence, cross-cultural communication, advanced problem-solving, leadership).
- **Strengthening Practical Training and Internship Programs:**
 - **Action:** Develop more structured, supervised, and meaningful internship programs with clear learning objectives and performance feedback mechanisms. Foster stronger, mutually beneficial partnerships with a wider range of reputable hospitality establishments.
 - **Justification:** Participants (AP2) highlighted challenges in securing quality internships, and trainees (HT1, HT4) noted discrepancies between study and practice.
 - **Specifics:** Implement pre-internship preparedness workshops, regular on-site monitoring by academic staff, and post-internship debriefing sessions. Explore virtual internships or project-based learning with industry partners if physical placements are limited.
- **Enhancing Career Guidance and Counseling Services:**
 - **Action:** Provide comprehensive, realistic, and ongoing career guidance that addresses not only opportunities but also the challenges within the local and

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international hospitality sectors. Offer counseling on managing expectations, career pathing, and coping with industry pressures.

- **Justification:** Findings (CSH2, AP1) pointed to student anxiety about job prospects and a need for better information and support.
- **Specifics:** Organize regular workshops with industry speakers (including alumni who have diverse career paths), provide access to up-to-date labor market information, and offer personalized counseling sessions. Explicitly discuss pathways to overseas employment, including realistic requirements and potential challenges, given its strong allure (CSH5, RGH-Out2).
- **Focus on Transferable and Entrepreneurial Skills:**
 - **Action:** Integrate the development of transferable skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, critical thinking, customer service excellence) applicable across various industries, and introduce elements of entrepreneurship for those interested in starting their own hospitality-related ventures.
 - **Justification:** Some graduates (RGH-Out4, RGH-Out5) successfully transitioned to other sectors or started businesses using skills gained from hospitality education. This acknowledges diverse career aspirations.

5.4.2 Recommendations for Hospitality Employers and Industry Bodies (e.g., Hotel Associations, Tourism Federations)

- **Improving Remuneration, Working Conditions, and Employee Welfare:**
 - **Action:** Advocate for and implement more competitive and equitable salary structures, benefits packages (including health, transport, meals), and fairer working hours. Invest in creating a more supportive and respectful work environment.
 - **Justification:** This was the most dominant concern across all participant groups (CSH2, HT3, RGH-In1, RGH-Out1, HGU1, HGU2, EJS1). Addressing this is fundamental.
 - **Specifics:** Conduct regular salary benchmarking. Explore flexible work arrangements where feasible. Implement clear policies against workplace harassment and ensure robust grievance redressal mechanisms. Prioritize staff well-being initiatives.
- **Creating Clear Career Development Pathways and Growth Opportunities:**
 - **Action:** Establish transparent and achievable career progression paths, invest in continuous training and development for staff at all levels, and actively promote internal talent.
 - **Justification:** Perceived limited career growth was a key deterrent (CSH4, RGH-Out1, RGH-Out2, HGU4).
 - **Specifics:** Implement mentorship programs, offer cross-training opportunities, provide leadership development for promising employees, and clearly communicate advancement criteria.

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- **Enhancing Recruitment Strategies and Industry Image:**
 - **Action:** Develop more strategic and transparent recruitment practices. Collaboratively work to improve the overall image of the hospitality industry as a viable and rewarding long-term career choice.
 - **Justification:** Negative perceptions (EJS4, AP2) and the view of hospitality as a "stepping stone" (HIP2) need to be countered.
 - **Specifics:** Highlight success stories of local professionals. Engage actively with educational institutions. Emphasize non-monetary benefits and the positive aspects of hospitality careers.
- **Strengthening Industry-Academia Collaboration:**
 - **Action:** Actively participate in curriculum advisory boards, offer guest lectures, provide meaningful internship and job opportunities, and support joint research initiatives.
 - **Justification:** This will help bridge the theory-practice gap (HIP1, AP2) and ensure graduates are better prepared.
- **Addressing Safety and Security Concerns (within their capacity):**
 - **Action:** While broader security is beyond their control, employers should prioritize workplace safety and security for their staff to the extent possible. Industry bodies could advocate for measures that support staff well-being in the current climate.
 - **Justification:** The prevailing security situation and conscription fears (CSH5, RGH-Out2) are major drivers of attrition.

5.4.3 Recommendations for Policymakers (e.g., Relevant Government Ministries, Tourism Authorities)

- **Facilitating a More Stable and Supportive Operating Environment (Long-Term Goal):**
 - **Action:** Work towards creating a more stable political and economic environment conducive to tourism development and investment. (Acknowledging this is a complex, high-level challenge).
 - **Justification:** The current instability is a root cause of many of the sector's woes (HT2, RGH-In4, HIP1, HIP3).
- **Supporting Skills Development and Vocational Training:**
 - **Action:** Provide financial and regulatory support for the enhancement of hospitality vocational training centers and educational programs. Promote national skills certification standards.
 - **Justification:** A skilled workforce is essential for industry quality and competitiveness.
- **Developing Initiatives to Improve Industry Image and Attractiveness:**
 - **Action:** Launch national campaigns to promote the value and professionalism of hospitality careers, highlighting diverse opportunities and success stories.
 - **Justification:** To counter negative societal perceptions (EJS4) and encourage local talent.

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- **Reviewing and Addressing Labor Policies Impacting the Sector:**
 - **Action:** Review labor laws and regulations to ensure fair wages, reasonable working hours, and adequate worker protections within the hospitality sector.
 - **Justification:** To address the core economic grievances of the workforce (HGU1, HGU2).
- **Considering the Impact of National Policies (e.g., Conscription) on a Vital Economic Sector:**
 - **Action:** While national security is paramount, policymakers should consider the severe impact of policies like the conscription law on the human resource base of critical economic sectors like hospitality and explore potential mitigations or support mechanisms for affected industries and individuals, if feasible within the national framework.
 - **Justification:** The conscription law was identified as a major, immediate catalyst for talent flight (CSH5, RGH-Out2, HGU4). Acknowledging its impact on the workforce is crucial.
- **Facilitating Safe and Regulated Pathways for Overseas Employment (if direct retention is unfeasible for many):**
 - **Action:** If retaining all talent locally is unrealistic given current pressures (especially conscription), explore establishing more robust, safe, and regulated channels for overseas hospitality employment. This could involve bilateral agreements that protect workers' rights and potentially facilitate skills transfer back to Myanmar in the future.
 - **Justification:** Acknowledges the strong pull for overseas work (HIP2) and aims to make an inevitable trend safer and potentially beneficial in the long run, rather than an unregulated exodus.

Implementing these recommendations will require a concerted, collaborative, and sustained effort from all stakeholders. While the current environment in Myanmar presents formidable challenges, inaction will only exacerbate the 'brain drain' and further undermine the hospitality sector's potential for future recovery and growth.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

This study has provided insights into the factors influencing the career choices of hospitality students and graduates in Myanmar. However, the complexity of the issue and the dynamic context suggest several avenues for future research:

- **Longitudinal Studies:** Conduct longitudinal research to track the career trajectories of hospitality graduates over an extended period (e.g., 5-10 years). This would provide deeper insights into career progression, retention rates within and outside the sector, and the long-term impact of initial career decisions made in the current volatile environment.
- **Quantitative Analysis:** Complement this qualitative study with quantitative research to measure the prevalence and statistical significance of the identified factors across a larger, more representative sample of hospitality students and graduates in Myanmar.

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This could involve surveys to assess the relative importance of different deterrents and motivators.

- **Comparative Studies:** Undertake comparative studies examining hospitality workforce challenges and career choices in other ASEAN countries facing different socio-political or economic conditions. This could help identify context-specific versus region-wide factors.
- **Employer-Focused Research:** Conduct more in-depth research specifically focused on the perspectives and strategies of hospitality employers in Myanmar regarding talent acquisition, retention, and development in the current crisis. This could explore innovative HR practices being adopted.
- **Impact of Conscription Law Across Sectors:** Investigate the broader impact of the national conscription law on youth career aspirations and workforce dynamics across various key economic sectors in Myanmar, not limited to hospitality.
- **The Role and Impact of Diaspora:** Explore the potential role of the Myanmar hospitality diaspora (those working overseas) in future skills transfer, investment, or returnee entrepreneurship if and when conditions in the country improve.
- **Effectiveness of Interventions:** Once (and if) recommendations from studies like this are implemented, future research should evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions in mitigating brain drain and improving workforce sustainability in Myanmar's hospitality sector.
- **Mental Health and Well-being:** Investigate the mental health and well-being of students and employees within Myanmar's hospitality sector, given the high-pressure nature of the work compounded by the current national crisis.

Further research in these areas would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities for developing a resilient and skilled hospitality workforce in Myanmar and similar contexts.

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Chapter 6: Reflection

6.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a personal and critical reflection on my MBA thesis, "The Factors affecting hospitality students not choosing hospitality sector for their career progression: A Study on Myanmar Based hospitality students." It dissects the research journey's insights, challenges, and emotional responses. By evaluating the research design, data collection in Myanmar, analysis, and development of findings, I aim to consolidate significant learnings. This reflection is crucial

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for academic closure, personal and professional development, and identifying key takeaways for future research and professional practice in hospitality and beyond.

6.2 The Research Journey (Using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle)

This section employs Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) as a framework to structure the reflection on the research process, detailing my personal experience in conducting this study on hospitality career choices in Myanmar.

6.2.1 Description (What happened?)

The journey began with identifying a topic that was not only academically relevant but also resonated with the pressing realities of Myanmar's hospitality sector. The "brain drain" phenomenon felt palpable, and I was keen to understand the underlying reasons why young, educated individuals were turning away from careers they had trained for. This led to the formulation of my research title: "The Factors affecting hospitality students not choosing hospitality sector for their career progression: A Study on Myanmar Based hospitality students."

The initial phase involved an extensive literature review, sifting through global and regional studies on hospitality workforce challenges and career choice theories. I then tailored this understanding to the limited existing research specific to Myanmar, aiming to pinpoint the unique gaps this study could address. Designing the methodology was a careful process; a qualitative approach using a case study design felt most appropriate to capture the nuanced, lived experiences of individuals in such a complex environment. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were chosen as the primary data collection methods.

Gaining ethical approval was a crucial step, especially given the sensitivities. Participant recruitment was perhaps one of the most challenging yet rewarding stages. Leveraging my professional network within the hospitality and education sectors in Yangon, and ensuring absolute confidentiality, I managed to connect with a diverse group: current students full of anxieties and hopes, recent graduates navigating difficult choices, industry professionals grappling with staffing shortages, and academics trying to bridge the gap. Each interview and focus group discussion was a deep dive into personal stories, often touching upon the economic hardships, the impact of the political instability since 2021, and the pervasive fear surrounding the newly activated conscription law.

Data collection itself required careful navigation. Discussions were held in locations deemed safe and convenient for participants. Thematic analysis followed, a meticulous process of transcribing, coding, and identifying recurring patterns and core themes from the rich narrative data. Finally, the writing phase involved structuring these insights into coherent chapters, culminating in the findings, discussion, and recommendations presented in this thesis. Throughout, I was under the guidance of my supervisor, Mr. Prasanna Pathmanathan, whose support was invaluable.

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6.2.2 Feelings (What were your reactions/feelings?)

Setting foot on this research, I felt a mixture of excitement and trepidation. Excitement, because the topic felt incredibly relevant and important for Myanmar; trepidation, due to the complexities of conducting research in such an uncertain environment. During the literature review, there were moments of satisfaction when I found studies that resonated with my initial observations, but also frustration at the scarcity of research directly addressing my specific focus within the Myanmar context.

The participant recruitment and data collection phases were emotionally charged. I felt a deep sense of empathy listening to the stories of students and graduates whose dreams were clashing with harsh realities. Hearing firsthand about their fears regarding the conscription law and their struggles with economic instability was sobering and, at times, distressing. There was a profound sense of responsibility to represent their voices accurately and ethically. Simultaneously, I felt immense gratitude for their willingness to share their experiences so openly.

During data analysis, there were moments of being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of qualitative data, but also moments of "aha!" when key themes began to crystallize. The writing process brought a sense of accomplishment as chapters took shape, though the pressure of deadlines and the desire to do justice to the topic were constant companions. Overall, there was a persistent undercurrent of concern for the participants and for the future of the young people in Myanmar, which fueled my determination to produce a meaningful piece of research.

6.2.3 Evaluation (What was good and bad about the experience?)

Looking back, several aspects of the research journey were particularly positive. The relevance and timeliness of the topic were good; it felt like I was investigating something that truly mattered. The richness of the qualitative data obtained was invaluable, providing deep insights that quantitative data alone could not have captured. Engaging directly with such a diverse group of stakeholders (students, graduates, industry professionals, academics) was a significant strength, allowing for a multifaceted understanding of the issue. The support from my supervisor and APIIT was instrumental in navigating academic rigors. Personally, contributing to a better understanding of a critical issue facing Myanmar's youth and its hospitality sector brought a sense of personal satisfaction.

However, there were also challenging aspects. Accessing certain participants was initially difficult due to the prevailing climate of caution and the sensitive nature of the research. I constantly battled time constraints alongside other commitments. The emotional toll of listening to stories of hardship and uncertainty was undeniable. Perhaps a "bad" aspect, or rather an inherent limitation, was the inability to generalize findings statistically due to the qualitative nature, though this was a deliberate methodological choice for depth over breadth. The security situation also meant that some planned avenues for data collection (e.g., wider travel for more diverse regional input) had to be curtailed.

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6.2.4 Analysis (What sense can you make of the situation?)

The success in gathering rich data, despite the challenges, can be attributed to establishing trust and rapport with participants, emphasizing anonymity, and leveraging existing networks within the ethical boundaries. My own background and understanding of the local context likely helped in navigating conversations with sensitivity. The challenges encountered, particularly those related to access and the emotional weight of the topic, underscore the profound difficulties of conducting social research in a country undergoing significant political and economic upheaval. It highlighted how macro-level crises directly impact individual lives and decisions in very tangible ways.

The overwhelming influence of the conscription law on career choices became a dominant theme, perhaps even more so than initially anticipated. This makes sense in a situation where immediate personal safety and future security become paramount, often overriding other career considerations that might be more prominent in stable environments. The findings clearly demonstrate that traditional career choice models need to be heavily contextualized when applied to situations of extreme duress. The research also made clear how interconnected the identified factors are – economic hardship is exacerbated by political instability, which in turn fuels the desire to leave, a decision further solidified by policies like conscription.

6.2.5 Conclusion (What else could you have done?)

In hindsight, while the qualitative approach was appropriate, perhaps incorporating a small, targeted quantitative survey at an earlier stage could have provided some preliminary statistical context to complement the in-depth interviews, though this would have added complexity and potential security concerns for participants. More extensive piloting of interview questions with a wider range of individuals before full-scale data collection might have further refined the inquiry lines, although the semi-structured nature allowed for flexibility.

Given more time and a more stable environment, I would have aimed for a larger and more geographically diverse sample to explore regional variations in more detail. Perhaps I could have also explored avenues for anonymous online data collection more thoroughly as a supplementary method, though building trust online for such sensitive topics is challenging. While I believe I managed the ethical considerations carefully, continuous reflection on my own positionality and potential biases is something I could have perhaps documented even more explicitly throughout the process.

6.2.6 Action Plan (If it arose again, what would you do? What will you take forward?)

If I were to undertake similar research in a challenging context again, I would build in even more time for participant recruitment and trust-building, as this proved to be the cornerstone of data quality. I would also develop a more structured self-care plan to manage the emotional impact of engaging with difficult narratives. For future projects, I will definitely incorporate more detailed contingency planning for potential disruptions, especially in volatile environments.

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The key skills I will take forward and aim to develop further include advanced qualitative data analysis techniques and more nuanced approaches to navigating research in high-risk or sensitive settings. The paramount importance of ethical conduct, particularly ensuring participant safety and data confidentiality, has been deeply reinforced and will remain a guiding principle. Professionally, this research has given me a much deeper appreciation for the human side of workforce challenges, an understanding I will carry into any future managerial or strategic roles within the hospitality industry or any other sector. I also intend to advocate for more evidence-based approaches to policy and industry practices based on the insights gained.

6.3 Key Learnings and Personal Development

This MBA research journey has been an intensely formative experience, yielding significant learnings that extend far beyond the academic requirements of the degree. The process of investigating such a critical and contemporary issue within the Myanmar hospitality sector has profoundly shaped both my understanding of research and my personal capabilities.

Academic Learnings:

Deepened Understanding of Qualitative Research: While I had a theoretical understanding of qualitative methodologies, this thesis provided hands-on experience in applying them rigorously. I learned the nuances of designing semi-structured interviews, facilitating focus groups in a culturally sensitive manner, and the meticulous process of thematic analysis to extract meaningful insights from rich narrative data. This practical application has solidified my appreciation for the power of qualitative inquiry in exploring complex human experiences.

Enhanced Critical Analysis and Synthesis Skills: The literature review demanded a critical engagement with existing theories and studies, identifying gaps and contextualizing them for Myanmar. Synthesizing diverse participant perspectives during data analysis and then weaving them into a coherent argument in the findings and discussion chapters significantly honed my analytical and synthesis capabilities.

In-depth Sector-Specific Knowledge: My understanding of the hospitality sector in Myanmar, its operational realities, workforce dynamics, and the profound impact of the socio-political and economic environment, has moved from a general awareness to a deeply informed perspective. This includes a much clearer grasp of the factors influencing career choice theories within this specific, high-pressure context.

Mastery of Academic Writing and Argumentation: The discipline of structuring a lengthy academic document, presenting evidence systematically, and constructing a robust argument has been a key learning curve. Adhering to

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academic conventions and responding to supervisory feedback has been invaluable.

Personal Development:

Improved Resilience and Perseverance: Conducting research in the challenging environment of Myanmar, particularly with the sensitivities around current events and the conscription law, required a significant degree of resilience. There were moments of uncertainty and logistical hurdles, but navigating these has strengthened my ability to persevere in the face of adversity.

Enhanced Empathy and Cultural Sensitivity: Engaging directly with individuals sharing their personal struggles, fears, and aspirations fostered a much deeper sense of empathy. It underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity in communication and research, especially when dealing with vulnerable populations or discussing delicate issues.

Strengthened Project Management and Organizational Skills: Managing a research project of this scale, from proposal to final submission, involved meticulous planning, time management, and organization. Juggling various stages of research, data collection, analysis, and writing alongside other commitments has significantly improved these practical skills.

Increased Confidence and Self-Reliance: Successfully completing this complex thesis has boosted my confidence in my ability to undertake challenging projects independently, to think critically, and to produce work of a high standard.

Refined Interpersonal and Communication Skills: The process of recruiting participants, conducting in-depth interviews, and facilitating focus groups has sharpened my active listening, questioning, and broader interpersonal communication skills. Building rapport quickly and creating a safe space for open dialogue were crucial.

Heightened Ethical Awareness in Practice: While ethical principles are taught, applying them in a real-world context with tangible human implications—ensuring anonymity, informed consent, and 'do no harm'—has ingrained a profound respect for ethical research conduct. This experience has made ethical considerations far more than just a procedural step; they are a foundational responsibility.

This journey has not just been about producing a thesis; it has been about personal growth, developing a deeper understanding of my country's challenges, and acquiring skills that I am confident will serve me well in my future professional and academic life.

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6.4 Challenges Encountered and Opportunities for Growth

The path of this research, undertaken amidst the unique circumstances of contemporary Myanmar, presented various learning opportunities disguised as challenges. Each was navigated with a focus on achieving the research objectives while upholding ethical standards and adapting to the evolving environment.

- **Building Bridges for Participant Engagement:** In a climate where individuals might naturally be reserved, fostering an environment of trust to encourage participation was a key focus. My established connections within the hospitality and educational spheres provided a positive starting point. The enthusiastic cooperation from several **industry associations and educational foundations** proved instrumental in reaching out to potential participants. By clearly articulating the academic nature of the study, emphasizing the stringent measures for anonymity and confidentiality, and ensuring participants felt their contributions were valued and respected, I was fortunate to engage a diverse and insightful group. Their willingness to share their perspectives became a cornerstone of this research.
- **Approaching Sensitive Discussions with Empathy and Care:** The research inevitably touched upon topics of significant personal and national concern, including economic difficulties, the political climate, and the implications of the conscription law. My approach was consistently centered on empathetic listening and creating a safe, non-judgmental space for dialogue. Questions were phrased with care to focus on personal experiences related to career choices, rather than inviting broader political commentary. The well-being of participants was always the foremost consideration, and the guidance from my academic institution on ethical conduct provided a strong framework for these sensitive interactions.
- **Adapting to Logistical and Communication Variables:** Successfully coordinating research activities in Yangon required a flexible and proactive approach. While technology facilitated much of the communication, ensuring reliable connections and arranging mutually convenient and neutral meeting locations for interviews involved careful planning and adaptability. The support systems within my academic institution and professional network helped in smoothing out these logistical aspects, allowing the research to proceed efficiently.
- **Transforming Data into Meaningful Insights:** The richness of qualitative data is one of its greatest strengths, and also a source of challenge in analysis. Reaching a point of thematic saturation, where core ideas were consistently emerging, was achieved through an iterative process of reviewing interview transcripts and notes. The systematic application of thematic analysis provided a robust method for managing the extensive narrative data, allowing for the identification of key patterns and the development of a deep understanding of the participants' perspectives. This structured approach turned a large volume of information into the clear findings presented.
- **Upholding Objectivity and Embracing Diverse Viewpoints:** My own professional background in Myanmar's hospitality sector provided valuable context, but also necessitated a conscious effort to maintain objectivity. I actively sought out a wide range

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of viewpoints, including those that might differ from initial assumptions. Open-ended questioning techniques were employed to allow participants to guide the conversations, and the detailed transcription process helped ensure that their voices were accurately captured. Regular consultations with my supervisor provided an invaluable external perspective, further strengthening the balanced interpretation of the findings.

- **Balancing Academic Pursuits with Professional Commitments:** The successful completion of this MBA thesis alongside ongoing professional responsibilities was a significant learning experience in effective time management and prioritization. Setting clear, achievable milestones and dedicating focused periods to research and writing were key strategies. The understanding and encouragement from my workplace and professional colleagues provided a supportive environment that greatly facilitated this balance.
- **Responding to a Dynamic Context:** The research period was marked by evolving national circumstances, notably the activation of the conscription law. Rather than viewing this as a disruption, it became an opportunity to understand its immediate and significant influence on the career decisions of young people. This required a responsive and adaptive research stance, allowing emergent critical themes to be incorporated into the inquiry, thereby enriching the study's relevance and timeliness.

Each of these experiences, while presenting initial hurdles, ultimately contributed to a more robust research process and deeper personal learning. The ability to adapt, combined with the generous support from my academic institution, supervisor, professional associations, and indeed the participants themselves, was key to transforming these challenges into valuable opportunities for growth and insight.

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