A WORK-BASED STUDY OF HOSPITALITY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND ITS RELEVANCE TO INDEPENDENT RESTAURANTS IN AUSTRALIA

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the significance of vocational education and training (VET) in enhancing employability skills within the hospitality industry, with a specific focus on independent restaurants in Southeast Queensland, Australia. Despite the importance of VET to this sector, its relevance to front-of-house operations in independent restaurants remains relatively unexplored. To address this gap, the present study investigates the alignment of VET programs with the needs and expectations of restauranteurs and explores the necessity for VET qualifications for successful employment in the hospitality domain. Adopting a qualitative approach, the study employs semi-structured interviews with independent restaurant owners and managers, along with an in-depth analysis of relevant literature on VET and its relationship with the hospitality industry. The findings of this research have two aims: 1) To highlight the substantial role of VET hospitality programs and their alignment with the needs and expectations of staff in independent restaurants. Additionally, this research aims to contribute to the success of independent restaurants by enhancing service quality, refining employee skills, and promoting competitiveness in a dynamic and evolving industry environment; and 2) the study aims to identify significant challenges within the current VET curriculum for the hospitality industry. These challenges include legislative constraints and time commitments associated with VET programs, limited access to suitable training initiatives, and suitably qualified trainers. This aim is also to determine if VET qualifications are a requirement for employment. To strengthen this study, the method of content analysis has been used throughout the analysis of the study. This approach improves the rigour of the research by examining and interpreting textual data from interviews and literature. Thus, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the issues that arose. Nonetheless, the research is exploratory, providing valuable insights and opportunities for further investigation into the intricacies of hospitality curricula in relation to independent restaurants and other sectors of the hospitality industry. Ultimately, this study provides implications for enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of VET for independent restaurants in Australia, enabling them to meet the demands of the industry, enhance service quality, and elevate the employability skills of their workforce.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I Damien Lowe declare that the Thesis entitled **A Work-based Study of Hospitality Vocational Education and Training and its Relevance to Independent Restaurants in Australia** is not less than 25,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my work.

Date: 09/12/2023

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Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The abbreviations used throughout this thesis are listed below.

Abbreviation	Meaning
ACOTAFE	Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education
AISC	Australian Industry and Skills Committee
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
AQTF	Australian Quality Training Framework
ARA	Australian Retailers Association
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
ATFC	Australian Training Framework Committee
CA	content analysis
CBT	competency-based training
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CPSG	Curriculum Projects Steering Group
FOH	front-of-house
HE	Higher Education
JSC	Jobs and Skills Councils
MPSR	Master of Professional Studies (Research)
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NSSC	National Skills Standards Council
NTQC	National Training Quality Council
POS	point of sale
QR	Quick Response codes
QSR	quick service restaurants
RIM	Research Information Management
RTO	registered training organisations
SIT	Service Industry Training (training package)
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VEETAC	Vocational Education Employment and Training Advisory Committee
VET	vocational education and training

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   Hospitality and Vocational Education and Training

The need for skilled workers in the hospitality industry has been exacerbated by the recent pandemic COVID-19 (Siow et al. 2021). While the hard skills of hospitality such as setting tables and carrying multiple plates have remained consistent over time, the industry's demands have evolved. Soft skill development, including critical thinking, teamwork, and more complex customer service requirements, has become imperative for staff to work in a physically demanding industry. The significance of vocational education and training (VET) in addressing these skills cannot be overstated. VET has always played a critical role, in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, in preparing individuals for the dynamic challenges within the hospitality sector. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), in 2021 stated there were 4.3 million vocational education and training (VET) students studying various courses within the Australian tertiary education sector. The NCVER study, which classifies hospitality courses under food, hospitality, and personal services, suggests approximately 8.6% of total enrolments (approximately 180,000) were participating in qualifications ranging from Certificate II to Diploma level in hospitality. Therefore, these statistics underscore the pivotal role VET plays in hospitality skill development. The need to keep abreast of these changes and provide quality up-to-date training and industry development for workers navigating the landscape of the hospitality industry is more critical than ever, especially in the aftermath of the global crisis.

The relationship between vocational education and the hospitality industry has been extensively studied. However, a notable gap in previous research lies in the recognition of the diverse sectors within the hospitality industry. Despite, hospitality being commonly characterised by its customer-centric approach, there exists a tendency to overlook distinct segments in this sector. This oversight is significant as these separate sectors require unique skills and necessitate tailored training approaches within the hospitality working environment (Robinson et al., 2016). This Master of Professional Studies (Research) project, therefore, aims to provide data on the relationship that vocational education and training have with the independent

restaurant sector, within a hospitality industry context. This qualitative study seeks to explore the experiences and perceptions of individuals within one area of the hospitality industry, independent restaurants. This project explores the relationship between vocational education and stand-alone restaurants and investigates what skill requirements independent restaurants have when hiring staff. Furthermore, this project also reviews how VET can be used for ongoing servicing and training of staff, across multiple sectors of hospitality. Through a detailed analysis from semi-structured interviews, this research seeks to provide insights into how VET can support the staffing dynamics within hospitality and independent restaurants. Additionally, this study looks at the role of VET further integrating knowledge-based learning into practical applications across the diverse sectors of the hospitality industry.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the study

The hospitality industry is one of the largest service sectors and employers in Australia and has undergone significant transformations since the introduction of hospitality courses in the mid-1970s. In 2007, Breakey and Craig-Smith (2007) conducted a study investigating the evolution of educational training programs within the Australian hospitality sector since the inception of hospitality courses in Australia in the mid-1970s. Their research offered insights into curriculum changes up until 2007, highlighting the significant role of formal classroom-based education. This pedagogical approach demonstrated correlations between advancements in the industry, improved student outcomes and heightened industry expectations – factors that are directly relevant to this project.

While the provision of quality classroom-based education inherently contributed to industry development the study by Breakey and Craig-Smith (2007) had limitations. Specifically, it did not focus on distinct skill requirements within the diverse sector of the hospitality industry, despite acknowledging the theoretical existence within the broader service industry. This research gap underscores the need to further investigate deeper into the various sectors within the realm of hospitality, a goal that this thesis project aims to achieve. Furthermore, research by Alexakis and Jiang, (2019), and Goh and King, (2020) has indicated future research must be more comprehensive concerning the individual sectors of hospitality. Building on these insights, this project seeks to address this gap by providing a nuanced examination of

specific skills requirements within various sectors or divisions within the hospital sector.

The goal of this research was to examine the relevance of Australian education programs and curricula in preparing individuals for employment in the restaurant industry.

The attainment of this goal is dependent on the following secondary objectives:

1) To identify the skill sets required to work in restaurants in the food and beverage sector of hospitality as the industry demands.

2) To define the differences between various sectors of hospitality and skill requirements.

3) To critically analyse the current curriculum in VET offered to students within the entry-level qualifications of hospitality (Certificate III and Certificate IV in Hospitality); and

4) To formulate practical recommendations for the refinement of the existing hospitality VET curriculum. This is based on the identified skills and the gaps between the current curriculum and employer expectations.

In line with the principles of the Master of Professional Studies (Research), personal objectives and views are incorporated into the initial development and outcomes of the research project. Throughout the process of this thesis, the researcher engaged in self-reflection regarding his current career in the hospitality industry and explored how work-based research could enhance his current professional workspace. This self-reflection has led to the establishment of personal objectives within this research project, which it is anticipated will be as follows.

a)   To analyse the various sectors within the hospitality industry and assess the relevance of VET requirements for employment in this field.

b)   To conduct research that benefits both the hospitality and VET sectors as well as students pursuing hospitality studies. This is achieved by identifying essential curriculum modifications and teaching approaches.

c)   To further understand and deepen the comprehension of the professional landscape within the hospitality industry, enhancing personal leadership qualities in the context of both hospitality and vocational education.

This research project endeavours to generate further knowledge of industry-based practices and through evidence-based research, provide continuous

improvement for vocational education and training education programs in hospitality. This will expand the perspectives of key stakeholders. It will also contribute to the continuous improvements required in the VET sector that will help ensure the development of a highly skilled and competent workforce that meets the demands of the separate areas within the hospitality industry.

It is anticipated that this thesis also provides valuable information for educators' policymakers and the industry, which may be used to assist in corrective action or future decision-making, and which will help to effectively prepare students and workers in hospitality with dynamic, successful careers. The research questions that guided this study are as follows.

RQ1: What are the current Australian entry-level hospitality VET curricula and are these qualifications relevant to independent restaurants?

RQ2: How does VET education facilitate the current employability skills at entry-level positions in independent restaurants?

RQ3: How are the independent restaurants in hospitality benefiting from hospitality VET training?

1.3 Purpose statement

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to generate further knowledge of the hospitality industry and to compliment continuous improvent in the structure of vocational education and training. This is completed by examining the relationship between Hospitality VET programs and the skills requirements of the hospitality industry that are continually evolving. The research, in conjunction with the research questions, seeks to examine and address the challenges that are faced by both sectors and foster a symbiotic connection, incorporating academic knowledge and practical skills. By focusing on this intersection, this study aims to contribute to existing knowledge and enhance the opportunities of individuals for a career in the hospitality industry. This research endeavours to identify collaborative opportunities and proposes a strategic model framework, the Hospitality Training Model (HTM) that promotes the mutual benefit of vocational education and the hospitality industry.

To elaborate on the research questions, and to address the gaps from previous research, this thesis is composed of several chapters that collectively investigate the significance of vocational education and training (VET) and explore the relationship

between entry-level tertiary education to independent restaurants within the hospitality industry. The thesis follows with a literature review (Chapter 2), delving into the history of vocational education and training. Subsequently, the literature review investigates previous research conducted in the hospitality and VET sectors. Chapter 3 presents a comprehensive 'desktop' review of the current Hospitality Training Packages, offering insights into lesson structures, curricula, and the role of private registered training organisations (RTOs). In Chapter 4, the chosen methodology for data collection and analysis is thoroughly examined, emphasising a role in providing valuable insights for concluding the thesis. Chapters 5 and 6 analyse and discuss the rich data gathered throughout the research, with each chapter offering crucial insights into the necessity of vocational education in the hospitality industry. Finally, the concluding chapter (Chapter 7) highlights the key findings, reflecting on the Master of Professional Studies (Research) process, and discusses the implications for future research. This section also addresses the limitations of the current study, providing insights into areas that warrant further investigation and acknowledging the contributions made by this research to the broader field.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

The Australian vocational education and training (VET) sector has evolved significantly over the past 100 years. Starting in the late 1800s, apprenticeships, modelled off the English tertiary education system, emerged as a means of skill development in industries of the time. These apprenticeships evolved into the direct teaching method where instructors stood in front of the classroom and dictated resources to students. This transition was driven by the need to address technical skill shortages during the Second World War and expedite the reintegration of service personnel, into the workforce (Bowman & McKenna, 2016). These early forms of formal training and educational initiatives laid the foundation for the evolution of the VET sector. VET has since played a pivotal role in tertiary education in Australia, serving as a primary provider of skill development across various industries.

The turning point for the Australian VET sector was in 1973, through government policy, when the skills training sector was formalised by suggestions of the Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (ACOTAFE) chairman, Myer Kangan (Kearns & Hall, 1994). The Kangan report assisted in establishing the VET sector with a national identity within education, Commonwealth funding and an introduction to government-funded technical and further education (TAFE) facilities (Wheelan & Carter, 2001). By the mid-1980s, the framework for the modern VET system started taking place with social and government reforms leading to changes in the classification of the courses being offered at TAFE institutes (Stevenson, 2007). It was the development of the Curriculum Projects Steering Group (CPSG), that assisted in regulating curricula and the implementation of courses (Bowman & McKenna, 2016). The Vocational Education Employment and Training Advisory Committee (VEETAC) replaced the CPSG in 1990. VEETAC was created to support the national VET sector with curriculum advice and provide a link between industry and government regarding training services, curriculum, and student outcomes. Training packages were introduced in 1997, to bring consistency of curriculum around Australia and align teachings with the various industries taught (Smith, 2010). At this time, privatisation of the VET industry took place. The Registered Training Organisation

(RTO) was introduced to the sector, with most training organisations now owned and operated by private individuals or business groups (under directions from government policies). Alongside government-run TAFEs, RTOs implemented and delivered industry-specific courses and skills training nationally (Bowman & McKenna, 2016).

From the early 2000s, changes to the VET framework occurred regularly, with the introduction of the National Training Quality Council (NTQC), which replaced the Australian Training Framework Committee (ATFC), and the Standards for Training Packages were released (in a handbook format). In 2004, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) report suggested that the curriculum needed further contextualisation to the specific industries being taught, and the implementation of courses required different teaching styles (Schofield et.al., 2004). Further changes occurred in the early 2010s, such as the introduction of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), which provided standards for the increased numbers of community, enterprise, and private RTOs.

With the constant changes in policies and legislation in the VET sector, the relevance of tertiary education is a critical area of constant inquiry. Keeping abreast of the evolving changes in the hospitality industry and the requirements of education curricula, led to more government-initiated reforms and skills and workforce development agreements were formed to highlight ongoing issues with the delivery of the VET curriculum (Wheelahan & Carter, 2001). By mid-2015, a new industry-led Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC) was implemented to oversee the improvement of relevant curricula for various industries and provide advice to the then Council of Australian Governments (COAG). The AISC continues to oversee the implementation and development of the curriculum in conjunction with ASQA (which is now the Australian VET governing body), however, there have been significant changes to this structure in 2023. With the disbandment of the AISC, ASQA now governs all industry involvement with curriculum development (ASQA 2023).

The ongoing developments resulting from the formation of AISC, which focuses primarily on industry-led, curricula development and industry-specific qualifications, and the constant changes that the hospitality industry is experiencing, such as industry standards and technology, raise questions on the effectiveness and relevance of the current VET curriculum within the dynamics of the hospitality industry. While there is a substantial body of literature on the history and development of the Australian VET sector there is a notable absence of research regarding the alignment of the individual

sectors that constitute the broader hospitality industry. These sectors encompass independent restaurants, cafes, hotel food and beverage areas and conference and events.

2.2   Competency based training and skills in VET

Competency-based training (CBT) dates back to the 1920s in Australia, with the initial criteria of CBT assessment in tertiary education introduced with the formalisation of VET when it was privatised in the mid-1980s. The focus of CBT is to provide students with practical-based education rather than the traditional teachings of just passing on theoretical information (Kepanen et al., 2020) and has become a mandatory assessment tool in the Australian vocational education sector (Tran & Nyland, 2013).

Several studies have postulated that competency-based training provides quality assessment, dependent on previous skills attained or attributes of students. However, CBT in vocational education is not without its complications. Unlike traditional methods of teaching, where a teacher stands in front of a class and passes on knowledge through verbal communication, competency-based formats require a more in-depth understanding of the overall pedagogical process (Kepanen et al., 2020).

With multiple layers of comprehension from a teacher required to assess CBT, Wesselink et al. (2010) identified eight principles to assist in the development of curricula (See Appendix A, for more details on the eight principles of CBT in vocational education). These eight principles highlight four key areas that need to be considered which are,

1. Instructions - The development of learning guides and curricula,

2. The delivery – How teachers should deliver the materials concerned. This includes the industry experience and experience of the trainer,

3. Assessment – How the assessment is to be completed, skills assessed, and objectivity of the overall competency required, and

4. Outcomes – Whether the students have gained the necessary skills to be work-ready.

These four key areas from the eight principles identified in Wesselink et al.'s (2010) study, present a valuable framework for competency-based assessments in vocational education. Serving as not only a structural guide but also facilitating a more comprehensive approach to training and assessing trade industries in the Australian VET sector. Additionally, the eight principles could enhance the focus on industry-

related performance measures and promote more industry inclusion in learning material development as emphasised by Smith and Kemmis (2010).

Despite these research hypotheses though, it remains unclear whether CBT is effective in addressing the specific skill requirements for the hospitality industry. Research from Chapman and Lovell (2006) suggests a gap in our understanding of whether certain attributes and skills crucial for hospitality professionals can be effectively taught through CBT. Their investigation has identified skills such as making cocktails, folding napkins, and setting tables that can be delivered and assessed through observation in a classroom. However, challenges arise when attempting to teach and evaluate attributes such as intuition, personality, and emotional intelligence, is not as easy to gauge the effectiveness of understanding and assessment through observation alone as indicated through Chapman and Lovell's (2006) study.

Defining hospitality skills also presents challenges due to the diverse sectors within the hospitality industry. Weber et al. (2013) explored various facets of these skills, such as problem-solving and interpersonal relationships, which are crucial for performing effectively in hospitality and restaurant settings. These skills, however, prove challenging to teach and assess within a classroom environment. Dhaliwal and Misra (2020) further emphasise the difficulty of teaching interpersonal skills theoretically. However, to address this issue, they proposed categorising soft skills like leadership, intuition, and emotional decision-making for management-level tasks, enabling competency-based learning formats. Yet, defining, teaching, and assessing emotional skills, particularly among junior front-of-house staff in restaurants, remains more elusive. As a result, the more pertinent approach to teaching hospitality skills appears to be work-based, on-the-job training, which has been identified as a more relevant alternative to the current traditional competency-based training packages taught by Weber et al. (2013).

Understanding the diverse skill sets demanded by the hospitality industry is essential for workforce development and education. Baum's (2002), research categorises various skills required to work in hospitality as either linear (what level of establishment the hospitality worker is situated in) or vertical (the range of technical skills). Depending on the specific role within the workplace and the degree of interaction with customers, skill requirements can vary significantly. Baum suggests further that lower-skilled and lower-level workers represent a majority of hospitality employees, versus higher-skilled managers within

hospitality and as such, the curricula of hospitality training and assessment need to reflect this.

Moreover, in addition to the challenges posed by the structure of CBT, Schulz (2008) has identified a critical aspect when applying CBT: the competency of the trainer and assessor of vocational education. His research prompts a crucial inquiry – do individuals with industry experience possess the necessary teaching skills and understanding of the requirements for completing certain learning tasks for students. Presently the qualifications necessary to teach VET, typically involve obtaining Certificate IV in Training and Assessment Education, which is designed to align with industry qualifications and industry experience. This VET qualification is usually acquired through various vocational institutes (ASQA, 2015). Therefore, as Schulz (2008) argues, the qualifications to teach at the VET level may not be robust enough to grasp the intricacies of CBT and various pedagogy elements

The application of CBT in the context of the hospitality industry, food, and beverage service sector leads to a pertinent question: Is traditional classroom-based hospitality education necessary or relevant? Raising the question if the curricula of hospitality VET teaches the correct subjects relevant to the areas of a student's area of interest. This question further prompts an examination of whether training and assessment of hospitality should exclusively adopt a work-based approach (Chapman & Lovell, 2006). The implications of incorporating CBT into the realm of hospitality education provoke considerations regarding the effectiveness and necessity of traditional classroom settings.

2.3   Training packages in Vocational Education and Training

After the national government decided to implement competency-based training in vocational education during the early 1990s, it became apparent that there was a lack of organisation and consistency between the government-run TAFEs and the government-accredited RTOs (Smith, 2010). In 1992, the nine Australian governments agreed to create a nationally coordinated vocational education and training system..This early stance created the training package, which aligned the curriculum courses and industry requirements into one. The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) was established under the Australian National Training Authority Act 1992 and was directly responsible to the Ministerial Council and Council of Australian Governments. This also provided sufficient situational control for the

government at the AQF level (Bowman & McKenna, 2016). Training packages, therefore, contain several units that are required to be completed to obtain a qualification. The number of units varies from different industries or trades; however, the training package does not supply or stipulate the specific curriculum that is to be used for each unit of competency (Wheelahan & Carter, 2001). While each unit within the training package consists of knowledge and practical requirements (competency-based) these are not explained in detail as to how these are to be assessed (ASQA, 2015). Therefore, the units that are taught in various RTOs nationwide differ greatly due to the complex nature of the interpretation (Wheelahan & Carter, 2001).

Given that there are no specific units recommended with the training package, there is potential for adverse effects on students' learning outcomes. Each RTO is responsible for selecting the units that they offer for instruction, except for core units, which are pre-determined. Guthrie and Waters (2022) suggest in their research that a lack of uniformity in chosen units within hospitality training packages across different RTOs could lead to inconsistencies in teaching methods. This, in turn, could affect student outcomes. Fraser (2021), discussing curriculum and pedagogy, suggests that incorporating participative learning into properly aligned curriculum framework favours could be beneficial for students' development. This approach shifts the focus from education solely within VET and encompasses a broader perspective on learning.

2.4   Hospitality curriculum in Vocational Education and Training

As previous studies have suggested, tertiary education curricula need to prepare students for career development and their personal lives (Fraser, 2020). Furthermore, the curriculum should provide the necessary skills to perform at various levels relevant to the competencies required in each area of the industry taught (Lee et al., 2021). The current format of the hospitality curricula within the Australian vocational education and training system varies depending on the level of qualification as set by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). At entry-level qualifications, (Certificate II to Certificate IV) the curricula, which are divided into units within a training package, are basic in terms of learning material and assessment and are written in a format for students who have little or no understanding or experience of the hospitality industry. The main learning outcomes focus on entry-level skills, such as setting tables, basic operations of a bar and using point of sale (POS)

cashiering systems. Some of the soft skills offered within the hospitality training packages include customer service and teamwork. However, as there is an abundant number of units in hospitality available to teach at the entry-level, there is some confusion regarding what the appropriate units are to teach. This adds to the non-relevancy of training within most RTOs to the industry sector of food and beverage (Robinson et al., 2010).

The training packages that form the Service Industry Training (SIT) qualifications within the VET sector have been developed and researched since the 1980s when vocational education in Australia formalised hospitality and tourism training (Weber et al., 2013). However, since this time the emphasis on the service of food and beverage, being a large component of the hospitality industry, has diminished within the curriculum of hospitality tertiary education having been replaced by other areas within the hospitality realm (Robinson et al., 2010). Partly due to student demands, more focus on teaching at entry-level qualifications within areas of business, analytical and problem-solving skills has increased (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019). However, as this is primarily focused on management teachings, these soft skills, while requirements for management, are perhaps not relevant to a server in a restaurant and introductory level of qualifications of hospitality.

Due to government restrictions, social distancing patterns, and the lockdowns at the height of COVID-19, the hospitality industry has had to adapt to the changes in the service of food and beverage. With the increased use of existing technology, for example, Quick Response (QR) codes for ordering food and beverages and new technologies such as virtual reality formats to enhance the customers' experience, front-of-house staff of restaurants' interactions with customers have changed significantly. However, while the inclusion of certain technical requirements is needed to be introduced into the entry-level hospitality curriculum post-COVID-19, focusing on the rudimentary skills of the restaurant front-of-house floor staff is still needed (Kift et al., 2021).

Curricula of tertiary education should be specific to the industry being taught and contextualised to the skills required to perform industry-specific tasks, as Brand (2013), indicates in his research. According to Lee et al. (2021), the curriculum in any education setting should be challenging and relevant to the student. This will lead to enhanced learning and potentially assist the students' future career involvement within the hospitality industry post-graduation or qualification

completion (Polesel, 2008). Therefore, the curriculum of hospitality must be constantly updated, relevant to specific areas of each sector within the industry, and specific to what is required within the workspace. Furthermore, studies have also identified that the skills learnt in a formal training environment or classroom should be easily transferred into real-life working situations and not generalised to the entire hospitality industry (Lee et al., 2021).

Of the courses offered within the SIT training packages, Certificate III in Hospitality and Certificate IV in Hospitality have the most enrolments as identified by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) (ASQA, 2019). These courses are predominately delivered by private RTOs and TAFE institutions and include international and domestic students (Bowman & McKenna, 2016). While there is a lower-level qualification (Certificate II in Hospitality) available, Certificate III and IV in Hospitality are deemed the entry-level qualification required to enter the hospitality workforce and as such, this is the emphasis and focus of this research paper.

Certificate III in Hospitality has 15 units of competency required to be completed by students, and the current training package identifies seven of these units as core units required to be completed. The remaining units are elective units that either the student elects to complete or the RTO training the qualification will select. These elective units are made up of various industry-related components ranging from tourism operations to accommodation and guest relations. Further units in Certificate III in Hospitality can include basic kitchen operations and housekeeping (ASQA, 2022).

As for Certificate IV in Hospitality, the requirements for the completion of this qualification are 21 units. This too comprises core units, of which there are nine in total that are required to be completed alongside the elective units. For each of these qualifications, the focus is on restaurants, in particular the food and beverage areas that is limited to the customer service units and minimal focus on table service (Robinson et al., 2010).

Within the 33 hospitality packages that RTOs have available to teach, only a small number of these are offered within private training organisations. The available hospitality packages that focus specifically on certain areas of the industry are housekeeping, accommodation, tourism, and events. However, with the 510 RTOs (private and government-funded) that currently deliver the hospitality qualifications, only a limited amount applies to relevant units within the training packages (ASQA, 2022).

One example of a relevant qualification is Certificate III in Hospitality (Restaurant Front of House Operations) SIT30716. This qualification exhibits a slight deviation from the primary Certificate III in Hospitality, as it is tailored to focus on front-of-house restaurant operations only. Currently, it encompasses an additional set of five competency units beyond the requisites of the standard Certificate III in Hospitality, which mandates the completion of 15 units. At present, in Australia there are 27 registered training organisations (RTOs) that are authorised to deliver this specialised qualification; however, the actual offering and delivery of this distinctive course are limited to only nine of the listed institutions. It is worth noting that while this qualification aligns itself with the broader domain of hospitality, it still encompasses certain units that may appear incongruent with the specific demands of the food and beverage sector within the hospitality industry (as evidenced by training.gov.au). A more comprehensive analysis of the SIT Training Packages is explained in Chapter 3 of this study. Reducing the units that are required to complete the qualification and making them relevant to the area of interest or workplace that the student has, potentially will make the study more relevant, keep attrition rates low and provide better education for entry-level staff of hospitality and restaurants (Richardson, 2010).

2.5 Skills versus knowledge

Hospitality education has evolved from the earliest curricula developed in the early 1990s (Goh, 2020). With these changes, researchers such as Robinson et al. (2010) have argued that curriculum development has moved away from the skills required to work in the hospitality industry to theoretical curricula catering for hospitality industry partners such as tourism, events, and accommodation. Much of these changes also occurred during a shift in the mid-2000s where the closure of large VET campuses around Australia left large gaps within hospitality education (Goh, 2020). With these closures, a large portion of training in the hospitality industry was left to universities that were aligned with the VET sector. However, with universities focusing more on tourism in their higher education (HE) curricula, this industry too, became the focus of VET-level courses (Robinson, 2015). Some academics (Example: Lugosi & Jameson, (2017) and Alexakis & Jiang, (2019), have suggested that hospitality training curricula should be focussed on other industries and not entirely on the hospitality industry. .

Hospitality curriculum in vocational education has consistently been in the background when it comes to research and changes that are suggested are mainly focussed on the management styles of the hospitality industry (Robinson et al., 2010). However, research has suggested that due to the hospitality industry changing consistently over time, the curricula needs to be updated accordingly (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019). Nevertheless, with the fundamentals of working in restaurants not changing for hundreds of years, perhaps these areas don't need to be constantly addressed (Robinson et al., 2010b). Previous research on the curricula related to industry has also suggested, that due to the lag between the understanding of the required teachings of hospitality and the implementation of a curriculum which is hindered due to lengthy timeframes, potentially the research becomes irrelevant (Goh & King, 2020).

It is important then, that curricula include skill development relevant to the individual areas within hospitality and the individual student as well (Wheelan, 2017). While vocational education is based on competency completions and not theory based assessments, due to VET being practical in nature, it has been identified from previous research that the importance of having a mixture of academic and practical skills taught benefits the student and industry (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). This could also potentially assist in academic and occupational retention as demonstrated in the study by Lee and Way (2010). To add to the importance of the relevancy of curriculum, a study by Goh and Scheri (2016) identified subjects such as accounting in the hospitality curriculum, created poor performance in students. While important topics such as management skills are required for higher-level education, most students see this as boring or perhaps not relevant due to current capabilities in their work, however, this study further highlights the importance of contextualised curricula in the hospitality sector (Goh & Scheri, 2016).

2.6   Chapter Summary

This literature review offers an overview of the historical development of VET in Australia, with a particular emphasis on its relevance to hospitality education. The review explores the challenges faced in reshaping the tertiary education sector and delves into the complexities associated with VET's teaching methods and curriculum development.

As the VET system continues to undergo transformations driven through government reforms, the introduction of training packages and the increasing privatisation of the VET industry training organisations, concerns regarding the legitimacy of vocational education have arisen. Government-initiated reforms and regulatory bodies such as the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) and the Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC) were established to provide structure and guidance for the current VET system. However, this literature underscores the significance of CBT within hospitality curricula and questions its alignment with industry needs. Notably, CBT may not address certain attributes of the hospitality professional and soft skills required to work at an entry-level, which this research suggests is becoming increasingly relevant.

This literature review also examines various training packages within the Hospitality sector, with a focus on Certificates III and IV in Hospitality, which are considered entry-level qualifications for the industry. This review has identified the need for relevant and updated curricula that align with specific industry sectors within hospitality to cater for the practical skill development required for students. Furthermore, the review explores the balance between theoretical knowledge and practical skills in hospitality education. It advocates for curricula that include a combination of academic and practical training to better prepare students for the industry and retain their interest and engagement. The findings underscore the importance of relevant and contextualised curricula in the hospitality industry's vocational education. By addressing the challenges and understanding the historical development of VET in Australia, this research anticipates the provision of future insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of hospitality education and training programs. As a continuation of the literature review, the following chapter reviews the current curricula of Certificate III and Certificate IV Hospitality. It also provides insight into how the units are chosen within private registered training organisations and offers an overview of legislative requirements when delivering the units within the qualification.

While much of the current research literature primarily concentrates on higher tertiary education and emphasises student outcomes, this research project delves into a distinct area of the hospitality industry. Specifically, it explores skill requirements for working in independent restaurants as perceived by owners or managers. Through

critical analysis of data obtained from semi-structured interviews and a review of the current literature, this study aims to address this research gap. The next chapter (3) extends the literature review by examining the curriculum of hospitality in VET. This is to provide further knowledge on the structure of the curriculum, and how RTOs manage the delivery of units within Certificate III hospitality and Certificate IV hospitality.

CHAPTER 3: THE VET CURRICULUM OF HOSPITALITY

3.1   Introduction

In 2012, the National Skills Standard Council (NSSC) was set the task of formalising training packages and training package standards. This included defining the units of competency and number of units required in each qualification. This also comprised of assessment procedures and guidelines, and implementation of credit of previous study (in a similar field of practice). To assist in the administering of the training package, and for RTOs to deliver various qualifications, a companion volume to provide advice and guidance on the application of individual packages was developed and is supplied to individual training organisations. As vocational education training packages and units within each qualification can be difficult to comprehend, this chapter aims to introduce the requirements utilising the SIT Tourism, Travel and Hospitality Training Package Companion Implementation Guide.

This section also delves into a critical examination of the current curriculum in VET focussing on its perceived irrelevance. The analysis is based on Figure 2.1, which was created using the analysis of the VET that outlines the key areas of training in the vet system.

3.2   The tourism, travel and hospitality industries

Within the framework of the AQF training package, tourism and hospitality are recognised as a collective industry, which, defined by the Australia and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) includes the following groups.

1. Accommodation and food services
2. Scenic and sightseeing transport
3. Travel agency and tour arrangement services

4. Event Management and tourist information centre operations
5. Amusement and other recreational activities; and
6. Casino operations

As Figure 1 indicates, there is a degree of commonality with the classification of hospitality and tourism due to integrated products and services. As such, the qualifications that are identified in the SIT vocational education packages are grouped according to their skill sets. An example of this grouping is the sales and marketing of food products. As the knowledge required to perform these activities falls within transferrable skills across the different aspects of food and beverage and casino operations, the skill set of marketing is taught across the required packages.

Figure 1

Industries within the hospitality and tourism sector of VET education
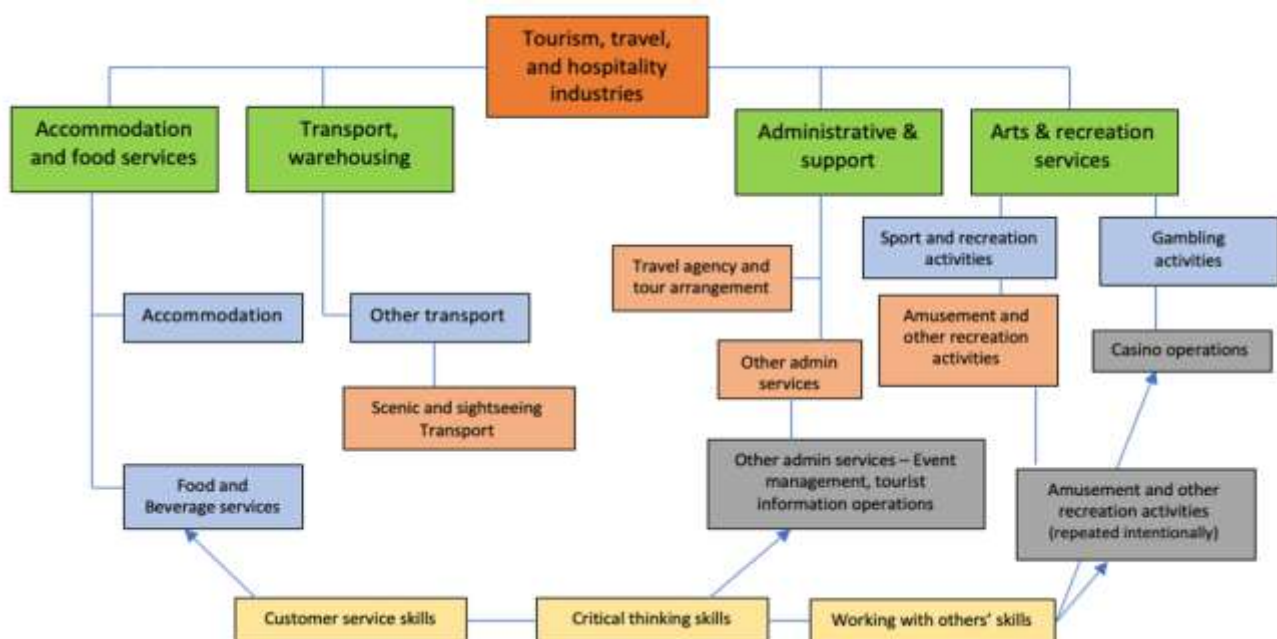
Skills are also grouped with the needs of the industry that have been identified, such as customer service and problem-solving attributes. These are seen as key industry skills that are required across all sectors within tourism and hospitality. There are also recommendations within the training package companion for training in specific areas to assist in staff retention and career paths for RTOs to deliver. Units such as recruitment, coaching others and mentoring to name a few are listed as what

the industry requires and what is best for student outcomes within the industry. However, the distinction between the levels of delivery (Certificate II to Diploma levels) is not discussed. There is also no discernment between particular areas of hospitality or tourism (such as variations between hotel skills and café skills) and the suggested skills suited to each.

3.3   Skill sets

The skill sets are designed per licence requirements within a particular industry, or any legislative requirements that may be needed in a specific area. An example of this is the liquor licence requirements within the hospitality, food, and beverage sector. For an entity (restaurant, café, club etc.) to sell or serve alcohol, then a liquor licence is required, and staff requirements include holding a responsible service of alcohol certificate. These skill sets are not full qualifications, but more a clustered group of units that creates a level of competency for the complete qualification (for example Certificate III or Certificate IV in Hospitality). The skill sets that are available within the SIT training package were created to make the choice of unit requirements for specific qualifications easier for the RTO to choose. However, it is at the RTO's discretion as to whether they deliver units or specific skill sets, such as the Responsible Service of Alcohol, as these are not deemed core units within ASQA guidelines.

3.4   Units of competency

As RTOs can choose from 227 units that are available within the hospitality training package, it is often a complex task to ensure the correct units are delivered to the right recipients and at the correct level of qualification (Richardson, 2010). As mentioned previously in this chapter, there are core units to consider, and the number, which is required to complete them, is determined by the level of qualification. The units of competency that need to be included in each qualification can change depending on the RTO structure and delivery plan, and the level of qualification. Within Certificate III Hospitality, a student is expected to be familiar with hospitality and work under limited supervision. The skills required at the Certificate III level are a basic understanding on knowledge of the industry operations as well as method implementation. The

companion volume lists the following jobs obtained as employment outcomes that may be obtained by completing the Certificate III Hospitality qualification: food and beverage attendant, barista, guest service agent (front desk of a hotel) and waiter.

From the selection within the specific training packages, RTOs can also choose from other training packages that are within the SIT training packages. These could include, for example, units in basic cookery skills, hotel operations, events, and tourism. While each of the units available is organised according to each area of the industry, (such as customer service, finance, or marketing), the decisions about which units to choose for the 15 units of competency for Certificate III or the 21 units of competency for Certificate IV requires familiarity with each sector of the hospitality industry.

3.5   Industry trends and issues

While core hospitality skills have not changed for the past century (Robinson et al., 2010), the demand to keep up with the trends that rapidly change in the service sector is addressed within the SIT training package companion. The recommendation within the companion is through the delivery of units that promote the use of the internet or other means to address what trends are current within the industry. Particular units also demonstrate how students could potentially remain up to date with the industry and legislative changes. Potential student study pathways are also incorporated within the recommendations of industry knowledge. The study pathways suggested are from entry level (AQF level 1) to the Advanced Diploma (AQF level 6), (i.e., the Associate Degree within tertiary university education). What the companion does not address, however, are the variations or degree of difficulty within the scope of each qualification. Also, there are no suggestions of education pathways into higher education that potentially could benefit students after initial study at the vocational level.

3.6   Prerequisite units

According to the SIT training package companion, prerequisite units are units that a student is required to complete before the completion of another unit. This requirement necessitates the student to demonstrate the necessary skills and knowledge that are the prerequisite of the following unit. As prerequisites are included

within most of the full qualifications, these are usually units delivered to students before, or at the beginning of a course. The prerequisites are also skills-based units and therefore, contribute to the outcome of the qualification. An example of this is the work health and safety units and hygiene units that may be required to be completed before a student completes Certificate III Hospitality. Although prerequisite requirements for units are highlighted within the companion, there are no prerequisites required to enter any of the AQF vocational education and training qualifications of hospitality. This means that anyone can complete the higher-level qualifications without any prior knowledge or experience in the hospitality and tourism industry.

3.7 Implementation of the training package

As mentioned previously in this chapter the training packages and units have been developed by the industry (hospitality and tourism) to identify the skill requirements of the service sector. Within each unit of competency, there are specific industry skill requirements that a student needs to meet. As well, each student who studies in the vocational education system needs to understand and demonstrate this knowledge of understanding. This is usually completed through the demonstration of practical skills or knowledge assessments. Throughout VET qualifications, some units require work experience or demonstrations (ASQA, 2015). This is common with the practical skill requirements of cookery, and other physical, hands-on industries. However, within the Certificate III and Certificate IV hospitality qualifications, there is only one unit that requires a student to demonstrate workplace or industry experience. The unit, SITHIND004 Work Effectively in Hospitality, requires evidence of work completed, which is collected through a traditional logbook, from an employer or a business that offers students unpaid work experience. The requirement for this unit is to complete 36 shifts, within a set time frame, although this, at times, appears ambiguous. According to Fair Work Australia (https://www.fairwork.gov.au), a shift constitutes 4 hours minimum for casual, shift workers. It is therefore questionable as to whether the full experience of working in hospitality (restaurants, cafes, or hotels) would be obtained by a student who can only complete the minimum shift. The remainder of the units (15 units Certificate III Hospitality or 21 units Certificate IV Hospitality) are typically delivered in classroom-based situations. As for the practical

assessments that are required for the hospitality qualifications, these are usually demonstrated in the classroom in role-play scenarios or through written assessments.

3.8   Changes to the hospitality training package

In the second half of 2022, ASQA announced changes to the skills assessment strategy and the SIT Training Package (ASQA, n.d). As unit changes were implemented over twelve months, it was not deemed appropriate or necessary to provide details of these changes in this thesis. Upon review of the updated units, very little has changed (except course code changes). There are currently no changes within the vocational education and training and assessment requirements to complete Certificate III and Certificate IV Hospitality, however, these details are not the focus of this research. In addition, neither the implementation of qualifications from the RTOs nor the AQF structure has been amended.

However, one significant change is the disbandment of the Australian Industry Skills Committee (AISC) in December 2022. The removal of AISC was replaced by the Jobs and Skills Councils (JSC), a change that reduced the committee group numbers from 67 (AISC) to nine (JSC). Hospitality skills recognition and recommendations now sit within the Arts, Personal Service, Retail, Tourism and Hospitality committee, which was established and is run by the Australian Retailers Association (ARA). This new committee oversees the skill requirements for the hospitality industry and the implementation of qualifications in conjunction with ASQA. This change occurred in January 2023.

3.9   Qualifications

Qualifications as set by the AQF, are the framework of individual courses or units of competency within each industry sector. While not a compulsory element that must be strictly adhered to, the Training Package Companion Implementation Guide provides details of what should be included in each qualification and recommendations regarding legislative requirements. These details include core unit requirements (i.e., the number required to complete and which units to teach) as well as any legalities within the industry or prerequisites. An example of this is Certificate III in Hospitality in which a student is to have 15 units of competency reached for the student to obtain

the qualification. Of these 15 units, seven are core (compulsory) units, and another eight are elective or common units in which a student needs to show competency.

In the current training of hospitality, a systematic approach is followed and is tailored to the industry's needs. The process involves a selection of the 33 qualifications, which include hospitality, cookery, tourism, events, and travel. This initial step involves the Industry Skills Council Group (ISCG) which provides recommendations for both core and elective units pertinent to each sector's unique requirements. These core units are considered essential for competency in a given sector and ensure learners acquire fundamental skills and knowledge necessary for success in their chosen field.

Following these recommendations, the responsibility shifts to the RTO to decide which units to teach, and in which order (that are within their teaching scope that are registered with ASQA) with the core units being compulsory. As illustrated in Figure 2, this framework of delivery and assessment adheres to standardised practices for assessing the depth and complexity of the skills acquired by learners.

Figure 2

Indication of steps facilitating hospitality VET training
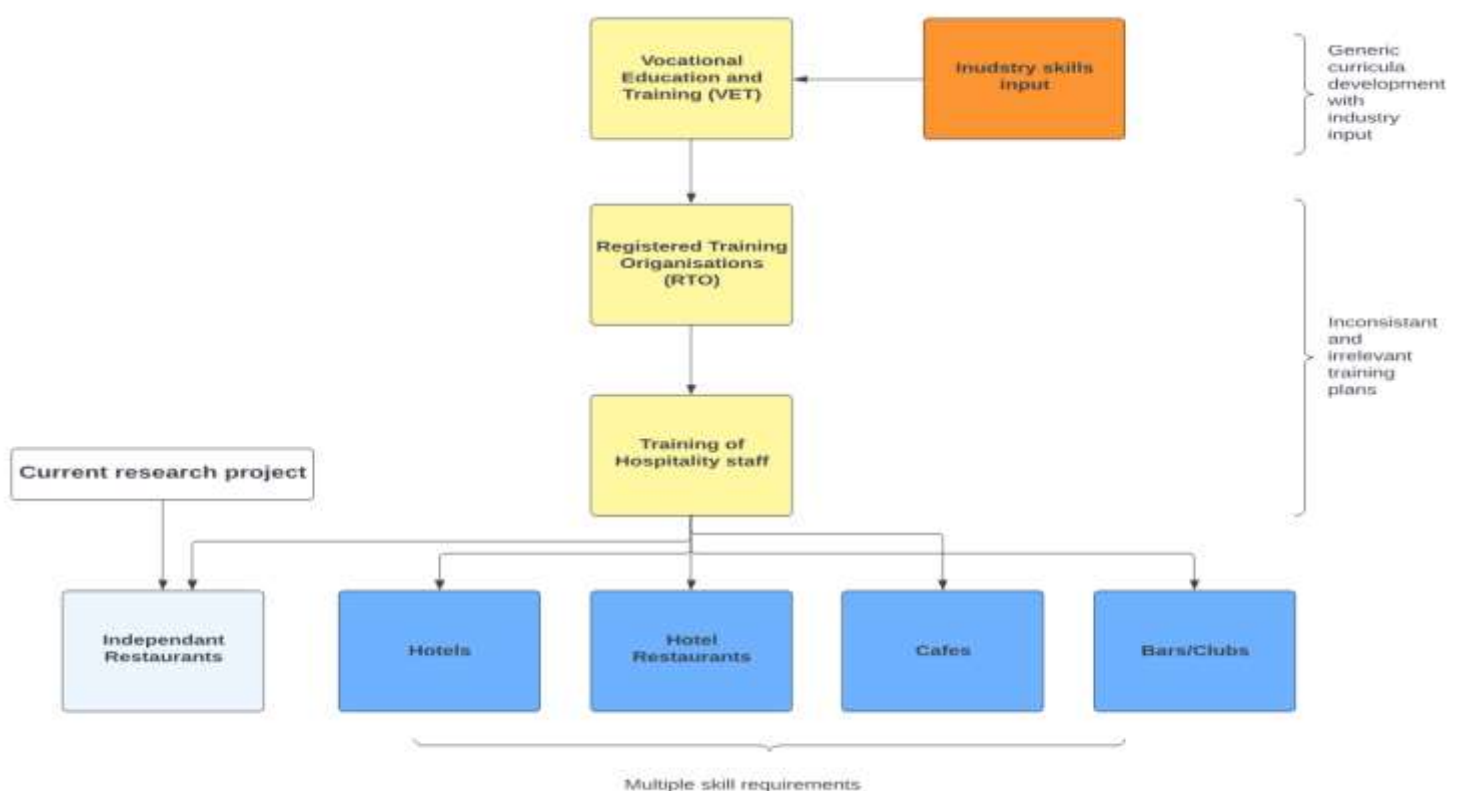
However, given the dynamic nature of the industry, continual refinement of core and elective units becomes imperative. Furthermore, the methods of delivering hospitality training programs must demonstrate a degree of adaptability to address the changes within the hospitality sector. The hospitality industry's technological advancements, shift in consumer preferences and global trends all necessitate a flexible approach to the delivery of hospitality training. Currently, the industry's influence is limited, with government regulators taking a lead role, as depicted in Figure 2. To enhance the responsiveness of hospitality programs, it is necessary to integrate industry insights more directly into the curriculum. This can be achieved through the inclusion of real-time case studies industry collaborations, and innovative teaching methods. By doing so, the hospitality programs will potentially remain responsive to the constant changes in the hospitality landscape.

During the discussion chapter of this thesis, an enhanced model framework, expanding on Figure 2, will be introduced. This new model has been crafted through comprehensive data analysis and has been structured to facilitate learners in acquiring the most relevant and up-to-date skills. This is done by integrating knowledge and facilitating practical experiences. The subsequent sections and chapters will explore the intricacies of the model's components and address the evolving education delivery of hospitality in VET. This model, upon examination, therefore, aims to establish a framework that adapts to the industry changes and enhances the effectiveness of VET in the realm of hospitality.

3.10   Chapter summary

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of the vocational education and training (VET) Hospitality Certificate III and Certificate IV programs that are designed to equip learners with essential skills and knowledge for the hospitality industry. The structure, content, and effectiveness of VET certifications to meet the demands of the dynamic and competitive hospitality sector have also been reviewed to further enhance understanding of the framework and paradigms of teaching hospitality. The chapter provides an insight into the significance of hospitality education and its role in preparing a skilled workforce to cater to the diverse needs of the industry. While it provides a broad sense of outcomes of Certificates III and IV in VET which aligns with government objectives, subsequently, this 'desktop' review of VET explores how these

programs are designed to strike a balance between theoretical learning and hands-on experience, fostering a holistic development of student's abilities and competencies. Furthermore, the chapter delves into an anticipated collaboration between educational institutions and the hospitality industry to create industry-relevant curricula. This evaluation sheds light on the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum, with possible areas for improvement upon more in-depth research.

Finally, the chapter concludes by offering insights into the prospects of Certificates III and IV in Hospitality, considering the changing landscape of the hospitality industry and emerging trends in education and training. It highlights the importance of continuous evaluation and adaptation of the curriculum to remain relevant and effective in preparing the next generation of skilled hospitality professionals.

To continuously evaluate and gain a deeper understanding of the relevance of hospitality vocational education and training curricula to independent restaurants, a thorough analysis of data is imperative. Therefore, the next chapter will explain the methodology and methods employed in this research project to yield meaningful results. This chapter will discuss how specific criteria within the research framework facilitated in-depth analysis and introduce Content Analysis (CA) as the chosen analytical tool. Additionally, the methodology chapter outlines the significance of using this analytical method within the context of the research design.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1   Introduction

This chapter introduces the methodology used to obtain the data for this research project and the analytic techniques used to explore the skill and education requirements of restaurant staff (i.e., front-of-house operations) working in independent restaurants. This chapter introduces the methodology, including paradigms, and research design that guides this project including reasons why the chosen methodology was appropriate for this thesis. The chapter also introduces the stages of the research process, the selection of participants, and a review of the research method, discussing reliability for future study. Further discussions within this chapter include how the researcher dealt with bias and addresses any ethical considerations associated with the data collection.

4.2   Research questions

This research aims to answer the following overarching research question: "What is the relevance of vocational education and training in hospitality to independent restaurants in Australia?" This research project is, therefore, designed to provide data and assist in answering not only the overarching question but also the following research questions and to learn further how vocational education curricula might be improved. It is anticipated that the answers to the following research questions will also assist in the future development of training policies for hospitality vocational education and training and the support education of hospitality:

RQ1: What are the current Australian entry-level hospitality VET curricula and are these qualifications relevant to independent restaurants?

RQ2: How does VET education facilitate the current employability skills at entry-level positions in independent restaurants?

RQ3: How are independent restaurants in hospitality benefiting from VET training?

4.3   Paradigm

It has been suggested that before conducting research, a paradigm or underlying philosophy of the prospective research should be recognised and understood (Davies

& Fisher, 2018). The paradigm is important to understand as this sets out the beliefs of the researcher, which guides the action of the research to be conducted. The adopted paradigm is a way of thinking or viewing the phenomenon and assists with making sense of the complexities within the scope of the research being conducted. While this research paper does not explicitly delve into paradigms research philosophies, it is important to emphasise the philosophical nature of how this research project is being conducted and the analytical framework used to review the data. This ensures that the process reduces bias and is free from subjectivity. Paradigms, therefore, are useful in addressing specific research problems and assist with answering questions, particularly in the heuristic social studies context (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Although there are several paradigms used in research, (e.g., Positivism, Constructivism, and Pragmatism) each has varying perspectives regarding ontology, epistemology, and methodology. This variance is dependent on the research process (methodologies such as mixed methods or qualitative) as well as the researcher's philosophy or world ideology. The choice of paradigm used is also relevant to epistemology, how the researcher anticipates gaining knowledge and their relationship with what is known, and what is to be learnt (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Therefore, the primary objective of this research project is to provide a critical analysis of the relevance of hospitality tertiary education and industry skill requirements. To articulate his thoughts effectively on this topic, the researcher deemed a Pragmatist approach appropriate (Davies & Fisher, 2018). With the premise of Pragmatism based on the principles and real-life experiences of the researcher's perspective of reality, mixed with a social interaction methodology, the Pragmatist's underlying view of constantly questioning and debating the norms benefits this research project and provides depth to the data collection and analysis process (Morgan, 2017). Pragmatism, as a philosophical approach, is typically associated with a mixed methods approach to collecting data. However, in this thesis, the focus is solely on using a single method of data collection: semi-structured interviews. In most instances, Pragmatism often plays a central role in shaping consequences rather than being merely a method for data collection. This approach assists in providing an accurate portrayal of participants within the study area, reflecting their individual realities (Farjoun et al., 2015). This alignment with Pragmatism's ontological perspective underscores the recognition of diverse realities among individuals. Each

person's experience remains distinct and constantly evolving due to the fluid nature of reality (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

By understanding the philosophical underpinnings of research, as articulated by Khanal (2019), the foundation of the research can be developed. With fundamental characteristics of reality (ontology), the interplay between the researcher and participants (epistemology), and the optimal approach to apprehending reality (methodology) collectively work together to define the research paradigm and guide the researcher's approach. In the context of this study, which seeks to offer a distinct comprehension of the significance of introductory vocational courses within independent restaurants, the employment of a Pragmatist approach affords the researcher a meticulously defined methodological framework. This, in turn, promises to yield research outcomes that are both intricate and concise (Farjoun et al., 2015).

4.4   Method

It has been suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018) that the approach to research methods depends on what the research questions are and what issue has been identified. Studies, such as Buchanan and Bryman (2007) and Guetterman (2015), have argued that the selection of research method is based on the personal experience of the researcher, the audience at whom the research is aimed, and the discipline in which the researcher resides (for example; science, humanities or the arts). Although there are many ways to customise research methods to a particular research problem or topic, three main methodological approaches are commonly used to organise the study data gathering, analysis and research framework. The three categories are qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods, and, as Lewis (2015) comments, the choice of methodology is determined by various factors. These factors include the required outcome, budget constraints, data collection method and, to some extent, the experience of the researcher (Lewis, 2015). Therefore, based on these principles and as this current study is to examine the experiences of independent restauranteurs through semi-structured interviews, a qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate. To enhance the qualitative nature employed in this research project, a deliberate focus was placed on the researcher's expertise in both the realms of hospitality and vocational education. Applying this expertise, contributed

to a nuanced comprehension of the insights garnered from in-depth interview data. Consequently, the adoption of a Pragmatism approach served to fortify the epistemological foundation and practical insights that underlie the present-day challenges concerning curriculum pertinence within the hospitality industry. This methodological choice facilitated the cultivation of practical perspectives that shed light on contemporary concerns, a phenomenon that resonates with the observations made by Kelly and Cordeiro (2020).

The use of Content Analysis (CA), which is the process of breaking down data (written or verbal) into measurable segments (Marvati, 2019), in this research, is used as a reflective, qualitative data analytic technique. This has allowed the researcher to reflect on the topics being discussed during the interviews, concerning the overarching and specific research questions. This reflection allows for a change in research questions or direction, which are driven by the participant's opinions and discussions. As outlined by Harkison et al. (2011) the concept of analysing answers to open-ended questions, such as in semi-structured interviews, is to add rich and complex narratives. It also provides the researcher with better comparisons and themes within the social science dynamics and a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon that has presented itself.

To analyse the raw data collected from the semi-structured interviews, and provide flexibility for reflecting on practice, Hsieh and Shannon's (2005), three approaches to CA, were employed. The first approach (Conventional approach) involved observing the conventions of the text and coding the data. The content of the responses in this research project was analysed the content rather than delving deeper into the meaning of the phrases, words, or answers. The second approach (Summative) of the Hsieh and Shannon (2005) analytical framework, allowed for the researchers' interpretations of the data to be drawn upon, which proved crucial for the initial setup of coding of data. This approach was significant due to the limited studies relating to the phenomenon being explored, which in this case, is vocational education of hospitality and its relationship to independent restaurants. Therefore, with few comparisons in the literature, the input from the researchers' experience provided an alternative. Following the two initial approaches, the third approach discussed by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), i.e., Directed Content Analysis, was not used in this research method. This last approach being a theory-driven process, did not fit within the scope of this research project. As there were no predetermined theories and

categories throughout the data analysis, which this third approach relies on, there was no basis to utilise this, in the present research project. See Table 2 for the three approaches to CA development structure utilised in the initial stages of this research.

Table 1

Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) three approaches to content analysis

Approaches	Preliminary stage	Development of codes or keywords	Sources of codes or keywords
Conventional	Begins with observation of text	During data analysis	Derived from data
Summative	Starts with keywords	During data analysis	Keywords derived from researchers or review of literature
Directed	Starts with theory	Before and during data analysis	Derived from theory of relevant research findings

Content Analysis as a data-gathering technique assists the researcher in interpreting meanings in various recorded methods of communication (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). Initially, CA was utilised in quantitative methods, which assisted in the sorting of written data derived from scientific research. However, as quantitative research required greater flexibility requirements, CA was adapted to qualitative measures (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). CA assists in analysing information derived from both primary data (for example, semi-structured interviews) and secondary data (for example, literature reviews) and allows the researcher to find meanings within the context of information gathered, rather than connections between the various forms of data collected. While CA has similar structures and methods of coding topics to other qualitative methodologies, CA allows fragmented data to be organised into structured categories. Other analysis techniques have intrinsic theme connections, however, the epistemology within CA provides direction for the research project and a deeper understanding of the phenomena being investigated through separate topics. CA also incorporates interpretations from the researcher into research analysis rather than

from structured text or codes. CA is also a suitable method when researchers are interested in how participants react or respond to questions in natural or familiar settings (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). It was therefore used in this research as there have been no studies found to date in this research project, that focus on independent restaurants and vocational education.

There are two suggested approaches to analysing data with CA. The first is Conceptual Content Analysis, which is explicit and focuses on repetitive words and phrases. The second is Content Relational Analysis. This is implicit and focuses on the meanings of the uses of words and phrases. The identification of these meanings is either based on the relationship between each of the topics that have been identified or as individual topics (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). The research allowed the participants of the study freedom to express their opinions and not be confined by specific parameters providing a closer relationship between the research questions and the answers sought.

While research endeavours must incorporate a degree of subjectivity, CA has often faced criticism for its perceived lack of scientific rigour. Some scholars have argued that the utilisation of CA can result in excessive researcher influence on the study's outcome. Additionally, CA has been criticised for its potential to overlook certain data sets, mainly due to a propensity for surface-level analysis (Golafshani, 2015). In this current research, these criticisms of CA have been carefully considered and have been addressed in several ways. First, the researcher conducted a thorough review of the data analysed, ensuring all comments provided by the participants were meticulously examined and accounted for. Secondly, a deliberate decision was made to employ a multi-tiered approach to analysis. This entailed subjectively examining each common phrase or word, thereby enhancing the transparency of the researcher's methods. This was one of the various methods to reduce the researcher's influence during data collection and analysis.

Qualitative research offers a natural approach to understanding research problems within specific context settings and according to Golafshani (2015), qualitative research has become a reliable and valid construct of research. Some scholars as indicated by Mackieson and others (2019), have criticised qualitative methods for their perceived lack of scientific rigour. However, when collected data, research, and results appear inconclusive, or insignificant, the integration of technology in data analysis may need to be utilised and the researcher's own experience drawn upon.

Moreover, a reflection of previous studies from the current literature review will ensure the data obtained remains relevant, reliable, and valid promoting transparency throughout the research project. All of which highlight qualitative study as a robust option for conducting research.

Qualitative research is deemed appropriate to this research as the purpose of the study is to explore the views of restaurateurs and restaurant managers. With the descriptive nature and social style that is presented through qualitative research, the aim is to find understandings and not present the findings as absolute truth. This method of research provides the necessary elements to conduct social analysis, and as this research is also heuristic in nature, the aim was to bring new understanding to the requirements of a specific area of hospitality. As there has been little research focusing on independent restaurants (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), using a qualitative method, this study will assist in providing rich and varied information for future research.

4.5   Sampling

With qualitative research there are many types of sampling techniques, however, some researchers who derive results from a qualitative study on relatively small participant cohorts require specific participants or information (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposive sampling, therefore, was utilised in this research design due to the smaller number of participants that were available in the selection process. Purposive sampling identifies the most appropriate research participants to address the research problem and as Palinkas et al. (2015) suggest, purposive sampling allows limited resources to be explored more effectively and can provide the research early identification of themes and topics from post-data gathering analysis. Purposive sampling also helps increase the validity of semi-structured interviews as participants are selected for their knowledge and experiences from years of actively being involved in the industry researched or the areas of interest. Campbell et. al (2020) argued that there is less generalisation within the research data using purposive sampling, as the participants chose to provide greater chances for the saturation of information due to their firsthand experience of the topics being researched.

In this study, purposive sampling was used to enhance the research's rigour and source relevant participants. Previous research has demonstrated that purposive

sampling increases trust on analysed data analysed and resulting outcomes (Campbell et al., 2020). By selecting participants with extensive experience in the restaurant industry, rigour was improved as the participants held diverse and valuable perspectives based on the topics raised during the interviews. This enabled them to provide in-depth insights from their many years of experience, which enriched the researchers' understanding of the topics investigated, leading to better results from the analysis.

4.6   Study participants

The process for selecting participants for semi-structured interviews in this research project was a focus of the comprehensive skills of individuals that will have been acquired through experience working within the hospitality industry, in particular food and beverage operations. This emphasis was established from the outset to ensure the collection of rich and relevant data. Initially, the participants were chosen from two primary categories: individuals with management or leadership backgrounds currently employed within the hospitality industry and owners of independent restaurants (excluding takeaways, franchise, or quick service restaurants (QSR) that have worked in the industry for a minimum period of five years. This criterion aimed to ensure a deep understanding of the operational and skill requirements of the industry. While this initial selection criteria, may appear limited, it was chosen to capture a holistic perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by staff in smaller establishments and how staff education affects their business operations.

Factors such as gender were not considered in the participant selection process, as it was felt that these aspects would not significantly influence the data on vocational education and training requirements for staff employment. Therefore, it made no relevance if the participant was male or female. However, consideration of geographical diversity came into the decision-making process for rural and remote settings as it was recognised that the impact of vocational education programs and staff accessibility to these programs of the hospitality sector differed to that of the metropolitan areas (i.e., education accessibility, hospitality establishment size and skills requirements). As these differences, however, were not part of the scope of the research it was decided to restrict the geographical operations to metropolitan areas.

Lastly, the willingness of participants to openly share their experiences and provide valuable insights into the restaurant sector of hospitality was a significant factor in the decision to recruit the participants. By adhering to this rigorous selection criteria, the research project was able to obtain a small but significant sample, that yielded complex and dynamic data regarding the hospitality industry and its relationship with VET.

Each participant chosen using the criteria was from independent restaurants based in venues located in the Southeast Queensland region. The style of the restaurant was also part of the selection criteria. Quick Service Restaurants (takeaway), franchise ownership, conglomerate ownership and hotel restaurants were eliminated from the selection process, as this research is based on VET education and the relevance to independently owned or run restaurants, which have their unique skill requirements and nuances. The age range of participants was 25-65 years of age and the length of time worked in hospitality ranged from five to 30 years.

Each participant's understanding and experience of the current hospitality industry in Queensland, have been provided. This format includes the use of pseudonyms and is based on the study of Fryer (2019) where he elaborated on the participants within his thematic study, providing a clear demonstration of industry expertise from a small sample.

Participant 1 – AA

AA has worked in the hospitality industry for the past 20 years as a chef. Starting his career in New Zealand, AA travelled to France for three years from Melbourne, before returning to Brisbane and opening his restaurant, which is now in its third year.

AA currently employs approximately 15 staff two of whom are studying vocational education (front of house and cookery). AA does not currently hold any Australian tertiary qualifications.

Participant 2 – FF

FF has been involved in hospitality restaurants for the past 15 years, starting her career within the family restaurant. Having travelled overseas to learn more about hospitality, FF returned to Brisbane 4 years ago to continue the family restaurant's legacy of fine Italian cuisine. This participant has not obtained tertiary qualifications through the Australian Vocational Education and Training system.

Participant 3 – DA

DA is Brisbane-born and after training four years to be a professional chef in Australia, spent 7 years training as a chef in France. Returning to Australia in 2018, DA opened a traditional fine-dining Australian cuisine eatery. Most staff are formally trained, however not in Australia. Qualifications of this participant include vocational education level IV cookery.

Participant 4 – LS

LS is an Italian native who has spent the past 10 years owning a restaurant in Brisbane. Most of LS training and skills were learnt in Italy, however, upon arriving in Australia, various qualifications have been gained, such as a Diploma of Hospitality, Diploma of Management and Certificate IV Cookery.

Participant 5 – HD

This participant originates from France and is a sommelier who opened restaurants in Sydney and Brisbane. HD has trained overseas for many years before opening restaurants that feature Australian and French cuisine paired with wine from various regions of Australia. Currently, this participant does not hold any Australian qualifications.

Participant 6 – CB

CB is the only participant who does not have a hospitality background or qualifications in cookery or hospitality. However, CB does fit the criteria of choosing the research participants, due to owning two restaurants in the Southeast Queensland (Brisbane) region for over five years. CB also works closely with private registered training organisations and assists with apprenticeship training schemes in the kitchen and front-of-house areas. Of Italian descent, CB has learnt hospitality skills from family and through ownership of the restaurants.

4.7   Data collection

Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews. Originally named the "focus interview" by Merton and Kendall (1946, p. 541) the method of interviewing in a less structured manner provides a more relaxed nature of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, thus providing more fluid conversation and

elaboration of information that may be pertinent to the research project (Gill et al*.,* 2008). According to MacIntosh and Morse (2015), semi-structured interviews have gained popularity with researchers due to their unique structure and being adaptable to both research data collection and a research method. MacIntosh and Morse (2015) continue to elaborate on this theory by suggesting that semi-structured interview data that is obtained, cannot be sourced through other means of data collection. They add to this that structured questionnaires or participant observation, as examples do not allow the participants freedom of expression and often provide shallow answers. Having open-ended questions provides in-depth and often more information than required and therefore easier to perform an analysis with a structured systematic method approach.

Using open-ended questions developed in advance, clarification was sought from interviewees about their understanding and attitudes towards skill sets and education in the hospitality industry. All participants were asked a variety of questions about their business of hospitality and whether they were familiar with the Australian vocational education system. As most of the participants were not overtly familiar with vocational education, a small list of core units (12 units listed in total, see Appendix C for the compiled list of units) was introduced during the interview, which was to assist the interviewees with a basic understanding of some of the units taught at the Certificates III and IV level of hospitality vocational education. This list of core units within the hospitality-training sector was to persuade each participant into a particular thought, it was to provide background information on the hospitality training courses.

Each interview was conducted with one participant and one interviewer, and approximately 30 minutes in length. The question topics consisted of the participant's experience in the hospitality industry, with the same seven questions asked during each interview (see Appendix B for the full list of questions). These questions were developed based on the prospective skills required to perform in the dining areas of restaurants (front of house). Follow-up questions were frequently asked to provide participants with an opportunity to elaborate further on their opinions or for clarification purposes.

The interview techniques and questions were formulated from Kallio et al.'s (2016) framework for semi-structured interviews. Kallio et al.'s five-step process consists of

1) identifying prerequisites.

2) using previous knowledge.

3) formulating the semi-structured interview.

4) pilot testing; and

5) presenting the structured interview.

This framework from the first three steps assisted in the structure of the interview questions, which looked at the researcher's first-hand knowledge, incorporated this into the research questions and formulated the semi-structured interview questions. Once the questions had been written and analysed for compatibility, except for step four, (omitted due to time constraints) the questions were presented in an order that provided structure to the interview. This structure also contributed to the objectivity of the researcher conducting the interviews. Basing the interviews on a semi-structured process also provided more credible and proficient information from the interviewee.

All interviews were recorded on a TASCAM™ DR-05X personal voice recording device, and were made aware of the recording status (start and stopping) throughout the interview process. Before each interview commenced, written and verbal consent was provided to the researcher, with each interview taking place in a single session. The online transcription service Otter™ was used to transcribe each post-interview session, and the interviews generated between seven and 12 pages of transcript. Each transcription was then reviewed and edited by the researcher to ensure the accuracy of the account of the interview and any identifiable information of the participant removed. Computer-assisted data analysis software NVivo (release 1.7) was used as an aid in the data management process and assisted in the organisation of manually inputted codes and themes. The researcher and not the supporting software, however, led the research analysis process. As Maguire and Delahunt (2017) stipulated in their research, the use of data analytic software can be an effective organisational tool in thematic analysis, when working through lengthy transcripts and data, and when time is limited, the software can speed up the coding phase, quicker than doing it manually. However, their research also suggests that artificial intelligence and software programs are not effective when the final analysis and theories are created (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

4.8   Interview schedule

After an initial desktop review of the current VET hospitality training package curriculum, a relevant framework for discussion about the understanding of vocational education of hospitality before the interviews was developed. The importance of relevant questions developed for the semi-structured interviews to understand the relevant skills necessary was supported by research from Schaap et al. (2011). Schaap et al.'s (2011) study, which focused primarily on a triangulation of data collection (self-reports, interviews, and concept mapping), concluded that structured forms of data collection, such as one-on-one consultations, provide more insight into industry requirements and personal industry opinions. While focus groups were considered, within a group activity or focus group, there was a chance that each participant may not be so forthcoming in ideas of requirements for each establishment for fear of negative repercussions within the hospitality industry due to the competitive nature of the sector.

The interviews were held at the participant's restaurants in the South-East Queensland region and were approximately 30 to 40 minutes in length, with initial funnelling techniques to develop rapport with the participant at the beginning of the interview (Crawford, 2012). Using the interview funnel technique, whereby the start of the conversation was broad and general in nature (with some discussions excluded from being recorded), to then moving to the specific questions, assisted in providing less risk of bias and misunderstanding the aims and objectives of the interview as it put the interviewee in a more relaxed state (Rosala & Moran, 2022). As indicated previously in this chapter the candidates were owners or managers of independent restaurants. This was opposed to managers in restaurants in hotels, as it was identified the skills and knowledge specific to independent restaurants varied in hotels and hotel restaurants (Robinson et al., 2016). The interviewees each had a minimum of five years of experience in restaurant operations; however, only a few held a current hospitality (VET or HE) qualification higher than an Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) level 4. Each participant was approached directly by the researcher, through a formal email introduction, and an information sheet of the study and the particulars of the university included in the email proposition. A consent form was also required to be completed before the interview took place, which again was emailed to the

participants and returned on the day of the interview (See Appendix D for consent information).

Initially, the researcher anticipated approximately 10-12 participants for this study. However, the final number of participants in the study was six, with various factors affecting the overall number of study interviews. While the saturation point of research data collection is usually determined by gaining sufficient data for accomplishing the research aims and objectives in a research project (Alam, 2020), other barriers to the collection of data played a part in determining the cut-off point of participants in this case. These included the period to collect the data within the post-graduate study period, coinciding with a lack of interest from potential participants hindered the interview numbers. In the initial participant sourcing, a portion of potential participants that were approached did not return the researcher's introduction email. Upon follow-up from the researcher, a majority were not interested in sharing their views and opinions in this research project either. With the criteria of participant selection also excluding a more significant proportion of restaurant managers or owners, such as franchisees of cafes and owners of quick service restaurants (QSR) (takeaways) there were significant restraints on achieving a large quantity of information. However, as Alam (2020) indicated in his research, qualitative data works well with small sampling sizes from semi-structured interviews, due to the amount of information that each interview produces.

4.9   Researcher and reflexivity in qualitative research

In a qualitative study, the researcher plays a significant role within the methodology, as highlighted by Vaandering and Reimer, (2021). This involvement necessitates the practice of reflexivity, which involves recognising the researcher's impact on the research process. Reflexivity becomes especially important in qualitative research as it helps identify and mitigate potential biases and influences that may affect participants and data collection procedures. To ensure the research process is free from bias and to obtain the best results that are beneficial to all parties concerned, it is important to conduct data analysis and interpretation diligently. However, as qualitative research is interactive in nature it has been argued that neutrality in interviews and bias-free data analysis is impossible (Zhang & Okazawa, 2022). In addition, the subjectivity of the researcher needs to be addressed, as the

researcher needs to account for the reasons why the topic or research is taking place. The influence of the researcher on the participants of the study, too, needs to be presented, as this could affect the outcome of interviews and how the interviewees view the questions and their understanding of the topics and industry concerned. Research completed by Miller (2000) found that semi-structured interviews and their informalities provide relevant contributions from the researcher, just as much as the interviewee does. However, Vaandering and Reimer (2021) suggest the researcher's personal views and experiences on the topic also influence how the data are gathered, analysed, and interpreted.

The researcher in this research project is a hospitality professional with a career spanning nearly 30 years. During the time spent in hospitality, the area of food and beverage has been the focus of gaining skills within restaurants. The researcher has trained as a chef, sommelier (wine steward) and professional front-of-house operations (restaurant management). This experience has provided an in-depth understanding of the hospitality industry requirements at various levels or areas of expertise. Spending the last seven years in the vocational education sector as a trainer and assessor of hospitality has provided the researcher's understanding of education requirements of the hospitality industry and compliance issues of policy and procedure of education at the government level, with curricula at an organisational level. With this background, the identification and comprehension of distinct constructs among the participants in the semi-structured interviews were straightforward. To support this reasoning, researchers have argued that conducting research grounded in their personal experiences not only enhances their understanding of social dynamics but also contributes to the investigation of the topic (Zhang & Okazawa, 2022)

However, it is important to note that during the interviews, the researcher did not intentionally impose his values, opinions, or beliefs on the participants. Drawing on the acquired experience allows the researcher to comprehend and identify the discussed processes, as this experience closely aligns with those who have been interviewed. However, the research focus needed to remain on understanding the phenomenon that was being investigated (Zhang & Okazawa, 2022). This meant the researcher had to put aside his understanding of the topics being discussed during the analysis phase of the research project and keep an open mind regarding the outcomes of the interviews. This is discussed further in the section on reliability and validity.

4.10   Data analysis

To investigate relationships between what was typical of hospitality skill requirements and what is currently being taught in vocational education, the participants needed to understand the basics of vocational education. This was to ensure the participant understood each question and provided answers that were relevant to the research. Using the Content Analysis (CA) method allowed an overall interpretation of the data that was obtained, and three phases were used to determine initial codes. In this research, codes were devised from the keywords that were identified, and then the interviews were broken down into themes, consisting mainly of two-to-three-line statements. An example of this breakdown can be viewed in Table 3, whereby the Vocational Education sector has been created as a category and the theme within this is the understanding of the hospitality VET from the perspective of the participant or hospitality professional. As no research framework is completely linear, this structure of data analysis allows multiple revisions and constant alterations to ensure the themes are correct, and in line with the research questions analysed. These changes were identified through analysis of answers from initial interviews and reviewed against other participants, ensuring relevant questions were considered. In addition, using this framework provides the flexibility to adapt multiple theories and does not have the restrictions as that of other qualitative analysis ideals.

Table 3

Semi-structured interview data

Participant	Duration	Pages of transcript (# pages single spaced)	Number of occurrences of a code
AA	33.47	12	70
FF	30.28	9	70
DA	36.27	12	46
LS	32.10	9	53
HD	34.57	10	67
CB	23.04	7	21
Average	*31*	*9.8*	*54.5*
Total	*189.73*	*59*	*267*

Creating themes based on the underlying research questions provides a pattern of understanding the industry's perspective on vocational education from the

independent restaurateur's point of view. This also provided the necessary evidence to support the topics that emerged. As Braun and Clarke (2013) have noted in their earlier research, themes do not need to be specific but do need to be relevant to the research questions. As such, analysis of identified themes took place to ensure that they were relevant, related to the research question, made sense and the data supported the themes. An example of the analysis of identified themes was the removal of an initial topic that was repeated by the researcher. Asking each participant, the following question, 'What skills need to be included in VET?' was neither answered sufficiently in the interviews nor understood by the interviewees due to their not being involved with vocational education and not knowing what was needed in vocational education curricula. The data that was obtained did not support any topics or development of what should be in VET curricula of hospitality and therefore was eliminated from the analysis process. As further analysis continued by re-reading transcripts, sub-topics developed, and more definitions and refinement took place.

Each recorded interview was transcribed verbatim and edited for errors manually. This was completed this way so the researcher could recall relevant information during the interviews and become familiar with the data as quickly as possible. However, as analysis of this nature is a continuous process, each review of the interviews revealed further topics and a deeper understanding was reached. The literature review also assisted the researcher in observing the best aspects concerning the topics of investigation. The literature review, working in conjunction with the data analysis, helped identify further areas around the research question.

The analysis, therefore, was completed in three phases, with each phase outlined in further detail in the sections below.

4.10.1   Phase 1

In the initial stages of the analysis, the researcher read through the collected data thoroughly. This was to gain an overall sense of the data that was collected and the notes and thoughts during the process of the researcher. This initial data analysis built a framework of various meanings, understandings and participants' concepts of answers that were relevant to this paper. This process was completed several times with breaks in between to ensure that the meanings and constructs of the participant's answers were not interpreted differently. During this beginning phase of data analysis,

the researcher noted similarities of topics that were digressive to the initial questions asked, and these similarities from the participants were analysed further.

4.10.2   Phase 2

The second phase involved the identifying of topics that emerged from the different interviews. The identified topics were deconstructed and analysed further to ensure there were minimal errors or missed areas. Each topic was examined for contradictions between each transcript and if there were any ambiguous meanings from the constructs of each participant. Furthermore, this phase was to identify the levels of meaning that potentially could identify the objectives raised within each of the research questions and the overall project. With the deconstruction of the topics, as identified in the research (Kleinheksel et al., 2015) any underlying information in the current context of the data collected is revealed. In this case, any discussions that are relevant to the hospitality curriculum and the hospitality industry.

4.10.3   Phase 3

In the third and final phase of the analysis, following the examination of various topics, a synthesis that bridges the realms of education and practical experience has been devised. This convergence, labelled in the Hospitality Training Model to be introduced later in the thesis, as "Effective hospitality training", integrates insights from the reviewed literature to bolster the stability and credibility of the findings incorporated into the reviewed literature to ensure the stability and credibility of the findings. Employing the common practice of coding each interview, typical in the initial stages of data analysis after semi-structured interviews in qualitative studies, yielded four distinct topics. These topics provided the researcher with guidance and direction for the analysis and highlighted areas that needed further exploration. As the data analysis advanced and a comprehensive comparison of each interview unfolded, three main questions emerged through inductive reasoning. These questions, 'What are the vocational education requirements for industry', 'How do restaurateurs perceive vocational education and 'What are the benefits to the restaurateurs or managers of employing vocationally trained hospitality staff'- arose from ongoing cross-examination during the initial coding process.

4.11 Trustworthiness

Semi-structured interviews used in this research aimed to understand what hospitality professionals see as necessary skills with the framework of vocational education and what future developments will be required for the operations of restaurants regarding staff skills. As the participants are professionals in their respective hospitality areas and have first-hand knowledge and experience of restaurant operations, they are considered experts, providing the level of trustworthiness required for data collection in this project. However, there are complications to the level of trustworthiness of the participants and validity as trusting values are entirely determined by the researcher conducting the interviews. As Kallio et al. (2016) indicated in their research there are multiple influences when conducting interviews. This includes researcher bias towards the subject and the data collection procedure itself. James and Busher (2006), noted that to ensure credibility and transferability it is important that the researcher has the experience and background knowledge to discuss the topics without boundaries. Having the industry experience of the researcher explained to each participant before the interviews, allowed trust and rapport with each interviewee, leading to the interviewee divulging deeper information (James & Busher, 2006). Another way that bias was minimized was through a clear set of rules (Price & Smith, 2021). This included a set of prompt questions established before each interview. While other irrelevant topics may have been discussed during the interviews, having the questions allowed prompts for relevant discussions and to stay on track (Zhang & Okizawa 2022). Other methods during the analysis of the data to remain as impartial as possible were to record the data and transcribe the interviews verbatim. This allowed the researcher to remain as objective as possible and minimise bias (Husband, 2020).

4.12 Ethical considerations

After ethics approval (No. H22REA046), the researcher initially identified participants through informal research over the Internet to identify the owners of restaurants in the Southeast Queensland region. This was done by completing a Boolean word search through the online search engine, Google. The keywords used in the online search were, 'independent', 'restaurateurs', 'dining', 'hospitality',

'Brisbane', and 'Southeast Queensland'. From this identification method, contact details were sought, which was predominately email. As email was the preferred method of contact, as stated on individual websites of the restaurant, a draft introduction email was written and contextualised accordingly to the specific person being contacted. The sample was then expanded by including the search parameters, to include managers of independent restaurants, who were contacted to ascertain if they would participate in the research project. A few of the participants were sourced from recommendations from industry peers and one was known to the researcher.

Various researchers (Lindgren et al., 2020 and Marvasti, 2019) suggest that Content Analysis is unobtrusive with fewer ethical issues needing consideration at the outset of this research. This is mainly due to the nature of the semi-structured interviews and the topics were not industry sensitive. This is also highlighted during the research project as the participant's opinions are not analysed subjectively. While there was minimal risk to the participants of the interviews, the researcher ensured ethics remained a top priority throughout the study. As data collection through individual interviews is the centre point of this research it was imperative to adhere to the ethical code of conduct that is issued by the University of Southern Queensland and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (updated 2018).

The initial key principles of this project were included:

- All participants gave consent to being interviewed before the interview commencement.
- All participants did so voluntarily, and of their own free will.
- All information and materials that the participants provide (verbal or otherwise) have been kept confidential; and
- Research outcomes were monitored, and ethics were adhered to and maintained.

All information upon completion of the research will be held through the university's Research Information Management (RIM) system. Further to this, all participants were over the age requirements and did not demonstrate any impaired mental capacity (from their ability to perform the duties they hold in their workplace).

In line with the ethics approval, any recorded material will be erased after 5 years (following final approval by the USQ Research Committee and USQ Ethics

Committee). This will ensure minimal risk related to confidentiality. It was also imperative that the methods outlined in this chapter were followed to ensure the validity and reliability of the study.

4.13   Chapter summary

The goal of this chapter was to outline the various research methods used in this project. It was also to provide clarity on the participants and the process of data collection. The methods of analysis were outlined and using Content Analysis with a pragmatic approach as the core structure of analysis assists in providing potential answers of what is required in VET Hospitality curricula to support the future of skills required in the hospitality industry have been developed. Furthermore, it was important to develop a succinct data analysis process, to allow more defined topics for not only this research but for discussions in the future.

The significance of future studies is underscored by the hybrid nature of education and practical components of the hospitality industry, particularly independent restaurants. Currently, research on specific areas of hospitality remains limited (Robinson et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the forthcoming chapters of this research paper unveil the study results in Chapter 5 and provide a definitive and detailed discussion in Chapter 6 to elucidate the implications of this study. These chapters will also lay the groundwork for future research in the tertiary education teaching of entry-level hospitality in Australia.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1   Introduction

This chapter sets out the results of the semi-structured interviews undertaken in this research project and provides an analysis framework for the post-analysis discussion concerning the research questions. The data related directly to each of the research questions resulted in seven topics, each of which is detailed in this chapter. As this research project is predominately interpretive in nature, there is very little statistical data produced. However, the included material within this chapter which is quantitative is to provide descriptive statistics to help identify common themes or topics. These tables also provide a useful visual platform from which a qualitative review of the data analysed can be reviewed and implemented in answering the research questions. A descriptive design was chosen for this study since this would allow the researcher to analyse the raw data in depth without being encumbered by a theoretical bias (Lochmiller, 2021; Wentzel, 2021). As qualitative methods would allow the researcher to inquire into the attitudes and sentiments of the participants involved (Chew et al., 2021) this methodology was chosen. Furthermore, a qualitative methodology permitted the researcher to acquire an in-depth knowledge of the situation being studied (Shank, 2006; Lambert & Lambert, 2012).

As described in Chapter 4, reflexivity and the procedures surrounding the methods of removing bias, assisted in identifying preconceptions and realities. This awareness of reflexivity has helped the researcher focus on interpreting the data in a relatively impartial manner. Furthermore, the researcher attempted to maintain as reasonably possible, an emotional distance between the participants during the interviews, to reduce any possible persuasion of beliefs of what the researcher wanted the interviewees to say or produce the right answers. Throughout the interviews, follow-up questions were only used as a prompt to encourage the participants to engage further with the researcher and not to induce provocation towards either industry (VET industry or the hospitality industry).

5.2   The interview questions

The purpose of this study was to explore individual perspectives in order to provide an understanding of the relationship between the current curriculum of hospitality (Certificate III and IV) in vocational education and independent restaurants, which are a part of the hospitality infrastructure. This research did not aim to create theories but rather to provide an understanding of how hospitality vocational courses assist in the performance of restaurants and if they are necessary from an employment standpoint. Therefore, to understand this relationship and to answer each research question effectively, structured interview questions were required to have a significant focus on vocational education equally combined with hospitality practice knowledge. This was so the participants could comprehend each question and freely express their attitudes and opinions during the interviews.

Originally, ten questions closely aligned with the three research questions were asked in the semi-structured interviews. However, after the first two interviews, it was clear that three of the interview questions were not relevant and subsequently were removed in future interviews. The questions concerned were, "What skills are needed since the COVID-19 pandemic", "In what ways are government policies helping the industry staff shortage" and "What skills are needed in the future post-COVID-19?". As this research project is not concerned with the ongoing pandemic, the effect of the pandemic on hospitality or the staff shortages due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the three questions were deemed irrelevant to the research being conducted. However, it is important to note that this did not affect the overall results and the answers from the original questions of the initial two participants, were not included in the initial coding and theme creation. For a full list and details of the final questions asked during the semi-structured interviews, please see Appendix B.

Initial coding in this research project was achieved through the commonality of words found within the data obtained and assigning a particular code to similar connotations. Seven topics were identified (see Table 4), which then began the framework of topics concerning the research questions with each section or topic that was mentioned in the interview multiple times. When coding was completed, seven topics arose from the semi-structured individual interviews.

Table 4 provides the correlation to the main topics that were identified which also highlights an example of what was discussed during the interviews (not verbatim) and the conclusions to the main topics

Topics	Initial topics (identified during analysis)	Examples of topic discussion/questions	Number of references in transcripts	Percentage (referenced in transcripts)
Industry relevant and related skills	Different approaches in hospitality	Potential staff should understand the industry and the differences	14	4.29%
	Skills required in hospitality (non-specific)	Skills can be taught on the job. No theory training needed	37	11.35%
	Training for current staff	Helps to upskill the current staff	15	4.60%
	New skills to work in hospitality	From a business aspect it is good for the staff to take an interest in the business	3	0.92%
	Certificates and experience	What certificates are required or experience preferred	7	2.15%
	Customer service skills	Some staff naturally have it	3	0.92%
VET Programs	VET education required in hospitality	Makes no difference in employing staff	24	7.36%
	Knowledge of hospitality vocational education	What is your current understanding of hospitality VET education?	43	3.99%
	Knowledge of VET (From industry perspective)		13	1.53%
	Expectations of VET Student to employer	Where were the graduates? What are the expectations once employed?	4	1.23%
VET Relevancy	How should we teach hospitality	Should learning hospitality be conducted in the restaurant?	6	1.84%
	Teaching in classroom as requirement of hospitality in VET		1	0.31%
	Changes required in VET	The changes in VET consistently changing	12	3.68%
	Relevant courses (units) to industry	From a restauranteur understanding of VET	3	0.92%
Experience vs. education	Passion for the hospitality industry	Education could provide a passion for the industry	42	12.88%
	No career opportunities	Some people do not see a future in the industry	2	0.61%
	Experience or education	What is better, experience on the job or education, then work experience?	43	13.19%
	Industry to train new entrants	Would it be better for industry to teach new employees of hospitality?	7	2.15%
Formal training	Vocational curriculum - is it required	Is hospitality necessary for future employment?	7	2.15%
	Technology and VET	Technological changes in the industry. Needs to be addressed in VET	2	0.61%
	The hospitality industry needs change	The hospitality industry needs to change to attract future staff	18	5.52%
Soft Skill needs	Emotional intelligence	Having staff think for themselves and act appropriately using common-sense	21	6.44%
	Changes in hospitality	Changes of skill requirements in hospitality	16	4.91%
Career in hospitality	What is hospitality	The changes of the meaning of hospitality have put people off a career in hospitality	7	2.15%
	Restaurants v Hotels	Hotels are more interested in VET. Independent restaurants, not so much. No incentives.	2	0.61%
	Changes in hospitality	Change of hospitality involvement to encourage future staff	16	4.91%
	Changes at government level	Government restrictions on F&B outlets	12	3.68%

5.3   Hospitality industry skills

Opinions varied with the initial discussion of hospitality skills. To begin with, the interviewees were asked about what skill requirements were for their staff and if (entry-level) qualifications to obtain work were required, garnered responses that qualifications were not necessarily the main consideration. As interviewee AA suggested: 'But I've never asked someone if they have a certificate when I hire them. So, there's no requirement for them to have it to work, so to speak. And when we hired the apprentice, we had to make sure there was either my or Shane's kitchen. But other than that, no." It also became apparent throughout the interviews that the current employment market of hospitality was a matter of having anybody willing and able to work in the restaurants. According to one owner, finding suitable staff has become such an issue that for him, "staffing is at the stage where you're just happy to have someone turn up" indicating current skill requirements were indifferent to most of the participants. However, all participants commented on emotional intelligence, and having this rudimentary skill was common throughout the conversations. It was often commented by the participants that this was becoming a main attribute of staff to work in the front of the house (in the front of the restaurant) areas. According to one participant, "[we are looking for] young staff that has just a switched-on head, good attitude", although he admitted was difficult to find this attribute within the current staffing applicants.

As hospitality in Australia is seen as a transient industry and not having serious career opportunities, sourcing staff with the right attitude is often difficult. Participant DA highlighted these issues by saying, "...over [in Europe] front a house is a respected industry. It is a career industry. And it's a lifetime career. And so, people train and study at work in establishments where they're respected, they earn very good money", he further adds, "Over here, I never had a student for front of the house, apply for a job, [just] walk through the door. And even if they did, I don't think they would be looking to, I think very rarely would find someone, who is looking to be a restaurant manager in their career later, or sommelier". According to one restaurateur, the status of employing staff is, as he described, "5-10 years ago, it was all about, you know, how, how large was your CV? How, what restaurant had you worked for, you know, what

were you studying? Have you been on that job front for at least a year? Have you got that experience to be able to conduct this role within this restaurant?". He further describes the employment market moving away from qualified staff and suggests, "Now, at this current point in time? Do you have two hands? Do you have two legs and [do] you have a brain between your ears? [We] will teach you everything you need to know. So, while that's not this straightforward, straight arrow projection of what the hospitality industry should be about, that's literally where we're at right now today".

Several participants also speculated that low wages are an issue within the hospitality industry. As participant DA indicated, "…the problem in the industry right now is everyone's chasing money. And that's not what the industry was always bought for. It was about the experience, the family, the vibe, the connectivity, and the actual restaurant. And we did it because we loved food, and we loved wine. So, the money will come for any right candidate that's willing to do the hard yards". Another interviewee also found similar issues with the ability to pay hospitality staff, due to severe competition with larger conglomerates. He continued further, suggesting that government intervention was required. Qualifying his comments by suggesting that, "the industry needs to be legislated a bit better. And, you know, it's, it starts with where, where the authority gives a license to how many restaurants, they should limit it to given say in this area, they should only limit about two restaurants. That's it. No, not 500."

Comparisons to other industries versus the working conditions in the hospitality industry, with the unsocial hours, low wages, and what is generally perceived by the public as an uneducated job, were discussed by all participants throughout the data-gathering interviews. As interviewee LS commented, "It's the perception of the people? Yeah, I think, too. I think some staff has some very bad experiences. And it's called the word of mouth. Now, word of mouth has worked very well for the restaurant's reputation but works very well for the restaurant staff operation point of view, you know, through people, [talking]" The discussion progressed into staff-related matters, which the participants were queried about the presence of staff shortages. Further adding that if staff shortages were common, and was this attributed to inadequate training or lack of hospitality education. All participants unanimously denied the existence of such a predicament at present. One participant HD framed it this, "So it's an interesting fact because I don't think there is a shortage of people. I think we are used to being used to utilise casual force from overseas for many years. And, that's utilising our forces

from Australia. And I think there is probably more to do in terms of how we build up that pipeline. From a young age, to now."

Asking the participants whether the industry should train on the job only, instead of classroom-based teaching, respondent DA suggested that government should provide more apprenticeship-style incentives. "This could potentially reduce the risk of staff attrition rates." He elaborated further by saying, "Because, for minimum wage for somebody that doesn't know how to do anything, you have to pay him, now $23.00 So casual, how much money and you still have to train them? And then when you train them, and they learn then they move on." To ascertain if VET could benefit the hospitality industry with any future potential staffing issues, the interviewee's understanding of VET was asked. A few respondents replied that they were not aware of how vocational education could benefit them. Asking how a range of qualifications over experience could benefit their restaurants or hospitality in general, participant AA response was, "Experience is more powerful than a piece of paper. Yeah, you cannot, you cannot take away that experience from someone, you can, [however], take a piece of paper away from that person if he doesn't have the experience."

5.4   Benefits of VET in hospitality

Although several participants during the interviews indicated they were unaware of how or what hospitality vocational education consists of, all believed varying amounts of vocational education could be of benefit to the industry. One participant, FF described her staff's attitude towards learning vocational education as a personal endeavour, stating, "They [the restaurant staff] want to understand, what do you do for functions? How do you read a spreadsheet? Like, can I learn how to do the cash-up? Like, what's the difference between the wages and they want to understand the whole thing front to back? And having them have that understanding is a brilliant thing, because then they know why they're doing what they're doing." On the other side however, if staff are not interested in continuing a career in hospitality, she voiced the following statement, "Whereas, with some of the other staff who aren't as invested long term, you can see that it's like, I just do this because I've been told to, but there's no understanding of drive or passion behind what they're doing."

After presenting a list of the 12 core units in the vocational education courses to the participants to view, most agreed that a few of the courses presented would be

beneficial. Some of the financial units as example was discussed. However, most commented on customer service units are better to have an experience rather than learning from a textbook, so this was seen as not relevant to their establishment. Also, the context of the curriculum was questioned, which was how it related to restaurants, or was the focus was more on hotels and events.

Comparatively, emotional intelligence was commented on throughout all interviews as an important aspect of working in an area of restaurants. Most interviewees also mentioned they were looking for emotional intelligence over a qualification. As a few participants stated, "We just need to have people (staff) working. A qualification doesn't also mean that they know what they are doing either." Some interviewees mentioned that the classroom is no place to teach hospitality and therefore experience in the restaurant was going to be more beneficial.

Overall, there was a mixed reaction and comprehension of the benefits associated with hospitality vocational training. Amidst the diverse reactions, one participant's comment stands out. When asked about the comparative merits of VET training versus on-the-job learning, participant DA voiced a thought-provoking perspective: " Where are these front-of-house students that, you know, you've been teaching? I know, (redacted) at TAFE and he said that some is getting taught over there as well. Where are they going to work? Because I don't think there'd be a better team to learn under than the three workings here. They're not coming to work in a place like this. What are they looking for in their career? they can just go and get a pretty job in a hotel, food and beverage manager and then just sit in an office for life?"

5.5   Experience versus education

When it comes to experience versus education, most participants were adamant that experience should be a common aspect of learning hospitality. As Participant CB claimed, "Along the way, they need to be exposed to what the real industry is, to what really is expected of them to know how they need to perform within those parameters. Because it's not just sunshine, rainbows, and lollipops!" However, as interviewee FF commented on whether the theory is better in a classroom situation or the hospitality environment, this is what she has noticed, "Yeah, I think the theory is important. However, if you are just someone was to hand me a book on hospitality, I would say like, thank you. I actually do not [need training] as I'm running the

restaurant, like, you know, like, I'm actually in here I'm doing it. And you'll learn more that way [through experience]. But then you miss that whole background on why you are doing what you are doing." On the other side of training and whether this should only be completed in a restaurant or on-the-job training, it was clear that the participants thought this a good idea. However, who is going to pay for the extra training aspects and whether should this be accredited through government schemes was discussed throughout the interviews.

When asked the question if the hospitality industry needs change, and more emphasis on education might be worthwhile, one participant responded by saying, "I think it is still very much seen as a transitional thing [the hospitality industry]." She further adds, "I think making that more accessible [education], (...) if the government had incentives for small restaurant business owners, to encourage them [hospitality students] to get out there to get those jobs to get that experience. Then to go and start their own business in the restaurant industry like that would be brilliant because it would, both get them into the businesses while they need the staff, but also help them [students] be invested in what they're doing every single day."

Some participants identified a lack of passion for the industry as another noteworthy aspect. While acknowledging this as an industry-wide concern, a few interviewees specifically noted that VET might not be effectively encouraging students to consider a career in hospitality. This response could potentially be linked to the courses on offer or the students' outcomes. An understanding of the diversity of the hospitality industry too could be an ongoing concern. This sentiment was echoed by a restaurateur who remarked, 'I think there is a misconception or perception from the young generation in Australia, that hospitality it's only a job to supplement in an income, while we're studying, and then we move to someone else...'. However, as other interviewees pointed out, cultivating a genuine passion for the industry holds the utmost importance for the longevity of the hospitality industry, and the passion for the industry needs to start at an operational level.

5.6   Chapter summary

In summary, the outcomes highlighted within this chapter reveal that the individuals interviewed struggled to identify the essential, specific skills demanded by the hospitality industry and independent restaurants. The participants too were

unaware of the benefits that could be obtained from tertiary education. Given that many were primarily focused on the day-to-day operations of their overall businesses, there was a trend indicating that hiring staff based on qualifications obtained was not of paramount concern. However, the analysis underscored the significance of emotional intelligence, common sense, and personable attributes in the selection of staff members.

The scrutiny of these results has yielded the identification of seven key themes, which collectively constitute the analytical framework essential for addressing this research inquiry in determining the relevance and necessity of vocational education and training within the realm of independent restaurants in the hospitality sector. Subsequently, the following chapter delves into a comprehensive discussion of these findings, explaining the analytical framework and developing clarity of the research question outcomes.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1   Introduction

This research aims to further understand the relevance and requirements of training and education in independent restaurants within the hospitality industry. Moreover, the present research project seeks to provide insight into what the expectations are of staff training and education as well as skills required from a restaurateur and manager's perspective. This chapter, therefore, reflects on previously reviewed literature and discusses the results and topics of this research project as identified through the analysis of the semi-structured interviews. This chapter also explains the results of the research questions and what is required and currently taught at entry-level hospitality training. The findings of this project, it is anticipated, might serve as a useful starting point for future studies on vocational curriculum relevancy to the hospitality industry. It is also intended that this research project will address the absence of studies or research in the separate areas of hospitality for example, independent restaurants rather than focus on researching the industry in its entirety and at the management level. However, it is important to note that the interpreted results need to be approached with caution due to the limitations of the current research. These limitations and any consequences of the research project's design are discussed in the next chapter. This chapter also introduces a concept diagram to assist in the comprehension of the research findings post-analysis and subsequent subtopics to provide a visual aid for the conclusion in the next chapter.

6.2   Analysis

Some academics (e.g., Alhelalat, 2015; Baum, 2021; Lee et al., 2021), and industry leadershold the view for improved outcomes in hospitality, regarding the education of skills, there has to be better integration between industry and education providers. These ideals are further highlighted in several studies focused on the vocational, education and training sectors (e.g., Dung, 2021; Harris, 2015; Wheelahan, 2015), where industry liaison with the education sector is paramount. This has been discussed in a recent study from the UK (Richmond & Regan, 2022), with suggestions that restaurant training proves more beneficial to students in hospitality situations than

in a classroom. While most research on the hospitality industry is focussed on the relationship between the two sectors (i.e., hospitality and VET), and basic skill requirements are the main focus, most studies of education in hospitality fail to address separate areas of the service industry and the individual education requirements (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019). This research project, therefore, provides data based specifically on one area of the hospitality industry (independent restaurants) and answers the overall research question of whether there is relevance in the hospitality curriculum in VET to the hospitality industry. It is anticipated that the findings of this research project will benefit both sectors: Vocational Education and Training (VET); and Hospitality. The following section provides a conceptual diagram of the results, and to assist in understanding each topic related to the analysis outcome, a review of seven lead topics is delineated in the following section. This concept diagram assists in providing a link in the relationship between industry, vocational education, and current hospitality curricula. An emphasis on the interrelationship between the subtopics and how they fit into the scope of the research question is followed up in the subsequent section. The analysis findings drawn up in the following diagram, also assist in answering the overarching research topic and sub-topic research questions, which are presented in the conclusion, Chapter 7.

6.3   Introducing the hospitality training model

The Hospitality Training Model (HTM) illustrated in Figure 3, visually represents a symbiotic relationship between current VET training programs and the hospitality industry. Uniquely tailored for this research project, the model introduces a strategic framework aimed at enhancing the existing VET curriculum delivery as depicted in Chapter 3 (p.43) The centrality of this model, is in its deliberate emphasis on aligning with on-the-job practical skills. By illuminating the implications arising from the fusion of hospitality practical training, the HTM ensures students and participants in hospitality training attain proficiency in both concepts of hands-on experience and academic knowledge.

The unveiling of the intricate interconnection between VET and the hospitality industry, within the model, serves to underscore the importance of integrating practical experience and theoretical knowledge in curriculum delivery. The model asserts that a holistic approach, one that incorporates both facets, is imperative for achieving

optimal results in student education within these sectors. However, the effectiveness of the model hinges on clearly defining these interconnections and conducting a thorough exploration of its key elements.

To ensure the success of the HTM, it is essential to clearly define the collaborative synergies between the hospitality sector and VET. Therefore, the subsequent sections break down the nuances of the Hospitality Training Model and encompass potential learning outcomes necessary and crucial for fostering successful careers and upskilling the workforce. Particularly in independent restaurants and more broadly, the hospitality industry.

6.3.1 Skill alignment to industry

The top row of the model, characterised by the identification of the seven topics, is closely aligned with the skill requirements for success in the hospitality industry. These skills are acquired through the integration of relevant curriculum, and training programs offered by VET institutions, forming a pivotal component of the Hospitality Training Model. As the initial topics within this row suggest, the adaptability of the curriculum to meet industry standards and demands, with experiential learning acquired through practical experience, will equip future graduates with essential skills and knowledge required for employment within the hospitality sector. This approach serves a dual purpose: not only does it facilitate entry-level employees into the hospitality industry but could also contribute to the long-term sustainability of the industry by ensuring a highly skilled workforce.

6.3.2 Bridging the gap

A fundamental aspect of the Hospitality Training Model revolves around the significance of experiential learning. This involves investigating how VET programs can be integrated into real-world and hands-on approaches within the context of the hospitality industry. Within the immediate segments of the model, the significance of industry partnerships is highlighted in various sections, illustrating how the convergence of two areas of education namely, theoretical comprehension and on-the-job practical learning, strengthens the connection between VET and the specific facets of the hospitality industry that students focus on mastering.

6.3.3 *Implications*

The integration of hospitality VET as outlined in this training model has several important implications. By aligning the VET programs with the specific needs of the hospitality industry, students are more inclined to identify the necessary skills and competencies, in conjunction with their educational provider. Possessing specific skills required in various sectors of the industry, not only enhances employability but increases future career prospects. From the perspective of the hospitality industry, the training model underscores the importance of industry involvement in curriculum development. This participation has the potential to enhance the relevance and responsiveness in VET institutions and foster a culture of continuous improvement of delivery and student outcomes.

By incorporating this model into regular training sessions, the aim is to create a holistic education experience that addresses the identified gaps in the VET curricula, and the skills necessary in a multi-faceted industry. Through collaboration between knowledge and skill, this model seeks to define vocational education and training in hospitality, fostering a new generation of professionals, well-prepared for the challenges and opportunities that the industry provides.

Figure 3

Hospitality Training Model indicating educational benefits between VET and Hospitality industry
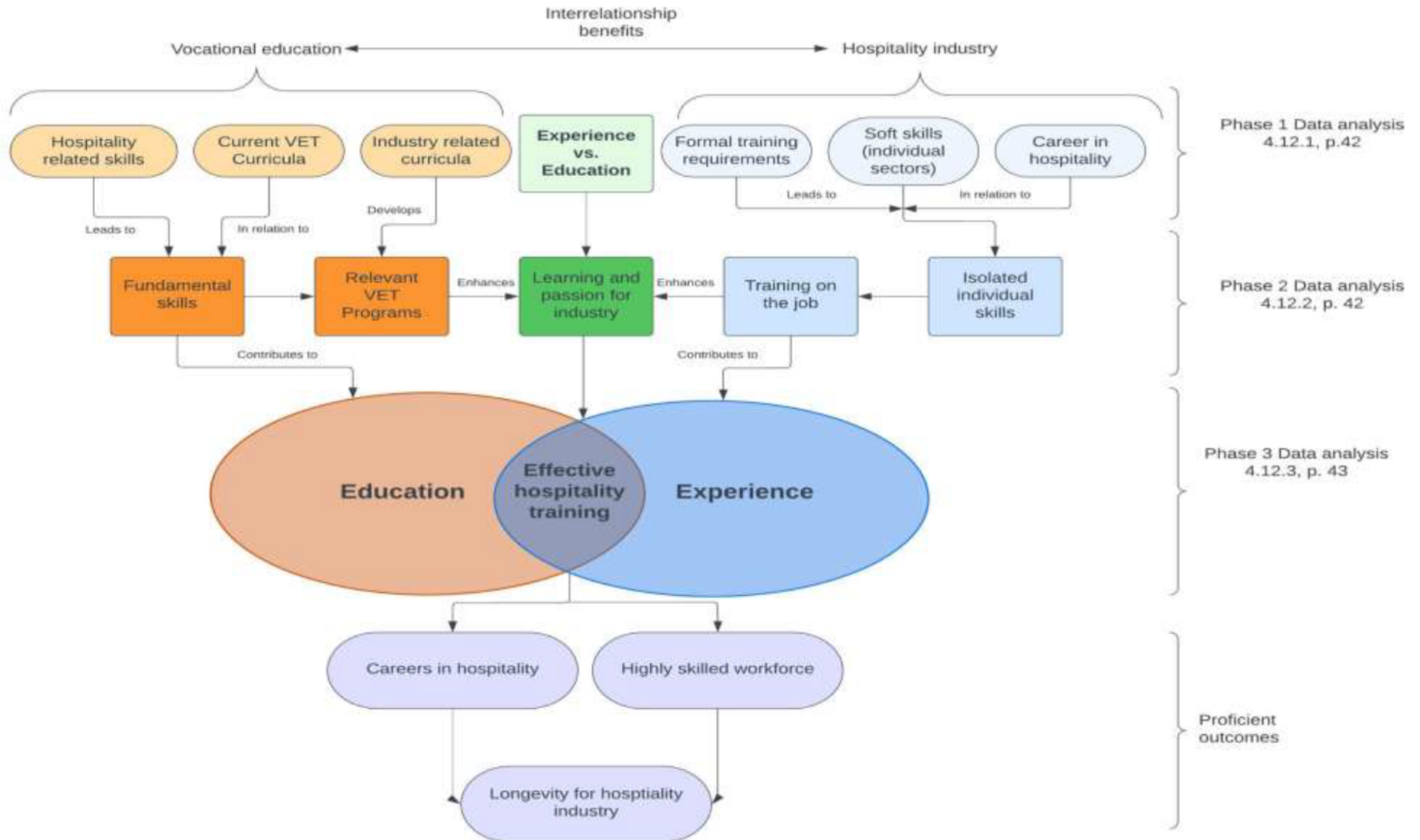
6.4   Summary of findings by topic

As has been identified in Table 1 of the previous chapter (Chapter 5), seven topics emerged from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews. These topics, which consisted of Industry-related skills (as a topic, not the individual skills), VET programs, VET relevancy, Experience vs. Education, Formal training requirements, Soft skill needs and Careers in hospitality, provided the necessary starting points for further analysis. Upon further review, the subtopics emerged concerning the initial seven topics. The sub-topics also lend themselves to the initial data analysis to support the underlying principles of what is required to enhance the student experience in hospitality courses. These subtopics then merge to suggest the blend of education (i.e., on-the-job experience and classroom-based teachings) would provide students and staff of hospitality the best education outcomes, highly skilled employees, and potential career-focused students. Further analysis of the seven topics that have been identified precedes the concept diagram.

Topic 1 – Hospitality related skills

Industry-related skills at an entry-level have inherently been focused on the hard skills of the industry, namely coffee making, setting tables, carrying plates, and working the checkout system. As students' progress through higher-level qualifications a focus on enhancing customer service, leading teams in hospitality venues and economics comes into the learning realm. This topic also focuses on the participants on the lack of understanding of the skills that are taught within vocational education hospitality programs.

One of the most important aspects of this study was to ascertain the skills of hospitality, the education requirements of staff and the level of experience of the staff that independent restaurateurs require. Initially, participants were asked about their skill levels and how these would be significant in today's hospitality industry. As most interviewees stated that it was mostly on-the-job learning, they were aware today's employment in the service industry was different. However, all participants during the interviews of this study were aware that employees' skills were now centred on emotional intelligence and personality improvements. Interestingly there was an acknowledgment from each participant, that emotional development skills were

deemed more important than the traditional hard skills, examples such as espresso making and setting tables that are often discussed in research papers (Dhaliwal & Misra, 2020; Smith & Kemmis, 2010).

Several participants throughout the interviews stated that they were unfamiliar with the vocational education and training system and the skills that are taught in entry-level hospitality curricula. Previous studies on the relationship between education and hospitality have identified similar issues that curriculum is deficient or lack of understanding from the industry, despite industry involvement in curriculum development in previous years (Alhelalat, 2015; Smith & Kemmis, 2010).

After analysing the results of skills required to work in independent restaurants in this project, which involve more emotional intelligence skills than the practical skill elements, this study is consistent with other studies that deem vocational education requirements may be limited to theoretical teachings and not the practical skills of hospitality (Dhaliwal & Misra, 2020). These revelations also support the findings in Barron et al.'s (2014) paper that suggest responsive or relevant education to the hospitality industry provides positive staff outcomes, which in turn results in low attrition rates within the service sector, and emotional intelligence becoming a primary skill requirement in the hospitality industry.

As most participants commented, the core skills of serving customers, setting tables and other industry-orientated skills that are within the independent restaurant sector, can be taught within the business or through on-the-job training. This too has been highlighted in other research, with interpersonal skills such as good communication and teamwork coinciding with emotional development skills, providing the ultimate candidate for positions in service-orientated industries (Schulz, 2008). Therefore, this topic has recognised the skill requirements of hospitality appear to have shifted to include more personality traits rather than mechanical day-to-day skills.

Topic 2 – Current VET curricula

The current vocational education program in hospitality offers generic training with a holistic view of students gaining experience in the industry. While there are some relevant courses and legislative units provided within the program, there was a census among the participants of this research project that the program needs more emphasis on the relevant skills and particular areas of the food and beverage sector.

Most recent studies on vocational education are focussed on post-pandemic (COVID-19) and how the delivery of mid-tertiary education (AQF levels 1- 5) is performed. Focus too on industry involvement and how the increase of government funds into VET can provide further benefit to practical industries such as the hospitality and the potential staff shortage crisis that is a contemporary issue across various industries in Australia (Hall & Stanwick, 2021). Previous statistics provided by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) indicate that the 2018 - 2019 the total amount of tertiary qualifications issued for the hospitality industry and food and beverage was 787,400. It was also estimated that 62% of these qualifications were Certificate III and Certificate IV level (Hall & Stanwick, 2021). Recent figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) have indicated that these figures have reduced to 638,018, for the year 2021–2022 period, with a similar number of these qualifications being at entry level (ABS, 2022). While these statistical number changes are not surprising, due to the pandemic of COVID-19 and the reduction and closures of businesses, particularly in hospitality, the results of this research paper indicate the reduction of students in entry-level qualifications of hospitality is not an issue for the participants of this research project. As one participant indicated, when informed of the number of hospitality industry graduates, he queried where all these students were employed, which he surmised was perhaps not in the hospitality industry. This adds further questions that need to be researched on who benefits from the outcome of these students who are completing these qualifications. As most participants indicated throughout the discussion process, they had not felt the effects of the staff shortage, and this they attribute to their approach to staff management. Some participants also suggested that further education in Certificate III and Certificate IV would not increase the likelihood of future employment and would not have made an impact on the industry and the shortage of staff within the sector of hospitality.

Topic 3 – Industry related curricula

Vocational education, training, and hospitality have a long educational relationship. This topic explores the connection between the requirements of hospitality and what is currently being delivered in the VET sector, and at the foundation level of Certificate III and Certificate IV Hospitality. The topic also highlights

the importance of correct alignment and structure of the courses about the requirements of the industry.

The current vocational education and training hospitality package that is taught in public and private RTOs' delivery of units seems irrelevant to what is currently required in the domain of independent restaurants. Units delivered in the hospitality courses such as Managing finances within a budget were discussed during the interviews but were not seen by the participants as units that the hospitality staff would require. However, this is the perception of the participants from this project and as there are no previously published papers regarding independent restaurants this was hard to dispute. As discussed in Chapter 3, the plethora of units that are available for RTOs to deliver is challenging. Furthermore, changes to the training packages (of all industries) add to the complication for the RTOs. These changes occur frequently and are carried out in consultation with industry. However, as RTOs are not included in consultation regarding these changes, and participants are not aware of the units currently taught in the hospitality curriculum, the relevancy to the industry can be disputed due to the lack of industry participation in the design of the curriculum (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019).

Topic 4 – Experience versus education

This topic investigates the ongoing concern of the value of practical experience versus a theory-based education. Further exploration of both realms considers the benefits of each and the significance of blending both formats to better skill the students and workers of hospitality. Most of the results analysed from the interviews highlighted a significant favour from the participants of having physical work experience in an actual setting of hospitality (in this case restaurants). This was seen as far more favourable to have the skills of hospitality developed within this setting than in a classroom, online or distance. However, one unexpected result of this study confirmed that despite the lack of understanding of education provisions in VET from the participants, most could see benefits in the teaching of specific skills in classroom-based situations.

The term, "hire for attitude; train for skills" which was coined by a Southwest Airlines co-founder in the mid-1970s (Winter, 2012), was a concept used in the research paper of Tesone and Ricci (2012). Focussing on food and beverage outlets

and accommodation services, their research determined that education blended with practical skills enhanced the motivation of students, encouraging students to stay within the industry and develop careers within hospitality. These results further support the idea that practical skills should be completed on the job, whereas the foundations of these skills are kept in the classroom. A blended method of learning, according to the findings of Tesone and Ricci (2012), also found that the employment of staff was primarily based on the attitude of the person and not the skills that they may or may not have. Like the participant's responses in this research, attitude is a priority when it comes to employment. How the potential staff member acts, dresses and other behavioural conditions would always take precedence over qualifications. Many of the respondents in this research, further elaborated by saying, "Having people just turning up on time is a bonus," Experience, therefore, in a practical industry, as most respondents support, needs to be addressed. While skills, such as customer service and preparing food can be executed through learning in a blended format in a classroom or on the job, attitudinal skills cannot be taught in a structured format. This research project has not defined or identified in any capacity to answer the question of how to teach emotional values within entry-level qualifications of hospitality. Although to hypothesise, there may be connections to the training of hospitality and the need or want of training within the student. However, further research is needed to identify how teachings and learnings of emotional development can benefit the hospitality industry, independent restaurants and the students undertaking Certificate III and Certificate IV Hospitality.

Topic 5 – Formal training requirements

As explored in Chapter 3, the hospitality industry is subject to specific legal mandates. Consequently, there exists a consensus among the participants of this project, the acknowledgment of formal training to a certain extent, and widely agreed that such courses should not be considered a comprehensive substitute for any qualifications. Nonetheless, formal training requirements for employment in the hospitality sector remain a topic warranting further discussion. Currently, within the vocational education sector of hospitality, certain short courses, and specific topics, such as the Responsible Service of Alcohol unit, must be taught in traditional classroom-based settings. These qualifications are nationally recognised within the

AQF Qualification Framework, and as such only registered training organisations are authorised to deliver these single-unit courses and issue certificates of attainment. As for front-of-house operations, most participants and recent research (Goh, 2020; Kift et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021), highlight that training on the job is preferable as students can train within the scope of their specific employment or work setting. This is also true regarding the length of time it takes to complete an entry-level certificate, which on average is 12 months. This was highlighted in a recent research think-tank in the United Kingdom (Richmond & Regan, 2022), the average learning of front-of-house operations took only six weeks. Therefore, as the current Certificate III and Certificate IV Hospitality courses in Australia run for 12 months, the question raised, is there a need for these qualifications, as the benefits of VET-trained staff appear negligible.

Therefore, the results of this study suggest the formalities of training may not be required, as each of the participants had indicated that training on the job was typical of the industry. Formal training was suggested to be too long as well, which has implications for people wanting to create career opportunities in hospitality. This was also discussed further regarding obtaining qualifications and if this was worth the expense for the student and would benefit entry-level workers with a career in hospitality. Most interviewees disagreed, and favoured work experience over qualifications. Some participants, one of whom commented, "*Just because you have a [formal] qualification, does not necessarily mean they know what they are doing*", reiterated the need for practical experience within this topic of discussion.

Topic 6 – Soft skills

As indicated throughout this thesis, the importance of soft skills, or non-technical skills, has been consistently recognised as a contemporary aspect of the employment of hospitality staff. As many participants in this research commented, these attributes are considered equally important as some of the qualifications that are obtained. Nevertheless, ongoing discussions persist regarding the identification of the most crucial soft skills required. This also coincides with the methods to acquire these skills and delivery within vocational education and training. This topic highlights the need for several areas of skills, and experiences necessary to have a successful career in the hospitality industry, regardless of sector. As identified in Topic 1, emotional intelligence now plays an important part in working in independent

restaurants in hospitality. From being a diligent worker to the ability to focus on the tasks in the workplace, and make impulsive customer service decisions, emotional intelligence is an important factor that dominated all interviews for this research project. Several reports have shown that emotional intelligence is a skill that needs to be incorporated into all industries, (Smith et al., 2015; Smith & Kemmis, 2010). Having staff that can think critically and analytically is just as important as hard skills, such as carrying plates and making an espresso, which is often associated with the curricula of hospitality in most vocational institutes.

One of the aims of this study is to identify the skill requirements to work in the front-of-house areas in independent restaurants. Surprisingly, most participants are not concerned with the traditional skills that are usually associated with hospitality. Whether this shift in attitude from the participants is due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which has changed the dynamics of staff requirements in hospitality, this study did not identify any cause or responses to elaborate on and confirm these changes. However, recent studies (Dhaliwal & Misra, 2020; Maniram, 2022), have suggested that there is an inherent need for the hospitality industry to train staff in problem-solving, interpersonal and other attitudinal skills to assist in the retention of staff and personal development of staff. In turn, Maniram's (2022) research has suggested that training emotional skills in hospitality increases customer service and other service aspects that benefit a business economically. This also could be an instance where changes in skill requirements have occurred subconsciously in the independent restauranteur's mindset and due to an industry shortage of staff, hard skill requirements have become negligible. As one participant (AA) mentioned during his interview, "*We just need anyone*".

Topic 7 – Career in hospitality

Within this research, various concepts have become known, including career prospects, the importance of fostering a passion for the industry and recognising the need for hospitality staff to engage in long-term careers. These concepts are intrinsically linked to the overarching theme of the project, which is education relevancy in the hospitality sector. From previous discussions within this thesis, it has become evident that the acquisition of essential skills, qualifications and hands-on

experience is crucial for the development of individuals who pursue successful careers in hospitality.

Creating a sense of inclusion and belonging was an important aspect that is presented in the results of the participant's interviews. This is discussed in previous research including Fraser's (2020) research that states that for successful career outcomes and an interest in pursuing a career in hospitality, the curriculum has to reflect contemporary industry requirements. This in turn will inspire students to perform better and have a passion for the industry. The findings of the interviews conducted in this study also revealed that a significant challenge for most participants is the difficulty in attracting individuals who are genuinely interested in pursuing a career in the hospitality industry. One interviewee emphasised the pivotal role of placing staff strategically in appropriate positions within her business to tackle this issue. This, she noted, when coupled with ongoing training and education, resulted in a notable improvement in staff performance and significantly extended their employment period for longer. These results, aligned with the findings of Aguilar (2021), further reinforce the notion that having correctly formatted educational tools with sound employment practices has the potential to create a genuine passion for the service sector. This, in turn, can lay the foundation for a lifelong career for individuals venturing into the hospitality industry.

6.5 Contradictions of analysis

While the analysis from the semi-structured interviews in this research, indicates that VET education is not a requirement for employment, nor is external training an important aspect for staff to maintain their positions in independent restaurants, previous literature reviewed in this thesis (Gousiou & Lagou, 2023) contradicts these findings. The hospitality industry includes a diverse range of establishments, with some areas comprising independent restaurants, hotels, bars, cafes, and casinos. For most of the hospitality industry, VET plays a critical role in ensuring individuals gain the necessary skills and knowledge for a career in hospitality. While the literature reviewed primarily focuses on hotels and larger conglomerate food and beverage outlets due to their core research emphasis on hotel operations, it was essential to investigate these studies to gain insights into the distinctions in employment aspects, skill requirements and career opportunities within the broader

hospitality industry. As depicted in the Hospitality Training Model (Figure 3) the topics introduced here are representative of independent restaurants and emphasise the necessity of obtaining fundamental skill sets as opposed to isolated individual skills. These topics were part of the foundation of the initial analysis of data and as such, expanded upon to explore the potential benefits of VET hospitality courses to the independent restaurant sector. In the second row within the Hospitality Training Model, the focus shifts to highlight the potential contributions that VET can provide to the industry. This includes up-to-date curricula, and providing relevant teachings that ignite a passion for the industry of current and future students. This section of the model also depicts various career opportunities for the students and advantages offered by vocational education, such as enhanced employability and potential for career advancement within the industry.

The establishment of seven topics identifies an interdependent relationship between each of the sub-topics. Within this structure, the focus on two areas was of importance. The first four topics indicate from the industry participants that vocational education and training (VET) needs to be relevant to their industry sector. There are also indications that the participants were not aware of the courses in VET and therefore, staff obtaining a Certificate III or Certificate IV Hospitality, is of little significance.

6.6   Chapter summary

In summary, the key findings derived from this research have been highlighted. These findings have led to the emergence of underlying outcomes, giving rise to subtopics that are intricately intertwined within the previous discoveries and presented accordingly. These subtopics (as presented in the second layer of the model, Figure 2) enhance our comprehension of the hospitality industry. This is made apparent by shedding light on the interchange between vocational education and practical work experience, both of which are essential for acquiring the skills necessary for this profession.

As both industries continue to evolve, maintaining a symbiotic relationship between education and experience will be essential to meet the ever-changing demands of hospitality. How they interrelate with the topics identified and provide opportunities in future studies is presented in Chapter 7, Conclusion.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

The objective of this study is to ascertain the relevance of the current hospitality Vocational Education and Training (VET) curricula to the hospitality industry and shed light on the requirements of educational practices involving independent restaurants. As the hospitality industry is one of the largest employers in Australia (Fraser, 2020), the particular focus of this project is on the requirements to work in independent restaurants, and the relationship with education providers, providing hospitality education. Therefore, the findings of this project provide valuable insight into the significance of collaboration between educational providers, industry stakeholders and government to improve student outcomes while assisting in shaping a robust vocational education system that can keep up with the demands of an ever-evolving hospitality sector. Previous research (Palinkas et al., 2015) has suggested that business performance improves through staff education and upskilling. These enhancements not only encompass the business realm but also personal growth, leading to a more passionate and dedicated workforce. This current research project aligns with these overarching ideals.

The following sections are a summary of this research project and provide answers to the overarching research question of whether Hospitality VET education is relevant to independent restaurants in Australia. Beginning with the researcher's reflection on the process of the Master of Professional Studies (Research) program and research project and any implications throughout. The researcher's reflection on his learning objectives and outcomes is also included with recommendations concerning future research studies. The research implications are discussed, and the limitations of the study are identified. This chapter ends with a final summary and comments to conclude the thesis, which is part of the requirements to complete the Master of Professional Studies (Research) program.

7.2 Research analysis

This chapter presents conclusions drawn from the analysis of data gathered through semi-structured interviews. It also highlights the necessity of industry-led responses, emphasising how crucial it is to integrate practical skills and professional

development opportunities of both current and new staff in the restaurant sector. While education for entry-level employees or students of hospitality and the delivery of the curricula can be a complex issue, there needs to be an emphasis on fostering the relationship between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This will ensure graduates of vocational education programs will have the necessary competencies, skills, and confidence to succeed in the workforce. While one aspect of this research has found, from the perspective of an independent restauranteur, that VET training has a limited impact on staff recruitment and retention; it is important to also consider the legislative requirements. An example of this necessity for employees in licence establishments such as a restaurant, cafe, or bar, is to hold the Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) certificate. Currently, this requirement is exclusively delivered through registered training providers.

While this research has highlighted some challenges faced by vocational education (including compliance issues, legislation changes, etc.) it has also identified several opportunities for improvement for both sectors, tertiary education providers and the hospitality industry. Embracing emerging technologies, changes in skill development requirements (emotional intelligence and other soft skills) and aligning the framework of VET closer to the service industry, supports the idea of enhancing the student's learning experience and creating a highly skilled culture within hospitality staff through continuous improvement, motivation, and learning. Stronger industry and VET relationships too can provide better initiatives to increase the level of skills in the workforce and keep up with the demands of changes within the hospitality sector.

7.3   Reflection on the research process

An important aspect of the Master of Professional Studies (Research) (MPSR) program is the reflection process of the learner on the achievements and the knowledge obtained throughout the study. Reflection also assists in providing in-depth conclusions by understanding the research question that was initially established and the relationship to the outcomes. This reflection also provides an opportunity to articulate to key stakeholders the valuable lessons learnt throughout the program and research process. This reflection will also provide insight into the personal development this study has provided the researcher.

Undertaking this research has required a high level of perseverance and self-motivation. The process of analysing literature, conducting interviews, and comprehending complex research procedures, frameworks and theories has pushed the boundaries of this researcher's intellectual capacities. While not without its challenges, the Professional Studies program has facilitated personal growth, self-reflection, and an invaluable approach to work-based learning to complete further studies and career advancement of the researcher. These personal achievements have expanded the researcher's knowledge, not only in the two areas of the researcher's working history (hospitality and vocational education) but also within the realms of work-based studies and the contributions to this area of research.

The following section discusses the key area of learning that this researcher deems the most important for any early career researcher to understand, which is methodology. Reflection on the methodology is a valuable component of the research process, as it enhances comprehension of the original concept of the research and assists in the direction of the desired outcomes of the researcher's objectives, and achievements.

7.3.1 Reflection of methodology

As highlighted previously, the core focus of this study is to understand the attitudes of restauranteurs and managers in independent restaurants towards formally educated staff and the relationship the hospitality industry has with VET. As there was little data, from academic research on independent restaurants and requirements of skills to attain work or increase skill levels, this research proceeded to generate data on the issue rather than providing theories and interpretations. During the early phase of the study, a qualitative approach was decided on to reflect the design of research information gathering being semi-structured interviews. Adopting a Content Analysis (CA) approach to analysing data, allowed the researcher to view the initial results of data analysis with no preconceived ideas, framework, or strict context of themes. Evaluating the data obtained through semi-structured interviews, CA provided wider scope to review the information and data and assisted in identifying the skill changes and requirements within the hospitality sector. Working with a smaller sample enabled the data to be examined in the framework of CA with reduced risk of researcher bias, since the participants' interview responses were taken at face value. Additionally, this

approach eliminated the need for complex data threads or potentially biased interpretations the researcher may have had. The methodology and analysis performed in this study have provided the researcher with an in-depth understanding of various processes by which the qualitative procedures obtain relevant information to understand and evaluate research questions. Having CA as the methodological framework was also critical to this research to fully engage the participants, differentiate the content during the analysis phase and provide clear outcomes (Marvasti, 2019).

7.3.2 Reflection of researchers' objectives

The researcher in this research began the MPSR program to further his understanding of the fundamentals of hospitality skills and the education providers that supply the training to entry-level staff in the service industry. These work-based personal objectives, as introduced at the beginning of this thesis, were as follows:

a) To identify the sectors within the hospitality industry relevant to vocational education. Thereby establishing clear and concise educational pathways for students aspiring to work in hospitality.

b) To support both hospitality and vocational education and training, as well as students of hospitality studies, by conducting research that identifies necessary changes to the curriculum, and teaching method improvements.

c) To seize the opportunity to further understand the industry at a professional level, fostering personal leadership growth within the hospitality industry and the field of vocational education and training.

One aspect of this research that was most rewarding was the engagement with industry professionals, from hospitality and the VET sector. This also included fellow researchers (inclusive of the current researcher's university supervisors) who have enriched the understanding of the implications of research in work-based learning. The researcher has expanded his network for future endeavours and has had a transformative impact on the practical realities while being employed in the sectors being researched. While challenges of time constraints and access to data have tested the resilience of the researcher throughout the study, the researcher has learnt to become more adaptable and resourceful, with considerable critical thinking improvement. An understanding of the impact that reflective practices have in work-

based learning has provided profound optimism for the future of the researcher of this study as the MPSR has given further insight into how and why the contribution of work-based studies is critical to the industry being researched. With this newfound knowledge, the researcher is excited to continue the ongoing dialogue, not only in the sectors of hospitality and VET as within this research, but in future work-based educational systems and programs.

7.4 Triple dividend

The Triple Dividend, as described by Fergusson et al., (2019) encompasses a range of potential benefits that can be realised by various stakeholders upon the successful completion of a work-based learning program. These benefits include economic, social, and personal gains. In the context of this research, which explores the convergence of vocational education, hospitality, and work-based research, it is possible to identify three primary beneficiaries who stand to gain from the triple dividend. To provide a comprehensive understanding of these recipients, details are outlined below.

7.4.1 Academic research and the work-based researcher

It is anticipated that the contributions to the academic and research community will provide new knowledge about the structure and relationship between the hospitality industry and vocational education. In the context of content analysis, the structure of the research process and the hospitality training model it is hoped, will provide valuable resources for future academics and students, investigating work-based phenomena in qualitative research. This research also identified gaps in the existing literature research studies, which has the potential to enhance the discourse surrounding the application of VET in hospitality. The researcher in this study also stands to gain as the research has provided a platform to enhance his academic endeavours and future studies. Having developed an understanding of the nuances of work-based learning will also aid in the professional advancement of the researcher within the vocational education sector and the hospitality industry.

7.4.2 Vocational education and training providers

This research has yielded significant insights into the delivery of hospitality from vocational education and training organisations. It has provided evidence-based findings regarding the skill requirements of independent restaurants, in which these insights and recommendations have the potential to enhance the current pedagogy approaches at VET level.

Furthermore, this research has introduced an alternative approach to teaching hospitality skills, which holds promise for achieving better learning outcomes among students. Educators can also benefit from this study by incorporating work-based learnings from the researcher to gain further insight into the workings of hospitality. This ultimately will enhance the relationship between industry and the VET sector, to better educate students and prepare them for future career success.

7.4.3 Hospitality industry

The hospitality industry stands to benefit significantly from the findings of this research to serve as a guide for education providers in aligning their practices with the best industry standards. Understanding the limitations and opportunities of hospitality and how best to implement various pedagogies throughout the different sectors of hospitality will invariably provide more proficiently skilled staff. The insights gleaned from this research should enable industry policymakers to make effective decisions on how future staff of the industry are educated and effectively implementing diverse pedagogical approaches across the various sectors of hospitality.

In summary, the triple dividend envisioned in this study can be achieved through its contributions to academic research. Consequently, the relationship between education providers and the hospitality industry becomes more effective in student outcomes. Additionally, this research sheds light on the effectiveness of work-based learning and highlights opportunities that are mutually beneficial to both industries.

7.5   Summary of research questions

Research Question #1, what are the current Australian entry-level hospitality VET curricula and are these qualifications relevant to independent restaurants? The results of this research indicate that independent restaurants while needing specific skills within front-of-house operations are not reliant on having VET-trained staff work

in their establishments. Most admitted they would prefer to train staff within their restaurants, as the research participants knew little about Australian vocational education curricula, skills training, or the quality of graduates. By their admission, the results show that formal hospitality training and education were deemed unnecessary in most instances. This research analysis also indicates that staff employment is not necessarily reliant on entry-level qualifications, such as Certificate III and Certificate IV Hospitality. Overall, there is an emphasis on practical skills acquired in real world, on-the-job experiences, which foster increased interest and passion within the hospitality sector, providing longevity for workers and career paths within the hospitality industry and independent restaurants.

These findings align with the outcome of this research, supporting the idea that Australian VET in hospitality needs to evolve to better cater for the multifaceted demands of the industry. One surprising revelation of this was the recognition that the current curriculum primarily focuses on practical hard skills of hospitality, which is increasingly perceived as best learned on the job, the key question now is how the curriculum adapts to remain relevant.

This leads to the second research question; how does VET education facilitate the current employability capabilities at entry-level positions in independent restaurants? Throughout this research, it has been highlighted in numerous instances that changes are needed in the hospitality curriculum (i.e., front-of-house operations). One change is the importance of emotional development and other fundamental personality traits in customer service. Based on the findings of this research, there is an indication that the current curriculum may not be relevant in modern Australian hospitality. Particularly, as the shift in focus on soft skills in the industry continues. Continuing with the second research question, the emphasis on job skill requirements is negligible, as the analysis of results in this study has determined that restaurateurs are unaware of the subjects taught at entry-level vocational education. The research also indicates a varying lack of trust from those interviewed, towards the learning capabilities and appropriate skills within classroom-based training of a practical industry.

The final research question, which focussed on the benefits of VET, asked, How are independent restaurants in hospitality benefiting from VET training? While the findings of this research found that VET was not a main requirement for employment in the independent restaurant sector, it has not provided conclusive evidence to

suggest that improvements cannot be made with staff with vocational education qualifications. Some legal qualifications are required for staff to work in licensed areas, gaming areas (such as casinos) and food preparation areas, however these qualifications, it would be assumed, would not increase business, motivate staff, and assist in career opportunities. Therefore, to be answered more completely, this research question would require further studies into potential benefits (financially and emotionally) for the hospitality industry and how vocational education could benefit as well.

7.6   Implications

The purpose of this study was to provide details of the skill requirements of working in hospitality and the micro sector of the industry, independent restaurants. This was investigated through semi-structured interviews and the resulting analysis yielded several findings concerning the benefits of industry, on-the-job training versus classroom-based learning. This, in turn, has provided benefits for the vocational education sector whereby the relationship between industry and education can relate further and provide better-qualified hospitality staff in future education programs. The findings of this study, while predominately theoretical, also have practical implications, which are discussed in this section.

7.6.1 Theoretical implications

In this study's context, the findings' theoretical implications provide a further understanding of the components of interaction required between independent restaurants, vocational education providers and education policymakers. The results of this research highlight previous studies that have been conducted on the importance of the relationship between industry and training providers, yet the current data suggest that little is known by independent restauranteurs about the current training curriculum and the outcomes for students. These findings raise important theoretical issues as previous studies of the vocational education and training sector provide conclusions that curricula are developed with industry input. However, this study raises questions regarding which of the relevant sectors of hospitality are involved in the development of curricula in vocational education, as the evidence suggests that those providing the direction of curricula may themselves be not relevant or correct.

As per the Training model that was introduced in Chapter 6, skills requirements need to be addressed, which in turn could potentially provide highly skilled staff providing better expertise in the industry. As was identified in previous studies, traditional methods of teaching and correct procedural training are not relevant anymore, as results from the participants of this research suggest that training in the restaurant sector is better completed on the job. The length of time for a course, which could be completed in six weeks versus a 12-month entry-level course, also highlights the need for change. Although the contemporary issue of staff shortage is not the focus of this research, it runs parallel with the view of independent restaurants due to the concern of a few of the participants who indicated that the next generation of staff was not keen on making hospitality a career choice.

7.6.2 Practical implications

The practical implications of this study are based entirely on the skill requirements for entry-level hospitality positions in independent restaurants. This also coincides with the relevancy of the current VET curriculum at Certificate III and Certificate IV Hospitality. This study has identified two major findings that lead to the conclusion and answer the main research question. The first is the notion of why the requirements of hospitality VET would be needed to work in the industry. The second finding that was a common theme throughout the research, it was suggested, was to have VET training in hospitality at Certificate III and Certificate IV levels to obtain work in hospitality. The answer to both findings, this research suggests, is that vocational education is neither a requirement to gain employment in the industry of hospitality nor a need to learn hospitality in a classroom situation. However, these findings can be used to develop targeted training of legislative courses and micro courses within hospitality to upskill staff of the industry.

The majority of research participants emphasised in their interviews that the primary requirement in the current staffing level situation if it was to affect them, was the presence of reliable staff. Further discussions on staff requirements in the industry revealed the need for emotional intelligence or skills in critical thinking as a growing factor of employment. While vocational education and training primarily focus on instilling fundamental hospitality skills such as customer service, teamwork and basic hard skills like setting tables, the cultivation of emotional intelligence, although

challenging to impart in a classroom setting, could be better addressed with the purview of management and advanced qualifications. Regarding the second point of needing hospitality skills trained before working in a restaurant, again the research suggests that this would not be necessary.

In conclusion, while VET education in entry-level restaurants operations may not be an immediate requirement, this research highlights the imperative for the future of hospitality industry to have well educated staff. This education is essential, whether in lower-level or senior management, or within other areas of hospitality industry, such as hotels and casinos.

Education is crucial for the industry's longevity and to ensure that passionate individuals continue to lead the way in the service sector. However, for this to happen there may need to be changes made in the structure of learning such as a shift to on-the-job-based training only and enhanced development of trainers and teachers of the industry. The implementation of this, along with changes in curricula, would require further research to establish what these requirements would be. Consequently, the current research lays important foundations for further research and studies, for the researcher to further address questions that were not reviewed in this research due to the parameters of this thesis.

7.7   Limitations

Although this current study is based on a small number of participants, the findings suggest there is some varying degree of need for vocational education and training in some aspects of hospitality and independent restaurants. However, the scope of this research was relatively narrow, as it was primarily concerned with independent restaurants in the hospitality industry and the pool of participants was chosen from Southeast Queensland only. Due to the vast number of crossover enterprises in hospitality (for example, cafes, hotels, and quick service restaurants (QSR)) and the time constraints of Masters-level research, this study had limitations, as the industry is too broad to be able to answer more comprehensive research questions. General research based on whether hospitality education was appropriate for the entire hospitality industry would not have provided specific answers due to the variance in skills required in different operations of the industry. To ensure a deeper understanding of the essence of hospitality, a decision was made to focus on a niche

area within the industry, specifically independent restaurants. This choice offered potential, for a broader perspective with fewer limitations, enabling a comprehensive comparison of the relationship between hospitality and VET.

7.8   Recommendations for further research

While the research in this study focuses only on the independent restaurants in Southeast Queensland, there is potential for further research within other sectors of the Australian, hospitality industry, including those in regional areas outside of capital cities. Adapting this research to rural and remote areas could prove valuable, especially given the limited opportunities for formal hospitality education in these outer regions. Such an adaptation may also assist restaurateurs with insights into the required skills and effective staff approaches. Moreover, this research offers opportunities for in-depth exploration of sub-sectors within the broader scope of the hospitality industry (examples being conference and events and front office of hotel operations). Research focusing on these micro-areas of the hospitality industry would not only enhance the understanding of specific skill requirements but also contribute to the future development of vocational education and training curricula. Furthermore, understanding separate areas of hospitality could benefit the industry by igniting passion and enjoyment for lifelong careers, by introducing qualifications specifically structured to the specific professional areas within the industry, beyond the traditional food and beverage sector. Expanding on the scope of this research to encompass the varied sectors of the hospitality industry in Australia not only complements the core ideals of this study, regarding vocational education and training but provides a comprehensive view of how VET can be tailored to the various needs of the hospitality industry.

7.8.1 Future research directions

It is expected that the Hospitality Training Model (Figure 3) will facilitate future research endeavours, offering opportunities to explore phenomena such as the long-term impact of an integrated approach to VET within the hospitality industry as this research suggests. Other potential research areas can include assessing of career trajectories including career progression, job positions and job satisfaction, which can contribute to a deeper understanding of relevant training required in the hospitality

sector. Furthermore, this model can be adapted and applied across different cultural and geographic contexts, which can take into consideration the challenges and opportunities in regional, rural or remote areas of Australia. This model too, could assist in the enhancement and integration of hospitality curriculum delivery and the hospitality industry. In the context of e-learning, virtual reality, and online simulations all can be adapted in a linear context of learning from the Hospitality Training Model. This can be taken further to analyse the role that policies and procedures are implemented, and how these affect the daily teaching practices of hospitality.

The introduction of the Hospitality Training Model presents a structured approach to addressing the relevance of the current VET curricula to the hospitality industry and in particular independent restaurants. This model has the potential to define and assist in reducing the skill gap that is often discussed within the industry and enhancing the employability of current and future service industry professionals through a structured educational framework. Moreover, the model supports continuous learning for students to build careers in the hospitality industry and specific domains. Overall, the Hospitality Training Model serves as a launching pad for future research, enabling scholars to delve deeper into various aspects of the intersecting pathways of VET and the hospitality industry, ultimately fostering positive outcomes between vocational education and training and the service industry alike.

7.9   Thesis summary

This study has several implications for hospitality and vocational education and training. Assuming that these research findings are representative of the industry, the study will also have positive effects on research and pedagogical practices in the future of hospitality vocational education and training. The evolution of vocational courses is a dynamic process. However, the delivery methods and the hospitality skills imparted through VET must remain responsive to the diverse requirements of various sectors within the hospitality industry. The curriculum must be tailored to specific sectors rather than being overly generalised across the entire spectrum of the industry. The majority of participants acknowledge the shifting landscape concerning their perceptions of hospitality curricula and skill prerequisites instructed, and by their admission understand that times have changed regarding their understanding of hospitality curricula. Although fundamentally, core hospitality skills (customer service,

setting tables, etc.) have remained the same, the industry's soft skills, for example, emotional intelligence and intuition, require further examination and understanding of how these are passed on to potential or existing hospitality industry staff. Therefore, this research suggests that both industries, VET, and hospitality, need to continue to explore better ways of working together to teach the skill requirements that the industry needs.

The knowledge of VET from an independent restaurant perspective outlines this sector's distinctive challenges. As Figure 3 outlines and in line with the reviewed literature, there are distinct advantages of having core fundamentals of the hospitality industry taught within the vocational system. Factors such as the complexity of the hospitality industry, marketing, and potential career growth, are all part of VET education. Ultimately, this study offers valuable implications for enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of VET for independent restaurants in Australia, enabling them to meet the demands of the industry, enhance service quality, and elevate the employability skills of their workforce. This, in turn, should benefit restaurateurs, by equipping staff with valuable business skills and an entrepreneurial spirit, which can contribute to the longevity of their establishments. This can include succession planning and potentially increasing overall business performance. Additionally, this has the potential to create a vibrant network between VET and hospitality, promising a prosperous future for both sectors.

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APPENDIX A

Appendix A – Competency Based Table highlighting Wesselink et.al 8 principles.

Table 1 of 4
Table 1. Principles for CBE.

Table 1. Principles for CBE.

1.	The **competencies** that are the basis for the study programme are defined.
2.	**Vocational core problems** are the organizing unit for (re)designing the study programme (learning and assessment).
3.	Competence development of students is **assessed** before, during, and after the learning process.
4.	Learning activities take place in different **authentic** situations.
5.	Knowledge, skills, and attitudes are **integrated** in learning and assessment processes.
6.	Students are stimulated to **take responsibility** for and **reflect** on their own learning.
7.	Teachers, both in school and practice, fulfil their role as both **coaches and experts**.
8.	A basis for students to achieve a **lifelong learning** attitude is realized.

'Wesselink et al. (2007) constructed a model that integrates both the curriculum and instructional method aspects of CBE. The model sketches the distinct features of competence-based education and can be applied to all levels of vocational education, i.e., preparatory vocational education, senior secondary vocational education, and higher education.'

These principles concern (1) the curriculum and specification of the study programme; (2) the way instruction should take place and the role of the teacher, i.e., the pedagogical or didactical practice; (3) the assessment procedure; and (4) the career competencies of the student. According to de Bruijn et.al., (2005), these four components (curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and career competencies) together form an infrastructure for powerful learning environments. Applied to educational practice, the model can be used as a heuristic guideline that enables and empowers teams of teachers to interpret and translate developments on national and international levels into aspects of their study programmes (Wesselink et al. 2010)

APPENDIX B

'How is the current hospitality curriculum in vocational education relevant to the restaurant sector in Australia?'
Interview questions for research conducted by
Damien Lowe
Student# U1143892

1. What is your knowledge or experience of hospitality vocational education?

2. Do you see the benefit of VET-qualified staff in relation to working in restaurants?

3. From this list of core units, which (if any) do you think are relevant to the restaurant front-of-house areas of hospitality?

4. From your experience, what are the necessary operational skills needed to work in the front-of-house/service areas of a restaurant?

5. What emotional skills or personal attributes do you think are needed to work in a restaurant's front-of-house/service areas?

6. When employing staff, how much influence does having a qualification (Certificate III or Certificate IV) have on the decision? Why/Why not?

7. What changes do you think need to happen in the future regarding staff skills and skill level?

8. What skills needed to be included in Vocational Education and Training? *

9. How is the current curriculum of VET about your niche of the industry helping? *
*Questions were omitted after evaluation of relevancy to the project and comprehension of the participant. Only one participant was asked these questions.

APPENDIX C

Consent form for all participants. Completed documents are kept secure as per requirements of the Ethics Approval (#H22REA046)

University of Southern Queensland
Consent form
Interview

USQ HREC Approval number:H22REA046

Project Title

Relevancy of Hospitality Vocational Education and Training Curriculum

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Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

• Have read and understood the information document regarding this project	☐Yes / ☐ No
• Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.	☐Yes / ☐ No
• Understand that if you have any additional questions, you can contact the research team	☐Yes / ☐ No
• Are over 18 years of age.	☐Yes / ☐ No
• Understand that any data collected may be used in future research activities	☐Yes / ☐ No
• Understand that the interview will be audio recorded	☐Yes / ☐ No
• Agree to participate in the project	☐Yes / ☐ No

Name (first & last)			
Signature		Date	

Please return this document to the principal investigator before undertaking the interview.