

CURRICULUM GAPS IN HOSPITALITY EDUCATION AND CRUISE SHIP INDUSTRY COMPETENCY STANDARDS

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Abstract

The global cruise industry has experienced remarkable post-COVID-19 growth, generating strong demand for skilled Indonesian workers. Yet a persistent structural gap exists between the learning outcomes of hospitality degree programs and the competency standards required by the hotel departments of international cruise ships. This study identifies and analyses the dimensions of that gap, examines the structural factors that sustain it, explores how alumni adapt once onboard, and formulates evidence-based policy recommendations. Using an interpretivist paradigm and a multiple case-study design, the research engaged 18 informants drawn from three groups: six academics and curriculum managers (APK), seven cruise-ship alumni (AKP), and five industry representatives (IKP). Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analysed using Braun & Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. Four core themes emerged: (1) gaps in cruise-specific technical competencies, principally STCW, USPH procedures, and industrial equipment, (2) multi-layered structural barriers comprising rigid regulation, resource constraints, and institutional culture, (3) self-directed alumni adaptation strategies centred on observation, buddy systems, and informal learning, and (4) a strong convergence of recommendations from all three stakeholder perspectives toward an integrated curriculum model. These findings provide an empirical foundation for curriculum developers, policymakers, and industry actors seeking to close the identified gap.

Keywords: curriculum gap; competency; cruise ship; hospitality education; STCW; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

The global cruise industry is on a remarkable growth trajectory in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic. The Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) reported that in 2023 some 31.7 million passengers set sail worldwide, surpassing the pre-pandemic record of 2019 by seven per cent. Global capacity is projected to grow by more than ten per cent between 2024 and 2028, with at least 56 new vessels scheduled to enter service (CLIA, 2024). This expansion is generating extraordinary demand for skilled workers across the many departments of a modern cruise ship.

Indonesia has real potential as a supplier of that talent. Yet behind the promise lies a structural problem that has yet to receive adequate attention: to what extent do the curricula of Indonesian hospitality degree programmes genuinely prepare graduates to meet the competency standards required by the international cruise industry? Artini (2015), in a Bali-based study, concluded that ordinary tourism and hospitality training is simply insufficient preparation for a cruise career and that a fundamentally different type of training and knowledge is required a conclusion whose relevance has only grown stronger in the decade since.

Pranoto et al. (2024) highlight the importance of social identity in shaping the motivation and behaviour of tourism workers, which is relevant to understanding why alumni face adaptation challenges that go well beyond the merely technical. Listyorini et al. (2023) stress the importance of developing tourism human resources with a deep understanding of cross-cultural consumer behaviour, a competency that is urgently needed in multinational cruise-ship environments yet is frequently absent from conventional curricula. Research on hospitality curriculum gaps has grown rapidly at the global level (Tushabe & Murimi, 2024; Hussain et al., 2023), but specific work on the cruise-industry context in Indonesia remains very thin.

Research Questions

This study addresses four main questions: (1) Which competency dimensions show the most significant gaps between hospitality degree outcomes and the standards of international cruise-ship hotel departments? (2) What structural factors contribute to the formation of those gaps? (3) How do alumni working on cruise

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ships experience and make sense of competency adaptation? (4) What policy recommendations and curriculum interventions are needed, from the perspectives of academics, alumni, and industry?

Purpose and Significance

The study aims to identify the dimensions of the gap, explain the structural factors behind it, understand alumni adaptation strategies as an insider perspective, and formulate evidence-based recommendations. Academically, it fills a gap in the Indonesian vocational tourism education literature. Practically, it provides an empirical basis for institutions including STIEPARI, with its long track record of preparing internationally competitive tourism professionals (Listyorini & STIEPARI, 2025), to undertake targeted curriculum reviews. At the policy level, it offers a scientific argument for the Ministries of Tourism, Education, and Transportation.

METHODS

This study adopts an interpretivist paradigm with a qualitative approach and a Multiple Case Study design (Yin, 2018). This paradigm was chosen because ‘curriculum gap’ is a phenomenon understood differently by academics, alumni, and industry. It is precisely those layered understandings that constitute the most valuable data.

Informants were selected purposively on the basis of maximum variation sampling. The study involved 18 informants from three groups: six Academics and Curriculum Managers (APK), seven Cruise-Ship Alumni (AKP), and five Industry Representatives (IKP). Sampling was discontinued once theoretical saturation was reached. The full informant profiles are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Informant Profiles

Informant Group	Code	Name / Institution	Role / Position
Academics & Curriculum Managers (APK)	APK-01	Anwar Maulana / Prosens Hospitality School, Ngawi	Curriculum Manager
	APK-02	Dr. Fera Dhian Anggraini / Akparda Sakti, Yogyakarta	Lecturer / Programme Manager
	APK-03	Dr. (C). Ariyanto / Hospitality Institute, Bantul	Hospitality Academic
	APK-04	Budi Laksono / LPK Bahari Jaya, Bekasi	Curriculum Manager
	APK-05	Ayu Dewi Permata / SMK Al Hidayah Jepara	Hospitality Teacher
	APK-06	Acepta Ruli Matolesi / Training Institute,	Hospitality Instructor
Cruise-Ship Alumni (AKP)	AKP-01	Bagus Panuntun / Housekeeping Dept.	Cabin Steward (2 contracts)
	AKP-02	Srinata Alif Mulawardhani / Provision Dept.	Head Storekeeper
	AKP-03	Chaidar Bimantara Jati / P&O Cruises UK	Demi Chef de Partie
	AKP-04	Ari Sadewa / F&B Service Dept.	Waiter (since 2019)
	AKP-05	Muhammad Luthfi Ibrahim / Pastry Dept.	Pastry Assistant
	AKP-06	M. Khoirudin Amri / MY Al Salamah, Jeddah	Stateroom Steward (HK)
	AKP-07	Nuryanto / Virgin Voyages, Housekeeping	Cabin Host
Industry Representatives (IKP)	IKP-01	Rifgatul Ulfa / Baruna Academy	Recruiter / Trainer
	IKP-02	Anisa Nur Azizah / The Luminary	HR Recruitment
	IKP-03	Edi Wibawa / PT AHM	HR Manager
	IKP-04	Nugroho Sulistyo / PT Langkung Saksama, Jakarta	Crewing Agency Director
	IKP-05	Aditya Nugraha / PT Ifan Margatama, Yogya	Senior Recruiter

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews guided by separate interview protocols for each informant group. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants’ consent and transcribed verbatim. Data were analysed using Braun & Clarke’s (2006) six-phase Thematic Analysis: familiarisation, initial inductive coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, defining, and integrated report writing. Credibility was ensured through source triangulation (APK, AKP, IKP) and method triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of the 19 interview transcripts produced four core themes that answer each of the four research questions. These themes emerged inductively from the data and were confirmed through cross-group triangulation. The overall thematic structure is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis Results

Core Theme	Sub-themes	Data Sources
T1: Gaps in Cruise-Specific Technical Competencies	STCW & maritime safety deficit; USPH standards & work speed; industrial equipment; multi-accent cross-cultural communication	APK-01, APK-02, APK-05; AKP-01, AKP-04, AKP-07; IKP-01, IKP-03, IKP-05
T2: Multi-Layered Structural Barriers	Regulatory overlap between Ministry of Education and Ministry of Transportation; limited simulation facilities; scarce experienced instructors; dominant land-based orientation	APK-01 to APK-06; IKP-01, IKP-02, IKP-04
T3: Self-Directed Alumni Adaptation Strategies	Intensive observation and buddy system; informal on-the-job learning; mental resilience management; fellow-countryman networks	AKP-01 to AKP-07
T4: Convergence of Recommendations from Three Perspectives	Embedding STCW in core curriculum; ship-standard simulation; active industry–academia collaboration; building mental resilience	APK, AKP, IKP (triangulated)

Theme 1: Gaps in Cruise-Specific Technical Competencies

The first and most prominent theme to emerge from the analysis is a significant gap between the technical competencies taught in hospitality programmes and the specific competencies demanded by the cruise industry. This gap manifests in four interrelated dimensions.

Maritime Safety Competency Deficit (STCW)

All informants across all three groups consistently identified the absence of STCW certification from hospitality curricula as the most critical gap. APK-01 described the barriers to integration:

“At present, it is not formally integrated. The main obstacles are: the high cost of STCW training (IDR 7–8 million per person), the need for specialist facilities such as a swimming pool for survival training and a fire-fighting simulator room that hospitality schools simply do not have, and regulations that distinguish between educational institutions under the Ministry of Education and maritime training under the Ministry of Transportation.” (APK-01)

From the alumni perspective, AKP-01 recounted his experience of independently obtaining STCW as a prerequisite before his first contract:

“My campus made absolutely no provision for STCW certification. I had to find the information myself, register with a maritime training institute in Surabaya, and pay IDR 7–8 million. It took about five days of intensive training plus two weeks to process the certificate. This is a serious problem because that cost is a real burden for a fresh graduate.” (AKP-01)

Industry representative IKP-01 emphasised that STCW is not a mere formality but an operational competency on which the safety of thousands of passengers depends:

“Beyond a degree, STCW certificates, Basic Safety Training, Fire Fighting, First Aid, Personal Survival Techniques, are an absolute requirement because of international regulations. There is no room for compromise: a single hygiene failure can endanger 3,000 to 6,000 passengers.” (IKP-01)

These findings are consistent with Mori & Manuel (2024), who identified significant variation in how institutions integrate STCW, and with Rosmayana (2025), who documented the challenges of embedding maritime competencies in general education curricula. The costs reported by informants (IDR 1.5 million to IDR 8 million) reflect variation across training providers, with an average of IDR 3–5 million based on triangulation across all alumni informants.

USPH Procedures and Work-Pace Unpreparedness

All alumni in housekeeping and F&B roles reported being shocked by the United States Public Health (USPH) standards and the pace of work required. APK-04 from LPK Bahari Jaya identified this as one of the competencies for which students are least prepared:

“The competencies that students are least ready for are: work ethic, strict and detailed SOPs, maritime safety, and cross-cultural and multilingual communication.” (APK-04)

AKP-01 gave a vivid account of the gulf between campus standards and shipboard standards:

“At college, we cleaned rooms at our own pace. On the ship, one cabin had to be finished in 15–20 minutes following a 16-step written procedure. In my first week I was reprimanded by my Filipino supervisor for forgetting to replace the pillowcase with the fold facing outward, that is a mandatory standard on ships. I also struggled to clean public areas because I had never touched a polishing machine at college.” (AKP-01)

IKP-05 from an experienced crewing agency explained the urgency of USPH standards from a risk-management perspective:

“On land we may be used to wiping a table with an ordinary cloth, but on a ship you must understand the proper use of cleaning chemicals, correct water temperatures, and cross-contamination prevention procedures. These competencies cannot be compromised: a single virus outbreak on a ship can bring the entire company’s operations to a halt.” (IKP-05)

These findings reinforce Artini’s (2015) argument that cruise-ship hospitality demands ‘a different knowledge-set’ that differs substantially from land-based hotel standards.

Multi-Accent Cross-Cultural Communication Competencies

All alumni consistently reported that the English taught at college, focused on formal grammar and vocabulary differs fundamentally from the communication demands of a cruise ship, where multi-accent comprehension and survival English are essential. AKP-07 offered the most reflective account of this gap:

“At college we were typically taught formal, neat, textbook English. But once onboard, the English in use is extremely unpredictable. I was genuinely taken aback when I had to deal with hundreds of different accents — from the thick Eastern European or Indian accents of colleagues to guests from Latin America. Perfect grammar became almost irrelevant; what mattered most was the speed with which you could catch someone’s meaning.” (AKP-07)

A deeper dimension of cultural sensitivity beyond language ability was also identified as a significant gap. AKP-01 cited a specific incident:

“College never taught me that in Filipino culture, pointing with your index finger is considered rude, they use their lips or chin. I learned the hard way: I was once scolded because I happened to glance at my supervisor with an expression that was taken as disrespectful.” (AKP-01)

IKP-01 confirmed that a deficit in natural spoken English rather than academic proficiency is the most consistently observed gap among Indonesian candidates:

“The main deficit is natural English many graduates can read a text but cannot follow a British or American accent in radio communication.” (IKP-01)

These findings align with Brownell (2008), who identified cross-cultural leadership and intercultural competence as unique competencies rarely taught in conventional hospitality programmes.

Already-Relevant Competencies: Hospitality Technical Foundations

It is important to note that the analysis also identified competencies that are already considered relevant and immediately useful on a cruise ship. All informant groups acknowledged that the technical hospitality foundations service ethics, basic housekeeping procedures, F&B service, and work discipline constitute valuable capital. AKP-07 explained:

“Hospitality education gives you a strong foundation in SOPs and service discipline, which is absolutely crucial from the moment you start working on a cruise ship. On a ship where everything moves fast, crew have very little time to learn from scratch, so having a service instinct already honed at school is a tremendous help.” (AKP-07)

AKP-04 confirmed that competencies such as Excellent Service, Hygiene and Sanitation, English, and Product Knowledge transfer directly. This finding indicates that the problem is not that the entire curriculum is irrelevant, it is that the curriculum is incomplete. There are cruise-specific dimensions that need to be strengthened.

Theme 2: Multi-Layered Structural Barriers to Curriculum Renewal

The second theme identifies a set of structural barriers that systematically prevent educational institutions from responding to the needs of the cruise industry. These barriers are multi-layered regulatory, resource-based, and cultural, and cannot be addressed by any single intervention.

Regulatory Barriers: The Kemdikbud–Kemenhub Dichotomy

All academics identified the regulatory misalignment between the Ministry of Education (which governs hospitality curricula) and the Ministry of Transportation (which governs STCW certification) as the most fundamental barrier. APK-05 put it precisely:

“Regulatory barriers frequently stem from the difficulty of aligning national academic standards with highly specific international standards such as STCW from IMO. Curricula must satisfy the administrative requirements of the education ministry for graduates to receive their qualifications, but at the same time the cruise industry demands technical certification that can only be issued by a maritime transport authority.” (APK-05)

APK-01 added that the absence of specific government pressure or incentives compounds the problem:

“The Ministry of Education focuses on general national vocational education standards. The Ministry of Transportation does govern STCW, but it does not touch hospitality curricula. The Ministry of Tourism also lacks a specific programme for cruise ships. Incentives such as equipment grants or teacher-training for the cruise industry are extremely limited.” (APK-01)

These findings resonate with Rogers (2003) on how the factors of complexity and compatibility slow the adoption of innovation in institutional systems. Unsynchronised regulation creates institutional inertia that is hard to overcome.

Resource Barriers: Facilities and Instructors

Resource barriers take two forms: the high investment cost of simulation facilities, and a shortage of instructors with direct cruise-ship experience. APK-05 explained:

“Building a laboratory that replicates the compact but efficient cruise-ship working environment requires a large investment that educational institutions can rarely afford. Beyond that, there is a shortage of instructors with hands-on cruise experience; skilled practitioners typically choose to keep sailing because of the significant income differential.” (APK-05)

IKP-02, from the industry side, confirmed the competency gap between vocational training-centre graduates and academic graduates, with significant implications for recruitment strategy:

“Because vocational training centres allocate sixty per cent of study time to practical work, their graduates have better work readiness and work ethic than university graduates. On the other hand, university graduates with a stronger academic component have considerably better interpersonal capabilities.” (IKP-02)

This reveals a trade-off that needs to be balanced: technical readiness versus intellectual and interpersonal capacity.

Institutional Culture Barriers: The Dominant Land-Based Orientation

Cultural barriers stem from an academic mind-set that is poorly aligned with the disciplinary demands of cruise-ship work. APK-01 described this as ‘the assumption that a land-based hotel background is sufficient preparation’, while APK-05 elaborated:

“Cultural barriers arise from an academic mind-set that is sometimes poorly aligned with the very strict work discipline of the cruise industry. Campus environments tend to be flexible, whereas the cruise industry demands mental toughness, rigid punctuality, and the readiness to work under sustained high pressure for long periods.” (APK-05)

APK-04 reinforced this by pointing to the limited industry-academia collaboration that currently exists:

“The key to success lies in the intensity of communication with industry, the direct involvement of cruise lines (not just agents), and the integration of curriculum, training, and recruitment pathways.” (APK-04)

Theme 3: Self-Directed Alumni Adaptation Strategies

The third theme reveals how alumni actively develop adaptation strategies to bridge the competency gaps they encounter. Despite the limitations of their campus preparation, all alumni succeeded in adapting through a combination of informal strategies that were never formally taught.

Intensive Observation and the Buddy System

Almost all alumni reported that intensively observing senior colleagues especially during the first weeks of a contract, was the most effective adaptation strategy. AKP-01 described the process systematically:

“I learned by watching my Filipino colleagues for two full weeks. They were very helpful because they had once been new themselves. My Indian supervisor taught me the technique for cleaning a mirror without streaks in thirty seconds. The buddy system on ships is very effective — every new crew member is paired with a senior one.” (AKP-01)

AKP-07 extended this strategy with an emphasis on structured ‘learning by doing’:

“I watched how the experienced seniors worked the way they spoke to guests, the tricks they used to finish tasks quickly. I also frequently jotted down unfamiliar terms or new procedures in a small notebook so I would not have to ask the same thing twice.” (AKP-07)

These findings reflect Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning principles: the most effective learning occurs through a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, and active experimentation not through classroom instruction alone.

Mental Management and Psychological Resilience

The most unexpected yet most consistently mentioned dimension of adaptation was the need for a high level of mental resilience. AKP-07 identified this as a ‘survival competency’ that was never taught at college:

“The competency I had to develop most on my own was high-level emotional management and mental resilience. At college we were taught how to smile at guests; on a ship, you learn how to keep smiling and working with precision when you are exhausted from lack of sleep or missing your family back home.” (AKP-07)

IKP-01 confirmed from a recruitment perspective that mental resilience is the hardest competency to assess yet the most decisive factor in contract success:

“The most important thing is mental resilience, because working on a ship means living in a tiny cabin, limited contact with family, and shifts of ten to twelve hours a day with no days off for the duration of the contract.” (IKP-01)

AKP-01 offered practical advice that reflects the mental adaptation strategy he had developed:

“Master conversational English in multiple accents, get your STCW certification before you graduate, and train your body because ship work demands real stamina. And prepare yourself mentally for living in a two-by-two-metre cabin with a stranger for eight months.” (AKP-01)

Building Cross-Cultural Social Networks

All alumni reported that social networks especially with fellow Indonesians played an important role in the early adaptation phase. AKP-02 emphasised:

“The thing that usually helps most is having fellow Indonesians around to help you understand things, but there is no escaping the fact that your own initiative in asking questions and socialising with the rest of the crew is absolutely essential.” (AKP-02)

Interestingly, all alumni also identified that, over time, the ability to build networks across cultures beyond compatriots became the distinguishing factor between crew members who grew professionally and those who stagnated. AKP-07 offered a piece of advice for the next generation:

“Do not just memorise menus start exercising, build your physical fitness, and strengthen your heart so you do not give up easily when your supervisor reprimands you or when you feel lonely in the middle of the ocean.” (AKP-07)

Theme 4: Convergence of Recommendations from Three Stakeholder Perspectives

The fourth and most prospective theme identifies areas of convergence in the recommendations offered by three groups with very different perspectives. This convergence provides strong legitimacy for a curriculum-reform agenda, as it reflects a consensus among education providers, education users, and employers.

Embedding STCW in the Core Curriculum

The most consistent recommendation from all three groups was the need to integrate STCW Basic Safety Training (BST) into the core curriculum not as an optional add-on. APK-05 articulated this vision most clearly:

“The first change I would make is to integrate international safety certification (STCW) directly into the core curriculum package, so that students graduate not only with a degree but also with a seafarer’s book and a BST certificate that is ready for immediate use.” (APK-05)

APK-01 proposed a concrete mechanism: subsidising STCW costs through institutional partnerships:

“Integrating STCW certification as part of the curriculum, with subsidised costs through cooperation with maritime training institutions.” (APK-01)

Ship-Standard Simulation Facilities

All informant groups emphasised the need for practical modules and facilities that realistically simulate cruise-ship conditions. AKP-04 proposed:

“Give students far more work simulations that replicate the cruise-ship environment, using equipment that meets shipboard standards, so that graduates can adapt quickly. Also, English must become the full medium of instruction, not just a foreign-language subject.” (AKP-04)

IKP-01 from the industry side expressed enthusiastic support and offered concrete contributions:

“Industry is very willing to serve as guest instructors for two to three days per semester to teach USPH, STCW, and ship-service standards. We are also ready to provide authentic training materials such as procedure videos and housekeeping checklists, and to open short onboard internship programmes of one to three months for final-semester students.” (IKP-01)

IKP-05 reinforced this with the concept of a ‘Cruise Class’ reflecting a deeper model of strategic partnership:

“Industry could donate the most current operational standard modules such as the latest USPH sanitation protocols or provide active ship officers as guest instructors to teach directly on campus.” (IKP-05)

Building Mental Resilience and Professional Character

One dimension that consistently emerged from all groups and has historically been the most neglected in curricula is the need for mental-resilience training and professional character development for extreme work environments. IKP-03 framed it as a fundamental requirement:

“Mental toughness training the conditions on a ship, with fast-paced systems, constant pressure, and long working hours, demand a genuinely strong mind that will not give up easily.” (IKP-03)

IKP-05 offered a concrete pedagogical approach that institutions could implement:

“Campuses need to apply stricter discipline around time management and physical endurance. For instance, practical examinations should not last only one or two hours run a high-season simulation that requires students to stand and continue delivering excellent service for four to seven hours nonstop.” (IKP-05)

A More Substantive Industry–Academia Collaboration Model

All informants identified that existing collaboration generally limited to recruitment information and job placement needs to grow into a substantive partnership in curriculum development. APK-04 identified the conditions for success:

“The key to success lies in the intensity of communication with industry, direct involvement of cruise lines (not just agents), and the integration of curriculum, training, and recruitment pathways.” (APK-04)

APK-05 pointed to existing policy instruments that have yet to be fully exploited:

“The government provides incentives through the ‘Link and Match’ programme and competitive grants that encourage universities to partner with industry in designing curricula so that graduates enter the workforce more quickly.” (APK-05)

This convergence is academically significant because it supports the Competency-Based Education (CBE) model’s emphasis on aligning learning outcomes, industry standards, and learning experiences. Kim & Park (2023) found that programmes with strong industry linkages produce graduates with higher employability a finding now corroborated by empirical data from the Indonesian context.

Theoretical Discussion

Taken as a whole, the findings confirm and extend Artini’s (2015) conclusion that cruise-ship work requires competencies that are fundamentally different from those needed in land-based hotels. This study not only identifies the gap in more specific and multidimensional terms but also reveals the structural mechanisms that sustain it (Theme 2) and the adaptive strategies individuals develop in response (Theme 3).

Through the lens of Diffusion of Innovation (Rogers, 2003), it becomes clear why curriculum renewal has been slow: the high complexity of STCW integration, its incompatibility with the primary goals of general educational institutions, and the low observability of its direct benefits create conditions that are unfavourable for the adoption of innovation. The intervention required is not merely a change in curriculum content but a systemic change in the entire hospitality education ecosystem.

Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning theory provides a strong explanation for why alumni self-directed adaptation strategies (Theme 3) prove effective: learning through concrete experience on a cruise ship, combined with reflective observation and active experimentation, builds far more robust competencies than conventional classroom instruction. The implication is that curricula increasing the proportion and quality of experiential learning, including structured onboard internships will produce more work-ready graduates.

CONCLUSION

This study yields four main conclusions that answer each of the four research questions posed.

First, the competency gap between Indonesian hospitality curricula and cruise-ship standards is multidimensional and systemic. Four critical gap dimensions were identified: (a) the absence of STCW certification from core curricula an international regulatory requirement that currently must be pursued independently by would-be crew at a personal cost of IDR 1.5–8 million; (b) unpreparedness for USPH procedures and work speeds requiring the completion of a 16-step procedure in 15–20 minutes; (c) a multi-accent cross-cultural communication gap that goes well beyond formal English proficiency; and (d) physical and psychological unpreparedness for extreme working conditions (10–12 hours per day with no days off for months at a time). At the same time, hospitality technical foundations service SOPs, housekeeping, F&B, and service ethics were recognised by all stakeholders as relevant and immediately transferable capital.

Second, the structural barriers hindering curriculum renewal are layered and mutually reinforcing. Three barrier layers were identified: (a) regulatory barriers stemming from the jurisdictional dichotomy between the Ministry of Education (curriculum) and the Ministry of Transportation (maritime certification), creating an institutional grey zone; (b) resource barriers in the form of high simulation facility investment costs and a scarcity of experienced cruise instructors; and (c) institutional culture barriers a dominant land-based orientation that treats cruise preparation as a supplement rather than a core concern. These conditions are compounded by the absence of specific incentives or regulatory pressure to drive the integration of cruise competencies into hospitality curricula.

Third, alumni working on cruise ships develop effective self-directed adaptation strategies that are costly in terms of time and energy. Three main strategies were identified: (a) intensive observation and buddy systems anchored in compatriot and multinational senior colleagues during the first weeks of a contract; (b) informal on-the-job learning relying on learning-by-doing and self-documented ship procedures; and (c) active mental management encompassing homesickness management, emotion regulation under pressure, and the construction of a new professional identity. The fact that this adaptation succeeds despite an incomplete curriculum demonstrates the resilience and self-directed learning capacity of the Indonesian workforce, potential that a more responsive education system should actively support.

Fourth, there is a strong convergence across all three stakeholder perspectives towards a curriculum reform agenda built on four pillars: (a) integrating STCW into the core curriculum through a collaborative subsidy mechanism; (b) developing simulation facilities meeting cruise-ship standards; (c) mental-resilience and professional character training as an explicit curriculum component; and (d) transforming industry-academia partnerships from a placement orientation to substantive collaboration in curriculum development. This convergence provides a strong legitimising foundation for the reform agenda.

For hospitality education institutions, the study recommends integrating BST STCW as a mandatory core subject or certified internship component, restructuring practical laboratories to simulate cruise conditions, adopting English as the full medium of instruction in all practical areas, and formally incorporating mental-toughness training into the curriculum. For government, it recommends establishing cross-ministry coordination between the Ministries of Education and Transportation, developing specific incentive programmes for curriculum synchronisation with STCW standards, and exploring STCW financing schemes for hospitality students. For industry, it recommends establishing a Cruise Industry Advisory Board, providing structured onboard training for final-semester students, and sharing authentic training materials with campus partners. Future research should include large-scale quantitative surveys, implementation studies of pilot STCW integration programmes, longitudinal studies of alumni career trajectories, and comparative studies between Indonesian, Filipino, and Indian hospitality programmes.

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