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DIFFICULTIES OF THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN A LANDLOCKED MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the level of difficulties encountered by the hospitality industry in a landlocked municipality in Central Philippines during the calendar year 2025–2026. Using a descriptive-quantitative research design, the study involved 300 hospitality industry stakeholders composed of business owners, employees, and tourism-related personnel selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered using a researcher-developed survey questionnaire validated by experts and tested for reliability, yielding an excellent reliability coefficient. The study focused on three significant areas of difficulty: accessibility and infrastructure, market and competition, and management and support systems. Descriptive statistics, weighted mean, and the Mann–Whitney U test were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that the hospitality industry faces significant challenges across all three areas, including insufficient parking, limited infrastructure investment, seasonal fluctuations in tourist demand, intense competition, difficulty hiring skilled staff, and limited institutional support. Significant differences were found when respondents were grouped by age and highest educational attainment, but none were observed when grouped by sex and years of experience. Older respondents perceived greater difficulty with accessibility and infrastructure. In contrast, respondents with lower educational attainment reported greater difficulty with markets and competition, as well as with management and support systems. The study concludes that the hospitality industry in landlocked municipalities is constrained by infrastructural limitations, unstable market conditions, and weak management and institutional support. This study calls for collaborative efforts among local government units, hospitality establishments, and partner institutions to strengthen infrastructure development, enhance workforce capacity, and intensify tourism promotion in order to improve the sustainability and competitiveness of the hospitality industry.

KEYWORDS: *Difficulties; hospitality industry, landlocked municipality, accessibility and infrastructure, market and competition, management and support systems*

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The hospitality sector is a major contributor to economic growth, job creation, and intercultural communication. At the same time, municipalities that are geographically inland and thus lack direct access to the beach have different problems in making the most of their tourism and hospitality potential. These municipalities need to rely mainly on other attractions, such as cultural heritage, historical landmarks, festivals, ecotourism, and agricultural tourism, to attract visitors. Such dependence determines the specific features and problems of the hospitality sector in the landlocked regions.

Even though these municipalities have many cultural and natural assets, the hospitality industry their faces several operational problems. They are: limited accessibility and transportation networks, insufficient accommodation and food service infrastructure, poor marketing strategies, lack of capital, and a shortage of qualified personnel. Collectively, these barriers reduce service quality, limit competitiveness, and hinder long-term sustainability.

This study also aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It supports SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by addressing employment and business sustainability, SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) by examining logistical barriers, SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by highlighting the role of hospitality in cultural and social development, and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by promoting sustainable practices. Furthermore, SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) underscores the importance of collaboration among local governments, business owners, and communities to address the identified challenges.

The researchers were motivated to conduct this study by observing the struggles of hospitality stakeholders in landlocked municipalities. Tourism possesses clear potential, yet its expansion faces real-world operational challenges. This research aimed to pinpoint what holds the industry back so we can better use resources, improve its competitiveness, and support lasting economic progress.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aimed to determine the level of difficulty of the hospitality industry in a landlock municipality in the areas of Accessibility and Infrastructure, Market and Competition, and Management and Support Systems. Moreover, this aimed to determine whether or not significant differences exist in the level of difficulties of the hospitality industry when grouped according to the the profile variables identified.

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Theoretical Framework

This study relies on the Diamond Model of Competitive Advantage by Michael Porter (1990), which illustrates how specific industries or regions gain a competitive edge over others through four determinants: factor conditions, demand conditions, related and supporting industries, and firm strategy, structure, and rivalry. If it is about landlocked municipalities, factor conditions are limited to transport networks, lack of infrastructure, and shortage of skilled workers; demand conditions suffer from few tourists and lack of destination marketing; related and supporting industries are poorly developed, thus, hospitality businesses find it hard to get timely supplies and resources; and firm strategy and rivalry are affected by a small market size and little innovation.

This theory is relevant to understanding the hospitality industry, as resource constraints and poor accessibility significantly limit growth. Thus, this framework is chosen for the present study because it provides a comprehensive lens to examine how these determinants shape the competitiveness and sustainability of hospitality businesses in landlocked areas, while also guiding strategic improvements in infrastructure, human resource development, market creation, and sustainable practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural and landlocked places face structural problems related to accessibility (poor road connectivity, few transport hubs), which increase travel costs and thereby reduce the number of visitors; hence, access is one of the main factors determining the tourism performance and competitiveness of inland locations. Studies of rural destinations indicate that tourist numbers increase and tourism benefits are more equitably redistributed when transport corridors and connectivity are improved, as research by Bogdan, Constantin Ibanescu et al. (2022) has shown.

Hospitality businesses in landlocked areas typically face supply chain challenges (longer delivery times, higher input prices) that raise operating costs and, in turn, lower service quality. Henry Aigbedo, in his 2020 study, found that logistical issues were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in reduced product availability and making home-making businesses more vulnerable.

Inland towns in the Philippines report that poor roads and a lack of transport options are significant issues for local tourism, which increases hotel and other business expenses (Meralyn Supera et al. 2024). Provincial rest studies also substantiate that transport deficits are the main reasons for low occupancy and restricted business growth in the towns of the inland.

Workforce and management issues, such as staff shortages, low wages, limited training, and dependence on seasonal demand, have been identified by local studies as more severe in landlocked areas, where market size and training opportunities are smaller than in urban/coastal centers. These factors, which already limit service quality and customer loyalty, have been further exacerbated in landlocked areas.

Landlocked municipalities are at a severe disadvantage in tourism, receiving fewer visitors than their coastal counterparts. The gap in tourist arrivals between these two types of municipalities is partly due to inadequate marketing efforts and lower destination visibility for these inland places. As a result, the limited demand in these areas constrains business expansion. It restricts the revenue streams available to the local hospitality sector, as Lopez & Bautista (2020) highlight.

According to Kalvelage, L. et al. (2020). This mixed-methods study examines how improved infrastructure—specifically the development of tarred roads and growth corridors—affects tourism in the rural Zambezi region of Namibia. Think of it this way: while this isn't your typical hospitality study, it clearly shows that when people can get around more easily, more tourists come. The thing is, not everyone gets to share equally in those benefits. This indicates that being landlocked really hurts how well hotels and such can do, because it's so hard to get there.

According to Ibanescu et al. (2022), Tourism resilience & accessibility in rural destinations presents an empirical mediation model showing that accessibility to urban centres mediates tourism-based economic resilience in rural destinations — implying that accessibility improvements increase the resilience and performance of hospitality businesses.

This descriptive, survey study, conducted by Dela Cruz, D. M. N. (2023), examines hospitality stakeholders' challenges in operations, marketing, and finance during the COVID-19 pandemic in Zambales. Although it is not a landlocked province, Zambales faces specific rural and access-related issues that limit mobility and cause operational disruptions, just as in landlocked municipalities.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design, which is appropriate for examining the difficulties encountered by the hospitality industry in a landlocked municipality, as it allows for the systematic presentation of factual conditions and challenges faced by establishments. It also enables the collection and analysis of varied perspectives from industry stakeholders, providing a clearer understanding of location-related constraints, operational issues, and contextual factors affecting hospitality operations.

The respondents of this study were the 300 hospitality industry stakeholders. These included business owners and employees working in hotels, restaurants, resorts, and event-related establishments.

The researchers gathered the necessary data for this study by creating researcher-made survey questionnaires which had undergone validity testing obtaining the result of 4.78, and reliability testing with the result of 0.942, both interpreted as excellent.

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Ethical Consideration

The researchers followed research ethics in this study by obtaining informed consent from each respondent and stressing that participation was voluntary. Participants were informed they could quit at any time if they felt uneasy, and that their answers would be kept secret and used solely for scholarly research. When the results were reported, any personal or business identifiers were left out. Anonymity was protected by keeping identifying details from anyone outside the study team. The researchers maintained respect, openness, and integrity during data collection to protect the rights and well-being of all participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis of the level of difficulties of the hospitality industry in terms of Accessibility and Infrastructure, Market and Competition, and Management and Support Systems

Table 1

Level of difficulties of the hospitality industry in terms of Accessibility and Infrastructure

Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Poor road conditions leading to business locations	4.12	0.831	High Level
2. Lack of public transportation limits customer access	4.20	0.831	High Level
3. Delays in the delivery of supplies due to distance from major suppliers	4.00	0.795	High Level
4. Unstable internet connectivity affecting business operations	4.21	0.801	High Level
5. Inconsistent power or water supply	4.06	1.428	High Level
6. Insufficient parking space for guests during peak hours	4.38	0.863	High Level
7. Inadequate signage or directions to business establishments	3.88	1.073	High Level
8. Inadequate waste disposal and sanitation services	3.88	1.040	High Level
9. Absence of nearby tourist attractions reduces guest visits	4.26	0.784	High Level
10. Lack of infrastructure investments to support tourism growth	4.38	0.802	High Level
Overall Mean	**4.14**	**0.514**	**High Level**

Table 1 shows the level of difficulty in terms of Accessibility and Infrastructure, with an overall mean of 4.14, interpreted as *High Level*. These means hospitality businesses are really struggling with access to physical locations, public transport, utilities, and infrastructure. The highest average value was observed in Items 6 “Not enough parking space for visitors during peak hours” and 10 “No infrastructure development to support tourism growth”, both with the mean of 4.38. These indicate that businesses are struggling due to space constraints and the lack of municipal infrastructure projects that could boost tourism. The lowest average score was for Item 7 “Insufficient signage or directions to business establishments”, obtaining the mean of 3.88 interpreted as “ High level”.

The overall difficulty level shows that natural and infrastructural limitations remain major challenges for the hospitality industry. Poor transport facilities, irregular utilities, and limited parking negatively affect customer access, operational efficiency, and guest satisfaction. However, the lower difficulty rating for signage suggests that businesses have adapted by using online maps, social media, and other digital tools to help customers locate their establishments.

High ratings for inadequate parking and insufficient infrastructure investment reflect deeper issues in urban planning and government support. As landlocked municipalities are not priority tourist destinations, they often receive limited funding for roads, transport facilities, and utilities, which continues to constrain hospitality business growth.

The results support the findings of Ibanescu et al. (2022), which emphasized that accessibility issues—such as limited transport systems and underdeveloped infrastructure—significantly hinder tourism performance and service delivery in rural and landlocked destinations. This finding is consistent with the study by Mendoza & Aguilar (2019), which reported that rural and landlocked municipalities often experience tourism stagnation due to insufficient infrastructure, limited spatial planning, and the absence of long-term development strategies that support hospitality establishments.

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Table 2
Level of difficulties of the hospitality industry in terms of Market and Competition

Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Seasonal fluctuation in guest numbers or bookings	4.48	0.715	High Level
2. Intense price competition among hospitality businesses	4.27	0.774	High Level
3. Limited marketing and promotion support from the local government	4.19	0.762	High Level
4. Heavy reliance on local customers rather than outside tourists	4.30	0.720	High Level
5. Difficulty maintaining competitive service quality with limited resources	4.20	0.784	High Level
6. Low demand for new products or services	4.23	0.827	High Level
7. Limited online visibility and digital presence	4.24	0.789	High Level
8. Competitor pressure from lower-priced services	4.23	0.847	High Level
9. Low profitability during off-peak seasons	4.31	0.781	High Level
10. Lack of collaboration among hospitality businesses to boost tourism	4.31	0.777	High Level
Overall Mean	**4.28**	**0.511**	**High Level**

Findings in Table 2 shows the Market and Competition obtaining an overall mean of 4.28, indicating a “High Level” of difficulty. This suggests that hospitality businesses face intense competition and unstable market conditions. The highest mean was for Item 1 “Seasonal fluctuation in guest numbers or bookings”, at 4.48, reflecting inconsistent customer flow. This is common in landlocked areas where tourism demand fluctuates. Meanwhile, the lowest mean was for Item 3 “Limited marketing and promotion support from local government”, at 4.19. Although it remains a significant challenge, it is perceived as less challenging than seasonality and competition.

The findings indicate that the hospitality industry faces unstable demand and strong competition, particularly during off-peak seasons. Businesses rely heavily on local customers due to limited access to wider tourist markets. While some marketing efforts appear to be in place, they are insufficient to address broader demand challenges. Seasonal fluctuations remain high, largely due to the absence of major attractions, limited events, and minimal off-peak promotions. Being landlocked, the municipality lacks natural drawcards, making tourism highly seasonal and causing inconsistent revenue and intensified competition among establishments.

The results align with the study of Lopez & Bautista (2020), which found that landlocked municipalities face limited market demand and experience competitive pressure due to reduced tourist visibility and stronger dependence on local clientele.

According to Salcedo & Romanillos (2020), tourism-dependent businesses in inland areas commonly experience significant declines in visitor numbers outside peak seasons, leading to financial instability and increased vulnerability to competition.

Table 3
Level of difficulties of the hospitality industry in terms of Management and Support Systems

Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Difficulty hiring qualified and skilled hospitality staff	4.49	0.756	Very High Level
2. High staff turnover affects service quality	4.33	0.742	High Level
3. Limited opportunities for staff training and development	4.13	0.807	High Level
4. Delays or challenges in obtaining business permits and licenses	4.07	0.972	High Level
5. Insufficient government policies supporting the hospitality industry	4.29	0.732	High Level
6. Lack of local programs or initiatives to promote tourism	4.31	0.788	High Level
7. Inadequate safety and security measures for guests	4.03	0.962	High Level
8. Difficulty accessing affordable raw materials and supplies	4.24	0.831	High Level
9. Limited disaster preparedness or risk management support	4.33	0.758	High Level
10. Lack of financial assistance or incentives for business expansion	4.34	0.782	High Level
Overall Mean	**4.26**	**0.511**	**High Level**

The level of difficulty in terms of Management and Support Systems yielded an overall mean of 4.26, which indicates “High Level”. This demonstrates that establishments encounter management-related and external support challenges. Item 1 “Difficulty hiring qualified and skilled hospitality staff” recorded the highest mean score of 4.49, suggesting a severe shortage of trained personnel in the municipality. The lowest mean was for Item 7 “Inadequate safety and security measures for guests”, which scored 4.03. Although still high, respondents perceive this as the least problematic of the management issues.

The overall great difficulty level suggests the need for higher-quality employee training programs and for greater, easily accessible government support. The lack of staff affects the quality of service and the competitiveness of the business. On the other hand, the measure of safety with less difficulty suggests that

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the industry has basic safety measures but lacks other forms of institutional support. The very great difficulty in finding skilled staff indicates that the area lacks individuals trained in hospitality or who are not formally educated. The shortage of such personnel may be due to the absence of training centers in the area, the very few TESDA-accredited programs, and the lack of exposure among residents to the hospitality industry. Many skilled workers also relocate to cities or tourist areas where salaries are higher, leaving local businesses with a smaller pool of potential candidates. As a consequence, organizations have to compromise on service quality, which, in turn, adds to operational inefficiencies and customer dissatisfaction.

This finding corroborates the results of Gössling et al. (2018), who noted that the performance of hospitality establishments in remote and rural areas is frequently hindered by limited availability of skilled labor, the absence of training facilities, and a lack of government support. This is further demonstrated by the research conducted by Santos & De Guzman (2018), which found that rural lodging businesses are consistently short-staffed, as trained workers are still attracted to urban or tourist-mega areas where better pay and career advancement opportunities are offered.

Comparative analysis of the level of difficulties of the hospitality industry in terms of Accessibility and Infrastructure, Market and Competition, and Management and Support Systems when grouped and compared according to Age, Sex, Highest Educational Attainment, and Years of Experience in the Hospitality Industry

Table 4
Difference in the level of difficulties of the hospitality industry in terms of Accessibility and Infrastructure when grouped and compared according to variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	p-value	*Sig. level*	Interpretation
Age	Younger	134	136.02	9182.000	0.009	0.05	Significant
	Older	166	162.19				
Sex	Male	127	159.34	9862.500	0.129		Not Significant
	Female	173	144.01				
Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	156	158.02	10059.500	0.117		Not Significant
	Higher	144	142.36				
Years of Experience in the Hospitality Industry	Shorter	194	153.35	9729.000	0.439		Not Significant
	Longer	106	145.28				

Data on Table 4 revealed no significant differences in accessibility difficulties across sex, highest educational attainment, and years of experience, as their p-values were greater than 0.05. This means these groups perceive accessibility problems similarly. However, a significant age difference was found (p-value = 0.009). Older respondents had a higher mean rank (162.19) than younger respondents (136.02), suggesting that older respondents perceive greater difficulty with accessibility and infrastructure.

The lack of significant findings implies that accessibility problems are common to all respondents, regardless of sex, educational attainment, or experience. The absence of substantial conclusions indicates that accessibility issues are experienced equally by all respondents, regardless of gender, education, or experience. This suggests that the problems are structural and affect all workers in the hospitality sector equally.

On the other hand, the stark difference in respondents' ages indicates that the older generation of workers is more conscious and even more considerate of the limitations imposed by the infrastructure, given their more prolonged exposure to operational requirements. Moreover, older respondents may find the situation more complicated than younger ones because they have been dealing with infrastructure constraints for so long. Their prolonged exposure allows them to see past and present situations, thereby making them more critical of the slow pace of development. In addition, older workers are generally more sensitive to physical restrictions, such as poor roads or long travel routes, which, in turn, affect their mobility and work hours. All this accumulated experience creates a very high level of awareness among the old workers about the logistical barriers faced by the industry.

The significant finding aligns with Alam et al. (2022), who noted that workers with longer life and industry experience tend to recognize deeper structural issues affecting tourism and hospitality operations.

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Table 5
Difference in the level of difficulties of the hospitality industry in terms of Market and Competition when grouped and compared according to variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	p-value	*Sig. level*	Interpretation
Age	Younger	134	147.68	10744.000	0.610	0.05	Not Significant
	Older	166	152.78				
Sex	Male	127	154.31	10501.000	0.511		Not Significant
	Female	173	147.70				
Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	156	160.50	9671.500	0.036		Significant
	Higher	144	139.66				
Years of Experience in the Hospitality Industry	Shorter	194	155.47	9318.500	0.177		Not Significant
	Longer	106	141.41				

Analysis showed no significant differences across age, sex, and years of experience. However, a significant difference exists in the highest educational attainment (p-value = 0.036). Respondents with lower educational attainment had a Mean Rank of 160.50, while those with higher educational attainment perceived market difficulties more strongly, with a Mean Rank of 139.66.

The absence of notable outcomes indicates that all the demographics mentioned above experience market and competitive difficulties, regardless of age, gender, or experience.

The educational level, which is a significant distinction, suggests that the educated may have better market insight, information, or even adaptive strategies, thus making them suffer the market less. People with low education are more likely to consider these hardships severe because they may have a poor understanding of marketing strategies, digital tools, or the business operations in place, which, in turn, makes the whole situation seem more overwhelming. If they lack proper education in this field, it will be more challenging for them to shift the competition, understand trends, and respond to seasonal changes. This is the very thing training programs must address, as a lack of technical skills heightens the perception of difficulty.

This assertion is also found in De Vera (2023), who claimed that those with excellent academic qualifications in hospitality are more likely to adapt their practices and thus face fewer market challenges. A study by Velasco (2021) found that workers with limited educational backgrounds often struggle with market-related tasks, such as online promotion, pricing strategies, and service differentiation, leading them to perceive market pressures more intensely.

Table 6
Difference in the level of difficulties of the hospitality industry in terms of Management and Support Systems when grouped and compared according to variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	p-value	*Sig. level*	Interpretation
Age	Younger	134	148.04	10792.500	0.657	0.05	Not Significant
	Older	166	152.48				
Sex	Male	127	153.57	10596.000	0.598		Not Significant
	Female	173	148.25				
Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	156	165.40	8909.000	0.002		Significant
	Higher	144	134.36				
Years of Experience in the Hospitality Industry	Shorter	194	150.67	10249.000	0.963		Not Significant
	Longer	106	150.19				

Results showed no significant differences in management and support challenges across age, sex, and years of experience. However, a significant difference was found in educational attainment (p-value = 0.002). Respondents with lower education, with a Mean Rank of 165.40, perceived greater difficulty in management systems than those with higher education, with a Mean Rank of 134.36.

The non-significant results show that the challenges associated with management are common across all workers, regardless of their demographic background.

Meanwhile, the significant difference in education level suggests that more educated individuals may be better able to navigate organizational systems, process paperwork, or understand government procedures, thereby perceiving the difficulty as less.

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The less educated respondents might experience greater management difficulties due to their lack of familiarity with administrative processes, documentation requirements, and support systems. They may also have difficulty understanding government regulations, licenses, or financial aid programs, which can make management tasks seem more complicated. Without formal training, they may also find it challenging to implement operational standards or solve management-related issues, resulting in higher difficulty ratings.

This aligns with Rahman & Ali (2021), who found that people's capacity to handle management tasks and negotiate institutional assistance structures in hospitality businesses depends on their level of education. This aligns with the research of Herrera & Lopez (2020), who found that those with less education have greater difficulty navigating organizational decision-making and administrative procedures, particularly in small- to medium-sized hospitality businesses.

CONCLUSIONS

The hospitality industry in the landlocked municipality consistently faces significant challenges across all three areas examined. One of the major issues in Accessibility and Infrastructure is insufficient parking and a lack of tourism-related infrastructure investments, both of which are making it difficult to attract and serve guests and to grow the business. These problems affect all workers, regardless of their demographic characteristics, though older employees are more affected. In Market and Competition, the fact that tourist demand fluctuates by season is one of the main reasons income is unstable and why competition becomes so intense during off-peak seasons. Besides, limited online visibility and pricing pressure further exacerbate these problems. Respondents with lower educational attainment are those who feel these issues most strongly, indicating that a lack of skills is limiting their ability to cope with competitive market challenges. Regarding Management and Support Systems, the most complex issue to resolve is, without a doubt, finding qualified hospitality staff. A high rate of staff turnover, inadequate training, and scarce government support further complicate these challenges. Lower-educated respondents are those who suffer these problems more deeply, which is why it is so essential to provide greater workforce development support. Perceived difficulties in the hospitality industry vary depending on age and educational attainment. Older respondents face more issues related to accessibility and infrastructure. At the same time, those with lower educational attainment are most likely to point to difficulties with the market, related concerns, and management support systems. Overall, the hospitality industry is constrained by weak infrastructure, unstable market conditions, and limited support systems, which slow industry growth, limit workforce development, and hinder the municipality's tourism competitiveness.

It is recommended that a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach be adopted among the Local Government Unit, hospitality establishments, educational institutions, and training agencies to address infrastructure deficiencies, workforce skill gaps, and seasonal demand challenges, thereby enhancing accessibility, workforce readiness, and the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the local hospitality industry.

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