

Adapting to Post COVID Hospitality: Mapping of Competencies and Teaching Methods in TVET Programs (2020-2025)

¹Sri Wahyuningsih, ¹Yusep Sukrawan*, ²Riswano

¹Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

²Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding Email: yusepsukrawan@upi.edu

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ABSTRACT

The hospitality sector has undergone significant changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting workforce competencies and teaching methods in vocational education and training (TVET). However, empirical evidence regarding required competencies and effective teaching methods remains limited. This exploratory review addresses the gap by examining studies published between 2020 and 2025. Following PRISMA-ScR guidelines, a systematic search of the Scopus database identified 19 studies meeting the inclusion criteria. Qualitative content analysis addressed two research questions concerning essential hospitality competencies and teaching methods used to develop them. The findings highlight communication, teamwork, industry readiness, flexibility, and leadership as key competencies. Common teaching methods include internships, work-integrated learning (WIL), experiential learning, and industry-academia collaboration. These approaches strengthen practical skills and facilitate graduates' transition into employment. The review recommends updating TVET curricula and strengthening industry-academia partnerships to ensure hospitality education remains relevant, responsive, and aligned with evolving post-pandemic workforce demands.

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Introduction

The hospitality industry is one of the sectors most affected by and undergoing transformation due to the COVID-19 pandemic Sigala (2020). This has also influenced various operational aspects, ranging from how to interact with hotel guests to the skills required of the workforce Pantaruk et al (2025). This pandemic has not only created enormous challenges, but has also created opportunities to develop new skills that are needed in this industry. Lore et al (2025). As the hospitality industry recovers, the sector needs to adapt to ongoing changes, both in terms of the competencies required and the teaching methods applied in vocational education Suyatmo et al (2025). Therefore, it is crucial to identify the key skills that workers in the hospitality sector must possess and how hospitality TVET programs can develop these skills to meet the demands of an industry that continues to evolve post-pandemic Pantaruk et al (2025).

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the hospitality sector faced major changes, both in terms of operations and human resources. Skills that were previously considered sufficient, such as technical skills, must now be combined with stronger soft skills and the ability to adapt to rapid changes Lore et al (2025). TVET programs in the hospitality sector need to update their curricula in order to produce graduates with the skills needed to face the challenges and changing demands of an ever-evolving industry Pantaruk et al (2025). This context also calls for pedagogy that bridges theory and practice to strengthen work readiness through authentic experiences such as work placements and industry internships Taylor and Geldenhuys (2018). In response, hospitality programs have adopted various industry-based approaches, including internship placements and work-integrated learning models to maintain pedagogical relevance in the post-pandemic period Ratten and Jones (2020). Interpersonal competencies and adaptability are becoming increasingly important, given the unpredictable dynamics of the world of work Suyatmo et al (2025).

In a study conducted by Lore et al. (2025), it was found that soft skills such as effective communication, teamwork, and time management are the main competencies sought by the post-pandemic hospitality industry. They also emphasized that industry readiness, or the readiness of graduates to work directly in the industry, is highly dependent on solid technical and interpersonal skills Lore et al (2025). In addition, the ability to adapt to rapid changes in the hospitality world is increasingly becoming a determining factor for career success in this sector Suyatmo et al (2025).

Another study by Suyatmo et al. (2025) revealed that practical experience, including internships and work placements, plays a very important role in preparing graduates to face real challenges in the hospitality sector. TVET programs that directly involve the industry through internships or industry-based projects can improve work readiness and strengthen technical and interpersonal

skills Suyatmo et al (2025). By learning in an environment that resembles the real world of work, students become better prepared to face the demands of the industry Pantaruk et al (2025).

As a follow-up to these findings, Pantaruk et al. (2025) emphasize that adaptability and career skills are other important competencies that hospitality TVET graduates must possess. With rapid changes in industry trends and customer demands, the ability to adapt quickly is essential Pantaruk et al (2025). Previous research shows that TVET programs that teach skills that can evolve with the changing world of work are more effective in preparing graduates who are ready and flexible to work in the hospitality sector.

Although there has been research discussing the skills needed in the post-pandemic hospitality sector, there is still a gap in the literature regarding how teaching methods can be adapted to meet the changing demands caused by COVID-19. Specifically, little is known about how methods such as experiential learning and work-integrated learning have been reconfigured in response to pandemic-era constraints, and what barriers educators and students face in implementing them. This study therefore aims to map the competencies needed in the hospitality sector between 2020 and 2025 and to analyze the teaching methods applied in hospitality TVET programs to develop these skills. The focus on the post-pandemic period enables a more targeted examination of how skills requirements and pedagogical approaches have shifted, providing a foundation for curriculum reform that is both timely and evidence-based.

Aim of the Study

This study is a scoping review that maps the competencies needed in the hospitality sector during the period 2020 to 2025 and analyzes the teaching methods used in TVET hospitality to develop these skills.

With reference to existing research, this review aims to answer the following questions:

1. What competencies are most needed in the hospitality sector in 2020-2025?
2. What teaching methods are used to develop these competencies in vocational education programs (TVET) in the hospitality sector?

Method

To address the knowledge gaps identified above, a systematic scoping review was conducted. This approach was selected because it enables a broad mapping of existing evidence across diverse study contexts, which is particularly appropriate given the rapid and varied ways in which hospitality TVET programs have responded to the post-pandemic landscape. The following section

describes the search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and data analysis procedures used to ensure transparency and reproducibility.

We conducted a preliminary literature review following the PRISMA-ScR guidelines to ensure transparency and reproducibility in the review process Tricco et al (2018) to obtain an overview of Competencies and Teaching Methods in Hospitality TVET Programs. PRISMA-ScR flow diagram explain in Figure 1.

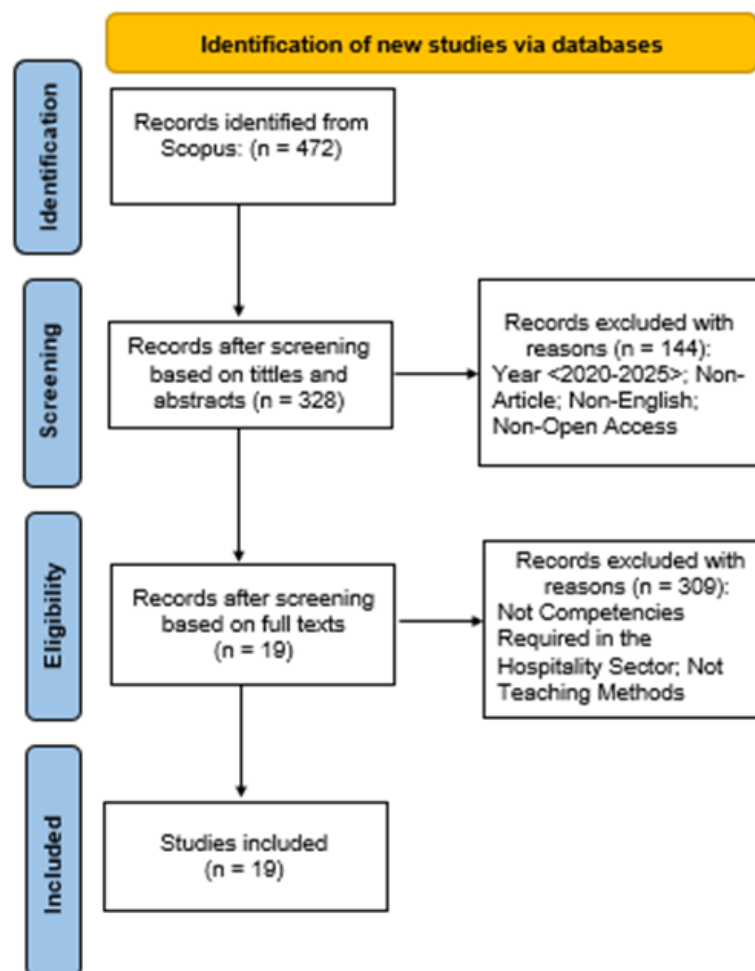


Fig 1. PRISMA-ScR flow diagram

Search Strategy

The data in this study includes articles focusing on competencies and teaching methods in hospitality TVET Programs (2020-2025). The data were collected using the Scopus database, one of the largest academic databases covering various disciplines Martín-Martín et al (2021).

First, we conducted a search using keywords accompanied by modified Boolean operators: (“employability skills” OR “workforce readiness” OR “job skills” OR “workplace skills”) AND (“TVET” OR “vocational education” OR “technical education”) AND (“hospitality” OR “hospitality industry” OR “hotel management”) AND (“training” OR “education” OR “programs” OR ‘curriculum’) AND (“skills development” OR “skill acquisition” OR “competencies”).

The study search was conducted in December 2025, and the initial search yielded 472 articles. In the first stage of the review, articles listed in the Scopus database were excluded (the PRISMA flow diagram of the search results can be seen in Figure 1). In the second stage, the lead author screened the titles and abstracts, eliminating studies that did not meet the inclusion-exclusion criteria (Table 1). Studies that passed the first stage were then analyzed in more depth through the full text. The main reason for further exclusion was the study's focus on Competencies and Teaching Methods in Hospitality TVET Programs. Thus, 19 studies conducted between 2020 and 2025 that met all inclusion criteria were included in the analysis.

Table 1. Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria

<i>Inclusion criteria</i>	<i>Exclusion criteria</i>
Hospitality TVET Education	Non-Hospitality TVET Education
Competencies in the Hospitality Sector	Non-Hospitality Sector
Teaching Methods in TVET Hospitality	Non-Teaching Methods
Clear and Open Access Articles	Incomplete/Inaccessible Data
2020-2025	<2020-2025>
English Articles	Non-English Articles

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the principles of qualitative content analysis in a systematic review Finfgeld-Connett (2014). Qualitative content analysis is a flexible method of data analysis, which can range from impressionistic interpretation to more systematic analysis (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

From the 19 studies included (Table 2), the author has created a detailed table of the studies included in this review containing the results of the answers based on the research questions. The summary of competencies required in the post-pandemic hospitality sector are Soft Skills, Communication, Teamwork, Industry Readiness, Adaptability, Leadership, Time Management, Hotel Management, and Problem Solving. Meanwhile, the summary of Teaching Methods in Hospitality TVET Programs includes Experiential learning, Internship, Work-Integrated Learning, and Industry-Academia Collaboration.

Table 2. Details of The Studies Included in This Review

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author (Year)</i>	<i>RQ1 Competencies Required in the Hospitality Sector (2020-2025)</i>	<i>RQ2 Teaching Methods to Develop Competencies in TVET Hospitality</i>
"Fostering future-ready professionals: The impact of soft skills and internships on hospitality employability in Thailand"	Pantaruk, S.; Khuadthong, B.; Imjai, N.; Aujirapongpan, S. (2025)	Soft Skills, Communication, Teamwork	Internship
"Preparing tourism, hospitality and events graduates to be industry ready: extending the three-factor model of authentic learning"	Kitchen et al. (2025)	Industry Readiness	Work-Integrated Learning
"Industrial trainees learning experiences of english related tasks at the workplace"	Singh, A.K.J.; Raja Harun, R.N.S.R. (2020)	Communication	Experiential Learning, Internship
"Work-integrated learning competencies: A case study in a food engineering practice school program"	Ruayruay, E.; Kirtikara, K.; Nopharatana, M.; Chomsuwan, K.; Suwannathep, S. (2020)	Communication, Teamwork, Leadership	Work-Integrated Learning

Result and Discussion

A total of 19 studies published between 2020 and 2025 were included in this review. The majority of these studies (14 out of 19) were published between 2023 and 2025, reflecting the current state and relevance of this field of research to contemporary hospitality TVET programs.

The Most Needed Competencies in the Hospitality Sector (2020-2025)

Analysis of RQ1 (Figure 2) reveals the various competencies required by the hospitality sector in 2020-2025. The following are the most needed competencies in the hospitality sector for the 2020-2025 period are:

1. Soft Skills (Communication, Teamwork):

Many articles highlight the importance of effective communication and teamwork in the hospitality sector, especially after the pandemic. These competencies are essential to ensure quality customer service and effective collaboration within teams in the hospitality sector. Pantaruk et al. (2025) mention that good communication skills are very important for

strengthening interactions with customers and building effective relationships between staff. Lore et al. (2025) also confirm that good teamwork skills are necessary to improve team performance and enhance customer experience in the hospitality industry.

2. Industry Readiness:

Industry readiness is a key competency required by TVET hospitality graduates to work effectively in this sector. This includes technical and interpersonal skills that enable graduates to immediately adapt to the world of work. Suyatmo et al. (2025) emphasize that graduates with industry readiness will adapt more quickly to the ever-evolving demands of the hospitality industry. Pantaruk et al. (2025) also highlight that practical skills during internships can increase students' industry readiness and accelerate their transition into the workplace.

3. Adaptability:

Adaptability is very important, especially amid rapid changes in the hospitality industry. Adaptability here includes the ability to deal with various changes in market trends and customer preferences post-pandemic. Sufi et al. (2025) it has been found that graduates who can adapt to new trends will be better prepared to face challenges and achieve success in the world of work.

4. Leadership:

Effective leadership is essential, especially for managerial roles in the hospitality sector, where the ability to manage teams and make quick decisions is highly valued. Braunstein-Minkove et al. (2023) reveal that leadership has become increasingly important post-pandemic as teams must respond swiftly to rapidly changing operational situations. Ruayruay et al. (2020) also note that strong leadership contributes to operational efficiency and team cohesion in hospitality. Competencies Required in the Hospitality Sector (2020-2025) explain in Figure 2.



Fig 2. Competencies Required in the Hospitality Sector (2020-2025)

Teaching Methods Used to Develop Hospitality Competencies in TVET Programs

Analysis of RQ2 (Figure 3) reveals a variety of teaching methods in hospitality TVET programs. The following are the most frequently used teaching methods in hospitality TVET programs to develop the required competencies:

1. Internship:

Internships are the most commonly used teaching method for developing practical competencies in the hospitality sector. Through internships, students gain firsthand experience that enables them to develop the technical and interpersonal skills required in the workplace Musa et al (2025). Pantaruk et al. (2025) emphasize that internships provide students with direct exposure to industry practice, offering valuable insights into the real world of work. Chen et al. (2023) further demonstrate that international internship experiences can strengthen language competency and employability, though gaps between student and industry stakeholder expectations remain a persistent challenge. Barriers to internship implementation include limited placement availability during periods of industry disruption, uneven mentoring quality across host establishments, and difficulties in standardizing the learning outcomes that students achieve across varied workplace contexts Nguyen et al (2023).

2. Work-Integrated Learning (WIL):

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is an educational approach that combines academic learning with real-world work experience through collaboration between educational institutions and industry. Its main objective is to improve students' work readiness by providing opportunities to apply theory in practical contexts Ortega-Sánchez et al (2020). WIL allows students to learn while working, giving them the opportunity to acquire practical skills that are directly relevant to careers in the hospitality sector Suyatmo et al (2025). Ipinge et al. (2020) added that WIL facilitates the development of skills that can be directly applied in the workplace, thereby improving students' readiness for careers in the hospitality sector.

However, the reviewed literature highlights several significant barriers to the effective implementation of WIL. Industry disruptions, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic itself severely restricted access to physical workplaces, making it difficult for institutions to sustain traditional WIL placements (Ipinge et al., 2020; Ratten and Jones, 2020). Mesuwini et al. (2023) found that TVET lecturers in South Africa reported challenges related to institutional support, inadequate industry partnerships, and lack of structured frameworks for assessing WIL outcomes. Furthermore, power imbalances and inconsistent workplace cultures can negatively

affect students' WIL experiences, as identified through the critical incident analysis conducted by Nguyen et al (2023).

In response to these barriers, several studies point toward online and hybrid WIL adaptations as a promising direction for future-proofing the method. Ratten and Jones (2020) specifically examined virtual internships as an emerging WIL model during COVID-19, demonstrating that digital platforms can facilitate meaningful industry engagement even when physical placements are unavailable. In a hybrid WIL model, students may complete part of their placement on-site and part through remote or simulated tasks, maintaining industry connectivity while accommodating logistical or health-related constraints. Ipinge et al. (2020) demonstrated the viability of simulation-based approaches in Namibia, where students used structured simulations to develop WIL-relevant competencies prior to and during the pandemic, suggesting that technology-enhanced and blended delivery modes can serve as effective supplements or substitutes for traditional face-to-face WIL. As the hospitality industry continues to digitalize, hybrid WIL models that integrate virtual tools, digital guest interaction simulations, and remote mentoring from industry professionals represent a viable and resilient alternative that TVET institutions should consider embedding into their standard program designs.

3. Experiential Learning:

Experiential learning is also widely used to teach soft skills such as communication and teamwork. This method provides students with opportunity to learn in situations simulate the workplace, thereby preparing them to face real challenges upon employment. In the post-pandemic context, the reviewed studies indicate that experiential learning has been meaningfully adapted beyond its traditional forms. Dewantara et al. (2025) introduced an innovative model in which students conduct structured industry interviews as part of formal assessments, enabling them to engage directly with hospitality professionals and acquire firsthand industry insights without requiring a full internship placement. This approach proved particularly effective in contexts where access to physical work environments was restricted, as it preserves the authentic experiential dimension while being deliverable in a flexible, near-campus setting. Similarly, Ipinge et al. (2020) documented the use of structured simulations in Namibia as an experiential mechanism to build work-integrated competencies during COVID-19, when traditional placements were suspended. These simulations replicated realistic hospitality scenarios including guest service interactions and complaint handling allowing students to

develop communication, problem-solving, and teamwork competencies in a controlled but realistic environment.

Singh and Raja Harun (2020) further illustrate how language-related tasks encountered during industrial training can themselves serve as experiential learning events, reinforcing communication skills through authentic, unscripted workplace encounters. Across these studies, a consistent theme emerges: post-pandemic experiential learning in hospitality TVET has shifted toward more deliberately designed, scenario-based, and technology-supported formats that can function independently of continuous on-site industry access, while still preserving the core principle of learning through doing in authentic or authentically simulated contexts.

4. Industry-Academia Collaboration:

Collaboration between industry and academia ensures that the education curriculum remains aligned with the evolving needs of the hospitality sector. This approach offers several strengths, including increasing the relevance of education to contemporary industry needs, facilitating the development of professional networks for students, and opening up opportunities for innovation through knowledge exchange Ahmed et al (2024). Through this collaboration, students gain valuable hands-on experience and industry insights. Sufi et al. (2025) show that such collaboration helps students understand the latest trends in the hospitality sector and equips them with skills that are highly sought after by employers. Teaching Methods in TVET Hospitality explain in Figure 3.

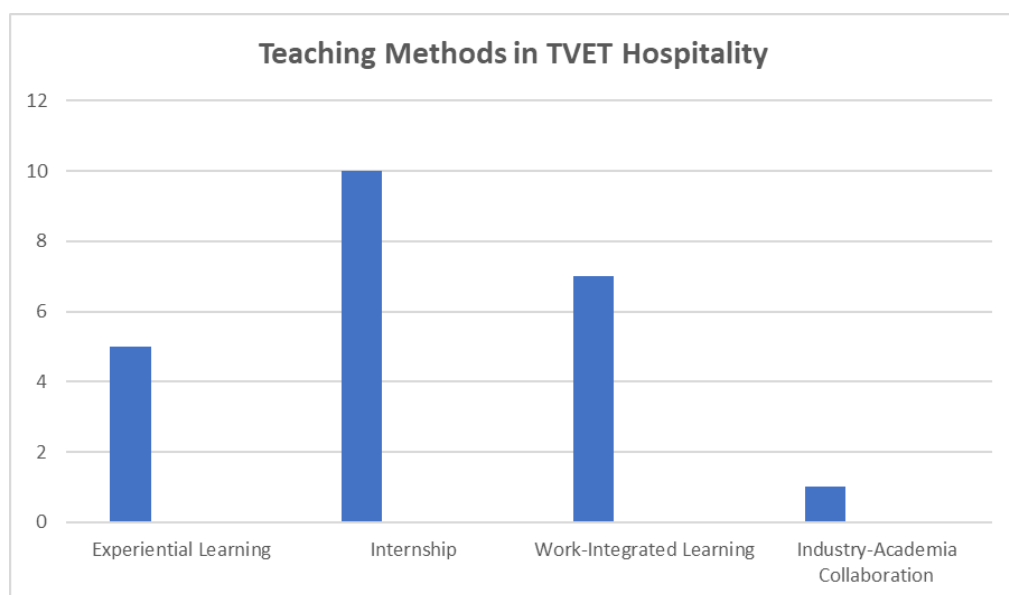


Fig 3. Teaching Methods in TVET Hospitality

Discussion

Based on these findings, the most needed competencies in the hospitality sector for the 2020-2025 period are soft skills, industry readiness, adaptability, and leadership. These competencies are critically important for graduates of TVET hospitality programs, who need to be prepared to face the challenges of an increasingly dynamic post-pandemic world of work.

The most effective teaching methods for developing these competencies are internships, work-integrated learning, and experiential learning. These methods allow students to gain firsthand, experience-based learning, which is essential for developing the practical skills needed in the hospitality sector. Industry-academia collaboration has also proven highly effective in creating synergy between educational goals and industry needs, ensuring that TVET hospitality graduates possess skills that match market demands.

Importantly, the reviewed literature also reveals that the implementation of these methods is not without challenges. WIL and internships are vulnerable to industry disruptions, and the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of purely placement-dependent program designs (Ipinge et al., 2020; Ratten & Jones, 2020). Experiential learning has responded to these challenges with greater adaptability, incorporating simulations, virtual industry interactions, and structured interview assessments as viable alternatives (Dewantara et al., 2025; Ipinge et al., 2020). These adaptations suggest that hospitality TVET programs should not rely exclusively on any single method but should instead develop flexible pedagogical portfolios that can be reconfigured in response to external disruptions.

Furthermore, there is still a need to adapt the curriculum to the latest technological developments and industry trends. This research therefore provides important insights for developing a TVET hospitality curriculum that is more responsive and relevant to the continuously changing needs of the sector, particularly in preparing students for a hospitality landscape that is simultaneously more digitalized and more unpredictable than it was before the pandemic.

Limitations

1. Limited Data Sources:

This article uses only the Scopus database for literature searches, which may limit the scope of relevant articles, particularly those not indexed by Scopus or published in non-accredited journals.

2. Time Period (2020-2025):

This article focuses on research published between 2020 and 2025, focusing on hospitality education and TVET after the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this article does not cover earlier research that may be relevant to competencies and teaching methods in hospitality education before the pandemic, or more recent research after 2025.

3. Language Restriction:

To maintain consistency in data collection and analysis, this scoping review included only articles published in English. This may exclude relevant studies from non-English-speaking countries.

4. Sector Focus:

This scoping review focuses only on hospitality TVET programs. Articles that discuss hospitality education more generally, or that address other sectors affected by COVID-19, are not included in this analysis.

Conclusion

This scoping review maps the competencies required in the hospitality sector and analyzes the teaching methods used in TVET hospitality programs to develop these skills, drawing on 19 studies published between 2020 and 2025. The main findings indicate that the most needed competencies in the post-pandemic hospitality sector include soft skills (communication and teamwork), industry readiness, adaptability, and leadership. These competencies are increasingly important in a dynamic work environment shaped by the lasting effects of COVID-19 on hospitality operations and workforce expectations.

In addition, the most commonly applied teaching methods are internships, work-integrated learning (WIL), and experiential learning. These methods provide students with opportunities to gain practical experience and develop skills that are essential for meeting the demands of the hospitality industry. Industry-academia collaboration has proven effective in aligning the education curriculum with the needs of the evolving sector. However, the review also highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing the barriers associated with these methods, particularly the vulnerability of placement-based approaches to industry disruptions and of developing hybrid and online alternatives that can ensure pedagogical continuity in future crises.

Overall, these findings indicate that hospitality TVET programs need to continue adapting to post-pandemic changes. The curriculum must be designed to include the latest competencies required by the sector and must integrate teaching methods that are both experience-based and

industry-relevant. This study also underscores the importance of strengthening collaboration between industry and academia to create learning experiences that are more relevant, practical, and adaptive to evolving market and technological conditions.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on post-pandemic changes in the hospitality sector, providing an in-depth account of how competencies and teaching methods in hospitality TVET have evolved and adapted to meet the newly emerging needs of the post-COVID hospitality world.

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Email : joves@mpv.uad.ac.id

Website : <http://journal2.uad.ac.id/index.php/joves>

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