

Industry-Academia Alignment in Entry-Level Hospitality Competencies: Evidence from Indian Hotel Management Education

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Abstract:

This study examines the alignment between industry and academia in entry-level hospitality competencies in India. The data was collected from 389 respondents in Delhi NCR, including 179 hospitality academicians and 210 hotel recruiters. The analyses used descriptive statistics, principal component analysis, reliability testing, independent sample t-tests, paired sample t-tests and gap analysis. The study identified six competency dimensions: communication, self-management, leadership and analytical ability, professional skills and knowledge, service ethics and safety orientation, and social intelligence and career attitudes. Required competency scores were higher than observed scores across all the dimensions. The largest gap was found in leadership and analytical competencies, followed by self-management and service ethics/safety orientation. These findings indicate that the hospitality programs need stronger competency-based curriculum mapping, structured internship assessment, simulation-based learning and industry-led employability feedback.

1. Introduction

Hospitality education is expected to prepare graduates for a workplace where service encounters are direct, visible and strongly influenced by human behavior. The hospitality sector reflects the characteristics of services, including intangibility, inseparability and heterogeneity, where employee behavior plays an important role in shaping the guest experience (Zeithaml et al., 1985; Kusluvan et al., 2010). In hotels, entry-level employees are not only beginners assigned to routine tasks. They represent the organization during guest contact, coordinate with different departments, respond to service situations and are expected to work under time pressure. Their employability therefore depends on a combination of technical knowledge, communication ability, self-management, ethical conduct and adaptability in changing service situations (Tas, 1988; Tesone & Ricci, 2005; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006).

A continuing concern in hospitality education is whether the competencies emphasized by institutions match the competencies expected by hotels. Earlier studies on hospitality employability have repeatedly highlighted communication, teamwork, problem-solving, professional attitude, customer orientation and self-management as important requirements for hospitality graduates (Raybould & Wilkins, 2006; Huang & Lin, 2010; Wang & Tsai, 2014; Jiang & Alexakis, 2017). This issue becomes especially important at the entry-level stage because fresh graduates often move directly from classrooms, practical laboratories and internships into guest-facing work. Academic programs may assess students through curriculum performance, practical examinations and internship completion, whereas recruiters judge them through workplace behavior, reliability, guest orientation and readiness for operational pressure. As a result, the same graduate may be viewed differently by educators and employers.

The present study addresses this issue by comparing the perceptions of hospitality academicians and hotel recruiters in the Delhi NCR region. Delhi NCR was selected because it provided access to both hospitality education institutions and hotel recruiters involved in entry-level employment. Rather than treating competencies only as industry-defined requirements, this paper examines competency alignment as an educational issue. The central concern is not only which competencies hotels require, but also how hospitality education can respond when required competencies are higher than competencies observed among selected graduates.

This paper contributes to hospitality education in three ways. First, it identifies a six-dimensional competency structure from 31 competency variables relevant to entry-level hotel employment. Second, it compares academic and industry perspectives on the relative importance of these competency dimensions. Third, it examines the gap between required and observed competencies and discusses what these gaps may imply for curriculum design,

internship assessment, simulation-based learning and industry-academia collaboration. These areas are important because they enable students to make the connection between what they learn in the classroom and what is expected of them in the workplace through internships, simulation-based learning, and organized industry feedback (Pratt & Hahn, 2016; Ng et al., 2023).

1.1 Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions:

RQ1. Which major competency dimensions are important for entry-level employment in hotels?

RQ2. How do hospitality academicians and hotel recruiters view these required competencies?

RQ3. Where is the gap between the competencies expected from graduates and the competencies actually observed in them?

RQ4. How can these findings help improve hospitality curriculum, internship assessment and employability training?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Hospitality employability and entry-level competencies

Employability in hospitality cannot be explained only by technical knowledge. Hotels expect graduates to use their knowledge in actual service situations where they interact with guests, supervisors and colleagues. For this reason, entry-level competency includes both job-related skills and behavioural qualities such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, self-management, professional attitude and customer orientation.

Earlier competency studies in hospitality have shown that industry professionals give high importance to interpersonal and practical competencies. Tas (1988) identified guest problem handling, professional appearance, communication and customer relations as important competencies for hotel management trainees. Tesone and Ricci (2005) also reported that employers value teamwork, communication, empathy and guest service qualities in entry-level hospitality employees. Raybould and Wilkins (2006) found that hospitality managers placed strong emphasis on generic skills such as interpersonal ability, problem-solving, self-management and leadership.

Subsequent studies also suggest that hospitality graduates need a combination of soft skills, operational awareness and adaptability. Huang and Lin (2010) found that hospitality managers and scholars differed in the importance they assigned to certain management trainee competencies, especially practical experience, skills, and work-related knowledge. Jiang and Alexakis (2017) also showed that students and managers may not always view entry-level hospitality competencies in the same way. These studies indicate that hospitality employability is not simply a matter of completing a degree, but it depends on how well graduates demonstrate expected competencies in real workplace conditions.

2.2 Industry expectations and academic preparation

Hospitality institutions and hotels observe graduate readiness from different positions. Institutions prepare students through courses, practical classes, internal assessment, examinations and internships. Hotels, on the other hand, observe graduates in actual service conditions, where they have to interact with guests, supervisors and co-workers, work under time pressure and respond to service problems. Because of this difference, a competency may be included in the curriculum but may not always be strongly visible in the workplace.

Studies comparing academic and industry views show that this difference is important. Huang and Lin (2010) found that hospitality managers and scholars differed in the importance they gave to some management trainee competencies, especially practical experience, skills and work-related knowledge. Wang and Tsai (2014) examined employability from student and industry perspectives and showed that hospitality graduate readiness cannot be judged only through academic achievement. Jiang and Alexakis (2017) also found that students and managers may not always view entry-level management competencies in the same way.

The Indian context also needs attention. Jauhari (2006) argued that hospitality careers in India require a combination of professional, operational and interpersonal competencies. Yang et al. (2014) examined competencies needed by hospitality management graduates in India and showed that both industry and educator perspectives are useful for curriculum improvement. These studies suggest that industry-academia alignment should not be limited to occasional consultation with hotels. It should also influence curriculum design, practical training, internship assessment and employability preparation.

The present study treats academic and industry perspectives as two different but useful viewpoints. It does not assume that the industry perspective is better than the academic perspective. Academicians understand curriculum, teaching, assessment and student development, while hotel recruiters understand workplace expectations, guest-facing performance and recruitment readiness. Comparing these two perspectives helps to identify where both groups agree, where they differ, and where hospitality education may need to strengthen the transition from classroom learning to workplace performance.

2.3 Competency-based education, internships and experiential learning

In the hospitality industry, competency-based education is beneficial since it requires students to demonstrate their abilities rather than just their knowledge. In hotel management programs, this means that communication, teamwork, problem-solving, customer handling, self-management and professional behavior should be connected with classroom teaching, practical sessions and assessment. These competencies should not remain only as general expectations in the syllabus. They need to be reflected in practical tasks, rubrics, feedback and internship evaluation.

Internship is one of the most important stages where students face actual hotel work. However, internship may not reduce the competency gap if it is treated only as departmental exposure or completion of training hours. It becomes more meaningful when students are evaluated on specific behaviors such as punctuality, grooming, guest interaction, hygiene and safety practices, initiative, adaptability, teamwork and problem-solving. Solnet et al. (2009) also supported the use of competency-based internship models in hospitality education. Ng et al. (2023) found that the internship environment can influence students' career intentions through reflective thinking.

Simulation and experiential learning can also support competency development before students enter full-time employment. Role plays, case discussions, business simulations, service-recovery situations and mock guest complaints can help students practice decision making in a safe learning environment. Pratt and Hahn (2016) showed that business simulations can improve hospitality student learning. Such activities are useful because many workplace competencies, especially communication, problem-solving and adaptability, improve through repeated practice and feedback.

For the present study, this discussion is important because the gap between required and observed competencies cannot be addressed only by increasing theory classes. Hospitality programs need a stronger connection between curriculum, practical training, internship assessment and industry feedback. This can help institutions understand which competencies are being taught, which are being practiced, and which competencies still need more attention when students move into entry-level hotel jobs.

2.4 Research gap and positioning of the present study

Existing studies show that hospitality employability depends on a mix of technical, interpersonal and behavioural competencies. However, many studies either focus mainly on industry expectations or compare general perceptions of students, educators and managers. Less attention is given to the difference between competencies that are required for entry-level hotel jobs and competencies that are actually observed in selected graduates.

This difference is important for hospitality education. A competency may be considered important by both academicians and recruiters, but graduates may still show a lower level of that competency during recruitment or early employment. In such cases, the problem is not only about identifying competencies. It is also about understanding whether the curriculum, practical training, internship and assessment system are helping students demonstrate those competencies in real hotel situations.

Studies such as Wang and Tsai (2014), Jiang and Alexakis (2017), Yang et al. (2014), and Alexakis and Jiang (2019) show the need to connect hospitality curriculum with employability expectations. However, there is still scope to examine this issue in the Indian hotel management education context by comparing academicians and hotel recruiters on both required and observed competencies.

The present study addresses this gap by using data from hospitality academicians and hotel recruiters in Delhi NCR. It first identifies competency dimensions from 31 competency variables. It then compares how both groups rate required competencies and examines the gap between required and observed competencies. This approach helps position competency alignment as an educational issue, not only as a recruitment issue. The

findings are expected to offer practical direction for curriculum mapping, internship assessment, simulation-based learning and employability preparation.

3. Conceptual Framework

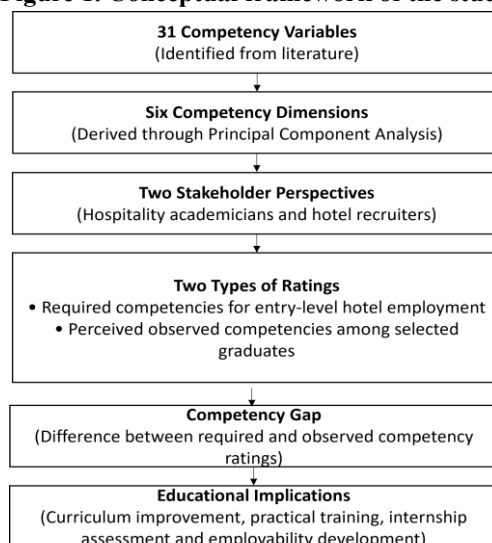
The conceptual framework of this study is based on the idea that entry-level employability in hotels is not formed by one skill alone. It is shaped by a group of related competencies that include communication, self-management, leadership and analytical ability, professional knowledge, service ethics, safety awareness and social attitude. Earlier studies on hospitality employability also show that hotels expect graduates to demonstrate both technical and behavioral competencies in actual service situations (Raybould & Wilkins, 2006; Jiang & Alexakis, 2017; Yang et al., 2014).

In this study, 31 competency variables were first identified from the literature and then grouped into six competency dimensions through Principal Component Analysis. These dimensions were Communication Competencies, Self-Management Competencies, Leadership and Analytical Competencies, Professional Skills and Knowledge, Service Ethics and Safety Orientation, and Social Intelligence and Career Attitudes.

The framework compares two types of competency ratings. The first is the level of competency required for entry-level hotel employment. The second is the level of competency observed among selected hospitality graduates. These ratings are examined from two perspectives: hospitality academicians and hotel recruiters. Academicians represent the education and training side, while recruiters represent the employment and workplace expectation side.

The gap between required and observed competencies is treated as an important indicator for hospitality education. A higher gap suggests that the competency is considered important but is not being demonstrated strongly enough by graduates. These gaps can help institutions review curriculum design, practical training, internship assessment and employability preparation.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study



Source: Author's own conceptualization based on the study design

4.3 Instrument

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire prepared from the literature on hospitality competencies and graduate employability. The questionnaire included 31 competency variables related to communication, self-management, leadership and analytical ability, professional skills and knowledge, service ethics and safety orientation, and social intelligence and career attitudes.

The questionnaire measured two aspects of each competency. First, respondents rated the extent to which each competency was required for entry-level hotel employment. Second, they rated the extent to which the same competency was observed among selected hospitality graduates. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented No Extent, 2 Small Extent, 3 Some Extent, 4 Large Extent and 5 Very Large Extent.

The questionnaire also collected demographic information, including the respondent category, gender, age, educational qualification and work experience.

A pilot study was conducted with 41 respondents comprising hospitality academicians and hotel industry professionals. The pilot study was used to check the clarity, relevance, response pattern and reliability of the questionnaire before the main survey. The pilot data were not included in the final analysis and were not used for testing the final hypotheses. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to assess internal consistency. The reliability value for the required competency scale was 0.960 and for the observed competency scale was 0.988, indicating very high internal consistency. Although these values were high, the items were retained because they represented different competency areas identified from the literature. The questionnaire was reviewed for item clarity and possible overlap, and minor corrections were made in item matching and questionnaire structure before final data collection. In the final analysis, reliability was examined separately for each extracted competency dimension.

4.4 Data collection

Primary data were collected through both offline and online modes. Hard copies of the questionnaire were shared during professional meetings, institutional visits and interactions with eligible respondents. Online responses were collected through email invitations and digital survey links. Follow-up communication was used in selected cases to improve the response rate and clarify the questionnaire process.

Participation was voluntary. The respondents were informed about the academic purpose of the study, and their responses were used only for research purposes. Personal identities were not reported in the analysis. As the study involved adult professional respondents and collected only perception-based, non-sensitive data, formal ethical approval was not required by the institution. Informed consent was obtained from respondents before participation.

4.5 Data analysis

The data were analysed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation, were used to describe the respondent profile and competency ratings. Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation was used to identify the underlying competency dimensions from the 31 competency variables. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was checked through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity.

Reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha. Independent sample t-tests were used to compare the perceptions of hospitality academicians and hotel recruiters regarding required competencies. Paired sample t-tests were used to compare required and observed competency ratings within each respondent group. Gap analysis was calculated by subtracting the observed competency mean from the required competency mean. Detailed statistical values are provided in the results section and supplementary material.

5. Results

The results are presented in four parts. First, the respondent profile is reported. Second, the factor structure and reliability of the competency scale are presented. Third, the required and observed competency ratings are compared. Finally, the competency gaps are discussed in relation to hospitality education and employability development.

5.1 Respondent profile

The final analysis was based on 389 usable responses. The sample included 179 hospitality academicians and 210 hotel recruiters. This provided representation from both the education side and the hotel recruitment side of entry-level hospitality employment.

Table 1
Respondent profile

Respondent group	Number	Percentage
Hospitality academicians	179	46%
Hotel recruiters	210	54%
Total	389	100%

The distribution shows that both stakeholder groups were adequately represented. This is important because the study compares academic and industry perceptions of required and observed competencies.

5.2 Factor structure and reliability

Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation was used to identify the underlying competency dimensions from the 31 competency variables. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was 0.932, indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Six competency dimensions were extracted, explaining 69.78% of the total variance.

The overall competency scale recorded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.936. Reliability was also examined separately for each extracted dimension. All six dimensions recorded Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.80, indicating good internal consistency.

Table 2
Factor structure and reliability summary

Competency dimension	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Communication Competencies	4	0.881
Self-Management Competencies	6	0.867
Leadership and Analytical Competencies	7	0.894
Professional Skills and Knowledge	6	0.861
Service Ethics and Safety Orientation	3	0.832
Social Intelligence and Career Attitudes	5	0.812
Overall competency scale	31	0.936

The six-factor structure suggests that entry-level hospitality employability is multidimensional. It includes communication and professional knowledge, but it also depends on self-management, leadership potential, service ethics, safety orientation and social attitudes. For hospitality education, this means that employability preparation should not be limited to technical training alone.

5.3 Required and observed competency ratings

The required competency ratings were high across all six competency dimensions. The combined mean scores ranged from 4.35 to 4.50 on a five-point scale. This indicates that both hospitality academicians and hotel recruiters considered all six dimensions important for entry-level hotel employment.

Communication Competencies and Service Ethics and Safety Orientation recorded the highest combined required mean scores. This suggests that entry-level hotel work depends strongly on guest communication, professional behaviour, hygiene, safety awareness and the ability to respond responsibly to customer problems.

The observed competency ratings were lower than the required ratings across all six dimensions. Communication Competencies recorded the highest observed mean score, followed by Service Ethics and Safety Orientation. Leadership and Analytical Competencies recorded the lowest observed mean score. This indicates that graduates were perceived to be relatively stronger in communication and service behaviour, but weaker in leadership potential, decision making, conflict management, analytical thinking and result orientation.

Table 3 Required and observed competency ratings

Competency dimension	Required mean	Observed mean
Communication Competencies	4.50	3.80
Self-Management Competencies	4.38	3.56
Leadership and Analytical Competencies	4.37	3.43
Professional Skills and Knowledge	4.35	3.65
Service Ethics and Safety Orientation	4.50	3.72
Social Intelligence and Career Attitudes	4.35	3.6

The difference between required and observed ratings is important for hospitality education. It suggests that the issue is not only whether these competencies are included in the curriculum, but whether students are able to demonstrate them at the level expected by hotels. The lower observed scores point towards the need for stronger practical assessment, structured internship feedback and learning activities that help students practise workplace behaviour before recruitment.

5.4 Comparison between academicians and hotel recruiters

The independent sample t-test was used to examine whether hospitality academicians and hotel recruiters differed in their ratings of required competencies. The results showed that the two groups had similar views on most competency dimensions. Out of the six dimensions, a statistically significant difference was found only for Leadership and Analytical Competencies.

Recruiters rated Leadership and Analytical Competencies slightly higher than academicians. This suggests that hotels may expect entry-level graduates to show stronger decision making, problem-solving, conflict handling, analytical thinking and result orientation than what is normally emphasised at the academic level. For the remaining five dimensions, the differences were not statistically significant. This indicates that academicians and recruiters broadly agreed on the importance of communication, self-management, professional knowledge, service ethics, safety orientation and social intelligence.

Table 4 Comparison of required competency ratings between academicians and hotel recruiters

Competency dimension	Academic mean	Recruiter mean	Mean difference	p-value	Result
Communication Competencies	4.54	4.47	0.07	0.191	Not significant
Self-Management Competencies	4.41	4.36	0.05	0.379	Not significant
Leadership and Analytical Competencies	4.32	4.42	-0.1	0.042	Significant
Professional Skills and Knowledge	4.36	4.34	0.02	0.698	Not significant

Service Ethics and Safety Orientation	4.49	4.51	-0.02	0.675	Not significant
Social Intelligence and Career Attitudes	4.4	4.31	0.09	0.088	Not significant

The finding partially rejects the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between academicians and recruiters in their perception of required competencies. The difference is limited to Leadership and Analytical Competencies. From an education perspective, this result is important because it shows that the main disagreement is not about basic communication or professional behaviour, but about higher-order workplace readiness. Hospitality programmes may therefore need to give more attention to decision making, service problem analysis, conflict situations and result-oriented tasks during practical training and internships.

These findings reject the null hypotheses that there is no significant difference between required and observed competencies from the perspectives of academicians and recruiters. The result is important because the largest gaps are not limited to technical knowledge. They are mainly related to workplace judgement, decision making, self-management, responsibility and professional maturity.

In hospitality education, this indicates that although students may be exposed to these competencies during their course, they may not be applying or displaying them effectively in practical training or workplace settings. Leadership and analytical competencies may need more attention through case-based teaching, service problem analysis, role plays, live events, reflective tasks and internship feedback. Similarly, self-management competencies may be strengthened through time-bound practical tasks, professional behaviour assessment, stress-handling activities and workplace discipline during training.

Detailed paired sample t-test values and item-wise gap values are provided in Supplementary Material S1.

5.5 Required-observed competency gap

Paired sample t-tests were used to examine the difference between required and observed competency ratings. The results showed that observed competency scores were lower than required competency scores across all six dimensions. The differences were statistically significant for both academicians and hotel recruiters.

The combined gap analysis showed that the largest gap was in Leadership and Analytical Competencies. This dimension included leadership, decision making, conflict management, creativity, critical thinking, analytical skills and result orientation. The second highest gap was found in Self-Management Competencies, followed by Service Ethics and Safety Orientation.

Table 5 Required-observed competency gap

Competency dimension	Required mean	Observed mean	Gap	Gap level	Rank
Communication Competencies	4.5	3.8	0.7	Moderate	5
Self-Management Competencies	4.38	3.56	0.82	High	2
Leadership and Analytical Competencies	4.37	3.43	0.94	High	1
Professional Skills and Knowledge	4.35	3.65	0.7	Moderate	5
Service Ethics and Safety Orientation	4.5	3.72	0.78	Moderate	3
Social Intelligence and Career Attitudes	4.35	3.6	0.75	Moderate	4

These findings reject the null hypotheses that there is no significant difference between required and observed competencies from the perspectives of academicians and recruiters. The result is important because the largest gaps are not limited to technical knowledge. They are mainly related to workplace judgement, decision making, self-management, responsibility and professional maturity.

In hospitality education, this indicates that although students may be exposed to these competencies during their course, they may not be applying or displaying them effectively in practical training or workplace settings. Leadership and analytical competencies may need more attention through case-based teaching, service problem analysis, role plays, live events, reflective tasks and internship feedback. Similarly, self-management competencies may be strengthened through time-bound practical tasks, professional behaviour assessment, stress-handling activities and workplace discipline during training.

Detailed paired sample t-test values and item-wise gap values are provided in Supplementary Material S1.

6. Discussion

The findings show that hospitality academicians and hotel recruiters largely agree on the importance of entry-level competencies. This agreement is important because it suggests that the gap is not mainly due to completely different expectations between education and industry. Rather, the issue appears to be the difference between competencies that are expected and competencies that graduates are perceived to demonstrate in practice.

Communication Competencies and Service Ethics and Safety Orientation received high required ratings. This is understandable because entry-level hotel employees are often placed in guest-facing or service-support roles. They need to communicate clearly, listen to guests, follow professional behaviour, maintain hygiene and safety standards, and respond responsibly to customer problems. These findings are consistent with earlier hospitality competency studies that emphasised communication, interpersonal skills, customer orientation, problem-solving and professional attitude as important for hospitality graduates (Tas, 1988; Tesone & Ricci, 2005; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006).

The significant difference between academicians and recruiters was found only in Leadership and Analytical Competencies. Recruiters rated this dimension slightly higher than academicians. This may indicate that hotels expect even entry-level graduates to show some level of judgement, initiative and problem-solving ability. The fresh graduates may not hold supervisory positions immediately, they are still expected to handle service situations, coordinate with colleagues, and respond to guest issues and make small decisions within their role. This finding supports earlier studies showing that industry and academic stakeholders may differ in how they view practical experience, work readiness and management trainee competencies (Huang & Lin, 2010; Jiang & Alexakis, 2017).

The largest required-observed gap was also found in Leadership and Analytical Competencies. This is a key finding of the study. It suggests that graduates might be receiving exposure to leadership, decision making, creativity, conflict management and analytical thinking, but they might not be demonstrating these competencies strongly enough during recruitment or the early workplace situations. One possible reason is that such competencies are difficult to develop through lectures alone. They need repeated practice through case discussions, role plays, service-recovery situations, live events, group tasks, reflective exercises and internship feedback.

The gap in Self-Management Competencies is also important. Hotel work often involves time pressure, long working hours, multitasking, emotional control and discipline. The graduates who have technical knowledge but lack time management, stress management, initiative and planning ability might face difficulty in adjusting to hotel operations. This finding indicates that employability training should not be limited to interviews, grooming and communication practice. It should also include workplace discipline, responsibility, resilience and self-regulation.

The findings also show that observed competencies were lower than required competencies in all six dimensions. This does not necessarily mean that hospitality institutions are failing. A more balanced interpretation is that the students are learning these competencies in academic settings, but the transfer of these competencies to real hotel situations remains incomplete. Academic assessment often takes place in structured classrooms, practical laboratories and examinations. Hotel recruiters, however, observe graduates in less predictable workplace situations where guest expectations, time pressure and service problems are immediate. This difference may explain why observed competency ratings were lower than required ratings.

For the hospitality education, the results support the need for a stronger alignment between curriculum, practical training and the workplace expectations. Competencies should not remain only as broad learning outcomes. They should be broken into observable behaviours and assessed through practical tasks, internship rubrics and industry feedback. Earlier work on the internships and simulation-based learning also supports the value of structured work-integrated learning and realistic learning activities in hospitality education (Solnet et al., 2009; Pratt & Hahn, 2016; Ng et al., 2023).

The overall discussion suggests that the main challenge is not simply identifying which competencies are important. The more important challenge is helping students demonstrate these competencies at the level expected by hotels. This requires closer cooperation between hospitality institutions and hotel recruiters, especially in curriculum review, internship assessment, service simulations, employability workshops and feedback on graduate performance.

7. Implications for Hospitality Education

The findings have direct implications for hospitality curriculum, practical training and internship assessment. The study shows that academicians and hotel recruiters broadly agree on the importance of most entry-level competencies. Therefore, the concern is not only about identifying the right competencies, but about helping students demonstrate these competencies in actual hotel situations.

First, hospitality institutions should map their curriculum with the six competency dimensions identified in this study. Each course, practical class and training activity can be linked with specific competencies such as communication, self-management, leadership and analytical ability, professional knowledge, service ethics and social intelligence. This will help institutions check whether these competencies are actually taught, practiced and assessed across the program.

Second, internship assessment should be made more competency-based. At present, internships are often evaluated through completion reports, attendance, departmental exposure and general feedback. These are useful, but not sufficient. Internship evaluation should also include observable behaviors such as punctuality, grooming, guest interaction, teamwork, initiative, hygiene and safety practices, problem-solving and ability to work under pressure. A common internship rubric developed jointly by institutions and hotels may help reduce the gap between academic preparation and workplace expectations.

Third, greater attention should be given to leadership and analytical competencies. This was the dimension with the largest gap. Entry-level leadership does not mean formal authority. It may include taking responsibility, identifying a problem, helping a team member, making a suitable decision within role limits and responding calmly to a guest-related issue. These abilities can be developed through case discussions, role plays, service recovery exercises, live events, group projects and reflective assignments.

Fourth, self-management should be treated as an important employability outcome. Students need regular opportunities to practice time management, planning, stress handling, discipline and professional responsibility. These competencies can be assessed through time-bound practical tasks, event responsibilities, attendance behavior, peer work, reflective journals and feedback from trainers.

Fifth, industry involvement should become more structured. Guest lectures alone may not be enough. Hotel recruiters, training managers and department heads can be involved in curriculum review, mock interviews, practical assessment, internship evaluation and employability workshops. Their feedback can help institutions understand which competencies are improving and which still need attention.

Table 6 Educational implications of major competency gaps

Major competency gap	Curriculum response	Internship and assessment response
Leadership and Analytical Competencies	Case analysis, service-recovery situations, role plays, group leadership tasks and problem-based learning	Supervisor feedback on decision making, initiative, conflict handling and problem-solving

Self-Management Competencies	Time-bound practical tasks, reflective journals, professional behaviour training and stress-handling activities	Assessment of punctuality, planning, discipline, responsibility and ability to work under pressure
Service Ethics and Safety Orientation	Hygiene, safety, ethics and guest complaint scenarios in practical classes	Checklist-based feedback on hygiene, safety compliance, guest concern and responsible service behaviour
Communication Competencies	Presentations, guest interaction role plays, listening activities and interdepartmental communication exercises	Evaluation of guest communication, listening, clarity, confidence and professional interaction

The results suggest that hospitality education should move from a general employability approach to a more competency-based approach. This does not require replacing the existing curriculum completely. It requires clearer mapping, more structured assessment, stronger internship feedback and regular industry participation. Such changes can help students move more effectively from classroom learning to entry-level hotel employment.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study has a few limitations. The first limitation is related to the study area. The data were collected from Delhi NCR, which has a large number of hotels and hospitality education institutions. However, the findings may not represent the situation in all parts of India. Expectations may be different in smaller cities, resort locations, stand-alone hotels, institutional catering units or tourism-related organisations.

The second limitation is linked with the nature of the data. The study used the perceptions of hospitality academicians and hotel recruiters. These two groups are important because they represent the education side and the employment side. However, the study did not directly observe graduates while they were working in hotels. Therefore, the observed competency ratings should be understood as stakeholder perceptions, not as direct measurement of graduate behaviour.

The third limitation is that the study focused only on entry-level hotel employment. Competency expectations may change according to department, hotel category, job role and organisational culture. The findings may therefore not apply in the same way to areas such as event management, cruise operations, facility management, restaurant chains, tourism services or other non-hotel hospitality sectors.

Future studies can extend this work to other regions of India and include different types of hospitality organizations. Interviews with recruiters, faculty members, students and recent graduates may also help explain why some competencies are not strongly demonstrated during recruitment or early employment. A longitudinal study may be useful to follow students from classroom learning to internship and then to their first job.

Future studies may also test specific educational interventions, such as the competency-based internship rubrics, service simulation exercises, reflective journals, live event assessment or industry-led feedback sessions. Such research can help to identify which teaching and assessment methods are most useful in reducing competency gaps among hospitality graduates.

9. Conclusion

This study examined the entry-level hospitality competencies from the perspectives of hospitality academicians and the hotel recruiters in Delhi NCR. The purpose was to understand not only which competencies are required for entry-level hotel employment, but also whether these competencies are observed at the expected level among selected hospitality graduates.

The findings showed that all the six competency dimensions were considered important by both respondent groups. Communication Competencies and Service Ethics and Safety Orientation received high required ratings, which reflects the guest-facing and service-sensitive nature of hotel work. At the same time, observed competency scores were lower than required scores across all six dimensions.

The largest gap was found in the Leadership and Analytical Competencies, followed by Self-Management Competencies and Service Ethics and Safety Orientation. This finding is important because the main gaps were not limited to technical knowledge. They were more closely related to decision making, initiative, analytical thinking, conflict handling, stress management, responsibility and professional maturity.

This study suggests that the hospitality education needs to give more attention to how competencies are practised and assessed. It is not enough for competencies to be mentioned in the curriculum or covered indirectly during practical classes. The students need opportunities to demonstrate these competencies through the simulations, case-based learning, live events, role plays, internship feedback and structured practical assessment.

The study supports a stronger competency-based approach in hotel management education. Better curriculum mapping, clearer internship rubrics, stronger industry feedback and more workplace-like learning activities can help to reduce the gap between academic preparation and hotel recruitment expectations.

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