

## HOSPITALITY CURRICULUM UP-GRADATION TO ENHANCE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: A HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

Hospitality Education has gained prominence in India post-1990s. Today, hundreds of institutions are offering 3 years and 4-year Hospitality Degree programmes after class 12<sup>th</sup>. The courses are offered by Hospitality Institutes in affiliation with State Universities & Central Universities. Today, Private Universities and Deemed to Be Universities are also offering hospitality courses. The National Council of Hotel Management & Catering Technology (NCHMCT), was set up in 1982 by the Government of India as an autonomous body for coordinated growth and overall development of Hospitality Education in India through its affiliated Institutions known as the Institute of Hotel Management, Catering Technology & Applied Nutrition. The four-year degree programme, BHMCT is regulated by the All India Council for Technical Education, New Delhi. The curriculum is considered the heart of education. Development of the curriculum is becoming central to achieving the purpose of education (Kusumawardhana & Indra, 2019). As the Hospitality Industry is going through a constant change that is influenced by Political, Economic, Socio-Cultural, Demographic, Technological, Legal and Environmental factors, the desirable skill sets, competencies and knowledge requirements are constantly changing. Curriculum plays a significant role in developing and bringing out the best in a learner to meet the future demands of the industry and individual career needs. Numerous studies have suggested there is a need for redevelopment of curriculum based on Web.2.0 technologies (Alashwal, 2020). This is due to COVID 19 pandemic's impact on education. The teaching-learning process has shifted to a hybrid model, a combination of online and face to face. The study was conducted by interviewing Hospitality Industry Professionals with a sample size of 35 respondents in Mumbai through an open-ended questionnaire. The sampling method applied is opportunity or convenience sampling. The data was further converted to themes & counts through the content analysis method using QDA Miner Lite, 2.0.8 version. The interpretation is drawn with appropriate suggestions.

**Keywords:** Hospitality Education, Curriculum, Hospitality Industry, Employability Skills

### Introduction

Hospitality education is a skilled-based course with a high degree of practical component embedded in the curriculum to create the right employability skills and knowledge. The Hospitality curriculum in India is developed by Universities and NCHMCT through the involvement of subject experts and stakeholders. The AICTE also develops a Model Curriculum for the BHMCT programme. However, the curriculum becomes outdated over some time as the industry is going through rapid change. The challenge is to keep the curriculum updated periodically for it to stay relevant. There is a need for constant review and up-gradation of the curriculum. The task of maintaining equilibrium between hospitality curriculum and industry needs is a challenge (Dimri, Dani & Rakesh, 2021). A good curriculum can fulfill the educational aspirations of students by achieving the course objectives. Teachers play an important role in helping students to develop 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills by applying various methods to enhance students' capabilities by using innovative strategies and modern learning technologies that help to integrate cognitive and social skills. Also, students' participation in the learning environment promotes skills for the future (Alismail & McGuire, 2015). The hospitality sector is a rapidly expanding industry that plays a significant role in the global and national economy. However, there exists a disparity between the theoretical knowledge, expertise, and industry requisites. The industry is becoming more and more competitive, and it requires individuals who are skilled and competent to meet the demands of the customers. To bridge this gap, it is essential to develop an industry-centric curriculum that prepares individuals for employment in the hospitality industry.

An industry-centric curriculum focuses on providing the necessary skills and knowledge that are required in the industry. It should include courses that provide hands-on experience, which will help students to apply the theory they learn in the classroom to practical situations. Additionally, value addition courses that go beyond the curriculum are necessary to equip students with skills that are relevant to current needs in the dynamic world. These courses may include customer service, corporate etiquette, e- marketing, social media & reputation management, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship.

Employability in the hospitality industry is essential, and the curriculum should focus on providing students with the necessary skills that will enable them to secure employment. It is vital to have a curriculum that includes courses that prepare students for the industry's demands, including communication, problem-solving, and teamwork skills. Also, internships and industry centric research projects should be included in the curriculum to provide students with practical experience and exposure to the industry.

An updated curriculum that focuses on developing the necessary skills and knowledge required in the hospitality industry is critical. It should include value addition courses that go beyond the curriculum and provide practical experience to students. Such a curriculum will help bridge the gap between academic knowledge, skills, and industry needs, and equip students with the skills necessary for employability in the dynamic world

### **Review of Literature**

Based on the previous research, it was determined that the following reviews are appropriate and relevant to the title of the study.

A good course curriculum is a prominent variable for good career opportunities. The 3 clusters of perception of students towards Hotel Management are Good Lifestyle, Career Opportunities, Practice-based learning & Good Academic Environment. Practice-based learning is an integral part of the hospitality curriculum (Singh & Amandeep, 2017). Hospitality education provides students with a specialized skill set and general business knowledge, the curriculum taught in these programs is often outdated. The authors recommend that these programs be updated to reflect current trends and technologies in the industry to better prepare students for their future careers (Qian, Lin, Law, & Li, 2022).

The success of any course lies with its curriculum and content. The changes in the Hospitality Industry are rapid and involvement of industry representatives need to be involved in framing the syllabus. There is a need to bring Hospitality Education under one common umbrella for proper monitoring and uniformity (Kumar, 2014). Teachers play the most significant role in the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom through their knowledge, experiences and competencies and the curriculum should never be stagnant. It should be adaptable to changes in the educational community and society as an effective change agent (Alsubaie, 2016).

The usage of new technologies has brought in high potentiality in technology-based education which is effective in the process of teaching-learning and offers new possibilities and solutions to promote changes in education methodologies (Ladan & Alireza, 2011). Experiential Learning, as observed by faculty and peers, has increased students' interest in the subject matter and provides valuable work experiences in a group environment (Sebby, Angela, Brown & Carroll, 2020). Students set their criteria to determine their experience while studying the course. The role of teachers is becoming more demanding and they need to develop various methods of teaching to make the learning process more effective (Liasidou, 2016).

New forms of learning such as role-playing, presentations, games, and simulations should be looked into for the benefit of hospitality students and the industry. Also, focus on more practical work at institute labs than the emphasis on theory. Subjects like Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Service Marketing should be taught in all the semesters instead of one semester (Agbola & Dehlor, 2013). The curriculum is focused on managerial training and has a business orientation. However, industry input in curriculum development is limited, with private institutions leading the way in establishing relationships with industry stakeholders for internships and job placements. Individual faculty members are assigned to develop courses based on their expertise without any engagement and involvement from Hospitality Industry members in Nepal (Thapa, 2018). Students were found to be environmentally aware and valued sustainability for their future. Sustainability education was most effective when integrated throughout the course (Chawla & Manas, 2015).

### **Discussion on Review of Literature**

It is evident from the review of literature that curriculum is an integral element in the teaching-learning process. A well-structured course curriculum is a blueprint for course delivery. Hospitality education is a practical oriented course with a different pedagogy as compared to traditional theory centric courses. The role of the teacher is the most important element in the teaching process. A teacher with the required qualifications, industry experience with the right skill set can impart the right knowledge, and skills and enhance the competencies of the learner through innovative teaching strategies and the application of different learning methods. The hospitality institute must be equipped with modern equipment in their vestibule laboratories for practical training of students. The course curriculum is dynamic and requires periodic updation by academic experts and inputs from industry professionals and other stakeholders depending on the industry's needs. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, exponential technologies like Automation, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Robotics

will impact industry operations. Companies in Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality have started adapting to Artificial Intelligence, Robots, and Automation technologies in their operations (Ivanov & Stanislav, 2019). Basic working knowledge of new technologies is a must for new age Hospitality Students. The curriculum should factor into these technological developments and modern trends. Various research confirms experiential learning has a positive impact on students' learning process and the curriculum should factor in experiential learning as a practical component.

### Research Design

The research conducted is through a qualitative method with a sample size of 35 Industry Professionals across star hotels in Mumbai. Industry professionals included General Managers, Human Resource Heads, Training Heads and Departmental Operation heads. 25 Industry professionals responded with a success rate of 71.4%. The data was collected through opportunity sampling using an open-ended questionnaire. The researcher visited them personally through a prior appointment and interviews were held one to one. In certain cases, the questionnaire was sent by email for their response. Content Analysis was applied to analyze the qualitative data. Qualitative content analysis is one of the many qualitative methods currently available for analyzing data and interpreting the meaning of the data (Schreier, 2012). The open-ended qualitative data is analyzed by converting the text into themes and codes. The software used for this purpose is QDA Miner Lite, 2.0.8 version. QDA Miner is a qualitative data analysis software for coding textual data and graphical, annotating, retrieving and reviewing coded data and documents.

### Research Objectives

1. To gain insight into the current hospitality curriculum from hospitality industry professionals
2. Utilize industry feedback to propose curriculum changes and improvements

### Data Analysis and Discussion

Category	Theme	Count	Rank
Changes in Curriculum	Enhancement of Practical Component	20	1
Changes in Curriculum	Inputs on Entrepreneurship	5	6
Changes in Curriculum	Soft Skills and Attitudinal Training	16	3
Changes in Curriculum	Focus on New Technology and Trends	11	5
Changes in Curriculum	Internship Training- Extension of duration	14	4
Changes in Curriculum	Curriculum should facilitate alternative Hospitality Career Options	3	7
Changes in Curriculum	Periodic Curriculum Updation	18	2

Table 1: Data Analysis on Changes in Curriculum

#### Theme 1: Enhancement of Practical Component

According to Hospitality Industry Professionals, the current curriculum followed in academic institutes is not in sync with the industry's needs. The general opinion is to revise the curriculum periodically for quality manpower for the industry as it will reduce the cost of training and efforts.

20 respondents believe that the practical component of the Hospitality programme requires restructuring and enhancement to make it more industry-centric and relevant to current needs. This is in the area of Food Production, Food & Beverage Service, Front Office, Housekeeping, Computer Skills, Language Skills and Soft Skills. The current curriculum in many universities is outdated and requires a complete restructuring. Latest trends in Hospitality, Culinary, and Technology need to be factored into the curriculum with more focus on skill development and skill enhancement.

#### Theme 2: Periodic Curriculum Updation

Periodic curriculum revision is essential to keep the curriculum updated and relevant. The quality of students' output is linked to the curriculum. In many universities, the curriculum is not updated for several years. This will have a negative impact on the learner. New topics should be introduced in the curriculum. A study in the United States confirms there is a need to incorporate sustainability in the hospitality curriculum as it has become a new standard in the hospitality industry. The findings imply that the hospitality curriculum needs to be updated regularly and more progressive to help student's conceptual and practical competencies concerning sustainability (Millar, Michell, Park & Young, 2013). Similarly, many more topics can be introduced and delete the obsolete ones through in-depth research on global hospitality trends and the needs of the industry. Research conducted in Pune, India further confirms that the quality of courses is important to the needs of the market. The

current development needs to be incorporated into the curriculum (Jaswal, 2020). Also, while revising a curriculum, the involvement and participation of all stakeholders are essential. The curriculum needs to be benchmarked with global and national reputed universities and institutions which are considered as best in class.

### **Theme 3: Soft Skills & Attitudinal Training**

Soft skills are personal attributes and qualities that help an individual to interact effectively and harmoniously with people. The hospitality industry is a people-centric industry with guests visiting from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. Hospitality students need to learn and develop the right soft skills to interact and communicate effectively with their guests and teams. Research conducted in India concludes that 86% are soft skill competencies out of which flexibility, interpersonal skills, integrity, attitude, professionalism, work environment, communication, seeking responsibility and teamwork are skills that are critical for success (Anusha, Maitr & Manjunath, 2020). Attitude is an important attribute in service organizations between hotel personnel and customers as they create high-quality service encounters. The evidence from research suggests employers in hospitality are not looking for hard technical skills but soft skills like attitude and aesthetic skills (Nickson, Dennis, Warhurst, Chris, Dutton & Eli, 2005). These skills need to be a factor in the curriculum and the role the teacher plays an important role in developing soft skills among students during their interactions.

### **Theme 4: Internship Training- Extension of Duration**

Industry immersion through structured internship is mandatory in India and embedded in the Hospitality Course curriculum. NCHMCT prescribes 102 days of Industrial training, which is 17 weeks and 87 days is a must to qualify for examination. The University of Mumbai prescribes Industrial training for a minimum of 20 weeks. Various studies have found that Industrial training has a positive impact on student's career aspirations and choices. Research conducted in India concludes that industrial training is an essential part of the curriculum of hotel management for undergraduates and it helps students in their professional development and imparts practical skills which are beneficial for their employment (Kukreti, Ravish & Dani, 2020). The industry professionals have expressed extension of the training period to a much longer duration.

### **Theme 5: Focus on New Technology and Trends**

Industry experts believe that curriculum should incorporate new technologies and trends. Global trends impact regional trends. With social media and the internet, new trends that are distinctive and novel travel quickly. Technological trends like Online Bookings, Customer Relationship Management, Social Media and SmartPhones are transforming the hospitality industry to a new level of customer service and experiences (Kazandzhieva, Velina & Ilieva, 2017). Other technological trends that impact the hospitality industry are Artificial Intelligence, Big Data Analytics and Robotics. The new-age hospitality graduate is expected to know and understand these trends and apply them in hotel operations.

### **Theme 6: Inputs on Entrepreneurship**

Various research studies confirm that Millennials & Generation Z aspire to be entrepreneurs in their careers. An entrepreneur mindset is essential to work in the industry as individuals are expected to take ownership of their roles and responsibilities. With a focus on enhancing business and revenues for the organization, team members are required to think and act like business owners though they are employees and not employers. There is a need to factor the entrepreneurship component into the course curriculum.

### **Theme 7: Curriculum should facilitate alternative career options**

Besides hospitality, the hospitality graduate should be trained in other domains that facilitates to move to other sectors of services. Hospitality graduates work in Travel, Tourism, Retail, Facilities Management, Airlines, Quick Service Restaurants, Malls and other services. A research study in Pune, India brings out the various alternative career options for Hospitality Graduates other than hotels such as Luxury Retail, Facility Management and Consultancy. (Pol & Karmarkar, 2019). The curriculum should offer scope for specialization. This will expand students' horizons to the entire service sector.

### **Employability Skills & Curriculum**

Employability skills are those transferable skills essential for an individual to make him or her employable. Most preferred employability skills are Leadership & Communication, Attitude, Time Management, Decision Making and Information Technology Skills ( Dhaliwal & Misra, 2020). A research study conducted reveals that undergraduate hospitality students perceived the employable skills imparted in hospitality institutes were far below the level of skills essential to working in the hospitality industry (Dasgupta & Santanu, 2020). It's important to impart these skills to nurture hospitality students for better employability. These requisite skills need to be embedded in the curriculum for all the years of the course. A trained and experienced soft skills

trainer along with qualified and experienced hospitality educators can impart these skills. This will enhance students' confidence in facing interviews.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

The current curriculum needs revision and up-gradation by academia. Academia needs to involve all the stakeholders in the curriculum revision process. The suggestions and feedback from hospitality industry experts need to be considered and incorporated into the curriculum. The curriculum should be benchmarked with the best in class and developed by subject experts of eminence. The latest trends and new courses need to be incorporated into the curriculum based on industry feedback and research. The curriculum should be more relevant to the changing needs of the Industry. This will result in developing the right talent armed with the required skills, knowledge, competencies and capabilities. Various research validates the need for experiential learning for hospitality courses as its highly practical and skilled based learning. A Malaysian study further reiterates the effectiveness of experiential learning as compared to traditional classroom learning. This is according to hospitality faculty members and the hospitality industry (Azar, Albatta, Kamaruddin & Yati, 2020). Experiential Learning is more suited for hospitality and tourism courses (Abhishek, Mishra & Singh, 2017). To further enhance experiential learning, industrial training in hotels needs to be further strengthened. An internship in a hotel bridges a gap between theoretical and practical learning. This hypothesis is well accepted by the researcher (Kumar, 2021). The teachers in hospitality institutions should be well trained on the new curriculum, innovation in teaching methodology, pedagogy and advances in information, communication and technology (ICT). Post-Pandemic, hybrid mode of teaching-learning can be further explored as it has several advantages and benefits for students. Hospitality experts and professionals can be invited from any part of the world to deliver lectures and hold interaction sessions with students. The curriculum should focus on employability skills as it will help the students to build a successful career in the industry. These innovations in education will benefit the hospitality industry in acquiring the right talent that offers manpower stability & growth.

### Limitations

The study conducted on the responses received from 25 hospitality industry professionals working in star hotels in Mumbai is a good starting point. However, in order to gain more significant insights, it would be beneficial to have a larger sample size that includes professionals from all sectors of the hospitality industry. This broader sample size would provide a more comprehensive and representative view of the industry and its requirements. Therefore, it is recommended to increase the sample size for future studies to ensure a more robust analysis.

### Scope for future research

Future research can compare academic performance with employability and examine whether an updated curriculum emphasizing practical skills and industry-specific knowledge can improve employment prospects. Another area of research could focus on the effectiveness of hybrid learning in developing soft skills & technical knowledge essential for employability.

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