

Hotel Management Education and Professional Competency Development: A Review of Curriculum, Pedagogy, Employability, and Industry Expectations

Prakash Pandey^{1*} , Kesma Poudel² , Prakash Chandra Poudel³ , Nisha BK⁴ 

¹Faculty of Hotel Management, Central Model College, Bharatpur, Chitawan

²Faculty of Hotel Management, OCEM, Gaidakot, Nawalparasi

³Faculty of Management, Central Model College, Bharatpur, Chitawan

⁴BBA Scholar, Central Model College, Bharatpur, Chitawan

*Corresponding email: centralmodelcollege@gmail.com

Abstract

Review Article

The hospitality industry continues to evolve due to globalisation, technological advancements, changing customer expectations, and increased competition. Consequently, hotel management education faces growing pressure to develop graduates equipped with both theoretical knowledge and practical competencies. This review synthesises findings from nineteen (n = 19) studies published between 2009 and 2026 concerning hotel management curricula, pedagogical approaches, professional competencies, employability, and industry expectations. A review approach was used to identify major themes and trends in the literature.

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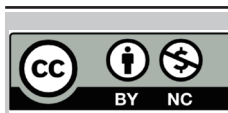
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The findings reveal persistent gaps between academic training and industry requirements, emphasising the importance of competency-based curricula, experiential learning, industry partnerships, and innovative teaching methodologies. The review highlights critical competencies demanded by employers, including those associated with industry expectations.

The review highlights critical competencies demanded by employers, including leadership, communication, problem-solving, customer orientation, and digital literacy skills. The study contributes to hospitality education literature by providing a comprehensive synthesis of existing evidence and proposing directions for curriculum reform and future research.

Keywords: *competency development, employability, hospitality curriculum, hospitality training, hotel management education, systematic review*



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1. Introduction

The hotel industry represents one of the most significant sectors within the global tourism and hospitality economy. As service quality increasingly determines organisational competitiveness, educational institutions are expected to prepare graduates capable of meeting the complex demands of industry. Hotel management education, therefore, plays a crucial role in producing professionals with technical, managerial, and interpersonal competencies (Chathoth & Sharma, 2007).

Several studies have examined various dimensions of hotel management education, including curriculum design (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019), teaching innovations (Zhang, 2016), competency development (Bharwani & Talib, 2017), employability outcomes (Radzi et al., 2014), and industry expectations (Yang & Yang, 2026). Despite growing research, findings remain fragmented across different educational contexts and countries.

A recurring concern in hotel management education is the mismatch between academic curricula and industry requirements. Employers frequently report that graduates lack practical competencies, leadership skills, and industry readiness, while educational

institutions struggle to balance theoretical knowledge with experiential learning (Umbreit & Pederson, 1989). The rapid transformation of hospitality operations further complicates curriculum development and competency assessment.

Based on the research problem, five research questions are derived. They are “what themes dominate the reviewed literature on hotel management education, which competencies are considered most important for hotel management graduates, what teaching approaches are most effective in hospitality education, how does curriculum design influence employability and professional readiness, and what gaps remain in existing research (Sisson & Adams, 2013).

The objectives of this research are to examine the existing literature on hotel management education and curriculum development; identify the major competencies required by hospitality employers; evaluate the teaching and learning approaches used in hotel management programs; assess the factors influencing graduate employability; and propose recommendations for curriculum improvement and future research.

This review contributes to hospitality

education literature by integrating findings from curriculum studies, competency frameworks, employability research, and pedagogical innovations. The findings can assist educators, curriculum developers, policymakers, and hospitality organisations in aligning educational outcomes with industry expectations.

2. Literature review

Curriculum development in hotel management education

Curriculum design remains one of the most frequently discussed topics in hospitality education research. Studies by Liu (2024), Zhang (2019), Kozak (2019), and Johanson et al. (2013) emphasised the need for standardised, industry-oriented curricula, with curriculum reform efforts increasingly focusing on integrating theoretical learning and practical training.

The Turkish case study investigating associate-level tourism and hospitality programs found substantial variations among institutions, suggesting the need for greater standardization to improve educational quality (Kozak, 2019). Similarly, Chinese studies highlighted curriculum examination systems and curriculum groups designed to strengthen professional competencies and educational effectiveness (Dello-

Iacovo, 2009).

Integration of theory and practice

Several studies stress the importance of bridging classroom learning and industry practice. Lam et al. (2013) found that experiential learning significantly enhances student engagement and competency development. The study by Zhang (2023) highlights that the “2+1” internship model examined by researchers at Donghu University demonstrated the effectiveness of extended workplace placements in developing practical skills and professional confidence. The same research shows that action-oriented teaching approaches similarly promote active learning through problem-solving and real-world application (Barreto & Mayya, 2023).

Teaching innovations and pedagogical approaches

The study by Chen et al. (2022) highlighted that innovative teaching methods have become increasingly important in hospitality education. The same study concluded that creative teaching strategies and integrated teaching approaches reported by Chinese researchers improved student participation and knowledge retention. Thompson (2009) compared traditional and online delivery modes in hotel management education and found that

both formats could yield satisfactory learning outcomes when appropriately designed, supporting the growing adoption of blended and digital learning environments in hospitality education.

Professional competencies in hotel management

Competency development has emerged as a central theme in the hospitality education literature. Bharwani and Talib (2017) proposed a comprehensive competency framework comprising 43 competencies, classified into four interrelated domains: cognitive, functional, social, and meta-competencies, which provides a holistic perspective on the diverse knowledge, skills, and attributes required for effective professional performance in the hospitality industry.

Similarly, Yang and Yang (2026) identified substantial competency gaps between industry practitioners and academic experts, highlighting the need for closer alignment between educational outcomes and industry expectations. The same study revealed that many competencies were considered critical for professional success, including leadership, communication skills, customer service orientation, strategic thinking, teamwork, problem-solving ability, adaptability, and technology management. The study by Marneros

et al. (2020) and Partlow (1990) found that while academic programs often emphasise theoretical knowledge, employers place considerable value on transferable and managerial competencies that enable graduates to direct complex organisational environments, respond effectively to technological change, and contribute to strategic decision-making. The study by Jauhari (2006) highlighted that higher education institutions need to strengthen the integration of these competencies into curricula to enhance graduate employability and industry readiness, which are associated with broader requirements for hospitality workforce development.

Hotel career development and professionalisation

Akosa et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review of research on hotel careers and concluded that individual, organisational, and societal factors shape career attitudes. Their findings suggest that effective recruitment and career development strategies can enhance workforce engagement and retention. Karsavuran and Özdemir (2025) further highlighted professionalisation as an emerging trend within hospitality management. Professional competencies and leadership development are

increasingly recognised as determinants of long-term career success.

Employability and graduate outcomes

Osman et al. (2015) highlighted that employability remains a major indicator of educational effectiveness and further demonstrated that graduate attributes such as communication skills, leadership, teamwork, and professional ethics significantly influence employment opportunities. Industry stakeholders consistently value practical experience alongside academic qualifications, highlighting the importance of internships and industry collaboration.

Industry-oriented management perspectives

Beyond education, some studies examined broader management issues within hospitality organisations. Scholz and Steiner (2015) argued that future hotel management should move beyond revenue-focused approaches toward customer-centered and knowledge-based management systems. The same study highlighted that educational programs must prepare graduates for increasingly complex organisational environments.

3. Methodology

Research design

This study employed a literature review guided by the preferred reporting items for reviews and meta-analyses

(PRISMA) framework to synthesise existing evidence on hotel management education and professional competency development. The PRISMA approach provides a transparent and systematic process for identifying, screening, selecting, and reporting relevant studies, thereby enhancing the rigor, reproducibility, and reliability of the review (Puente-Martinez & Bueno-Villaverde, 2026). The review aimed to examine the existing literature on curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, competency development, employability, and industry requirements within hotel management education (Moher et al., 2010).

Relevant studies were identified through systematic searches of major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect, using combinations of keywords such as hotel management education, hospitality education, professional competency, curriculum design, teaching innovation, employability, and industry requirements. The search was limited to publications from 2009 to 2026. After removing duplicate records, the titles and abstracts were screened for relevance before full-text assessment (Moher et al., 2010).

Eligibility criteria

Studies were included in the review if they met several predefined eligibility criteria. Specifically, the selected studies focused on hotel management or hospitality education and examined one or more key areas, including curriculum development, competency requirements, employability, teaching and learning practices, or industry expectations. To ensure the quality and credibility of the evidence, only publications appearing in peer-reviewed journals or conference proceedings were considered. In addition, the studies were required to report empirical findings or provide conceptual contributions relevant to hospitality education and workforce development. Finally, only studies published in English were included in the review. Studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on tourism without a hospitality education context, lacked sufficient methodological detail, were editorials or opinion papers, or did not address competency development or educational outcomes (Parums, 2021).

Study selection

The study selection process followed the four stages of the PRISMA framework: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Database searches initially identified relevant records, after which duplicate publications were removed. Titles and abstracts were screened

against the eligibility criteria, followed by full-text assessment of potentially relevant studies. Following this process, nineteen studies met the inclusion criteria and were retained for the final review (Parums, 2021).

Data extraction and analysis

Data from the selected nineteen studies were extracted using a standardised data extraction form that captured information on authorship, publication year, country, research objectives, methodology, sample characteristics, and key findings. The extracted data were analysed using thematic synthesis to identify recurring themes related to curriculum design, pedagogical innovation, professional competency development, graduate employability, career readiness, and industry expectations. The above-mentioned themes were compared and synthesised to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of hotel management education and its alignment with workforce requirements.

4. Results

The findings of this systematic review demonstrate that curriculum reform and standardisation remain central priorities in hotel management education. Most of the reviewed studies emphasised the need to modernize curricula and strengthen alignment with industry

requirements to ensure graduates possess relevant professional competencies. These findings are consistent with those of Liu (2024), Zhang (2019), and Kozak (2019), who argued that industry-oriented curriculum reform should integrate theoretical knowledge with practical training. Similarly, the Turkish case study by Kozak (2019) revealed considerable variation in hospitality curricula across institutions, highlighting the need for greater standardisation, while Dello-Iacovo (2009) reported that curriculum reforms in China enhanced educational quality through structured competency-based curriculum systems. Experiential learning emerged as another dominant theme across the reviewed studies. Internships, practical training, action-based learning, and industry placements were consistently associated with improved student competencies, workplace readiness, and professional confidence. These findings support previous research demonstrating that integrating theory with practice enhances student engagement and competency development. Zhang (2023) found that the “2+1” internship model significantly strengthened students’ practical skills and career preparedness, while action-oriented teaching approaches promoted critical thinking and real-world problem-solving. Collectively, these studies

indicate that experiential learning serves as an effective bridge between academic education and professional practice.

The review further identified competency-based education as a fundamental component of hotel management programs. Leadership, communication, teamwork, customer orientation, and problem-solving were the most frequently reported competencies required by the hospitality industry. These findings align closely with Bharwani and Talib’s (2017) comprehensive competency framework, which classifies professional competencies into cognitive, functional, social, and meta-competency domains. Likewise, Yang and Yang (2026) identified competency gaps between academic institutions and industry practitioners, emphasizing the importance of aligning educational outcomes with employer expectations. Marneros et al. (2020) similarly concluded that employers increasingly value transferable and managerial competencies alongside technical knowledge, reinforcing the need for competency-based curriculum design.

Graduate employability was strongly associated with the integration of workplace experiences, professional certifications, and collaboration between higher education institutions and the

hospitality industry. These findings are consistent with Osman et al. (2015), who identified communication, leadership, teamwork, and professional ethics as key graduate attributes influencing employment opportunities. Furthermore, Jauhari (2006) argued that embedding industry-relevant competencies within hospitality curricula enhances graduates' career readiness and employability. The findings also complement the systematic review by Akosa et al. (2024), which highlighted the importance of career development strategies and professional competencies in promoting workforce engagement and long-term career success.

Technology and innovation also emerged as important themes influencing hotel management education. Innovative teaching methods, blended learning, and digital learning environments were increasingly recognised as essential for preparing graduates for a rapidly evolving hospitality industry. The above-discussed results support Chen et al. (2022), who reported that creative and integrated teaching approaches improved student participation and knowledge retention, while Thompson (2009) demonstrated that both traditional and online learning environments can achieve effective educational outcomes

when appropriately designed. The increasing emphasis on technology-enabled learning reflects broader industry transformations and the growing demand for digitally competent hospitality professionals.

At last, the findings indicate that effective hotel management education depends on integrating industry-aligned curricula, competency-based education, experiential learning, employability-focused strategies, and innovative teaching practices. These themes collectively reinforce the need for continuous curriculum reform to ensure that hospitality graduates possess the competencies required to succeed in an increasingly dynamic and technology-driven industry.

5. Discussion

The synthesis of the 19 reviewed studies demonstrates a paradigm shift in hospitality education from traditional, content-focused instruction toward industry-responsive, competency-based learning models. However, a critical evaluation of those nineteen articles, across their distinct methodologies, objectives, and findings, reveals nuanced tensions between academic curriculum design and the real-world operational demands of the hotel industry.

The findings of this review highlight an ongoing tension between the need for curriculum standardisation and the necessity for institutional flexibility to respond to changing industry demands. Several studies (for example, Karsavuran & Özdemir, 2025). emphasised that modernising hotel management curricula and strengthening their alignment with industry requirements are essential to enhancing graduate competencies and employability. However, the literature presents differing perspectives on how these objectives should be achieved.

Hu (2014), through an institutional case study, identified substantial variations among associate-level hotel management programmes and argued that the absence of curriculum standardisation reduces the consistency and predictability of graduate's competencies. This finding supports the argument that standardised curricula can establish common educational benchmarks and improve the quality of hospitality education across institutions. In contrast, studies conducted in China, particularly those by Zhang (2023), advocated institution-specific curriculum reforms, including the optimization of curriculum groups and the redesign of assessment methods to strengthen professional competencies. The above-mentioned reforms

demonstrate how localised curricular innovation can better address regional industry characteristics and institutional priorities.

Although both perspectives mentioned above seek to improve educational quality and workforce readiness, this review suggests that an exclusive emphasis on curriculum standardisation may inadvertently limit institutional responsiveness to rapidly evolving industry needs. The hospitality sector is increasingly shaped by technological advancements, digital transformation, and evolving customer expectations, requiring educational institutions to continuously adapt their curricula. Excessively rigid curriculum frameworks may therefore constrain the integration of emerging technologies, innovative pedagogies, and region-specific industry requirements. Consequently, a balanced approach that combines core competency standards with sufficient institutional flexibility appears more appropriate for preparing graduates to succeed in dynamic hospitality environments.

The core problem identified in the literature is the continuing “readiness gap” reported by employers, stemming from a misalignment of stakeholder objectives. Bharwani and Talib (2017) employed a conceptual framework

to map forty-three comprehensive competencies across cognitive, functional, social, and meta-competency domains. While academically exhaustive, operationalising such a vast framework within standard degree structures is incredibly difficult. This implementation challenge is empirically validated by Yang and Yang (2026), who used a hybrid Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MADM) approach to identify severe perception gaps between academic experts and industry practitioners. Academic frameworks frequently over-emphasise theoretical strategic thinking, whereas industry stakeholders prioritize immediate operational survival skills, such as direct customer service orientation, communication, and team adaptability.

To bridge those competency gaps, researchers strongly advocate pedagogical innovation, though different delivery modes imply clear practical trade-offs. Empirical studies on theory-practice integration and action-oriented teaching demonstrate that problem-solving and real-world application significantly increase student engagement for their professional development. The empirical evidence of Zhang (2023) shows the utility of this in the “2+1” internship model at Donghu University,

where extended workplace placements successfully cultivated practical skills and professional confidence. On the digital front, The study by Thompson (2009) compared traditional and online delivery models and found that both formats yield satisfactory cognitive outcomes if properly designed.

The same study supports the integration of digital literacy and blended environments noted in recent literature. However, a critical synthesis indicates that while digital modes are highly effective for teaching technical concepts, they cannot replicate the tactile, high-pressure environment of physical hospitality operations, making extended experiential learning irreplaceable for long-term professional development.

Ultimately, the benchmark for hospitality education is graduate employability and career retention. The Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) study by Kozak (2019) provided empirical evidence that specific graduate attributes, notably communication, leadership, teamwork, and professional ethics, directly dictate immediate employment opportunities. This is associated with broader findings that workplace exposure during university is the strongest predictor of initial job placement.

However, looking beyond immediate

graduation, Akosa et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review of hotel careers. They noted that external organisational and societal factors deeply complicate long-term career attitudes and workforce retention. Graduates often leave the industry due to a misalignment between high academic management expectations and the realities of entry-level operations, which underscores Scholz and Steiner's (2015) argument that hotel management paradigms must evolve beyond strictly revenue-focused metrics toward knowledge-based, customer-centered management systems. Educational programs must therefore prepare graduates to lead this systemic shift in complex corporate environments, ensuring they are resilient enough to navigate industry realities while serving as catalysts for professionalisation.

6. Conclusion

This review examined literature on hotel management education, curriculum development, competency frameworks, employability, and industry requirements. The findings indicate that hospitality education is undergoing a significant transformation in response to changing workforce demands. Successful programs increasingly emphasise competency-based learning, experiential education, industry

collaboration, and innovative teaching methods. Leadership, communication, teamwork, customer orientation, and adaptability emerged as essential competencies for hospitality professionals.

Future curriculum development should prioritise stronger integration between academic institutions and industry stakeholders while incorporating technological advancements and evolving customer expectations. Additional longitudinal and cross-cultural research is recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of educational reforms and competency-based approaches.

Transparency statement

The author confirms that this study has been conducted with honesty and in full adherence to ethical guidelines.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare there are no conflicts of interest.

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