

Undergraduate Hospitality Students' Perception on Importance of Employability Skills: Empirical study from Kolkata, India

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Hospitality industry is one of the largest industries in the world where the requirement for manpower is ever rising. Employability skills are overshadowing the technical skills in the interview process with time. The abundance of skilled personnel in the job market has comforted the recruiters to emphasize on higher employability skills during the recruitment process. The recruiters are entrusting more on Psychometric Tests for the entry level recruitment to recruit the 'right' candidate with multi dimensional skills rather than those with very high academic knowledge but poor interpersonal skills.

This paper aims to find the undergraduate hospitality students' perception about the importance of employability skills. 72 students from 3 hospitality institutions in Kolkata, West Bengal participated in the survey. On-line questionnaire were used to collect the data. Basic statistical techniques were used in the analysis of data. The study revealed perception of male and female undergraduate hospitality students about the importance of various employability skills.

Key words: Hospitality, employability skills, students, perception

1. Introduction

Hospitality industry is one of the largest industries in the world where the requirement for manpower is ever rising. As per the need of the hour, the pre-requisite for manpower transforms and metamorphoses. Employability skills are overshadowing the technical skills in the interview process with time.

The abundance of skilled personnel in the job market The recruiters are entrusting more on Psychometric Tests for the entry level recruitment. 'Right' candidate with multi dimensional skills are getting better placement than those with very high academic knowledge but poor interpersonal skills. The analysis on the perception of various stakeholder on the nature of employability, such as, on businesses (Christou, 1999; Millar, Mao, & Moreo, 2010; Rajan, Sisson & Adams, 2013), students (Christou, 1999), and employees (Lane, Puri, Cleverly, Wylie, & Rajan, 2000) were done in various researches.

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Eminent research scholars in the United Kingdom (1980s) in European continent (1990s) and in Australia (2000) proposed various employability models. Both technical skills and personal attributes were given equal weight in those models.

Hillage and Pollard (1998) defined employability as an ability to be employed i.e. a) ability to gain initial employment b) ability to maintain employment c) ability to obtain new employment if required.

However, researchers (Chapman & Lovell, 2006; Jauhari, 2006; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005; Munar and Montaña, 2009; Agrawal & Dasgupta, 2018) have raised question on the efficacy and value of the curriculum in their studies and have argued that significant difference has been observed between the actual industry requirement and the syllabus content.

2. Review of Literature

Employability – Students’ perception

Storner and Aamodt (2010) stated that employability is regarded as an integral part of higher education with its usefulness in connection to career and work –life. The questions raised were about the graduates regarding their preparation to conduct the work tasks after getting employment. The researchers attempted to excavate the graduate’s perception on the concepts of employability among 13 European countries. The result found that the Norwegian graduates

are more satisfied in their study programmes as compared to other EU counter parts. The graduates educated in health and welfare, computing, law and engineering assessed their study programmes to be good on basis of achievement of employment. The research indicated that employment and unemployment factor are not dependent on the study programme characteristics but are controlled by the labour market job opportunities which are ever changing.

Nilsson (2010) aimed to focus on the perception of engineering graduates about employability. The researcher stated about increasing demand of the students regarding post graduation employability and has pointed out the constantly changing nature of work and external structural factors responsible for it. Employability contains various dimensions including actual competence of individual, formal qualification, hard employability skills, soft employability skills, transferable meta competence as well as inter personal skills. Managerial work may be associated to a higher degree with certain soft skills such as leadership abilities; team work and other interpersonal skills while the definition of employability has different meanings in the different phases of a professional career. The engineers argued that the development of employability is the responsibility of the management to a greater extent. An individual is expected to foresee the future demands in

the organisation as well as in the job market and should equip himself to meet the new demands and challenges.

Dissanayake (2015) discussed about the importance of soft skills as an employability factor in Sri Lanka. It has been found that in spite of rigorous admission procedure the students completing their undergraduate degree have remarkably low employability skills. The study emphasised on importance of soft skills as an employability factor in the private higher education institutions and also tried to demarcate the relationships between the selected soft skills with the employability of graduates at HEI's in Sri Lanka. 5 point Likert Scale was used throughout the analysis. Graduates perceived that the most important possession at the time of applying for the first job is high verbal communication skill. They also perceived there is a significant relationship between the level of verbal communication skills and the waiting period to get the first job while there is no such significant relationship with listening skills.

Employability in education

Laguador and Ramos (2014) advocated for the need of the involvement of industry – partners in framing of curriculum in the HEI have to enable higher standard of employability skills. As per research industry partners strongly prefer employees who are loyal and committed and can take responsibility as a team member and are

expected to shape themselves up as good leaders for the organisation. It was also found that employers prefer pro active individuals who are willing to be trained. This sort of individuals are result oriented and can carry all their responsibilities with less interference and instructions from their supervisors. Industry partners have shown their willingness to share their input to the student community for setting the objectives of the HEI's in line to their requirement. The employers have expressed their high regards in the competence of the graduates in terms of communication skills, IT skills and their knowledge & skills in research. With significant inputs from the industry the course curriculum designed by the faculty members will prepare students with better opportunities.

Gibbs & Slevitch (2019) advocated that “educators should prepare undergraduates with the necessary skill sets, including technical and emotional proficiencies to make them appropriately qualified and competent for a successful hospitality career”. Their study revealed that the technical and emotional competencies of a student can be nurtured and enhanced by the faculty members through lectures and classroom sessions on role plays, discussions etc.

Tejan & Sabil (2019) argue that universities and colleges should conduct surveys while creating academic programs. This will help them to gather information about the quality

of fresh entrants in the job market. The local universities and colleges should remodel their curriculum and modify their teaching practices to introduce the employability skills in demand to satisfy the requirement of the employers. This may result in interim challenges, but could offer lasting solutions. The researchers commented that the requirement of the potential employers must be understood by the students through proactive measures and are expected to respond accordingly.

3. Objectives

To assess the perceptual difference about the importance of employability skill among the male and female undergraduate hospitality students.

To rank the top ten employability skills as perceived by the male and female undergraduate hospitality students.

4. Research Methodology

A two part questionnaire was developed by the researcher for data collection. The first part of the questionnaire was related to the demographic background of the students while the second part was related to employability skills required by the hospitality professionals. The questionnaire had 34 employability skills further divided into the 5 skill sets namely a) *Basic Academic Skills* b) *Interpersonal Skills* c) *Personality Traits* d) *Work Related Skills* e) *Social Skills*. The respondents were asked to rate their perceived importance of employability skills on a 5 point Likert Scale through categories of *Extremely Unimportant (1)*, *Unimportant (2)*, *Neutral (3)*, *Important (4)* and *Extremely Important (5)*. The data used in this study was collected between February 2020 and April 2020 in Kolkata, West Bengal.

Basic Academic Skills	Interpersonal Skills	Personality Traits	Work Related Skills	Social Skills
Intellectual achievement (marks percentage)	Listening skills	Physical appearance	Innovative ideas (thinking out of the box)	Respect for self and others
Depth in subject knowledge (theory and practical)	Decision making skills	Grooming	Learning skills (quick learning ability)	Sharing and caring attitude (sociability skill)
Practical experience	Problem solving skill	Self confidence	Dedication / tenacity	Honesty and integrity
Reading skill	Power of reasoning (critical thinking skill)	Discipline	Positive attitude towards change	Empathy
Written communication skill	Willingness to work	Enthusiasm and self motivation	Sense of responsibility	

Basic mathematical / numerical skills	Teamwork	Self Awareness	Desire for achievement
Verbal communication skill (public speaking)	Work under pressure	Positive Thinking	
Foreign language	Leadership		
Basic computer/ IT skill			

Source: primary data

5. Data and Sample Design

Purposive random sampling method was used for this study. The hospitality undergraduate students from the final year batches were involved in the survey as they are already exposed to the industry due to their compulsory training. The students after an industry exposure are expected to relate themselves with the importance of employability skills in the industry. The questionnaires were sent to the students over email. Out of 100 questionnaires sent to the students, 72 valid questionnaires were received (72% valid return rate). Among the valid respondents, 43 were male students and 29 were female. The invalid questionnaires included those which were incomplete and which were marked in more than one rating.

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

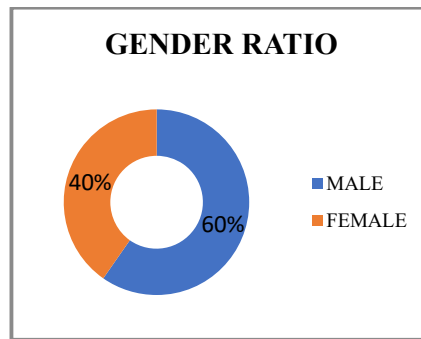
72 valid feedbacks were received from the undergraduate hospitality student studying in three hospitality management institutes in Kolkata, West Bengal. Out of the 72 respondents 43 (60%) were male while 29 (40%) were female. All the students (100%) were studying in the final year of their curriculum, and all of them have undergone their compulsory Industrial Exposure Training in some star category hotel in India and abroad.

Table 1: Gender ratio of students

STUDENTS	NUMBER	RATIO (%)
MALE	43	60
FEMALE	29	40
TOTAL	72	

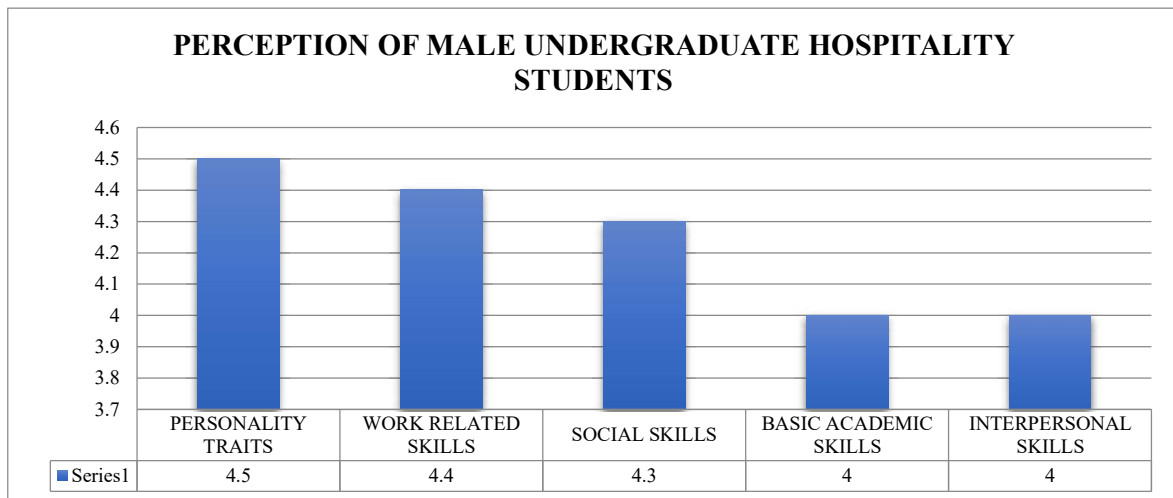
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Fig. 1: Gender ratio of students



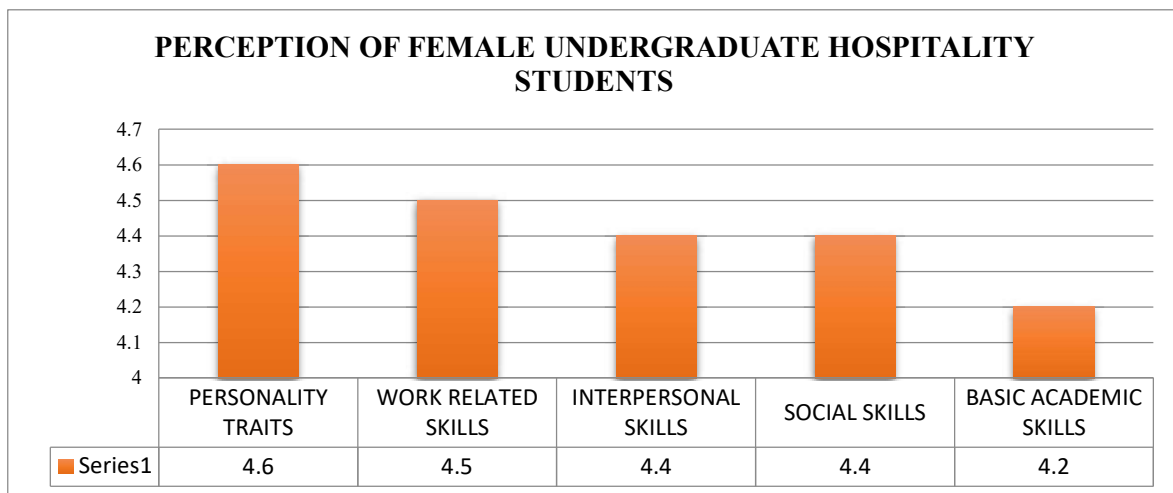
Source: Primary data

Fig 2: Perceived importance of employability skills (male)



Source: Primary data

Fig 3: Perceived importance of employability skills (female)



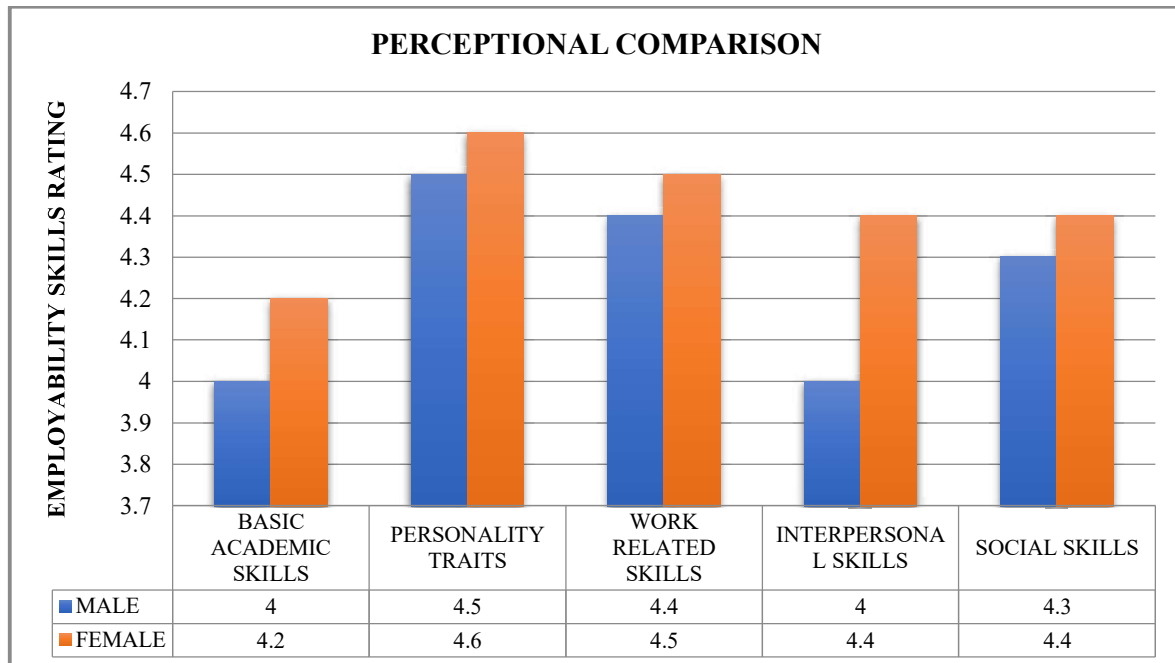
Source: Primary data

Fig. 2 shows that the male undergraduate hospitality students have rated *personality traits* (4.5 out of 5) as the most important employability skill set followed by *work related skills* (4.4 out of 5) and *social skills* (4.3 out of 5). Equal rating was given (4 out of 5) by the male students to skill set like *basic academic skills* and *interpersonal skills*.

Fig. 3 shows that the female undergraduate

hospitality students have rated *personality traits* (4.6 out of 5) as the most important employability skill set followed by *work related skills* (4.5 out of 5). Equal rating was given (4.4 out of 5) to skills set like *social skills* and *interpersonal skills*. The *Basic academic skills* were given the lowest rating (4.2 out of 5) by the female students.

Fig. 4: Perceived difference in the importance of employability skills



Source: Primary data

Fig. 4 shows that there is a difference in the perceptual importance of employability skills among the male and female undergraduate hospitality students. The rating shows difference in the mean scores at every skill set. It is found in the chart that both male and female students have rated *personality traits* as the most important skill set (rank 1) but the

mean score is different for the male (4.5) and female (4.6) students. *Work related skills* have been rated next in priority (rank 2) by both, but still a difference is there in the rating between the male (4.4) and female (4.5). Significant difference has been observed in the ranking of *basic academic skills* where the male students have rated the skill set with

rank 4 while the female students have ranked them in the last position (rank 5). *Interpersonal skills* were also given different weightage by both the genders. The male students perceived this skill set to be of lowest importance (rank 5) while the female students ranked it in the 3rd position. The *social skills* were ranked 3rd by male student but the female students did not find those skill set to be of similar importance and ranked them in 4th position.

Table 2: Top ten employability skill, as perceived by the undergraduate hospitality students (male)

Sl. no	Employability skills	Mean score
1	Grooming	4.63
2	Teamwork	4.62
3	Positive Thinking	4.60
4	Self confidence	4.57
5	Respect for self and others	4.54
6	Discipline	4.53
7	Sense of responsibility	4.53
8	Practical experience	4.52
9	Leadership	4.48
10	Willingness to work	4.44

Source: Primary data

The ranking of employability skills shows that *grooming* was perceived to be the most important employability skill for the male undergraduate hospitality students followed by *team work* and *positive thinking*. The least important employability skill in the top 10 list, as perceived by the male students was *willingness to work*.

The rating of employability skills as perceived by the female undergraduate hospitality students shows *positive thinking* as the most important skill. *Grooming* and *discipline* comes in the second and third perceived priority. The last skill in the top 10 list for the female students was *learning skills*.

Table 2: Top ten employability skill, as perceived by the undergraduate hospitality students (female)

Sl. no	Employability skills	Mean score
1	Positive Thinking	4.73
2	Grooming	4.71
3	Discipline	4.68
4	Practical experience	4.67
5	Respect for self and others	4.66
6	Willingness to work	4.63
7	Positive attitude towards change	4.60
8	Sense of responsibility	4.60
9	Self confidence	4.59
10	Learning skills	4.57

Source: Primary data

7. Conclusion and limitations

The data was collected only from the final year students, pursuing undergraduate hospitality courses. The researcher found significant difference in the perception of the male and female students pursuing undergraduate hospitality education, about employability skill set, although most likely they were studying in similar colleges in the same city under same affiliation. The researcher also found that the students differed in their opinion and perceptual importance about the employability skills. The results could not be generalised for the student fraternity in the entire city, pursuing

undergraduate courses in hospitality education, as the sample size was not large enough and the study was limited to only three hospitality colleges. Although the research was only focussing on the perceptual outcome of the students, the reasons behind the perception building may also be considered for further research. More extensive research can be conducted in future to understand the perception of the students of the entire city, state or even the country. A comparative study can be done by collecting data from different states in India.

8. References

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