



Shrinking Enrolments in IHMs: An Exploratory Study from Key Stakeholder's Perspective

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Abstract

This study delves into the decline in admissions in hotel management programs and its broader implications on IHMs. Using focus group discussions and expert interviews with the students and industry professionals, the research aims to shed light on potential challenges and opportunities for the IHMs and the hospitality industry in the future. This topic provides valuable insights into the shrinking enrolments in IHMs and its consequent impact on the industry. By exploring the viewpoints of various stakeholders like students and industry professionals, the study can provide a comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors causing the decline in enrolment. This understanding can help IHMs make informed decisions to enhance their appeal to students, improve curriculum relevance, and strengthen industry partnerships. Similarly, the study can assist the industry to align the perspective of the industry professionals and the students to reduce attrition. Ultimately, the study's findings strive for the sustainability and growth of IHMs by reversing enrolment trends in the hospitality education sector.

Keywords: Shrinking enrolments, hotel management, focus group discussions, expert interviews, growth of IHM's.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a noticeable trend of shrinking enrolments in Hotel Management institutes (IHMs), raising concerns about the sustainability and relevance of these institutions. According to an article published; the number of students appearing for the NCHMCT- JEE has been on a year-on-decline. Sources revealed that several central IHMs had less than 30% of seats filled at the end of the admission process. Out of 12,500 seats, 1,035 remain vacant for the year 2023 (Kumar, 2022). As the global landscape of hospitality undergoes dynamic transformations, it is imperative to understand the factors contributing to this decline in student interest (NCHMT, n.d.). According to some IHM sources, only 5000 seats out of a total of 12000 seats could be filled for the three-year BSc program. The central IHMs in Guwahati, Gurdaspur, Srinagar, Shillong, etc. also had a really bad time, as only less than 30 percent of the seats could be filled

(Kumar, 2022). According to them, the National Council was not able to gauge the decline in interest of students in hotel management and was still blindly affiliated with private institutions. Whereas, some people blame the National Testing Agency, as JEE is also facing a year-on-year decline since NTA took over the process. According to Yadav (2022), just over 12,000 students wrote the Hotel Management JEE. Earlier, the figure would go up to as many as 25,000 to 30,000 students taking the test. Sources stated that only around 6,000 students showed up for counseling in 2021. Most IHMs are struggling to get students. A Central IHM principal said institutes in Shillong, Hajipur, Gurdaspur, Gwalior, and other cities. have a large number of seats vacant. Many of the private IHMs have just 4 to 6 students in the new session, he added. (JIET Universe, n.d.)

This research aims to delve into the intricate dynamics surrounding the diminishing enrollments in IHMs, exploring potential causes such as shifts in industry demands, changing student preferences, and the impact of technological advancements. By unraveling the underlying reasons for this trend, we aspire to provide valuable insights.

Employing a methodological approach that involves focus group discussions and expert interviews with both students and industry professionals, the study aims to elucidate the potential challenges and opportunities that IHMs and the hospitality industry are currently facing. The significance of this topic lies in its capacity to provide invaluable insights into the diminishing enrollments within IHMs and the subsequent impact on the broader hospitality sector. The study unfolds by diving into the multifaceted aspects of the declining admissions in IHMs. Through in-depth focus group discussions, the research seeks to capture the nuanced perspectives of students, discerning their reasons for the reduced interest in hotel management programs. Simultaneously, expert interviews with seasoned industry professionals are conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the external factors influencing the declining trend and to explore potential solutions.

One of the primary objectives is to offer a holistic view of the situation by incorporating the voices of various stakeholders. By synthesizing the viewpoints of both students and industry professionals, the research strives to unravel the intricate web of factors contributing to the decline in enrollment. This comprehensive understanding becomes the cornerstone for formulating strategies that can rejuvenate the appeal of IHMs to potential students. The study recognizes the paramount importance of enhancing the curriculum relevance within IHMs. Through careful analysis of student and industry feedback, the research aims to identify gaps in the existing curriculum and propose improvements. Furthermore, the research investigates the potential benefits of strengthening industry partnerships for IHMs.

The study acknowledges the necessity of aligning the perspectives of industry professionals and students to address the issue of attrition within the hospitality education sector. In conclusion, this research undertaking is not merely an exploration of declining admissions but its implications can prove useful in reshaping the landscape of hospitality education. By delving into the root causes, seeking input from diverse stakeholders, and proposing targeted solutions, the study aspires to contribute to the resilience, adaptability, and ultimate prosperity of IHMs in an ever-evolving educational and professional landscape.

Review of Literature

A recent study by Ivkov et al. (2020) investigated the perspectives of Tourism and Hospitality (T&H) students regarding the integration of service robots in hotels. The findings revealed that key considerations for students include anticipated business outcomes like cost reduction, improved efficiency, enhanced revenue, and increased market share. Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of performance aspects in service robotization, including swiftness, accuracy, and consistency. The implementation of service robots in T&H organizations is anticipated to significantly impact business operations, alter job requirements, and shape expectations for future employees. The researcher undertook this study due to the scarcity of academic research on students' perceptions regarding the adoption of robots in the T&H sector.

Understanding students' perceptions of technological advancements in the industry can guide IHMs in adapting their curriculum to align with emerging trends, potentially making hospitality education more appealing. By incorporating insights from such studies, IHMs can address the evolving expectations of future professionals, potentially contributing to reversing the trend of declining enrolments by ensuring program relevance in the rapidly changing landscape of the hospitality sector (Devkant, 2022).

A study sought expert opinions from both academicians and industry recruiters, consulted relevant literature, and analyzed historical placement records of Institutes of Hotel Management (IHMs) for supporting insights. Expert views from academicians and industry recruiters were sought, providing valuable insights into potential factors contributing to the decline. Additionally, a thorough review of existing literature, coupled with an analysis of past placement records of IHMs, aimed to uncover patterns or influences that could be impacting student enrolment (Ghosh & Jhamb, 2022). The outcomes could assist hotels and IHMs in formulating and organizing a successful internship program to address the disparity between the anticipated and existing skilled workforce in the hotel industry enrolment (Ghosh & Jhamb, 2021). Internship insights may uncover industry needs and preferences, allowing IHMs to tailor their curriculum to align with the current demands of the hospitality sector. Additionally, showcasing the practical benefits and real-world experiences gained through internships could serve as a compelling promotional tool for IHMs. By highlighting the tangible benefits of their programs, IHMs can attract potential students, contributing to the reversal of declining enrolments. In this way, a symbiotic relationship between hotels and IHMs, fostered by effective internship programs, has the potential to revitalize the appeal and relevance of hospitality education, subsequently mitigating the issue of diminishing enrolments. These results underscore the role of IHMs in enhancing performance through the formulation of effective administrative policies and procedures. By improving the hiring intentions of hotel recruiters, IHMs can subsequently elevate their reputation. This is achieved through fostering closely aligned collaborations between academia and industry, contributing to the attainment of sustainable development goals, particularly those related to quality education (Ghosh *et al.*, 2023).

By emphasizing the importance of IHMs in enhancing performance through effective administrative policies and academia-industry collaborations, the study suggests a strategic pathway. IHMs can leverage these insights to revamp their approaches, ensuring that educational

offerings align closely with the expectations of hotel recruiters. This alignment not only elevates the reputation of IHMs but also makes them more attractive to potential students. Through proactive measures that bridge academia and industry needs, IHMs can position themselves as integral contributors to sustainable development goals, ultimately revitalizing their appeal and reversing the trend of declining admissions.

According to the National Employability Study for Hotel Management graduates 2014, the key findings were: Based on the candidate's assessment of cognitive skills, personality, and domain knowledge, it was found out that only 4% to 11% of students passing out from Hotel Management institutes are fit to work in the hospitality sector. Females were more fit for hiring (8% to 18%) as compared to males (3% to 10%) across all profiles. Hotel management education in India is still following the age-old syllabus and focusing more on literature than practical aspects of hospitality.

With only a minimal percentage of graduates deemed fit for the hospitality sector, there arises a discrepancy between industry expectations and the education provided. The evident gender disparity further emphasizes the need for comprehensive curriculum reforms. Addressing these gaps becomes imperative for Institutes to attract enrolments by offering contemporary, industry-relevant education and enhancing graduates' employability.

Methodology

The tools used for the data collection (structured and direct) primarily were Focused group discussions and interviews along with online questionnaires. The study is based on an exploratory survey examining the declining admissions in IHMs.

Students studying in IHMs, and Industry Experts were identified as samples. A total of 14 respondents of Dr. Ambedkar Institute of Hotel Management, of batch 2021-2024 (final year) along with 4 final year students from various other IHMs and private hotel Management institutions such as IHM Ranchi, IHM Lucknow, and Amity University were approached for Focused Group Discussion. 4 industry experts from some of the top hotels of the country were approached for the same. This research study was designed to analyze the causes of reduced enrolments in IHMs. The focus was on the views of these key stakeholders. The target population for this research study was final-year students of the 2021-2024 batch and various other stakeholders in the industry. A questionnaire was prepared and views on them were recorded through Focused group discussions. Further, these discussions were transcribed and analyzed. The questionnaire was designed to obtain the views of students on the hotel management course, curriculum and teaching style, job opportunities, and various challenges faced during the course.

Another questionnaire was also designed to examine variables like job profile, pay scale, perception about the industry, and various causes that affect the choice of freshers for enrolment in the hospitality industry. This questionnaire was administered in a web-based format. The link to the survey, which was hosted on Google Forms, was shared with the participants by the researcher. The responses were then converted to pie charts to analyze the perspective.

A third separate questionnaire was prepared for other stakeholders of this research, that is the industry. A varied list of questions exploring the array of possibilities was presented to the

industry experts and people working in the industry who have been dealing with the hiring process from the IHMs and are proficient in the process and are more susceptible to sensing a change in the campus hiring landscape and analyzing the change in the trends. The questionnaire covered various aspects related to the recruitment of graduates from hotel management institutes (IHMs) by hotels. It included questions about changes in the number of IHM graduates applying for positions, desired skills, and qualities in recruits, satisfaction with graduates' preparedness, the correlation between declining IHM enrolments and availability of skilled professionals, areas of curriculum needing emphasis, the potential impact of reduced enrolment on the industry's future workforce, and initiatives/partnerships supporting hotel management education and addressing enrolments challenges. These questions aim to gather insights into the recruitment landscape, skill expectations, and challenges faced by the hospitality industry about IHM graduates.

Results and Discussion

The discussion revolved around exploring the motivations, challenges, and employment opportunities within the field of hotel management education. Participants shared their motivations for enrolling in hotel management courses, which included a passion for the industry, practical learning opportunities, grooming standards, and the desire to develop leadership and teamwork skills. They also discussed the challenges encountered during their studies, such as transitioning from different educational backgrounds and adapting to subjects like finance and accounting. Additionally, the conversation delved into the various employment opportunities available after completing the course, including within the hospitality industry, aviation, cruise liners, hospitals, revenue management, sales and marketing, and even entrepreneurial ventures like startups. The dialogue also touched upon the satisfaction with the quality of education and training provided under the prescribed curriculum, with participants expressing overall satisfaction while also suggesting potential changes to enhance practical training and mental health support.

The responses from HR representatives of Wildflower Hall Shimla, Trident Udaipur, and The Oberoi New Delhi provided insights into the challenges and expectations faced by the hospitality industry in hiring graduates, particularly from hotel management institutions. The common concerns revolved around the declining quality of candidates' skills such as communication, grooming, and practical knowledge, as well as the impact of external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic on job interest and pay scales. According to one expert, "there is a mixed perception regarding the number of IHM graduates applying for positions; This suggests a shifting landscape in the availability of qualified candidates for hospitality roles. Another expert emphasizes the importance of soft skills, stating that "the desired skills and qualities for hiring IHM graduates include communication, confidence, dedication, and adaptability," alongside technical knowledge. This underscores the multifaceted nature of success in the industry. Additionally, experts unanimously agree on the need for improvement in the skill set and preparedness of IHM graduates. This indicates a gap between academic training and real-world requirements. Furthermore, the declining enrollment in IHM programs is seen as potentially leading to a shortage of skilled professionals in the hospitality industry, with one expert highlighting that "factors such as low initial salaries and outdated curriculum" contribute to this

trend. Finally, addressing enrollment challenges requires strategic initiatives such as recruitment drives, partnerships with educational institutions, and leveraging social media for advertising, as emphasized by another expert who states, "initiatives like recruitment drives, partnerships with educational institutions, and social media advertising are suggested." Employers emphasized the importance of a strong personality, dedication, and practical experience, highlighting a need for improvements in curriculum, skill development, and industry-academic partnerships to address these challenges and bridge the gap between education and industry expectations. Overall, these responses underscore the imperative for continuous efforts to enhance the quality of hospitality education and narrow the gap between academic preparation and industry requirements, ensuring a competent workforce and sustained growth in the sector.

Implications

This research implies a comprehensive examination of hotel management education, encompassing various stakeholders such as students and industry experts, their perspectives, and experiences. It highlights the diverse motivations driving individuals to pursue such education, ranging from personal passion to skill development and career opportunities. The challenges faced during studies, such as academic transitions and subject adaptation, indicate the complexity of the curriculum and the need for effective support systems.

The discussion also suggests a collective acknowledgment of the importance of practical training and mental health support within the curriculum. This implies a recognition of the evolving needs and expectations of students, reflecting a commitment to enhancing educational experiences and preparing graduates for the dynamic demands of the industry. Overall, the dialogue implies a holistic approach to understanding and addressing the multifaceted aspects of hotel management education, with a focus on continuous improvement and adaptation to meet industry and student needs.

The responses highlight industry concerns about declining skills among hotel management graduates, exacerbated by external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers emphasize the significance of attributes like communication, grooming, and practical knowledge, underscoring the need for curriculum enhancements and stronger industry-academic collaborations to align education with industry needs. The emphasis on personality, dedication, and practical experience signals a shift towards holistic skill sets and suggests a call for more hands-on training. Overall, the implications suggest a pressing need for educational reforms to ensure graduates meet the evolving demands of the hospitality sector.

Limitations

The current research on enrolment in IHMs provides valuable insights but also reveals certain limitations. One significant limitation is the absence of faculty perspectives, which are crucial for shaping educational experiences. Another limitation is the confined sampling framework, focusing on only a few IHMs, which raises concerns about generalizability. The research does not address the dynamic educational landscape during the COVID-19 pandemic, nor does it explore its specific impact on IHMs. The research does not include perspectives of potential

candidates, such as prospective students and individuals considering hospitality careers, which limits insight into decision-making processes. Including these viewpoints in future studies is crucial for understanding evolving needs and expectations. Despite these limitations, addressing them in future research can enhance understanding and inform decision-making and policy development in hospitality education.

Future Scope

Exploring the critical issue of shrinking enrolments in IHMs presents promising avenues for future research. Firstly, examining government initiatives aimed at boosting admissions and evaluating their impact on enrolment numbers is imperative. Further assessment of NCHMCT's promotional activities could provide valuable insights. Secondly, researching the impact of changing the degree awarding authority from IGNOU to JNU on IHM enrolments could shed light on the broader implications of administrative decisions on educational institutions. Additionally, exploring technological integration in IHMs and its impact on student engagement and enrolment is crucial. Understanding how technology can attract students in the digital age is important for adapting to evolving needs.

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