Shaping Futures: A Comparative Study of Career Intentions Before and After Industrial Training among Hotel Management Students

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Abstract: Industrial training has emerged as a critical experiential learning component in hospitality education, offering students practical exposure that bridges the gap between academic knowledge and industry expectations. This study aims to explore the role of industrial training in shaping the professional development and career intentions of hotel management students. By employing a comparative design, the research captures and analyses the shift in students' career aspirations before and after undergoing six months of industrial training across various departments in hotels.

Data were collected through structured questionnaires and interviews from 150 final-year hotel management students enrolled in recognized Indian institutions. The findings indicate that industrial training not only enhances students' technical and interpersonal skills but also significantly influences their career choices. While many students reported increased clarity, motivation, and readiness for hospitality careers post-training, a notable percentage reconsidered their career paths due to factors such as long working hours, lack of mentorship, and perceived industry challenges.

This study highlights the importance of quality internship experiences in determining whether students choose to pursue or exit the hospitality sector. The insights generated can help academic institutions redesign training modules and collaborate more effectively with industry partners to deliver student-centered, meaningful training experiences that align with evolving career aspirations.

Keywords: Industrial Training, Career Intentions, Hospitality Education, Hotel Management Students, Experiential Learning, Professional Development, Internship Outcomes, Career Shift, Hospitality Industry, Student Perceptions

Introduction

The hospitality industry is recognized for its fast-paced, customer-oriented environment, where seamless service delivery, adaptability, and operational excellence are critical to success. With evolving guest expectations, increased competition, and technological innovation transforming the sector, the demand for a workforce that is not only academically trained but also professionally prepared has never been greater (Gursoy et al., 2008; Wang & Xu, 2022). In response, hospitality education has increasingly emphasized **industrial training** as a pedagogical strategy that enables students to translate theoretical learning into practical competence.

Typically structured as a six-month internship, industrial training immerses hotel management students in real-time operations such as front office management, food and beverage service, culinary production, and housekeeping. This direct exposure to diverse hospitality functions enables students to internalize workplace

expectations, sharpen interpersonal and technical skills, and assess their fit within various departments (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007; Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning frameworks such as Kolb's (1984) validate that professional growth is significantly enhanced through active engagement in real-world tasks.

Beyond acquiring operational knowledge, industrial training also plays a pivotal role in shaping students' **long-term career aspirations**. Research suggests that positive internship experiences foster career clarity, job satisfaction, and retention within the industry (Richardson, 2009; Lee & Chao, 2019). However, poorly designed or mismanaged internships can have adverse effects, leading to student frustration, skill stagnation, and even career disengagement (Roney & Öztin, 2007; Chan & Zhao, 2020). Elements such as mentorship quality, organizational culture, and the scope of responsibilities offered to interns heavily influence these outcomes (Chen et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2020).

Despite widespread implementation, the **impact of industrial training on career intentions** remains under-examined—particularly within the Indian hospitality education system, where student diversity and institutional structures add complexity to internship outcomes. Many students enter hotel management with romanticized or vague career expectations, which are often recalibrated during internships based on challenges such as hierarchical dynamics, unpaid labor, long shifts, and emotional demands (Fernandez & Singh, 2022; Kumari & Mehta, 2024).

This study seeks to investigate how industrial training influences the **professional development and evolving career intentions** of hotel management students in India. By conducting a comparative analysis of student perspectives before and after their training, the research aims to identify patterns of transformation, contributing factors, and gaps between academic preparation and industry realities. The findings aim to inform curriculum development, internship structuring, and student support strategies that better align with the professional demands of the modern hospitality workforce.

Literature Review

Experiential learning is widely recognized as a cornerstone of effective hospitality education, enabling students to develop essential professional competencies through immersion in real-world contexts. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory emphasizes that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, thereby positioning industrial training as a critical learning strategy in vocational fields like hotel management. These internships allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in professional settings, navigating challenges in communication, service delivery, and operational efficiency.

Multiple empirical studies support the view that internships enhance technical and interpersonal skills, confidence, and career readiness. Barron and Maxwell (1993) found that students participating in internships demonstrated notable improvements in time management, teamwork, and communication—core attributes valued in hospitality careers. Similarly, Zopiatis and Constanti (2007) observed that internships significantly improved students' understanding of hotel operations, although some students experienced frustration due to monotonous assignments and lack of departmental rotation.

However, not all outcomes of industrial training are positive. Several scholars have identified a mismatch between students' expectations and the actual responsibilities assigned during internships. Chen, Chang, and Hsu (2011) found that students often enter training expecting active learning and mentorship but are frequently relegated to menial tasks, leading to disengagement and dissatisfaction. These concerns are echoed by Roney and Öztin (2007), who argued that internships can diminish students' enthusiasm for the industry when accompanied by poor supervision, long hours, and minimal skill development opportunities.

Conversely, when structured effectively, internships can enhance job satisfaction and long-term career orientation. Gursoy, Maier, and Chi (2008) emphasized that mentorship, task diversity, and workplace support contribute

significantly to career commitment. Their findings indicate that positive internship experiences reinforce students' intentions to remain in the hospitality sector and develop more realistic expectations regarding professional roles.

Recent studies have added a critical dimension to this discourse by examining how **gender and cultural background** influence internship experiences. Fernandez and Singh (2022) noted that female students, particularly from collectivist societies, often encountered gender-based limitations during training, including being assigned stereotypical roles and limited opportunities for leadership tasks. Goyal, Ahmed, and Verma (2024) reported that South Asian students favored internships that offered structured mentorship and well-defined expectations, while Western students appeared more adaptable to performance-based, autonomous training environments.

Emerging global research also highlights the evolving landscape of internships post-COVID-19. According to Wang and Xu (2022), the pandemic has transformed internship models by prompting greater digital integration, mental health awareness, and hybrid learning structures. In India, Kumari and Mehta (2024) examined gendered perceptions of work-life balance and found that female students often reassessed their career aspirations due to limited flexibility and emotional strain encountered during internships.

Furthermore, Robinson, Ruhanen, and Breakey (2020) advocate for a more collaborative approach to industrial training, where academic institutions and industry partners co-develop internship frameworks to close the gap between learning objectives and workplace realities. Chan and Zhao (2020) also highlight the role of feedback mechanisms and intern voice in improving satisfaction and retention rates.

In summary, while the literature strongly supports the role of industrial training in enhancing professional development, it also underscores the variability in student outcomes. These differences are shaped by multiple intersecting factors including **mentorship quality**, **organizational culture**, **identity dynamics**, and **industry-academia coordination**. Addressing these issues is essential for maximizing the benefits of experiential learning and ensuring that internships serve as a bridge—rather than a barrier—to long-term hospitality careers.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the role of industrial training in the professional development of hotel management students.

2. To compare the career intentions of hotel management students before and after industrial training.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a **descriptive and comparative research design** using a **mixed-methods approach** to comprehensively explore how industrial training impacts the career intentions and professional development of hotel management students. The quantitative component measures changes in students' career goals and perceptions using pre- and post-training survey instruments, while the qualitative component captures deeper insights through open-ended responses and interviews. This methodological framework allows for triangulation, thereby enhancing the reliability and depth of the research findings (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

Sample

The target population includes **final-year hotel management students** enrolled in accredited institutions in India who have completed a **mandatory six-month industrial training** component as part of their curriculum. Using **purposive sampling**, a total of **150 students** were selected from institutions known for offering structured training programs aligned with National Council for Hotel Management & Catering Technology (NCHMCT) standards. The diversity in student demographics—including gender, cultural background, and training locations—enhanced the generalizability of findings.

Data Collection

Data were collected through both **quantitative surveys** and **qualitative interviews** at two critical stages of the student training journey:

- **Pre-Training Questionnaire:** Administered prior to the commencement of industrial training, this section (Section B of the instrument) captured students' initial career motivations, expectations from training, preferred departments, and confidence levels in their career choice.

- **Post-Training Questionnaire:** Conducted immediately after the training concluded, this segment (Section C) assessed students' actual experiences, perceived skill development, training satisfaction, challenges faced, and changes in career intentions.

- **Factors Influencing Career Perception:** Section D examined external influences such as job market trends, work-life balance, salary expectations, and previous exposure to hospitality work using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree).

- **Moderating Role of Gender and Culture:** Section E explored how gender identity and cultural background influenced students' career decisions and experiences during training. Questions addressed discrimination, equality, cultural bias, and workplace inclusion.

- **Qualitative Insights:** In-depth interviews were conducted with **10 students** selected from diverse backgrounds to elaborate on quantitative patterns and capture nuanced narratives on how industrial training shaped their long-term career aspirations. These interviews included prompts based on open-ended questions from Sections C, D, and E of the questionnaire.

Tools and Techniques

- **Likert Scale Surveys:** Quantitative data were obtained from structured responses using 5-point scales across various sections of the questionnaire. Reliability and internal consistency were ensured through pilot testing.

- **Paired Sample t-Tests:** To statistically evaluate the difference between students' career intentions **before and after** industrial training, paired t-tests were applied. These tests measured shifts in confidence levels, department preferences, and willingness to pursue a hospitality career.

- **Thematic Analysis:** Open-ended responses and interview transcripts were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Recurring themes included skill acquisition, emotional labor, mentorship quality, cultural challenges, and long-term goal reassessment.

- **Demographic Analysis:** Section A of the questionnaire collected demographic data such as age, gender, educational background, and number of internships. This data was used to explore group-level trends and possible moderating effects.

This multi-instrument approach ensures both the **breadth** and **depth** of the study, allowing the researcher to map patterns in career intention shifts and identify the underlying mechanisms influencing them.

Data Analysis and Findings

The analysis was based on responses from 150 hotel management students who completed both the **pre-training** and **post-training** questionnaires, supported by **qualitative insights** from in-depth interviews with 10 selected participants. The data reflects perceptual and directional changes in professional development and career intentions as a result of industrial training. The questionnaires covered multiple areas including career confidence, skill acquisition, role preferences, industry expectations, and the influence of gender and cultural background.

Professional Development

Industrial training significantly contributed to students' professional growth across multiple dimensions. As per responses in **Section C** of the post-training questionnaire:

- **87% of students** reported notable improvement in their **communication, time management, and problem-solving skills**, corroborating the intent of industrial training as outlined in **Section B** (expectations from training and core skills aimed for).

- Many students cited real-time exposure to hotel operations—including check-in/check-out procedures, handling guest complaints, kitchen line operations, and event setups—as key learning moments.

- **74% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed** with the statement: *"The internship increased my ability to choose a career in hotel management,"* suggesting that industrial training enhanced not only their technical competence but also their career clarity.

- Qualitative feedback reinforced that working under industry professionals and rotating across departments allowed students to apply academic knowledge practically, aligning with Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning.

Shift in Career Intentions

A clear shift in students' career aspirations was observed when comparing responses from **Section B** (pre-training) and **Section C** (post-training):

- **Before training**,

  o **72%** of students aspired to work in operational departments, primarily **Front Office** and **Food & Beverage Service**.

  o **15%** expressed interest in **entrepreneurship** or opening their own ventures in food service or boutique hospitality.

  o **13%** remained **undecided**, often citing lack of exposure as a reason.

- **After training**,

  o Only **54%** wanted to continue in **core operational roles**, indicating a **decline in operational interest**.

  o **26%** shifted focus toward **entrepreneurship, event planning, or pursuing higher education** (such as an MBA in Hospitality or Tourism).

  o **20%** reported **disinterest in pursuing a hospitality career altogether**, primarily due to perceived challenges such as **workplace stress**, **poor work-life balance**, and **lack of career progression**.

Students responding negatively typically rated their training as "Fair" or "Poor" in the **post-training satisfaction scale**, and mentioned that expectations set in **Section B** (such as learning new skills and networking) were only "partially met" or "not met".

Shift in Career Intentions Before and After Industrial Training
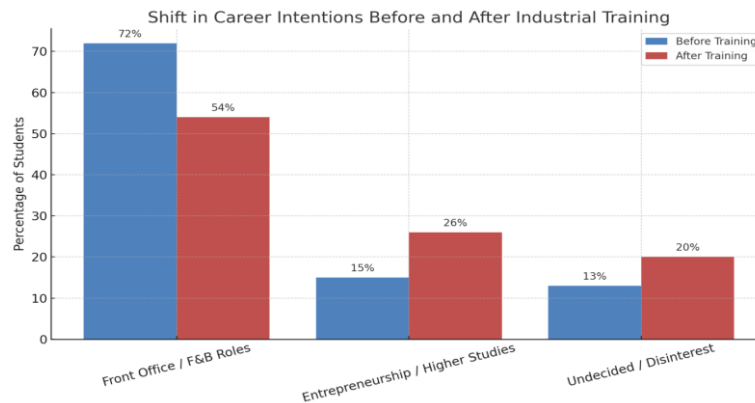
The bar chart visualizes the **shift in career intentions** before and after industrial training:

- Interest in **Front Office / F&B roles** declined from 72% to 54%.
- Interest in **entrepreneurship or higher education** increased from 15% to 26%.
- **Disinterest or indecision** rose from 13% to 20%.

This clearly illustrates how industrial training reshaped students' career paths—both positively and negatively.

Key Influencing Factors

Using **Section D** (Factors Influencing Career Perceptions), respondents were asked to rate several variables on a 5-point Likert scale. Analysis of these variables revealed several **key factors** that influenced their post-training career decisions:

1. **Quality of Mentorship**:
   - Students who had **assigned mentors** or regular feedback sessions rated their experiences more positively and were more likely to remain in the industry.
   - Lack of mentorship led to feelings of neglect, particularly in larger chain hotels.

2. **Type of Property (Luxury vs Budget)**:
   - Those placed in **luxury hotels** often felt overwhelmed by high expectations and guest pressure but appreciated the brand exposure.
   - Conversely, students in **budget hotels** reported more hands-on learning but expressed concerns about professionalism and resource limitations.
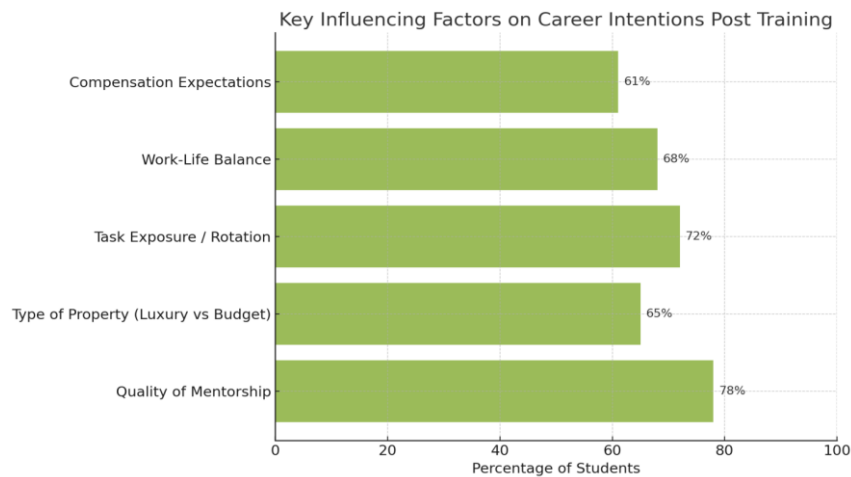
3. **Task Exposure and Departmental Rotation**:
   - Students who underwent **multi-departmental rotation** reported greater satisfaction and career clarity.
   - Those confined to a **single repetitive role** (e.g., only polishing cutlery or handling linen inventory) expressed boredom and disengagement.

4. **Work-Life Balance and Compensation Expectations**:
   - **68%** of students felt that the **long working hours and lack of breaks** affected their interest in long-term careers in the industry.

○ Comments in the open-ended sections suggested that **unpaid internships** or **low stipends** were major demotivating factors, especially when coupled with demanding shifts.

Key Influencing Factors on Career Intentions Post Training

This horizontal bar chart illustrates the **key factors that influenced students' career decisions** after their industrial training:

- **78%** emphasized the importance of **quality mentorship**.

- **72%** pointed to the value of **task exposure and departmental rotation**.

- **68%** were affected by concerns around **work-life balance**.

- **65%** considered the **type of property** (luxury vs. budget) influential.

- **61%** were influenced by **compensation expectations**.

These insights reflect how the nature and structure of industrial training directly affect students' willingness to remain in the hospitality sector.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role that industrial training plays in shaping both the **professional development** and **career intentions** of hotel management students. The analysis highlights a dual narrative—on one hand, industrial training acts as an empowering experiential learning tool; on the other, it exposes students to structural and cultural challenges that may deter them from long-term engagement in the hospitality sector. These findings reflect the complexity and multi-dimensional impact of internships in a globally evolving hospitality landscape (Robinson, Ruhanen, & Breakey, 2020; Wang & Xu, 2022).

Impact on Professional Competence

A substantial majority (87%) of respondents reported significant improvement in professional competencies including communication, time management, and problem-solving after completing their industrial training. These outcomes align strongly with **Kolb's (1984)** theory of experiential learning, which emphasizes learning through reflective practice in real-world contexts. The results also corroborate prior studies that demonstrate how internships improve job readiness and technical proficiency (Barron & Maxwell, 1993; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007; Dredge & Jenkins, 2018).

However, not all students benefitted equally. The quality of supervision and departmental exposure emerged as critical differentiators in skill development. Students who received consistent guidance, performance feedback,

and cross-functional training displayed higher levels of confidence and motivation. These results support **Gursoy, Maier, and Chi's (2008)** findings that structured internships with mentoring lead to stronger workplace integration and long-term professional commitment.

Shifts in Career Intentions

The pre- and post-training comparison revealed a **notable shift in students' career goals**. While 72% initially expressed interest in operational roles (e.g., Front Office, F&B), only 54% maintained this preference post-training. Meanwhile, interest in entrepreneurship, higher studies, or alternate sectors increased, with 20% expressing a desire to leave the hospitality field altogether.

This transformation echoes the concerns raised by **Roney and Öztin (2007)** and **Chan and Zhao (2020)**, who noted that exposure to exploitative or rigid training conditions—such as long hours, repetitive tasks, and lack of mentorship—can disillusion students and prompt them to reconsider their professional path. Qualitative feedback from this study similarly indicates that such negative experiences eroded enthusiasm and contributed to emotional fatigue and goal realignment.

Role of Influencing Factors

Key variables influencing students' post-training outlooks included **mentorship quality**, **property type**, **task variety**, **work-life balance**, and **compensation expectations**. Figure 2 highlights that 78% of students identified mentorship as a decisive factor in shaping their post-training career perspective. These findings are supported by **Chen, Chang, and Hsu (2011)** and **Ahmed and Khan (2023)**, who found that when students' expectations are unmet—especially in terms of job engagement and guidance—it leads to dissatisfaction and reconsideration of career plans.

Students in mid-range or budget hotels often reported richer hands-on learning due to higher operational involvement, while those in luxury hotels felt constrained by hierarchical structures and limited access to decision-making or creative responsibilities. This affirms findings by **Richardson (2009)**, who identified lack of autonomy and over-regulation as barriers to meaningful learning.

Moreover, work-life balance concerns, including long shifts and unpaid or low-paid internships, were particularly discouraging for students with personal or financial obligations—supporting findings by **Kumari and Mehta (2024)** regarding gendered experiences of burnout and reduced motivation in Indian hospitality settings.

Intersections of Identity

Though a detailed analysis of gender and cultural identity is presented in a later section, early findings from this study suggest that these variables significantly shape internship experiences. Several female students reported being assigned stereotypically "feminine" tasks or being overlooked for leadership opportunities, reflecting patterns noted by **Fernandez and Singh (2022)**. Similarly, **Goyal, Ahmed, and Verma (2024)** found that students from collectivist cultures often preferred structured and guided environments, while those placed in loosely organized training environments experienced discomfort and disengagement.

These intersectional insights reaffirm that training outcomes are not uniform and must be evaluated in the context of students' social and cultural backgrounds. Industry practices must evolve to reflect inclusive and equitable training environments that enable all students to thrive.

Implications

Based on the findings of this study, several implications emerge for the key stakeholders involved in hospitality education and workforce development—namely academic institutions, the hospitality industry, and students themselves.

Implications for Academia

Academic institutions offering hotel management programs play a foundational role in shaping student preparedness and expectations. The study highlights a clear need for institutions to **re-evaluate their industrial training frameworks** by aligning them more closely with industry realities and student aspirations.

- **Collaborative Curriculum Design:** Universities should partner actively with hospitality organizations to co-develop training programs that provide balanced exposure to technical and soft skills.

- **Pre-training Orientation:** Structured orientation sessions on workplace norms, communication protocols, and professional expectations should be integrated into the curriculum.

- **Mid-term Reviews:** Institutions should monitor student progress through feedback forms and mentor check-ins during training to ensure timely intervention when challenges arise.

- **Academic Credit and Evaluation:** Institutions may also consider making industrial training a graded or credit-bearing component to enhance student accountability and engagement.

Implications for Industry

Hospitality employers are equally responsible for ensuring that industrial training serves as a meaningful bridge between education and employment. The study's findings suggest that **mentorship quality and task diversity** are pivotal to positive student outcomes.

- **Structured Mentorship Programs:** Hotels should assign dedicated mentors to each intern, offering regular feedback and professional guidance.

- **Departmental Rotation:** Allowing students to work across departments ensures broader skill development and better career clarity.

- **Feedback Systems:** Post-training evaluations should be two-way—where interns also assess their learning experience to help organizations improve.

- **Ethical Work Environments:** Companies must discourage exploitative practices (e.g., repetitive or menial tasks only) and instead treat interns as future professionals.

Implications for Students

Students must approach industrial training with a blend of **open-mindedness, resilience, and professional curiosity**. The research underscores that the benefits of internships are maximized when students actively engage with their roles, seek feedback, and reflect on their experiences.

- **Realistic Expectations:** Students should be prepared for the challenges of hospitality work, including long hours, hierarchical settings, and guest-facing responsibilities.

- **Resilience and Adaptability Training:** Pre-internship modules on stress management, workplace etiquette, and coping strategies can prepare students for high-pressure environments.

- **Reflective Learning Practices:** Keeping journals or completing reflective assignments during training can help students internalize lessons and track skill development.

Conclusion

Industrial training serves as a transformative experience in hospitality education, bridging the gap between classroom learning and professional practice. This study reveals that such training significantly influences both the **professional development** and **career intentions** of hotel management students. The comparative findings

demonstrate that while many students gain confidence and clarity in their career goals, others reevaluate their aspirations due to challenges encountered during their internships.

The shift in student intentions—whether toward reaffirmed industry commitment, entrepreneurial ventures, or career reconsideration—is shaped by multiple factors, including **mentorship quality**, **departmental exposure**, **institutional support**, and **individual resilience**. These insights reinforce the importance of designing experiential learning opportunities that are structured, inclusive, and genuinely educational.

Ultimately, for hospitality education to remain effective and responsive, academia and industry must work collaboratively to deliver internships that not only build skills but also inspire long-term engagement with the profession. By doing so, they can better equip students for **sustainable, fulfilling, and future-ready careers** in the dynamic world of hospitality.

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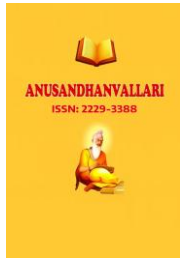
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