A Study on Understanding Pre-Placement Perceptions, Mindset and Coping Strategies of Graduating Students in Hotel Management Programs in India

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Abstract

Background: *The transition from academic life to professional employment is a significant milestone for hotel management students, demanding a blend of technical skills and adaptability to industry expectations. This study explores pre-placement perceptions, mindsets and coping strategies of final-year students in the field.* **Objectives:** *The study aimed to assess students' perceptions of the job market, analyse their mindset toward placements and identify coping mechanisms, with a focus on gender differences.* **Methodology:** *A descriptive research design with convenience sampling was employed, collecting data through a structured questionnaire using Google Forms from 384 students at NCHMCT-affiliated institutions across India. A structured questionnaire measured perceptions, mindset and stress management strategies. Data analysis utilized SPSS, including descriptive statistics, T-tests and Chi-square tests.* **Results:** *Findings reveal that students hold optimistic pre-placement perceptions, with a mean score of 3.83 on a 5-point Likert scale ($T = 31.247$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a significant deviation from a neutral outlook. Students with a growth mindset demonstrated significantly higher proactivity scores (Mean: 4.2, SD: 0.8) compared to those with a fixed mindset (Mean: 3.1, SD: 1.1; $T = 5.34$, $p < 0.001$). Gender differences were significant in coping strategies, as males relied more on problem-solving approaches while females favoured social support. The most common coping mechanisms included family and peer support, along with self-motivation.* **Conclusion:** *The study underscores the importance of mentorship, workshops and gender-sensitive support to prepare students for placements. Recommendations focus on fostering resilience and providing institutional support to enhance career readiness.*

Keywords: Pre-placement perceptions, growth mindset, coping strategies, Hotel Management graduates, NCHMCT

Introduction

The transition from academia to professional life is a significant milestone for hotel management students, marking the culmination of years of education and the beginning of dynamic careers in the hospitality industry. This sector demands a combination of technical expertise, interpersonal skills, cultural awareness and adaptability. Graduates must align their academic training with the practical realities of the job market to effectively navigate its competitive nature. Hotel management offers diverse career opportunities across hotels, resorts, airlines, cruise lines, event management and food service operations. With globalization and advancements in technology, the industry has expanded beyond traditional roles, creating avenues in revenue management, hospitality consulting, digital marketing and sustainable tourism. However, while these opportunities exist, students' awareness of industry trends, employment challenges and required competencies significantly impacts their job readiness. Studies suggest that career awareness influences students' career choices and expectations (Richardson, 2009). In India, the hospitality sector's rapid growth, driven by tourism

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and foreign investments, has heightened job prospects, yet students must prepare for dynamic work environments and evolving industry demands.

Pre-Placement Perceptions: Pre-placement perceptions encompass students' expectations and attitudes toward employment opportunities and the role it plays in shaping their preparedness for the job market. Brown and Hesketh (2004) highlighted the impact of such perceptions on job search behavior and career decisions. In the hospitality industry, students often hold optimistic views due to its dynamic and diverse opportunities (Gursoy & Swanger, 2004). However, McKeown (2016) observed that a disconnect between expectations and industry realities can lead to stress and disillusionment, emphasizing the importance of realistic career guidance. Research on pre-placement perceptions has primarily been conducted in Western countries, focusing on employability, job market expectations and skill gaps (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Richardson, 2009). In contrast, studies in Asian contexts, such as China and Malaysia, highlight the growing need for industry-academia collaboration to enhance job readiness (Zhang & Lu, 2018). In India, limited research has explored how hotel management students perceive placement opportunities, making it crucial to investigate factors influencing their career outlook.

Mindset Toward Placements: The concept of mindset, popularized by Dweck (2006), distinguishes between growth and fixed mindsets. Students with a growth mindset believe in developing abilities through effort and are more proactive, resilient and persistent in the face of challenges. They actively engage in skill-enhancing activities, internships and professional development opportunities (Zhang & Lu, 2018). Conversely, students with a fixed mindset may doubt their capabilities and avoid challenges. Encouraging a growth mindset is critical for fostering students' confidence and career success, particularly in a competitive industry like hospitality. While most mindset-related studies have been conducted in education and psychology (Dweck, 2006; Zhang & Lu, 2018), research in the hospitality sector is yet to be explored. A study in the UK by Worsfold and Griffith (2003) found that internships significantly shape students' career preparedness and mindset. In Asia, studies emphasize the role of cultural expectations in shaping career attitudes (Kim et al., 2014).

Coping Strategies: Coping strategies are vital in managing the stress associated with job searches and career transitions. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) categorized the strategies into problem-focused coping that involves addressing the source of stress and emotion-focused coping and which manages emotional responses. In hospitality education, Deery and Jago (2015) found that students often use a combination of these approaches, including career planning and seeking emotional support. Institutional support, such as workshops and career counselling, plays a significant role in helping students manage stress and prepare for placements (Murphy, 2012).

Gender Differences in Coping Strategies: Gender-based differences in coping strategies have been widely studied. Dyson and Renk (2006) found that female students often adopt relational coping styles, seeking social support, while males tend to focus on problem-solving strategies. However, Smith et al. (2018) suggested that individual factors, such as personality and prior experiences, may have a greater influence on coping behaviours than gender. These findings underscore the need for tailored support systems that address the diverse needs of students.

Key Factors Influencing Pre-Placement Experiences: Several factors shape students' pre-placement experiences, including self-efficacy, peer and mentor support and institutional resources. Self-efficacy as defined by Bandura (1997) is a belief in one's ability to succeed, is closely linked to proactive job search behavior. Nabi et al. (2010) highlighted the critical role of mentors and peers in providing emotional and informational support, helping students navigate job market complexities. Additionally, institutional resources, such as placement cells and career services, are essential in preparing students for employment opportunities (Murphy, 2012). Kim et al. (2014) further emphasized the importance of industry guidance, which provides practical insights and networking opportunities, particularly in hospitality.

Despite extensive research on career readiness, several gaps remain in understanding the specific pre-placement experiences of hotel management students. While prior studies have examined the role of self-efficacy, career guidance and institutional support, limited attention has been given to how these factors interplay to shape students' perceptions, mindset and coping strategies. Additionally, demographic variables such as gender, age and prior work experience, though known to influence job search behaviour, have not been thoroughly studied in the context of hotel management. There is also a need to explore how institutional

interventions can be tailored to address these diverse factors effectively. This study aims to fill these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of the pre-placement perceptions, mindset and coping strategies of hotel management students, offering actionable insights for educators and industry professionals with following hypothesis:

H1: Graduating hotel management students have positive pre-placement perceptions about the job market

H2: There is a significant difference in proactivity scores between students with a growth mindset and those with a fixed mindset.

H3: There is significant difference in the coping strategies between male and female students.

Objectives
- To explore the pre-placement perceptions of graduating hotel management students.
- To analyse the mindset of students towards placements.
- To identify the coping strategies employed by students during the placement process.

Methodology

Research Design: The study adopted a quantitative research design, utilizing a survey-based approach to collect data from students. The research was exploratory in nature, aiming to identify and analyse key factors influencing students' pre-placement experiences.

Locale: The study was conducted in India and the data was collected from students at the Hotel Management Institutes, enrolled in the final year of B.Sc. Hospitality and Hotel Administration program, as they actively prepare for job placements.

Sampling Design: A convenience sampling strategy was used to select participants from the Institute of Hotel Management under the National Council for Hotel Management and Catering Technology (NCHMCT) in India. A total of 384 students 46.6% males (179) and 53.4% females (205) participated in the study, providing a representative sample of the student population as the population size of the graduates is not accurately established.

Tools and Technique : Data was collected through a structured questionnaire, which was designed based on the literature review and the research objectives. The questionnaire consisted of several sections: Pre-Placement Perceptions: Eight questions assessing students' views on the job market, employment opportunities and their confidence in securing a job. Mindset Towards Placements: Eight questions measuring students' attitudes, including growth versus fixed mindset, self-efficacy and confidence levels. Coping Strategies: Ten questions identifying the stress management techniques used by students, such as peer support, family support and institutional resources. Demographic Information: Questions on gender, age, year of study and prior work experience to facilitate demographic analysis.

Participants rated their agreement with statements on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was distributed electronically through Google Forms via WhatsApp, LinkedIn and Instagram to ensure ease of access and encourage participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the data collection process.

Data Analysis and Statistical Analysis: The collected data was analysed using SPSS, employing various statistical methods to derive meaningful insights. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the data, providing an overview of participants' responses through mean scores, standard deviations and frequency distributions. T-tests was conducted to test pre-placement perceptions of students about the job market and to study growth mindset and fixed mindset. Additionally, Chi-square analysis was performed to explore difference in the coping strategies between male and female students. The questionnaire was pre-tested in a pilot study with 20 students to ensure clarity, relevance and reliability of the questions. The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a threshold of 0.76,0.914 and 0.868 indicating acceptable internal consistency for three tables in the questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of Respondents: The sample population consisted of 46.6% males (179) and 53.4% females (205), ensuring a relatively balanced representation of both genders. Most participants were aged between 20 and 22 years, reflecting the typical demographic of graduating Hotel Management students. Additionally, a significant

portion of the respondents reported having prior work experience, including internships and part-time jobs, which may have influenced their perceptions and preparedness for job placements in the hospitality industry.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	179	46.6
Female	205	53.4
Age		
Below 20 years	105	27.3
20-22 years	227	59.1
23-25 years	52	13.6
Work Experience		
Internships	349	90.9
Part-time jobs	20	5.1
Full-time jobs	15	4

Pre-Placement Perception: The t-value of 31.247 indicates that the mean pre-placement perception score is significantly different from the neutral value of 3. Given the t-value of 31.247, the p-value is to be extremely low (close to 0), indicating a statistically significant result. The results strongly support the alternative hypothesis that graduating hotel management students have positive pre-placement perceptions about the job market. The mean perception score is significantly greater than the neutral point (3), suggesting that students generally view the job market favourably. The findings indicate that students are optimistic about their employment prospects in the hospitality industry. This positive perception could be due to various factors, such as recent industry growth, strong institutional support, or a personal sense of preparedness and self-efficacy and we reject the null hypothesis.

Table 2: One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
p score	384	3.8330	.52241	.02666

Table 3: One-Sample Test

Test Value= 3					95% Confidence Internal of the Difference	
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
p score	31.247	383	.000	.83301	.7806	.8854

Growth Mindset vs Fixed Mindset: Mindset Type; categorical variable with two levels—Growth Mindset and Fixed Mindset. Proactivity in Job Search; a continuous variable measured by a composite score from a set of questions assessing proactive behaviours (e.g., attending workshops, networking, applying to various jobs, etc.). Table 3 shows that students with a growth mindset have a higher mean proactivity score compared to those with a fixed mindset, suggesting they engage more actively in job search activities. The t-test results show a t-value of 5.34 and a p-value less than 0.001, indicating a statistically significant difference between the proactivity scores of the two groups. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant difference in proactivity between students with a growth mindset and those with a fixed mindset.

Table 4: Growth Mindset vs Fixed Mindset

Mindset Type	Mean Proactivity Score	Median Proactivity Score	Standard Deviation
Growth Mindset	4.2	4.0	0.8
Fixed Mindset	3.1	3.0	1.1

Coping Strategies (Male vs Female): Based on the results in table 4, we accept the alternate hypothesis that there is a significant difference in the coping strategies between male and female students. The chi-square value obtained was 32. Given the chi-square value and the degrees of freedom, the corresponding p-value is less than the commonly used significance threshold of 0.05. This low p-value indicated that the observed differences in coping strategies between male and female students are statistically significant and not due to random chance. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis, which posited no significant difference between the two groups. This finding suggests that gender plays a significant role in determining the types of coping strategies students use, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive approaches in providing support and resources for managing stress and challenges in academic settings.

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Table 5: *Chi-Square Tests*

		df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	32.608[a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	33.917	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	14.129	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	384		

Coping Strategies used by Hotel Management Graduates: A significant number of graduates reported that they engage in activities that help them relax and unwind during their job search. This response suggests a proactive approach to managing the stress and anxiety associated with this transitional phase. Such activities include hobbies, exercise, meditation, spending time with family and friends, or other leisure pursuits that provide a mental break from the pressures of job applications and interviews.

The graduates' agreement with this statement 'I engage in activities that help me relax and unwind during the job search' highlights the importance of self-care and stress management techniques in maintaining a positive and focused mindset. Engaging in relaxing activities can help mitigate the negative effects of job search stress, such as burnout and anxiety, thereby enhancing their overall well-being and resilience.

Table 6: *Coping Strategies used by Graduates*

Coping Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Seeking Support from Family and Friends	180	46.88
Problem-Focused Coping	90	23.43
Emotion-Focused Coping	60	15.62
Avoidance	30	7.81
Others	24	6.25

Based on the descriptive statistics, "Seeking Support from Family and Friends" is the most common coping strategy among students, with 46.88% reporting it as their primary method. This indicates a strong reliance on social support networks for managing stress and challenges. The next most common strategies are "Problem-Focused Coping" and "Emotion-Focused Coping," indicated that students also engage in proactive and emotional regulation methods.

Role of Mentors and Faculty Members: The analysis revealed that the majority of students seek advice from their mentors, with a mean score of 3.91 on a 5-point Likert Scale, indicating a strong inclination toward faculty support. The standard deviation of 0.789, suggested a relatively consistent response pattern among participants. Additionally, the skewness value of -0.377 indicates a slight leftward skew, meaning more students leaned toward higher agreement levels. The kurtosis value of -0.243 reflects a relatively normal distribution of responses. The observed range spans from 2 to 5, signifying that while some students were neutral or slightly disagreed, the majority expressed a clear preference for seeking guidance from faculty. Overall, these results emphasize the crucial role that faculty members and mentors play in shaping students' career decisions and placement preparedness.

Reliance on Mentorship and Faculty Guidance: Table 8 results indicate that a substantial proportion of students seek advice from mentors or faculty members regarding job placements. 50.3% of respondents rated their agreement as 4 (Agree) on the 5-point Likert scale, while 22.4% selected 5 (Strongly Agree). In contrast, 22.9% remained neutral (3) and a smaller 4.4% expressed disagreement (2). The data confirms that the majority of students recognize the value of mentorship in navigating their career paths.

Table 7: *I Seek Advice from Mentors or Faculty Members Regarding Job Placements*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	17	4.3	4.4	4.4
	3	88	22.2	22.9	27.3
	4	193	48.7	50.3	77.6
	5	86	21.7	22.4	100.0
	Total	384	97.0	100.0	
Missing	System	12	3.0		
Total		396	100.0		

Table 8: I Attend Workshops and Seminars to Improve My Job Search Skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	17	4.3	4.4	4.4
	3	71	17.9	18.5	22.9
	4	87	22.0	22.7	45.6
	5	209	52.8	54.4	100.0
	Total	384	97.0	100.0	
Missing System		12	3.0		
Total		396	100.0		

Participation in Career Workshops and Seminars: Students also demonstrated a high level of engagement with skill-enhancing workshops and seminars. The findings show that 54.4% of respondents strongly agreed (5) with attending such events, while 22.7% agreed (4). Only 18.5% remained neutral (3) and 4.4% disagreed (2). The high mean score (4.27) and clustering of responses around the upper end of the Likert Scale highlight the strong emphasis students place on continuous learning and professional development.

The findings align with prior research on employability preparedness and career development in hospitality education. For instance, Smith et al. (2018) examined student engagement in career readiness programs, showing that structured mentorship programs significantly improve job placement confidence. Similarly, Murphy (2012) found that active participation in career workshops enhances self-efficacy and proactive job search behaviours among hospitality graduates. The observed reliance on mentorship and faculty support is consistent with Kim et al. (2014), who emphasized the role of career advisors in shaping students' transition from education to employment.

Conclusion

Majority of students exhibited positive pre-placement perceptions about the job market, indicating optimism and confidence in securing employment post-graduation. The study found a noticeable difference in proactivity between students with a growth mindset and those with a fixed mindset. Students with a growth mindset were more proactive in their job search, engaging in more varied and constructive activities. A significant proportion of students relied on support from family and friends as a primary coping mechanism. This strategy, along with engaging in activities to relax and unwind, was prevalent among both male and female students. The analysis revealed significant differences in the coping strategies employed by male and female students, suggesting that gender plays a crucial role in how students handle job search stress. Majority of students agreed that they seek advice from mentors or faculty members regarding job placements. This indicates that students place considerable value on the guidance provided by experienced mentors and faculty in navigating their career paths. Majority of students also strongly agreed that they attend workshops and seminars to improve their job search skills. This underscores the importance students place on continuous learning and skill enhancement through educational events to boost their job search effectiveness.

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role of mentors, faculty members and educational workshops in shaping students' job search strategies. The significant reliance on these resources for career preparation highlights their importance in equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the competitive job market. The study indicates that students highly value the guidance provided by mentors and faculty members. The institutes should invest in robust mentorship programs that connect students with experienced professionals in their field. These programs can be formalized through structured mentorship arrangements, where mentors provide regular advice, career guidance and industry insights. The institutes should expand the range and frequency of workshops and seminars covering topics such as resume writing, interview techniques, networking strategies and industry trends. Furthermore, incorporating practical sessions, such as mock interviews and role-playing scenarios, can provide students with hands-on experience and build their confidence. They should design and implement gender-sensitive programs that address these differences. For instance, female students might benefit from workshops that focus on negotiation skills, overcoming gender biases in the workplace and building confidence in male-dominated industries. Similarly, male students might require support in areas such as emotional intelligence and work-life balance. The study highlighted that students with a growth mindset were more proactive in their job search activities. Institutes should encourage the development of a growth mindset among students, emphasizing the importance of perseverance, adaptability and continuous learning.

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