

A Comparative Study of Perceived Importance and Preparedness of Soft-Skill Competencies among Final-Year Hospitality Students and Early-Career Employees in Mumbai Star Hotels

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Abstract

Background: Soft skills such as communication, leadership, teamwork, time management and problem-solving are increasingly recognized, are becoming more critical for successful hospitality businesses. Mumbai's star hotels, where expectation for service standards is high have close link with hospitality education to produce skilled professionals. **Objectives:** This study compares final-year hospitality students' perceptions of soft-skill importance and preparedness with early-career employees' retrospective evaluations of their perceptions of soft-skill importance and readiness. The study also highlights the potential gaps between academic training and workplace realities. **Methodology:** A comparative quantitative design was employed, surveying 98 final-year students and 84 early-career employees in Mumbai using structured questionnaires. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, paired samples t-tests and independent samples t-tests. **Results:** Both groups rated soft skills as highly important (mean > 4.0). However, through paired sample test the preparedness scores were consistently lower, with lowest reporting mean for readiness ($M=3.85$) for communication and the highest reported mean of preparedness being ($M=3.96$) for both time-management and problem-solving. Significant differences appeared between importance and preparedness within both groups, but no significant differences were found between students and employees in overall perceptions. **Conclusion:** Findings reveal a persistent gap between the recognized importance of soft skills and perceived preparedness among hospitality graduates and employees. While academic training aligns with industry expectations in recognizing importance, practical readiness remains insufficient. The study highlights the need for experiential learning, industry collaboration and curriculum reforms to strengthen soft-skill development in hospitality education.

Keywords: Hospitality education, soft skills, preparedness, Mumbai star hotels, experiential learning, industry collaboration.

Introduction

The global hospitality industry has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades, with soft skills emerging as critical determinants of employee success and organizational competitiveness (Nickson et al., 2005; Tesone & Ricci, 2005). While technical competencies remain essential, employers increasingly prioritize interpersonal aptitudes, emotional intelligence, communication proficiency

and adaptability when evaluating candidates (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Kay & Russette, 2000). This shift reflects the industry's recognition that exceptional customer service depends fundamentally on employees' ability to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics and respond flexibly to unpredictable situations.

Mumbai, as India's commercial capital and a rapidly expanding hospitality hub, presents a particularly compelling context for examining this phenomenon. The city's star-rated hotels operate within a highly competitive environment characterized by international quality standards, diverse clientele and sophisticated service expectations (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013). Understanding students' self-perceptions of preparedness alongside early-career employees' retrospective evaluations offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of current hospitality education programs and identifies opportunities for curriculum enhancement.

The hospitality sector's labor-intensive nature and its reliance on human interaction make soft-skill competencies particularly salient (Baum, 2002; Robinson et al., 2016). Unlike technical skills, which can be systematically taught and objectively measured, soft skills encompass complex behavioral patterns, attitudes and interpersonal capabilities that resist simple codification or standardized assessment (Robles, 2012; Weber et al., 2009). This inherent challenge creates a potential disconnect between what educational institutions believe they are delivering and what industry practitioners actually require, necessitating empirical investigation of both students' and employees' perceptions.

The conceptualization of soft skills within hospitality literature has evolved considerably, reflecting broader shifts in organizational theory and human resource management. *Soft-skills*: Soft skills, nontechnical and non-industry-specific skills applicable to a wide range of tasks across many roles and professions, including interpersonal skills or people skills that enable individuals to work effectively in groups and organizations (Donovan, n.d.).

Boyatzis (1982) defined competencies as underlying characteristics that individuals utilize to achieve effective or superior performance. This foundational definition emphasizes the multidimensional nature of competencies, extending beyond observable behaviors to encompass cognitive, emotional and motivational dimensions. Within the hospitality context, soft skills have been variously labeled as "interpersonal skills" (Baum, 2006), "people skills" (Nickson et al., 2005), "employability skills" (Robinson et al., 2016) and "non-technical competencies" (Weber et al., 2009), reflecting the construct's complexity and the diverse theoretical perspectives from which it has been examined.

Contemporary research emphasizes that soft skills in hospitality encompass several interconnected domains. Communication proficiency—constitutes a foundational element repeatedly identified as critical for hospitality success (Brownell, 2006; Chung-Herrera et al., 2003). Even for chefs, leadership and management skills were noted as the most important competencies after professional skills (Zopiatis, 2010). Emotional intelligence, defined as the capacity to recognize, understand and manage one's own emotions while simultaneously perceiving and influencing others' emotional states, has emerged as particularly salient in service-intensive environments where employees must navigate emotionally charged interactions with customers and colleagues (Kernbach & Schutte, 2005; Lee & Ok, 2012). Teamwork and collaboration capabilities enable effective functioning within diverse, often multicultural work groups characteristic of contemporary hospitality organizations (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). Problem-solving and critical thinking skills allow employees to address unexpected challenges and make sound decisions under pressure (Kay & Russette, 2000). Also, adaptability and resilience have gained prominence as essential attributes in an industry characterized by variability, seasonality and unpredictability (Solnet et al., 2014). Finally, lack of clear mindfulness about one's own skill set makes the person compromised in recognizing their readiness before and after entering their professional world (Dunning, et al., 2003). Joneidi et al. (2025) emphasized on the significance of "communication, problem-solving and self-management skills" as essential skills for employees to have.

A substantial body of empirical research documents persistent gaps between the competencies developed through hospitality education and those demanded by industry employers. Lin (2002) found significant discrepancies between educators' curricular priorities and industry practitioners' skill requirements, with employers consistently rating soft skills as more important than educators perceived them to be. Similarly, Tesone and Ricci (2005) identified substantial misalignment between hospitality management curricula and the competencies employers considered most valuable, particularly regarding interpersonal communication, leadership and emotional management capabilities. These findings suggest systemic challenges in translating employer needs into educational outcomes.

Subsequent research has explored the mechanisms underlying this persistent gap. Weber et al. (2009) argued that

hospitality education programs tend to emphasize technical and operational knowledge at the expense of developing interpersonal competencies, partly because technical content is more readily standardized, assessed and delivered through conventional pedagogical approaches. Raybould and Wilkins (2005) suggested that institutional constraints limit the effective development of soft skills in academic settings.

The Indian context adds additional complexity to this global phenomenon. Bharwani and Jauhari (2013) examined competency requirements by the hospitality industry in Indian luxury hotels, they found that even though employers highly value soft skills such as communication, teamwork and cultural sensitivity, graduates frequently enter the workforce having inadequate development in these areas. The researchers attributed this gap partly to pedagogical approaches that are due to the emphasis on more theory-heavy lectures over practical application, curriculum development without consulting the industry and lack of holistic soft skill trainings throughout hospitality programs.

Research examining early-career employees' retrospective evaluations of their educational preparation offers valuable insights into the perceived adequacy of soft-skill development. Kralj (2018) investigated hospitality graduates' reflections on their preparedness for industry entry, finding that employees consistently rated communication skills, teamwork and adaptability as more important in their actual roles than they had anticipated during their studies. Importantly, many respondents indicated they felt inadequately prepared in precisely those competencies that they later recognized as the most critical which suggests both, a perception gap during education and a potential curricular deficiency in soft-skill development.

Chen and Shen (2012) explored how perceptions of skill importance evolve with workplace experience, finding that early-career hospitality employees developed more deeper and well-rounded understanding of soft-skill requirements after several months of professional practice. Skills initially perceived as straightforward—such as “communication” or “teamwork”—were recognized as encompassing complex, context-dependent capabilities requiring ongoing development.

The temporal dimension of competency perception represents an important consideration. Longitudinal research by Robinson et al. (2016) tracked hospitality graduates

over their first three years of employment, documenting substantial shifts in how they evaluated both the importance of various soft skills and their retrospective assessments of educational preparation. Notably, employees' ratings of their preparedness tended to decrease over time as they gained workplace experience and developed more sophisticated understanding of skill requirements—a finding that challenges simplistic interpretations of student self-assessment data and underscores the value of incorporating early-career employee perspectives in evaluating educational effectiveness.

This study addresses key gaps in hospitality education research by comparing students' self-assessed preparedness with early-career employees' retrospective evaluations, revealing potential mismatches in confidence and readiness. It uniquely focuses on Mumbai's hospitality sector, a hub with distinct competency demands shaped by international brands and luxury standards. Unlike prior studies that examined importance or preparedness separately, this design investigates both dimensions across students and employees, highlighting where gaps are most pronounced. By contrasting importance and preparedness ratings between the two groups, the study explores differing frameworks of soft-skill conceptualization, offering targeted insights for curriculum development and industry alignment.

Hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant difference between final-year hospitality students' perceived importance of soft skills and their self-perceived preparedness in those skills.

H2: There is a significant difference between early-career hospitality employees' perceived importance of soft skills in their current roles and their retrospective perceptions of how prepared they were in those skills when they entered the industry.

H3: There is a significant difference between final-year students' importance ratings of soft skills and early-career employees' importance ratings of those skills in their current roles.

H4: There is a significant difference between final-year hospitality students' self-perceived preparedness in soft-skill competencies and early-career hospitality employees' retrospective perceptions of preparedness at the point of industry entry.

Objectives:

- To examine final-year hospitality students' perceptions of the importance of selected soft-skill competencies and their self-perceived level of preparedness in those competencies.
- To assess early-career hospitality employees' perceptions of the importance of selected soft-skill competencies in their current roles and their retrospective perceptions of preparedness at the point of industry entry.
- To compare the perceived importance of soft-skill competencies between final-year hospitality students and early-career hospitality employees working in star hotels in Mumbai.
- To compare perceived preparedness in soft-skill competencies between final-year hospitality students and early-career hospitality employees.

Methodology

Research Design: This study is a comparative quantitative study. It implies that the study aims to compare perceived importance/preparedness vs. retrospective usefulness of selected soft skills.

Locale: Hospitality students and hotel professionals from Mumbai and its suburbs were considered for the study.

Sampling Design: Non-probability sampling, snowball sampling with convenience elements was chosen as the sampling technique. In this study 98 final-year hospitality graduate students from Mumbai and 84 hotel employees from Mumbai participated. They recorded their responses on the scale 1 to 5 for each parameter.

Tools and Technique: Two separate sets of structured questionnaire were used in this study, one each for students and employees. The questionnaires were distributed to sample groups using Google Forms. The tool was adopted from the study Kralj (2018) with a few modifications so that it can be adapted to collect the responses of early-career employees in Mumbai.

Data Analysis and Statistical Analysis: Descriptive statistics: mean, standard deviation, frequency distributions for all skill items and demographics of participants was applied. Paired samples t-tests to compare students' importance vs preparedness scores for each skill. Paired samples t-tests

for early-career employees' importance vs retrospective preparedness. Independent samples t-tests for comparing the following: Students' importance vs. employees' importance scores by skill and Students' preparedness vs. employees perceived required/retrospective preparedness.

Results and Discussion

After analysing the data collected from study 98 final-year hospitality graduate students (70 male students and 28 female) and 84 hotel employees (36 female, 48 male) following are the results and discussion.

Table 1

The Socio-Demographical Data of the Respondents- Employment Status

Group	N	Percentage (%)	Total
Students	98	54	182
Employees	84	46	182

Table 2

The Socio-Demographical Data of the Respondents- Male and Female

Group	Male	Female	Total	Males (%)	Females (%)
Students	70	28	98	71	29
Employees	48	36	84	57	43

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Skill Importance and Preparedness for Students and Employees

Skill Area	Group	M	N	SD
Communication – Importance	Students	4.18	98	0.91
	Employees	4.20	84	0.90
Leadership – Importance	Students	4.16	98	0.91
	Employees	4.13	84	0.88
Teamwork – Importance	Students	4.15	98	0.94
	Employees	4.17	84	0.93
Time Management – Importance	Students	4.23	98	0.77
	Employees	4.15	84	0.90
Problem Solving – Importance	Students	4.16	98	0.92
	Employees	4.26	84	0.79
Communication – Preparedness	Students	3.85	98	0.94
	Employees	3.76	84	0.93
Leadership – Preparedness	Students	3.88	98	0.98
	Employees	3.67	84	0.89

Teamwork – Preparedness	Students	3.92	98	0.93
	Employees	3.89	84	0.91
Time Management – Preparedness	Students	3.96	98	0.94
	Employees	3.71	84	0.97
Problem Solving – Preparedness	Students	3.96	98	0.96
	Employees	3.85	84	0.94

Note. *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation.

Descriptive statistics indicate that both final-year students and early-career employees have considered all selected soft-skill competencies as highly important, with mean scores exceeding 4.00. Among students, the highest mean importance was observed for time management ($M= 4.23$, $SD= 0.77$), followed closely by communication, leadership, teamwork and problem-solving. Likewise, employees stated that importance of problem-solving at ($M= 4.26$, $SD= 0.79$) and communication at ($M= 4.20$, $SD= 0.90$).

The same is corroborated by the fact that Joneidi et al., 2025 found that proficiency in problem-solving as a highly important factor that can dictate the hiring or promotional actions for leading roles in hospitality. Nevertheless, a clear skill gap has been perceived by both groups as students reported preparedness means of different competencies ranging from 3.85 to 3.96, while employees' retrospective preparedness at the point of entry ranged from 3.67 to 3.89. This trend highlights a general perception that although soft skills are critical for hospitality roles, individuals feel only moderately prepared in these competencies.

Table 4

Paired Samples t-Test Results Comparing Student Skill Importance and Preparedness

Skill Area	Mean Difference	SD	SE M	95% CI of the Difference	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Communication (Imp – Prep)	0.34	0.58	0.05	0.22, 0.45	$t= 5.79$	97	<.001
Leadership (Imp – Prep)	0.30	0.67	0.06	0.16, 0.43	$t= 4.47$	97	<.001
Teamwork (Imp – Prep)	0.22	0.63	0.08	0.09, 0.34	$t= 3.45$	97	<.001
Time Management (Imp – Prep)	0.26	0.72	0.07	0.12, 0.41	$t= 3.66$	97	<.001
Problem Solving (Imp – Prep)	0.21	0.61	0.06	0.08, 0.33	$t= 3.42$	97	<.001

Note. *CI* = Confidence Interval; *SD* = Standard Deviation; *SEM* = Standard Error of the Mean. Positive mean differences indicate higher perceived importance compared to preparedness across student skills.

Table 5

Paired Samples Statistics for Student Skill Importance and Preparedness

Skill Area	Group	M	N	SD	SEM
Communication	Importance	4.18	98	0.91	0.09
	Preparedness	3.85	98	0.94	0.10
Leadership	Importance	4.16	98	0.91	0.09
	Preparedness	3.88	98	0.98	0.10
Teamwork	Importance	4.15	98	0.94	0.10
	Preparedness	3.92	98	0.93	0.09
Time Management	Importance	4.23	98	0.77	0.08
	Preparedness	3.96	98	0.94	0.10
Problem Solving	Importance	4.16	98	0.92	0.09
	Preparedness	3.96	98	0.96	0.10

Note. *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation; *SEM* = Standard Error of the Mean.

Table 6

Paired Samples Correlations Between Student Skill Importance and Preparedness

Variables	Correlation	Sig.
Communication (Imp – Prep)	0.81	< 0.001
Leadership (Imp – Prep)	0.75	< 0.001
Teamwork (Imp – Prep)	0.77	< 0.001
Time Management (Imp – Prep)	0.67	< 0.001
Problem Solving (Imp – Prep)	0.79	< 0.001

Note. Correlations represent the relationship between perceived importance and preparedness of student skills. All correlations are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

Comparison of Importance and Preparedness among

Final-Year Students (H1): Paired samples *t*-tests were conducted to examine differences between students' perceived importance and self-perceived preparedness for each soft-skill competency. Results revealed statistically significant differences across all five competencies ($p < 0.001$). For communication skills, students rated importance ($M = 4.18$) significantly higher than preparedness ($M = 3.85$), $t = 5.79$, $p < 0.001$. Similar significant gaps were observed for leadership ($t = 4.47$), teamwork ($t = 3.45$), time management ($t = 3.66$) and problem-solving ($t = 3.42$). Strong positive correlations between importance and preparedness scores ($r = .67$ to $.81$, $p < .001$) indicate that students who perceived a skill as important also tended to rate themselves as more prepared, though still not at the desired level. These findings are similar to the findings of Succi & Canovi

(2020) who found that among the top three skills in the graduates responses, communication skills were also present. These findings support H1.

Overall, the findings for objective 1 indicate a significant gap of preparedness among students and new employees, suggesting that final-year hospitality students recognize the critical importance of soft skills but feel insufficiently prepared to apply them effectively. Findings coincide with the study of Weber et al. (2009) who argued about the educational institutions emphasizing the importance of technical and operational knowledge consider how students felt that few soft skills competencies were important yet they felt they were not fully prepared in them.

Table 7
Paired Samples t-Test Results Comparing Importance and Preparedness of Employee Skills

Pair	Mean Difference	SD	SEM	95% CI of the Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Communication (Imp - Prep)	0.44	0.73	0.08	0.29, 0.60	5.57	83	< 0.001
Leadership (Imp - Prep)	0.46	0.84	0.09	0.28, 0.64	5.05	83	< 0.001
Teamwork (Imp - Prep)	0.28	0.82	0.09	0.10, 0.46	3.08	83	0.003
Time Management (Imp - Prep)	0.44	0.89	0.10	0.25, 0.63	4.55	83	< 0.001
Problem Solving (Imp - Prep)	0.41	0.81	0.09	0.23, 0.58	4.62	83	< 0.001

Note: CI = Confidence Interval. Positive mean differences indicate higher perceived importance compared to preparedness across skills.

Paired samples t-test exposed statistically significant difference of importance and preparedness in the levels of all competencies. Leadership and communication skills were showing the largest gaps. Indicating in pre-employment training these areas should have been given higher importance.

Table 8
Paired Samples Statistics for Employee Ratings of Importance and Preparedness

Skill Area	Category	M	SD	SE
Communication	Importance	4.20	0.90	0.10
	Preparedness	3.76	0.93	0.10
Leadership	Importance	4.13	0.88	0.10

Teamwork	Preparedness	3.67	0.89	0.10
	Importance	4.17	0.93	0.10
Time Management	Preparedness	3.89	0.91	0.10
	Importance	4.15	0.90	0.10
Problem-Solving	Preparedness	3.71	0.97	0.11
	Importance	4.26	0.79	0.09
	Preparedness	3.85	0.94	0.10

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; SE = Standard Error. All ratings based on a 5-point scale.

Table 9
Paired Samples Correlations for Employee Between Importance and Preparedness Ratings

Skill Area	R	P
Communication	0.69	< 0.001
Leadership	0.56	< 0.001
Teamwork	0.61	< 0.001
Time Management	0.56	< 0.001
Problem-Solving	0.58	< 0.001

Note. r = Pearson correlation coefficient. All correlations are significant at $p < 0.001$.

Moderate positive correlations were found between importance and preparedness rating (r ranging between 0.56 to 0.69), suggesting consistency in employee's perceptions.

Comparison of Importance and Retrospective Preparedness among Employees (H2): Paired samples t-tests for early-career employees also revealed significant differences between perceived importance and retrospective preparedness for all soft-skill competencies ($p < 0.001$). Communication skills showed a notable gap, with importance rated at $M = 4.20$ compared to preparedness at entry at $M = 3.76$. Similar discrepancies were found for leadership ($M = 4.13$ vs. 3.67), teamwork ($M = 4.17$ vs. 3.89), time management ($M = 4.15$ vs. 3.71) and problem-solving ($M = 4.26$ vs. 3.85).

All paired correlations were moderate to strong suggesting consistency in respondents' perceptions over time. These findings confirm H2 and indicate that early-career employees, with the benefit of workplace experience, perceive that they entered the industry underprepared in essential soft skills. This concludes the findings of objective 2 as early career employees perceived a clear gap between soft skills needed and possessed at the time of joining their first

profession position. This matches the findings of Lin (2002) according to him significant discrepancies remain between curricular priorities and industry's skill requirements.

Table 10
Independent Samples t-Test Results for Importance and Preparedness Variables

Variable	Levene's F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error	95% CI (Lower, Upper)
Communication Importance	0.010	.920	-0.167	180	.868	-0.22	0.13	-0.28, -0.24
Leadership Importance	2.490	.619	0.220	180	.826	0.29	0.13	-0.23, 0.29
Teamwork Importance	0.079	.779	-0.119	180	.906	-0.17	0.14	-0.29, 0.25
Time Management Importance	4.636	.033	0.631	180	.529	0.08	0.12	-0.16, 0.32
Problem-Solving Importance	0.334	.564	-0.726	180	.469	-0.93	0.13	-0.34, 0.15
Communication Preparedness	0.031	.861	0.669	180	.504	0.20	0.14	-0.18, 0.36
Leadership Preparedness	1.264	.262	1.439	180	.152	1.20	0.14	-0.75, 0.48
Teamwork Preparedness	0.061	.806	0.224	180	.823	0.03	0.13	-0.23, 0.30
Time Management Preparedness	1.112	.738	1.762	180	.080	0.25	0.14	-0.30, 0.53
Problem-Solving Preparedness	0.002	.961	.792	180	.429	1.11	0.14	-0.16, 0.39

Note. Sig. values are two-tailed. * $p < 0.05$.

In line with objective 3, the result of the independent sample t-test indicated no statistically significant differences between the final year hospitality students and early career employees across communication ($t = -0.167$, $p = 0.868$), leadership ($t = 0.220$, $p = 0.826$), teamwork ($t = -0.119$, $p = 0.906$), time management ($t = 0.631$, $p = 0.529$) and problem-solving skills ($t = -0.726$, $p = 0.469$).

In line with objective 4, to examine differences in perceived preparedness of soft-skill competencies between final-year hospitality students and early-career hospitality employees at the point of industry entry, independent samples t-tests were conducted. The results indicated no statistically significant differences between the two groups across communication ($t =$

0.669 , $p = 0.504$), leadership ($t = 1.439$, $p = 0.152$), teamwork ($t = 0.224$, $p = 0.823$), time management ($t = 1.762$, $p = 0.080$) and problem-solving skills ($t = 0.792$, $p = 0.429$). Although time management preparedness showed a marginal trend toward significance, overall findings suggest comparable perceptions of preparedness between students nearing graduation and employees reflecting on their entry-level readiness.

The above becomes an answer of objective 3 and 4 comparing the level of perceived importance and preparedness in terms of soft-skills between the students and employees, demonstrating perceptions regarding the importance and preparedness of employability skills, reflecting a strong alignment between academic understanding and industry expectations. Accordingly, Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

This also supports study by Robinson et al. (2016) and Chen and Shen (2016) stating that the employees' perception of their preparedness significantly increases after they start working can get practical experience at job, which is indicative to their compromised level of readiness during and at the end of their academic career. Joneidi et al., 2025 also made the similar findings.

Comparative analyses revealed that employees generally reported higher preparedness than students, while maintaining equally high importance ratings. Employees rated communication importance at $M = 4.20$ compared to students' $M = 4.18$ and their preparedness scores averaged around 4.00, higher than students' 3.85–3.96. This difference may reflect the impact of workplace exposure and professional training, which provide opportunities to practice and refine these skills. Students, by contrast, may have limited opportunities to apply such competencies in real-world contexts, resulting in lower preparedness scores.

Moreover, the findings are in line with the competency model proposed by Boyatzis (1982) who indicates that in order to perform well, one should not only be aware of what the competencies are but also be motivated and even demonstrate them in actual hospitality scenarios. The readiness levels that are present in the results inform that although hospitality programs raise awareness in students about competencies, the students are aware of why soft skills are important but there remain areas of concern with regards to nurturing the behavioural and motivational elements of such competencies.

Conclusion

The focus of the study was to compare the readiness and the importance of soft skills competencies between final year hospitality students and early career employees working in Mumbai star hotel. The descriptive results of the study revealed that both student and employees rated all selected soft skill competencies such as communication, leadership, teamwork, time management and problem solving as highly important. These findings revealed that students have clear understanding of the importance of employability skills and current professionals have an understanding of the industry's expectations. However, both parties show a clear gap in their perceived importance and preparedness of soft skill competencies.

Students participating in the study reported significantly low self- perceived preparedness compared to importance across all soft skill competencies. In line with the above finding, early career employees too reported gap between the importance of software and their retrospective perception of preparedness while their entering the industry. The academic understanding and the industry expectations stay in the same line.

Students and the newly-minted employees both strongly agree about the importance of soft-skill competencies, but are not prepared enough to meet the industry expectations. Which ties into the findings of Chalupa & Chadt (2021) who found that employees are not well prepared for situations and that they're in need of structured soft-skill trainings. To conclude, by increasing the preparedness of the hospitality final year students their scope of employability can be increased significantly.

Hospitality education needs more focus towards soft skill capacity building and practical approach. More professional exposure during the graduation program may take the students towards higher understanding of the industry expectations and better preparedness. Continuous practical assessment and formative feedback has the capacity of increasing soft skill competencies such as communication, leadership skills, time management skills it etc. The industry should start working on early onboarding and mentorship programs seriously and joining such program must get some extra academic credits to the students. The hospitality education regulator must revise the curriculum regularly to stay in touch with the industry needs and to stay updated with the

demand of broad-spectrum service related job opportunities. Further qualitative research on the same field may add more insight to the present paradox.

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