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## **Status of Hospitality Education in Nepal: Analysis of the Perspective of Hospitality Students and Practitioners**

**Surya Kiran Shrestha<sup>1</sup>**

PhD Candidate

Tribhuvan University, Nepal

### **Abstract**

Hospitality Management Institutes have seen tremendous growth in the recent years in Nepal. More and more students have shown their inclination to pursue hospitality related courses from the institutes at national level or at different universities or from private institutes. However, the higher education system of this sector has encountered several constraints and challenges that led us to conduct this study to analyse the status of hospitality education in Nepal. The study employed a blend of qualitative and quantitative research method by delivering a descriptive approach as well as undergoing a simple empirical research. The respondents in this study were 180 final year students from bachelor level hotel management colleges and 10 human resource managers from large state hotels. The study explored the views of students and hotel practitioners about the courses offered, mismatch of expectation, the skills the hospitality graduates possess and the challenges in retaining them in Nepalese industry. The study revealed the existence of mismatch between the expectation and reality from the bachelor in hotel management course. Further, the hotel practitioners also expressed Nepalese hospitality graduates are capable to take the entry level positions and lack the managerial capability to lead the departments and the organisations.

**Keywords:** expectation, entrepreneurship intention, hospitality education, hospitality students and practitioners, opportunities and challenges

### **1. Introduction and Study Objectives**

Hospitality industry refers to the service industry and is synonyms for the tourism industry. In the last two decades, tourism has been contributing 6% of world output, one in 15 jobs and

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Shrestha is the former Deputy Head of the BHM programme at NATHM. He is a well-known faculty member of hospitality and tourism management in Nepal. His email is [suryakiranshrestha@gmail.com](mailto:suryakiranshrestha@gmail.com)

7% of capital investment. According to Kumar (2018), it can double its contribution to the world's output, increases jobs by 33% and capital investment can jump by 80%. Hospitality and tourism industry is the main source of the Nepalese economy contributing significantly to the GDP (Shrestha, 2020). The number of international tourists arrived in the country exceeded 1.1 million in 2018 and is predicted to be 2 million by 2020 (NTB, 2019). According to Nepal Rastra Bank (Central Bank of Nepal), the direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP was NPR 99.8 billion, 4% of total GDP in 2017 and was forecasted to rise by 4.9% in 2018. The GDP contributed by the tourism industry in 2019 was NPR 195 billion. Nepal's travel and tourism industry is expected to create more than 1.35 million jobs directly and indirectly by 2029 (NRB, 2019). The data of tourist arrival has shown the changes between January and February of 2018 and 2019 as 25.4% and 39% respectively. With the growth of tourism, the hotels industry has also increased at the same rate. According to the Ministry of Tourism, the annualised growth of hotels and restaurants was close to 10% (MoCTCA, 2018).

In all these regards, the last two decades has seen an increasing sense of self-awareness and reflection regarding the current state and the future evolution of hospitality (Jameson, Walmsley, & Ball, 2006; Jones, 2004; Lugosi, 2009; Slattery, 2002; Lynch, Germann, McIntosh, Lugosi, & Lashley, 2011). Some have adopted an optimistic position on the intellectual development of the field, acknowledging the growing engagement with other disciplines and subject areas, which has enabled hospitality to open new lines of enquiry and to export knowledge into other disciplines (Lashley, 2008; Lugosi, 2009; Morisson & O'Gorman, 2008).

The wide array of hospitality fields has contributed immensely to the growth of hospitality education (HEFCE, 1998). As an applied discipline, hospitality education has a close and strong linkage with its industry to educate hospitality students by keeping abreast with the current industry trends (Goodman & Sprague, 1991). A growing demand of hospitality workers can be translated into a growing demand of hospitality educational programs to adequately prepare the workforce to meet present and future demands in this enormous industry. As the hospitality industry is a service-oriented area, most of the hospitality programs put more weight on industry expectations and opinions.

Hospitality education must consider the expectations of the industry and student perception. However, there is not common consensus regarding the status of hospitality management education from the perspectives of students and practitioners. Thus, the study has been directed towards understanding the status of hospitality graduates' perceptions about the

courses. The general objective of this study is to find out the status of existing bachelor of hotel management courses practiced by various institutions in Nepal and the perception of their graduates and employers on it. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- To explore the perception of undergraduate hospitality students about the matching of their expectation from the courses offered and opportunities available for hospitality graduates at national and international level
- To explore the perception of entrepreneurship intention of undergraduate hospitality students, and
- To explore the opinions of hotel practitioners about the skills the hospitality graduates possess and the challenges in retaining them in Nepalese industry

## **2. Literature Review**

In providing useful typology, Copper et al. (1994) have explained three ways by which the study of tourism and hospitality has developed as an academic subject. First it was through specific training related to the travel sector, afterwards courses in the business areas and later, on the study of tourism and hospitality was approached along with traditional subjects such as Geography, Sociology and Linguistics. The beginning of higher education in hospitality dates back to 1893 (Hsu et al., 2014). Copper *et al.* (1994) commented that tourism and hospitality is an emergent subject, and that tourism and hospitality education has grown significantly during the last 50 years, but its knowledge is fragmented.

Nepal Academy of Tourism and Hotel Management (NATHM) initiated the hospitality education in Nepal in 1972. From 1999 NATHM started offering Bachelor of Hotel Management and Nepal College of Travel and Tourism Management offered Bachelor of Travel and Tourism Management affiliated to Tribhuvan University. As a part of the curriculum of hotel management, students need to join industry for exposure as an internship programme, but local industry can accommodate about 15% of the students only. Rest 85 percent of the students prefer international exposures for their internship. Meanwhile, it has been the problem for almost all the colleges in accommodating those 85 percent of the students preferring to join the international establishments for their internship amid and aftermath COVID-19.

Likewise, Nepalese hospitality industry has been suffering the brain-drain of qualified and skilled personnel. The lucrative job prospects outside of Nepal that includes earning higher than what a relatively more qualified person in Nepal could earn and more opportunities for

talented employee's people abroad. Nepali companies neither would be able to provide such opportunities in Nepal, nor meet the expectation of the youth (New Business Age, 2018; Sthapit & Shrestha, 2018). From the practitioner's point of view, Nepalese hospitality management industry has several challenges such as low pay, less opportunity for employment, mismatch between classroom learning and workplace, shortage of manager levels human resources, retention of skilled human resources, undue political and trade union pressure (Shrestha, 2020).

Curriculum within tourism and hospitality management degrees provides an understanding of the vocational characteristics of curriculum. Acquiring skills and knowledge are considered an important task for vocationally orientated education (Marsh and Willis, 2007). The most common purpose of tourism and hospitality undergraduate programmes is to prepare students to work in the tourism and hospitality industry (Stuart-Hoyle, 2003). Even though this may be narrow in a technical functionalism approach, it fits the vocational nature of a hospitality and tourism curriculum. Airey and Tribe (2000) described hospitality courses as being prominently influenced by industry. The emphasis on practical and industry-oriented content is clear from module titles such as Food Preparation Techniques. Further, Airey and Tribe (2000) also mentioned that over the recent years, course titles have shifted from hotel catering management to include hospitality and recognised the change in title opens a wider conceptual framework and at the same time the vocational orientation remains the core of curriculum.

However, the studies have shown some ambiguity regarding the expectancy from hospitality courses, opportunities available, hospitality entrepreneurship intention and the challenges in retaining hospitality graduates. Casado (1992) conducted a study on new and final year students and found that students who just joined the institute were having a very positive attitude toward the industry, but the final year students who were exposed to the industry were not having equally positive attitudes. Barron and Maxwell (1993) found that in general, the new students had a positive image of the industry, whereas the students with supervised work experience were having less-positive views. Emenheiser, Clayton and Tas (1997) found that most final year students were satisfied with their internship which strengthened their problem-solving ability in the hospitality industry, hence, they have a positive perception about the industry.

Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) discovered that most of the hospitality students have no idea about the industry when they join the course and thus when they are exposed to the actual

conditions in the industry, they get a negative attitude, and this contributes to the high turnover rate in the hospitality Industry. It implies that students' expectations will be realistic if they are informed about the real scenario of the hospitality industry, and thus they will prepare themselves to confront the upcoming conditions. Leslie & Richardson (2000) surveyed that student's pre-internship perceptions and post-internship experiences influence students to avoid careers in the hospitality/tourism industry. Jenkins (2001) in his study stated that work experience as a trainee in the industry affected senior students' perceptions in a negative way.

Collins (2002), and Lam and Ching (2007) found that poor or no stipend, poor employee relations, unorganised work environment, limited or no delegation, long working hours, and overall a hectic working environment faced by the final year graduates during internship are the most common factors that create dissatisfaction and decreased motivation toward industry and internship. Roney and Oztin (2007) highlighted that students' negative internship experiences resulted in the development of a less favourable perception of hospitality and tourism. Even when the students are having quite realistic expectations before and during their studies, still their turnover rate is high when they join the industry. Yafang and Gongyong (2008) emphasised that final year hospitality students who were exposed to real work conditions in hotels during their internship period develop negative perception toward industry due to lack of coordination between schools and employers', "opportunities for self-development," "pay and welfare," "work pressure," "opportunity for work rotation," "interesting and challenging work," and "autonomy involved in the work."

Park and Kim (2011) have stated that the post-internship perceptions generally have lower mean values than pre-internship expectations for most career factors, thereby implying that final year students after internships become pessimistic regarding their future jobs. Kasli and Ilban (2013) in their finding revealed that the final year students who have undergone training have developed a perception of trainees viewed as cheap labour in the hospitality industry and does not contribute to the professional development of them, and this makes the perception of the senior students negatively. Datta, Biswakarma and Nayak (2013) explained that there was a difference in expectation between senior students who had completed internships and juniors who were yet to undergo industrial training. The students who had completed their training had a more negative perspective towards the hotel industry.

### **3. Research Methods**

The study has employed a blend of qualitative and quantitative research by delivering a descriptive approach as well as undergoing a simple empirical research. The study would be analysing the role of hospitality management education in producing employable candidates on one side and the other side to show, guide and motivate the students to accept a more challenging role as entrepreneur in emerging hospitality sectors. The research has been planned and executed in the primary way and the analysing data using primary source. The research has been conducted in two phases and based on them the issues are analysed. At first stage, the study collected the perception about the hospitality education and constraints encountered by the final year students (already undergone internship) of three colleges representing two universities. As per survey, 6000 graduates graduate from 55 institutions annually. A total of 180 students, 60 from each college were selected using a simple random sampling method in February- April 2020. In the second stage, 10 human resources managers from 10 large-scale hotels (4-5 star-hotels) were purposively selected as a sample to take the opinion about the skills the hotel management graduates possess. The data was analysed using Microsoft excel.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Figure 1 depicts that most of the students agree about the matching of their expectations from the course and around 34% students (one third) are not satisfied with the hotel courses offered by the universities in Nepal (see Annex 1).

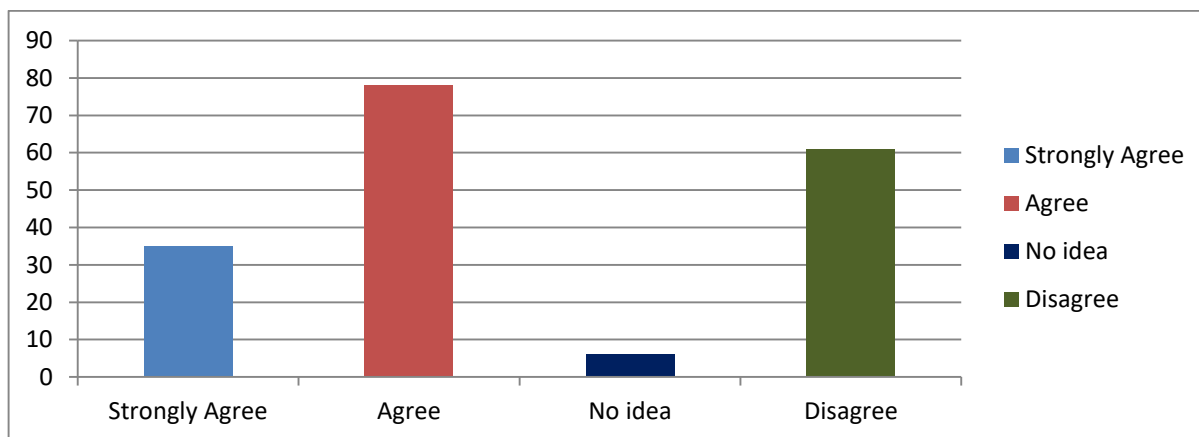


Figure 1. Matching of expectation from the course

Likewise, Figure 2 depicts that almost all the students (97.2 %) either strongly agree or agree regarding the existence of a gap in the hospitality education especially in the theoretical and practical inputs (See Annex 2). The hospitality students found the vast difference between theory and practice pre- and post-internship period.

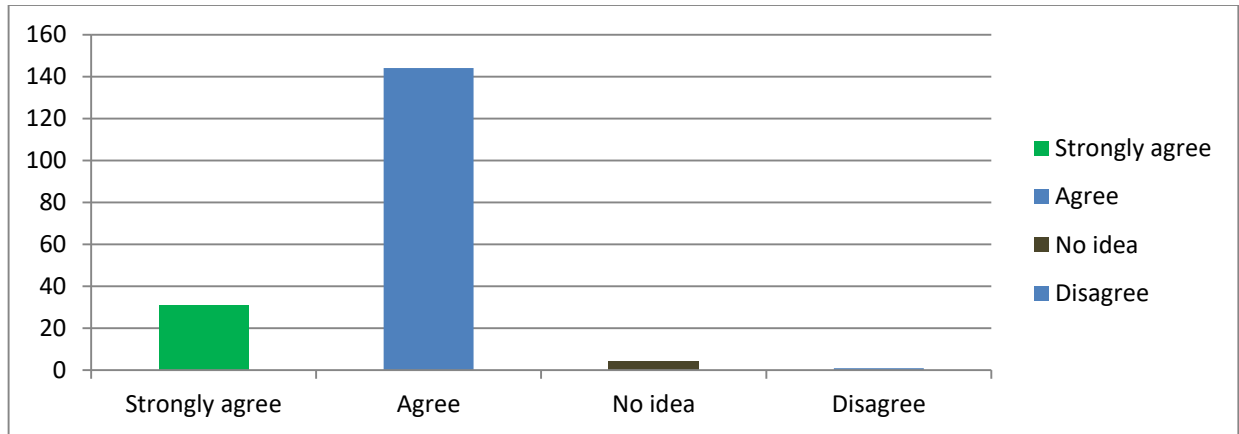


Figure 2. Gap in hospitality education

Similarly, *Figure 3* depicts the necessity of sufficient practical exposures in the colleges before joining the internship programmes. Around 97 % students agree (See *Annex 3*) regarding this requirement and it is the evidence of insufficient input from the colleges in terms of practical exposures.

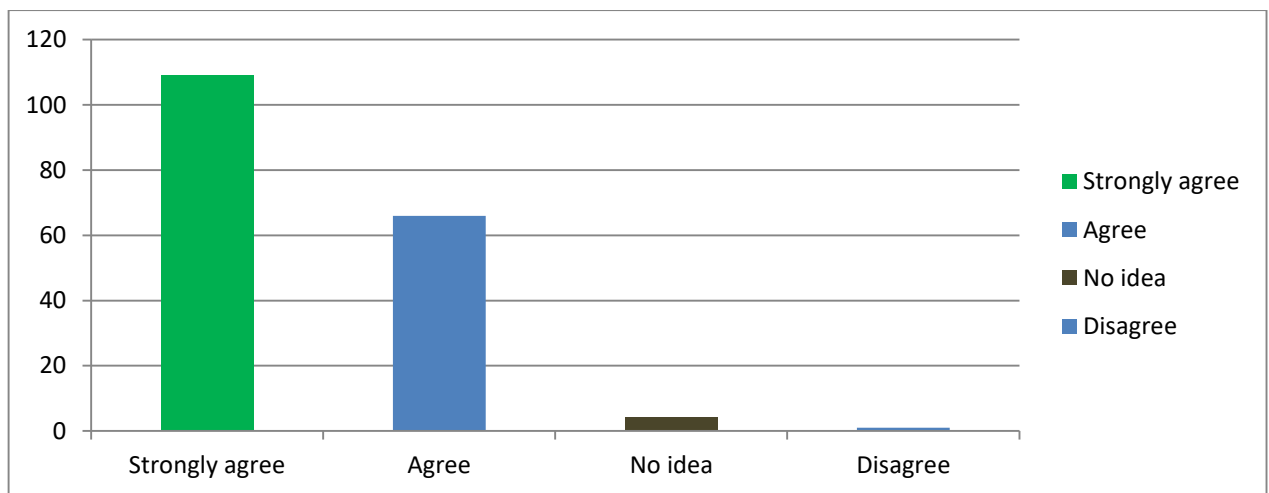


Figure 3. Requirement of practical exposure in the courses

*Figure 4* reports the evidence of opinion of the students regarding the standard of industrial exposure. 97.3 % students are not satisfied with the industrial practice during their internship program (See *Annex 4*). Majority of the students have the complaint regarding the exposure to a single department in the hotel during the entire internship programme.

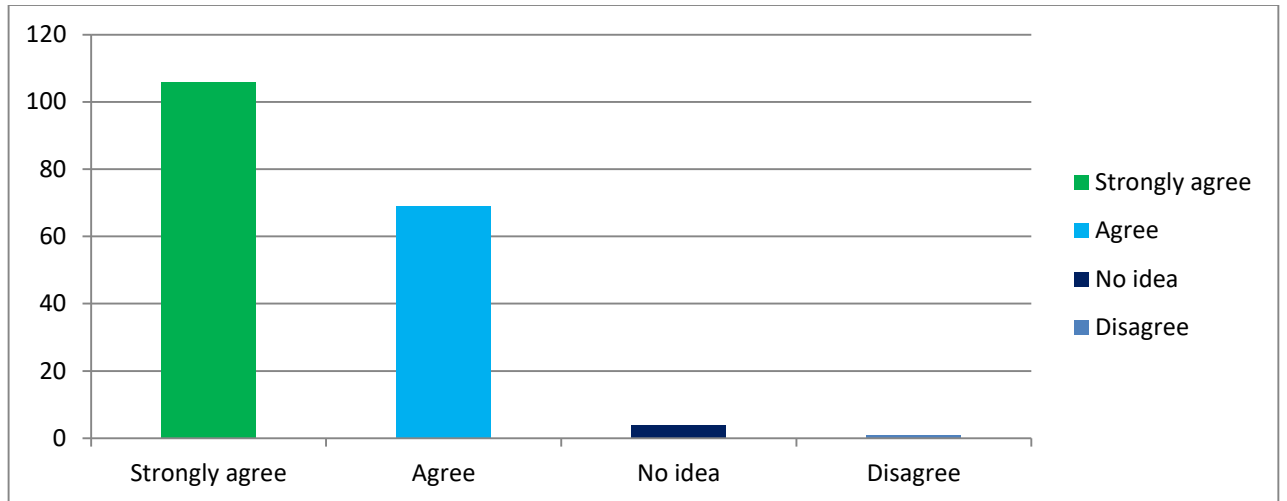


Figure 4. Requirement of meeting international standard in industrial exposure

Similarly, Figure 5 reports the evidence of opinion of the hotel management students regarding the availability of job opportunities at international and national level. Around 74 % of the students agree that more job opportunities are available at international level as opposed to national level (See Annex 5). It is also the evidence of intention and the attraction of the students of joining the job at international level. Indeed, the demand for hospitality graduates in the international market is very high.

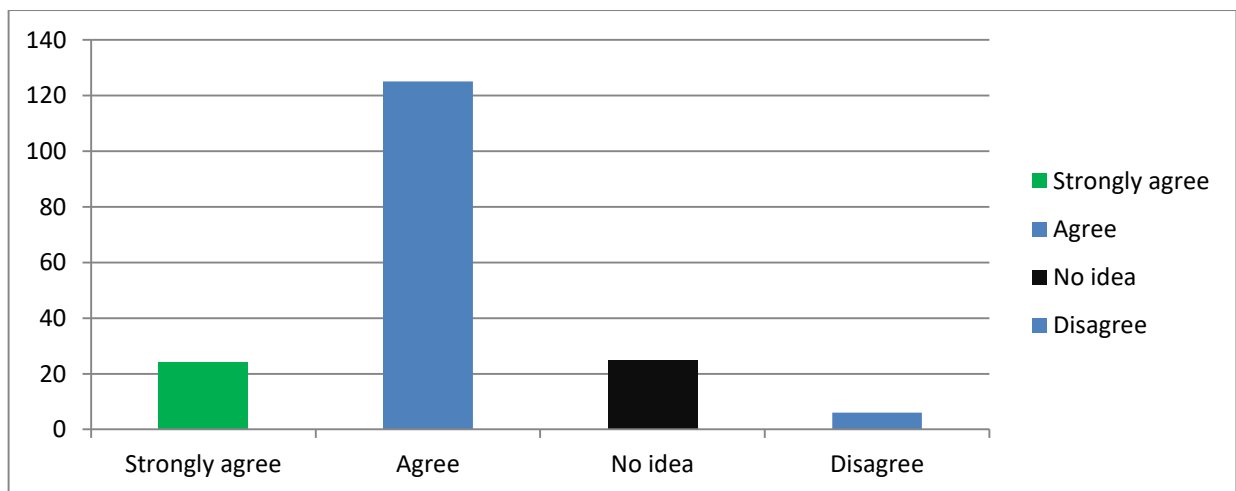
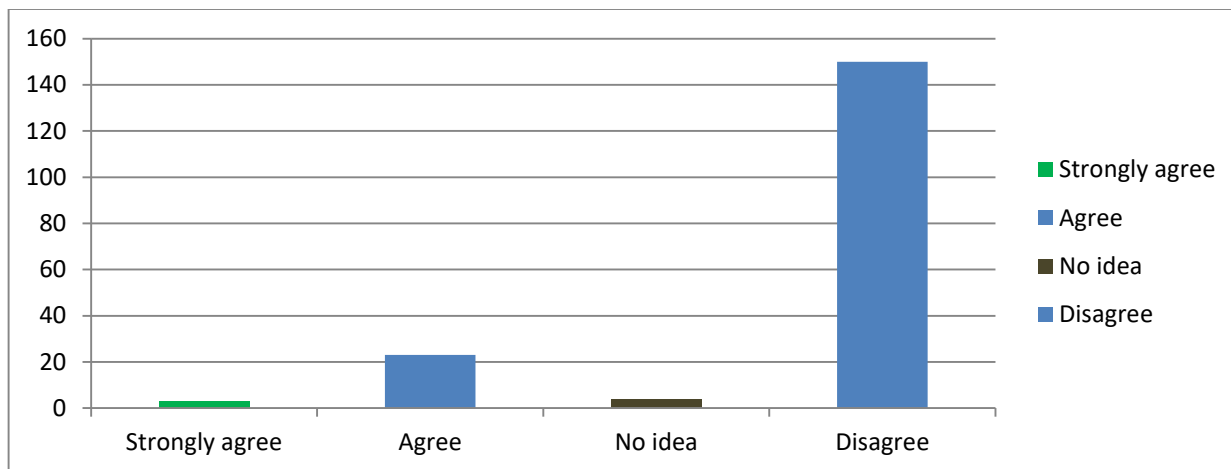


Figure 5. Demand of hospitality graduates and job market





*Figure 6. Intention of hospitality entrepreneurship*

Unfortunately, the hospitality entrepreneurship intention is very low among the hotel management students in Nepal. *Figure 6* depicts that only 14.5 % students were ready to take the entrepreneurship initiation in the future and 83.3 % of the students were not with the intention of initiating the entrepreneurship activities (*See Annex 6*)

The study also intended to capture the opinion of the student's intention after completing their course in Nepal. *Figure 7* exhibits the opinion on this regard. 56.7 % of the students have the intention to pursue higher studies either in Nepal or abroad. In overall, 61.7 % of the students have the intention to pursue higher studies abroad as opposed to 5% (*See Annex 7*), who intended to join universities in Nepal. Similarly, 40.6 % of the students opined their intention of joining the job market either in Nepal or abroad. In overall, 26.7 % students have the intention to join the job market at international level as opposed to 13.9 % who intended to join the Nepalese hospitality industry in Nepal. It is the evidence regarding the charm of foreign countries among the hotel management students in Nepal.

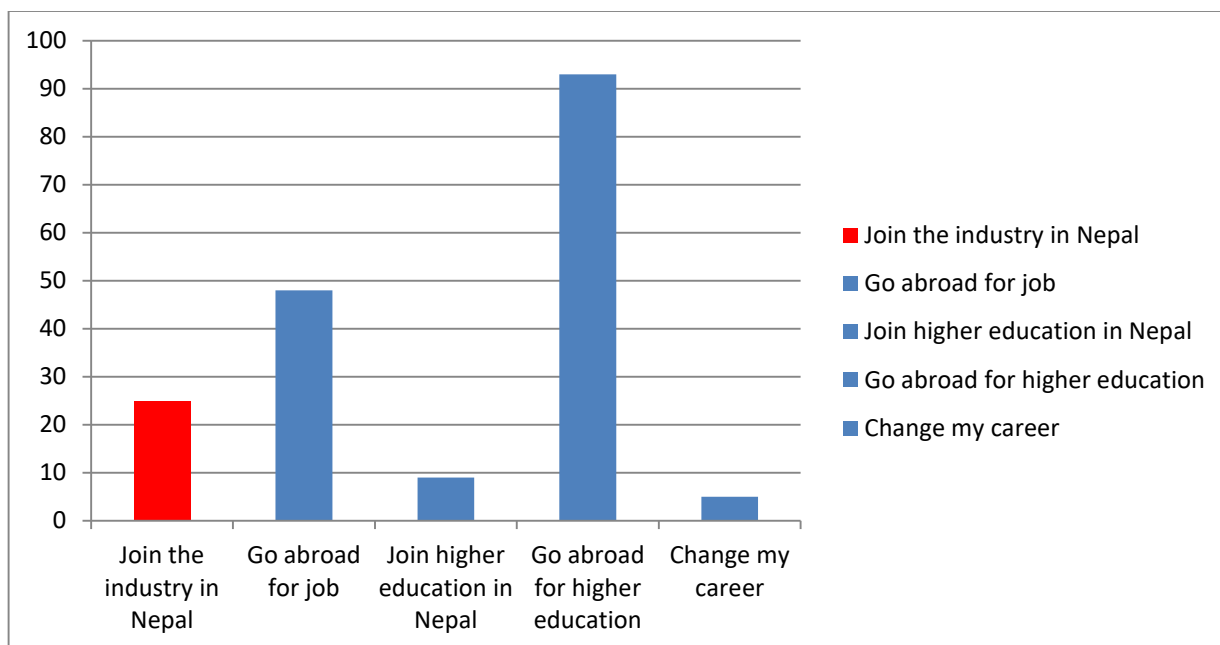


Figure 7. Immediate career plan after course completion

In the second stage of the study, 10 human resource managers from 10 large-scale hotels (4-5 star-hotels) were purposively selected as a sample to take the opinion about the skills the hotel management graduates possess. The structured interview was taken with the respondents with the objectives of collecting opinions about the quality of fresh hotel management graduates in terms of hospitality knowledge, skill and attitude. The opinions of the respondents after identifying the pattern are exhibited in four dimensions as:

#### **Subject knowledge and understanding**

*“The major criteria to select the potential candidates are the knowledge and understanding of subject matter which they have studied during the course in my view. It reflects the standard of curriculum, faculty as well as the education system so it is very easy to follow the merit basis”. But most of the human resource managers prioritised this quality as secondary level. They said that the entry level candidates required only basic knowledge and understanding of core subject matter. Nepalese graduates are up to the standard for entry level. They agreed that all candidates are not at par. Once employed, they will learn the practical works. Learning is a never-ending process. And also, there is gap between classroom theory input and real practical life”.*

### **Generic and professional skills**

*“Most important challenge of human resource management in the Nepalese hotel industry is that there is a lack of skilled human resource. There is a mismatch between what students learn in their curriculum in colleges/universities and what the employers expect from them at their work. Most academic institutions follow the conventional teaching pedagogy. Also, no proper practical training is provided by the institutions. So seemingly, generic and professional skills are always lacking. The skills comprise communication, decision making, problem solving, leadership, handling of guests, handling of equipment, informational technology etc.” Some managers found that those graduates who have done their internship abroad are at par but not all are at the same level. They said that the hotel industry became a training institute to train the students. When they are trained, they leave the hotel and go abroad. Most of the managers have prioritised generic and professional skills required for employment in the hospitality industry”.*

### **Emotional intelligence and personal quality**

*“In general, the emotional intelligence and personal quality reflect the attitudes of candidates. There are many personal qualities which may vary from one to another. These qualities comprise self-motivation, self-efficacy, self-confidence, politeness, good manners, personal grooming, positive attitude, eagerness to learn, working in a team, etc. Most hotel managers found that a new generation lacks in these areas. They said that they do not have passion, are not loyal to organisation, are not aware of professionalism, not confident in handling situations, not responsible as well. As per their views, if the employees have these quality attributes, they will be the real human capital for the industry. It will be beneficial for the industry as well as for them”.*

### **Brain-drain**

*“In this context all of the managers agreed that there is a shortage of skilled blue-collar workers... because growth opportunities are limited...there are problems with operation and management structure. So the qualified and skilled human resources cannot be retained by the Nepalese hotel industry. Many of them have opted to go to the foreign countries for jobs, it is because of high pay in employment or high opportunities”.*

## **5. Conclusion**

Hospitality management institutions have been mushrooming in the recent years in Nepal. More and more graduates are produced by hospitality related institutions from national or

international universities or institutes. However, the higher education system of this sector has encountered several constraints and challenges that led us to conduct these courses to analyse the future prospect of hospitality education at a higher level in Nepal. The study explored the views of students and hotel practitioners about the courses offered, mismatch of expectation, the skills the hospitality graduates possess and the challenges in retaining them in Nepalese industry. The study revealed the existence of mismatch between the theoretical and practical inputs at bachelor level of hotel management. Almost all students are not satisfied with industrial exposure and majorities have complaints regarding the exposure to a single department. Majority students have the intention to pursue higher education abroad after graduation. They agree that more job opportunities are available in the international market. Unfortunately, the hospitality entrepreneurship intention is very low among the hotel management students in Nepal. Although many universities' hotel management courses have the objectives of producing graduates for supervisory level, the hotel practitioners expressed Nepalese hotel management graduates are capable to take the entry level positions and lack the supervisory capability to supervise and manage the departments and the organisations.

Airey and Tribe (2000) described hospitality courses as being prominently influenced by industry. The emphasis on practical and industry-oriented content is clear from module titles such as Food Preparation Techniques. Further, Airey and Tribe (2000) also mentioned that over the recent years, course titles have shifted from hotel catering management to include hospitality and recognised the change in title opens a wider conceptual framework and at the same time the vocational orientation remains the core of curriculum. So the Nepalese hospitality management institutions should specify their courses as per the need of hospitality sectors and should not focus only on hotel monuments. The courses offered by them also should have a clear vision and mission objectives of the level of employees they produce.

**Limitations of the Study and Suggestion for the Future Study:** The study was limited within the bachelor's degree of hotel management education offered by various universities in Nepal. It is highly recommended to conduct such kind of research in travel and tourism management at bachelor level education.

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*Conflict of interest*

The author claims having no conflict of interest in the research work.

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## Annex 1

*Matching of expectation from the course*

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	35	19.4
Agree	78	43.3
No idea	6	3.3
Disagree	61	33.9
Total	180	100

## Annex 2

*Gap in the course*

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	31	17.2
Agree	144	80
No idea	4	2.2
Disagree	1	0.6
Total	180	100

## Annex 3

*Requirement of practical exposure in the course*

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	109	60.6
Agree	66	36.7

No idea	4	2.2
Disagree	1	0.6
Total	180	100

## Annex 4

*Requirement of meeting international standard in industrial exposure*

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	106	58.9
Agree	69	38.3
No idea	4	2.2
Disagree	1	0.6
Total	180	100

## Annex 5

*Demand of hospitality graduates in job market*

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	24	13.3
Agree	125	69.4
No idea	25	13.9
Disagree	6	3.3
Total	180	100

## Annex 6

*Intention of hospitality entrepreneurship*

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	3	1.7
Agree	23	12.8
No idea	4	2.2
Disagree	150	83.3
Total	180	100

## Annex 7

*Immediate plan after course completion*

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Join the industry in Nepal	25	13.9

Go abroad for job	48	26.7
Join higher education in Nepal	9	5
Go abroad for higher education	93	51.7
Change my career	5	2.8
Total	180	100