

Learning Outcomes Development for Improving the Employment Rate of the Hotel Management Students at Guilin Tourism University in China

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Abstract: This study investigates the fluctuating employment rates of hotel management graduates from Guilin Tourism University, a Sino-foreign cooperative program with École hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL). Despite the program's aim to cultivate internationally competitive talent, employment rates have seen a significant decline, from a peak of 98.21% to a low of 45.28%. Through a mixed-methods approach—incorporating surveys of 246 graduates and 120 industry stakeholders, alongside focus group discussions—this research identifies critical deficiencies in graduates' professional knowledge, practical skills, and sense of responsibility. Concurrently, employers emphasized high expectations in professional ethics, service quality, adaptability, and English proficiency. Statistical analysis (e.g., correlation, regression) confirmed significant relationships between these competencies and employment outcomes. The findings reveal a pronounced gap between student competencies and industry demands. In response, this paper proposes an integrated set of strategies, including curriculum modernization, systematic practical training, soft skills development, enhanced career guidance, and faculty internationalization. These measures are designed to bridge the identified gap, improve graduate competitiveness, and ultimately contribute to the development of both the university and the regional tourism industry. The study offers valuable insights for optimizing Sino-foreign cooperative education models within China's evolving hospitality landscape.

Keywords: hotel management; employment rate; Sino-foreign cooperation; learning outcomes; graduate employability

1. Introduction

Sino-foreign cooperative education has become a significant feature of China's higher education landscape following the reform and opening-up policy. Amid accelerating globalization and ongoing national educational reforms, the scale and quality of these programs have continuously improved ^[1]. Within the context of the Belt and Road Initiative's economic development and increasing international cooperation, there is a growing demand for interdisciplinary talents who possess international adaptability, an innovative spirit, and practical capabilities. Sino-foreign cooperative education is pivotal in cultivating such high-end talents with global perspectives and cross-cultural communication skills, thereby promoting international collaboration and local economic development ^[2].

These programs provide students with diversified and international educational opportunities, enhancing their professional knowledge, comprehensive literacy, and innovative abilities. This not only fosters personal growth and employment competitiveness but also drives the internationalization of China's higher education and the globalization of its domestic economy. Guilin Tourism University, located in Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, is a specialized institution integrating the six core tourism elements: "food, accommodation, transportation, travel, shopping, and entertainment." It comprises 14 teaching colleges offering 36 undergraduate programs and holds affiliations with major international bodies, including the United Nations World Tourism Organization.

A key partnership is its hotel management cooperative program with EHL Hotel Management Business School, launched in 2015. This program has graduated six cohorts, totaling 639 students. However, its graduate employment rate has experienced considerable volatility. As illustrated in Table 1, the rate peaked at 98.21% but plummeted to 45.28% in 2024, indicating underlying challenges in aligning graduate outcomes with market needs.

Table 1. Employment Rate of Hotel Management Graduates (2020-2024)

Years	Number of Graduates	Number Employed	Employment Rate
2020	87	49	56.32%
2021	116	104	89.66%
2022	104	72	69.23%
2023	109	79	72.48%
2024	106	48	45.28%

Data source: Guilin Tourism University Employment Statistics System. Employment rate = (Number Employed / Total Graduates) × 100%.

This study aims to deeply analyze the problems leading to this low and fluctuating employment rate within the Sino-foreign cooperative model at Guilin Tourism University. Furthermore, it seeks to develop a framework of learning outcomes and propose actionable recommendations for optimizing teaching management, thereby enhancing the employability

of its hotel management graduates and better serving the development of the local tourism industry.

1.1. Research Questions

1. What are the problems in improving the employment rate of hotel management major (Sino-foreign cooperative education), in the school of hotel management, Guilin Tourism University?
2. How to develop the learning outcomes for improving the employment rate of the hotel management major students in Guilin Tourism University?

1.2. Research Objectives

1. To investigate the problems leading to the low employment rate of hotel management major students at Guilin Tourism University.
2. To develop the learning outcomes for improving the employment rate of the hotel management major students at Guilin Tourism University

1.3. Scope of the Study

This study took Guilin Tourism University as a case study. The selection of this university was based on two primary reasons. Firstly, the researcher is an alumnus of Guilin Tourism University, majoring in hotel management (Sino-foreign cooperative program), and has been working at the university for four years. This familiarity with the institution facilitates the collection of relevant research data. Secondly, Guilin Tourism University is highly distinctive, with its hotel management program being a well-known brand, ensuring the study was both meaningful and representative.

The study population for investigating the problems was divided into two groups: 639 graduated students from the hotel management (Sino-foreign cooperative) program and 171 stakeholders working in the hotel industry. Using the Yamane sampling formula , the sample size was determined as follows: 246 graduated students and 120 stakeholders.

1.4. Definition of Terms

Learning Outcomes: Refer to the comprehensive achievements and manifestations in terms of knowledge, skills, responsibilities, and application that students acquire after completing a specific stage of learning, a particular course, or a major. Knowledge encompasses the mastery of basic theoretical and professional knowledge in hotel management. Skills include professional operational skills and general skills. Abilities involve the capacity to apply acquired knowledge and skills to solve practical problems, as well as innovation and critical thinking abilities. Responsibilities and application include professional ethics, a positive attitude, and a strong sense of service.

Hotel Management Major: An undergraduate program offered by ordinary institutions of higher learning, belonging to the tourism management discipline. It has a standard study duration of four years, and graduates are awarded a Bachelor of Management degree.

Sino-foreign Cooperative Education: Educational programs jointly organized by Chinese and foreign educational institutions within China. The goal is to provide high-quality educational resources and international educational experiences through cooperation. This form of cooperation covers multiple levels, including undergraduate, graduate, and higher vocational education. In this study, it specifically refers to the "4+0" mode, where all courses are completed in China, but foreign teaching plans and faculty are adopted.

Employment Rate: Refers to the proportion of employed graduates among the total number of graduates from Sino-foreign cooperative education programs. A low employment rate indicates a small number of employed individuals relative to the total number of graduates.

1.5. Research Expectation

This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the Sino-foreign cooperative education model of the hotel management major at Guilin Tourism University and its impact on the employment rate. It also intends to put forward recommendations for optimizing the teaching management of this international cooperative program in the new era. Guilin, renowned for its world-class landscape, attracts a large number of students to Guilin Tourism University. However, the inability of these students to secure good jobs after graduation highlights the necessity of studying and addressing the factors affecting the employment rate.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Core Concepts

Sino-foreign Cooperative Education: This refers to talent cultivation models jointly organized by Chinese and foreign educational institutions within China. In a narrow sense, it involves cooperation between qualified institutions targeting Chinese citizens. This study focuses on the "4+0" model, where students complete all courses domestically using foreign syllabi and faculty.

Employment Rate: A key metric for assessing higher education quality, it reflects the proportion of graduates securing employment within a specific period ^[3]. A low rate often signals a misalignment between graduate competencies and labor market demands ^[4].

Learning Outcomes: Defined as the comprehensive abilities students acquire, encompassing knowledge, skills, and the application of responsibilities ^[5]. For hotel management, this includes professional knowledge, operational and communication skills, and professional ethics.

2.2. Theoretical Framework and Related Research

The Theory of Learning Outcomes, particularly Gagné's categorization of learning capabilities, provides a robust framework for assessing graduate quality ^[6]. It posits that effective learning results in demonstrable abilities in verbal information, intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, motor skills, and attitudes.

Previous research indicates that hotel management education, including Sino-foreign programs, often grapples with a theory-practice disconnect, leading to graduates who do not

fully meet industry expectations [7,8]. Stakeholders in the hospitality sector increasingly value not only technical skills but also soft skills, professional ethics, and cross-cultural competencies [9,10]. The rapid digitalization of the industry further necessitates curriculum updates to include areas like smart hospitality and data analytics [11].

Theoretical Framework: This study is grounded in the Competency-based Education (CBE) Theory and Human Capital Theory, which posit that education should develop measurable competencies that enhance employability and economic returns. We propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Practical skill proficiency is positively correlated with employment success.

H2: Cross-cultural communication ability significantly improves job-market fit.

H3: Professional ethics and service attitude enhance employment stability.

This study builds upon this foundation by systematically investigating the specific gaps within a Sino-foreign cooperative context and empirically testing the above hypotheses, thereby developing a targeted learning outcomes framework for improvement.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design [12]. This approach involved first collecting and analyzing quantitative data via questionnaires, followed by qualitative data collection through focus group discussions to explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings. This design allows for data triangulation, enhancing the validity and depth of the results.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

The population was divided into two groups: 639 graduates of the hotel management program and 171 industry stakeholders. Using the Yamane sampling formula [13], a stratified random sample of 246 graduates and 120 stakeholders was selected for the survey.

Data Cleaning and Sampling Adjustment: Graduate education levels were re-checked against university records. The original sample included alumni who pursued further studies, which was clarified and adjusted to reflect the undergraduate nature of the program. The stakeholder sample, though skewed toward frontline staff (50%), was retained with a note on limitations. Weighting was applied to balance perspectives from managerial levels.

3.3. Research Instruments and Data Collection

Questionnaires: Two separate, structured questionnaires were administered online via "Questionnaire Star." The graduated student questionnaire covered four sections: General Information, Knowledge Mastery, Professional Skills, Responsibilities and Application. The stakeholder questionnaire covered General Information, Expectations, and Evaluations of graduates. Both used a five-point Likert scale and demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.951$ and 0.934) and good content validity (IOC between 0.67 - 1.00).

Focus Group Discussions: Semi-structured discussions were conducted with three university teachers and two industry experts. The discussion guide was designed around key

themes emerging from the literature and preliminary survey analysis. Thematic analysis was used, with two coders achieving a Cohen's Kappa of 0.82, indicating strong inter-coder reliability.

3.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0, employing descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation, multiple regression) to test the proposed hypotheses. The mean scores were interpreted using a predefined five-point scale. Qualitative data from the focus groups were transcribed and analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns and insights.

4. Findings

4.1. General Information of Samples

4.1.1. Graduated Students

The general information of the 246 graduated student samples. In terms of gender, 128 students (52.00%) are female, and 118 students (48.00%) are male, showing a relatively balanced gender distribution. Regarding age, the majority of the sample (155 students, 63.00%) are aged 20-24 years, followed by 25-29 years (61 students, 24.80%) and 30-34 years (30 students, 12.20%). In terms of the latest educational level, most students (155 students, 63.00%) hold a bachelor's degree, 51 students (20.70%) have a master's degree, and 40 students (16.30%) have a doctorate.

In terms of academic performance during their studies at Guilin Tourism University, 73 students (29.70%) are classified as excellent (GPA above 3.5), 92 students (37.40%) as good (GPA 3.0-3.5), 56 students (22.80%) as average (GPA 2.5-2.99), and 25 students (10.20%) as below average (GPA below 2.5). This distribution indicates that the sample includes students with different academic performance levels, ensuring the representativeness of the sample.

4.1.2. Stakeholders

Table 4.2 shows the general information of the 120 stakeholder samples. In terms of gender, 63 stakeholders (52.50%) are male, and 57 stakeholders (47.50%) are female, with a slightly higher proportion of males. Regarding the type of hotel, the largest proportion is resort hotels (42 stakeholders, 35.00%), followed by business hotels (28 stakeholders, 23.30%), premium hotels (27 stakeholders, 22.50%), luxury hotels (15 stakeholders, 12.50%), and other types of hotels (8 stakeholders, 6.70%).

In terms of years of service in the hotel industry, the majority of stakeholders (55 stakeholders, 45.80%) have 7-10 years of experience, followed by 4-6 years (33 stakeholders, 27.50%), over 10 years (20 stakeholders, 16.70%), and 1-3 years (12 stakeholders, 10.00%). This indicates that the sample includes stakeholders with rich industry experience, ensuring the validity of their evaluations and expectations.

In terms of position, grassroots employees (such as waiters) account for the largest proportion (60 stakeholders, 50.00%), followed by grassroots management personnel (such as supervisors, 45 stakeholders, 37.50%), middle-level managers (such as department managers, 14 stakeholders, 11.70%), and senior management personnel (such as general managers, 1 stakeholder, 0.80%). This distribution reflects the different levels of positions in the hotel industry, providing a comprehensive perspective on stakeholder expectations.

Finally, 103 stakeholders (85.80%) work in hotels that have cooperation with Guilin Tourism University, and 17 stakeholders (14.20%) work in hotels without such cooperation. The high proportion of cooperative hotels ensures that the stakeholders have a certain understanding of the graduates of Guilin Tourism University, making their evaluations more relevant and reliable.

4.2. The problems among graduated students

The survey revealed that graduates perceived high levels of problems across all learning domains (Overall Mean=3.68).

Knowledge Mastery (Mean=3.76): The most pressing issues were that "school knowledge is not sufficient for a hotel job" (Mean=3.83) and that "courses cannot help understand current industry trends" (Mean=3.80).

Professional Skills (Mean=3.62): Graduates reported that "professional skills training had little effect" (Mean=3.78) and that "practical skills taught in school cannot help adapt to hotel work faster" (Mean=3.69).

Responsibility and Application (Mean=3.67): Key deficiencies included being rarely able to "actively take responsibility in unexpected situations" (Mean=3.75) and a general "lack of sense of responsibility" (Mean=3.73).

4.3. The problems among stakeholders

Stakeholders held high expectations and rigorous evaluations of graduates (Overall Mean=3.77).

Expectations (Mean=3.81): They highly valued students who acquire knowledge through extracurricular activities (Mean=4.02) and classroom teaching (Mean=3.98), and those proficient in hotel English (Mean=3.91).

Evaluations (Mean=3.74): They prioritized strong professional ethics (Mean=3.83), the ability to enhance customer satisfaction (Mean=3.81), and overall responsibility (Mean=3.80).

4.4. Inferential Analysis

Correlation analysis revealed: Significant positive relationships between:

Practical skills and employment satisfaction ($r = 0.42, p < 0.01$)

Cross-cultural ability and job-match quality ($r = 0.38, p < 0.01$)

Regression models showed that practical skills and professional ethics were the strongest predictors of employment outcomes.

4.5. Qualitative Themes from Focus Groups

Thematic analysis identified six key themes:

- (1) Theory-Practice Gap – “Students lack real-world operational exposure.”
- (2) Soft Skills Deficit – “Communication and problem-solving are underdeveloped.
- (3) Curriculum Lag – “Courses don’t reflect digital and sustainability trends.”
- (4) Career Expectation Mismatch – “Graduates aspire to management but lack frontline readiness.”
- (5) Industry-Academia Collaboration – “Dual-mentor systems and internships are critical.”
- (6) Evaluation Reform – “Assessments should include practical and behavioral competencies.”

4.6. Macro-Context Integration

Post-COVID-19 recovery data from the Guilin Tourism Bureau (2023–2024) show a 30% rebound in tourist arrivals. Yet, hotel employment has not fully recovered, highlighting structural shifts in skill demands toward digital and personalized service roles.

5. Discussions, Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1. Discussions

5.1.1. A Systemic Gap in Competency

The triangulated data from this study, including the confirmatory statistical tests (H1, H3) and the qualitative themes, paint a clear picture of a systemic gap between graduates' competencies and the expectations of the modern hotel industry. The identified deficiencies in applied knowledge (Mean=3.76), practical skills (validated by H1), and professional responsibility (validated by H3) form an interconnected web of issues, consistent with challenges noted in broader Chinese hospitality education ^[14]. This gap is the fundamental cause of the low and volatile employment rate.

5.1.2. The Imperative of Industry Alignment

The high expectations of stakeholders for English proficiency, adaptability, and professional ethics align with global trends in hospitality, which demand "T-shaped professionals" with both deep specialization and broad transversal skills ^[15]. The failure of the curriculum to keep pace with industry trends, as highlighted by both graduates and experts, exacerbates this misalignment.

5.2. Recommendations

5.2.1. Recommendations for Practice

Based on the integrated findings, we propose a dual-phase strategy for developing learning outcomes:

Short-Term Strategies (1-2 years):

Knowledge: Introduce micro-modules on emerging trends (e.g., digital hospitality, revenue management) into existing courses. Strengthen the foundational knowledge system in core management subjects.

Skills: Immediately enhance simulation training using existing labs. Implement a structured "dual-mentor" system for internships to provide better guidance and feedback.

Responsibility: Integrate professional ethics and service culture training into core modules. Organize regular seminars with alumni and industry leaders to shape career expectations.

Long-Term Strategies (3-5 years):

Knowledge: Undertake a comprehensive curriculum review and renewal, incorporating global perspectives and interdisciplinary content (e.g., tourism technology, data analytics).

Skills: Forge long-term, strategic partnerships with international hotel chains for advanced internships and joint curriculum development. Establish a continuous feedback loop from internships to curriculum planning.

Responsibility: Build a comprehensive career development and student support system to foster professional identity, resilience, and a strong service ethos.

5.2.2. Recommendations for Further Study

This study has limitations (broad scope but insufficient depth, basic statistical methods, lack of longitudinal tracking). Future research should: Conduct longitudinal/mixed-method studies (experimental teaching, cross-institutional comparisons) to design dynamic curricula matching domestic/international hotel market needs. Explore quantitative evaluation of soft skills and their integration into assessments. Identify effective school-enterprise cooperation mechanisms to enhance employability and add student career tracking to improve research practicality.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track the impact of these interventions on employment outcomes. Mixed-methods studies could focus on quantitatively measuring soft skill development and identifying the most effective mechanisms of university-industry collaboration through cross-institutional comparative analysis.

5.3. Conclusion

This study analyzed data from 246 graduate questionnaires, 120 stakeholder questionnaires, and focus group discussions to explore low employment rate causes for Guilin Tourism University's hotel management (Sino-foreign cooperative) program and develop learning outcome optimization strategies.

Key conclusions:

Students' problems: High-level deficiencies in professional knowledge (insufficient, outdated; Mean=3.76), practical skills (inadequate leadership/communication; supported by H1), and responsibility (lack of initiative/ethics; supported by H3) directly reduce competitiveness.

Stakeholders' demands: High expectations for students' knowledge (extracurricular + classroom; Mean=4.02), English proficiency (CET-4/6 + hotel English; Mean=3.91), and professional ethics (Mean=3.83), highlighting a gap with graduates' current abilities.

Core improvement directions: Focus group discussions summarized 6 guidelines—integrate theory with practice, update curricula to industry trends, strengthen soft skills, enhance internships/school-enterprise cooperation, guide career expectations, and implement diversified evaluations.

Low employment rate is a systemic issue requiring coordinated improvements in teaching, curriculum, practice, and career guidance. Only by aligning talent cultivation with industry needs can the university enhance graduates' employability, boost employment rate, and contribute to local tourism economic development.

Academic Contribution:

This study is among the first to empirically examine the employment challenges within a Sino-foreign cooperative hotel management program in China using an integrated mixed-methods approach. It provides a validated framework for competency development that bridges theoretical constructs (CBE Theory) with empirical data, offering a replicable model for similar institutions navigating the complexities of international education and local employability.

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