

Developing Conceptual Framework for Life Skills: The Employability Requisite in the Hospitality Industry

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Abstract - New generation needs fundamental life skills in order to achieve their full potential. Life skills also known as psychosocial competencies are considered essential for employability, social inclusion, and individual growth. This study has a twofold objective, firstly it makes a distinction between the terms skills, life skills, soft skills and competencies as these terms often overlap in the literature reviewed; secondly, the study also explores whether life skills are required by graduates for employability in the hotel/hospitality industry. A critical review of the extant literature on soft skills, employability skills, competencies and employer's expectations with an emphasis on soft skills, from different sources, was conducted. A psychosocial competency framework was established. It was determined that the three domains of psychosocial competencies – the personal, social and cognitive domains impact job performance. Finally, a framework for life skills for employability was conceptualized for the hotel industry. This study contributes to the existing knowledge by developing a strong foundation of life skills. Individuals will be able to develop employability skills needed for the job. The study also gives the scope for an academia – industry interface for developing a life skills customer centric curriculum as it is a futuristic requirement for enhancing employability.

Key Words: Life skills, Soft skills, Competencies, Employability, Hotel Industry, Conceptual frame work.

1. INTRODUCTION

People can learn, make good judgement's, exercise their legal rights, live healthy, productive lives, and eventually become change agents thanks to a collection of abilities, attitudes, and psychosocial competencies described as "life skills." The acquisition of life skills aids one in maintaining a sound mind and competence in the face of obstacles. These abilities can be in a variety of contexts, including gender equality in education, environmental education, peace education, education for development, livelihood and income generation, and positive health promotion, among others. They also support the development of fundamental abilities like literacy,

numeracy, and digital skills. Having life skills enables young people to actively participate in their communities, continue their education, protect themselves, and advance their health and positive social interactions.

The term life skills is recent. Life skills can also be defined as a group of psychosocial competencies that assist individuals in making wise decisions, resolving issues, thinking critically and creatively, communicating clearly, establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, empathizing with others, and managing their lives in a positive and healthy way. The term was first used in the second half of the twentieth century. In the beginning, the program was intended to develop the individual abilities to overcome self-defeating behaviour. Adkins (1970) utilized it as an instrument for problem solving to manage the self. Botvin (1972) considered it as an instrument for controlling risk taking conduct. Hopson and Scally (1980) provided a framework of training in life skills. The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion was first to acknowledge the concept of life skills in terms of making improved health decisions in 1986. Later, life skills were considered essential for employability, social inclusion, and individual growth.

If young individuals want to find work, they must have the skills necessary to succeed in the workplace. They must have the self-assurance and drive to present employable abilities during interviews, overcome obstacles during the selection process, and exhibit interpersonal skills that support teamwork and other social interactions. Young people need these fundamental life skills in order to reach their full potential. It is evident that life skills should be given due weightage, particularly for students graduating from institutions of higher learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this section is to review the work of previous researchers. To highlight the mix in the usage of terms like skills/soft skills, life skills and competencies in various studies conducted in India and abroad are

enumerated below. In some studies, there is an overlap in the use of the term “soft skills” with the attributes of life skills. Likewise, in some studies, the term soft skills have been used synonymously with competencies. However, at this juncture, the definition of skills, soft skills, life skills and competencies must be elucidated first, per some cited texts:

Definition of Skills:

“The ability either to perform some specific behavioral task or the ability to perform some specific cognitive process that is functionally related to some particular task”. (Peterson and Fleet, 2004)

“Develops over time, with practice; involves cognitive processes and manipulation of knowledge . . . and includes an element of discretion that allows performance with economy of effort”. (Hurrell, Scholarios, and Paul Thompson, 2012)

Definition of Soft Skills:

“Non-technical and not reliant on abstract reasoning, involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular contexts”. (Hurrell, Scholarios, and Paul Thompson, 2012)

“Indicates all the competences that are not directly connected to a specific task; they are necessary in any position as they mainly refer to the relationships with other people involved in the organization”. (Barbara Cimatti, 2016)

Definition of Life Skills:

“The abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. (WHO, 1993)

“A group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner”. (UNICEF)

Definition of Competencies:

“A job competency is an underlying characteristic of a person which results in effective and/or superior performance in a job”. (Boyatzis, 1982)

“The body of knowledge required to effectively perform a range of tasks in a job underpins the demonstrated application of skill through this knowledge base being

selectively ‘accessed’ to support competent activity”. (Australian National Training Board, 1992)

“Competencies are the job behaviour people need to display in order to do a job effectively”. (Woodruffe, 1993). Some studies showing a random mix and overlap of the terms cited above, as well as an overemphasis on soft skills and competencies were reviewed:

Robles (2012) explained the technical knowledge and expertise required for a job are known as hard skills. Soft skills are personality traits and interpersonal skills, commonly referred to as people skills. Business executives value soft skills highly when hiring new employees. Along with having great hard skills, employers prefer new hires to also have excellent soft skills. This study revealed the top 10 soft skills that corporate executives believed were most crucial are “integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork, and work ethic.”

Jauhari (2013) mentions the key skills of IIMT students graduating from the Oxford Brookes program: critical thinking, analytical skills, leadership skills, team work, communication skills, self-management, IT skills, values of discipline and integrity. Students’ learning is based on competency development which is in sync with the desired competencies required by hotel management graduates.

Yang, et al., (2014) which competencies are necessary for hospitality graduates per requirement of industry professionals and educators, on the basis of which educational institutions can develop curricula. This would enable graduates to apply for positions within the hospitality industry. The methodology was to ask the respondents to fill in a questionnaire containing a set of managerial competencies which were: self-management, leadership and communication, efficiency and decision making legal aspects and interpersonal skills, critical thinking and career dedication, conflict and stress management.

Subramanian, (2017) investigated which skills – sets are required for those emerging from institutions of higher education. By incorporating soft skills into the curriculum, it is possible to develop the skills of management and technology graduates, preparing the students for employment.

Misra et al., (2018) emphasized that hospitality students need knowledge of ‘soft skills’ and those with such abilities are considered as a resource as they create a conducive

work environment. These abilities are required not only for day to day existence but they are required for the working environment. The skills required are: communication, interpersonal relationship, discipline, punctuality, creative thinking, critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, coping with stress, coping with emotion, empathy, self-awareness etc.

Loosekoot et al., (2018) focused on the relevance of industrial placements in helping hospitality students gain “soft skills” in addition to technical abilities acquired at their educational institutions is examined in this essay. The researchers claim that internships give a useful opportunity for students to learn and for industry to advertise their organizations to potential employees. While there are ideas like “problem-based learning” which assist students to think across subject silos. The researchers find that, in addition to hard skills, students gain communication skills, professionalism, teamwork, and personal growth using a year’s worth of student workplace diaries. The researchers suggest that while this exploratory examination of student diaries highlights the significance of internships, more should be done to maximize their benefits.

Singh et al., (2019) state the hospitality industry is one of the quickest developing sectors of industry in India and there is huge need and opportunity for youthful, instructed and qualified personnel. Academia and businesses agree that there is an expanding gap between the skills that organizations anticipate from entrance level personnel and the abilities they possess. To overcome this issue, industry experts demonstrate the requirement for development of employability skills at the entry level positions. The soft skills enumerated are: communication, inter-personal skills, stress management, problem-solving, self-management, time management, customer service skills, decision-making skills, leadership skills, cognitive skills and team work skills. Questionnaires from three stakeholders: students, employers and faculty were analyzed. The students identified the key skills as communication, work ethics, teamwork, interpersonal skills and self - management. For the employers, the important skills were communication and interpersonal skills. The skills identified by faculty were similar to those highlighted by the students with the addition of customer service.

Mohanty (2020) investigated the impact of skill training of youth in retail and hospitality sector conjointly in Odisha. Data was collected from primary and secondary sources and interviews, with result that the life skills

training program helped to improve communication skills and customer dealing.

Dasgupta (2020) opined one of the biggest employers is the hospitality industry. The world is changing at an extremely fast pace in which soft skills are overwhelming technical abilities. In the process of recruitment and selection, employability skills dominate the specialized technical abilities. The recruiters place more emphasis on psychometric tests for the selection of the ‘right’ candidate with multiple abilities. The role played by the higher education establishments are imperative at this juncture.

Pai et al., (2020) investigated managers, hotel management graduates and trainees in a cross – sectional study to ascertain the competencies required in 5 star hotels. It was concluded that 86% were ‘soft’ competencies such as communication, responsibility, teamwork, flexibility, integrity, interpersonal skills, positive attitude.

The main emphasis as per the literature reviewed, is focused on the development of either ‘skills’ or “soft skills” or “competencies”. The relevance of life skills in becoming employable is not prioritized for the hotel industry or the hospitality sector.

3. RELEVANCE OF PSYCHOSOCIAL COMPETENCIES ON JOB PERFORMANCE

However, there is ample evidence in literature that psychosocial competencies do impact job performance. A relationship between decision-making skills and managerial performance, highlighting the importance of decision-making skills for career development and work success has been reported by *Kose and Sencan (2016)*.

A cross sectional study found that complex problem-solving skills predicted job level at a large German automobile firm and was a much stronger predictor than IQ or school grades and the skill level in problem solving was found to predict the level of position within a company (*Mainert et al., 2015*).

Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) studied the shortcomings in skills in undergraduate programs in Australia, which were non-technical in nature. An online survey examined a set of 20 skills and concluded that critical thinking is the ‘corner stone’ of graduate education.

Kattara and El-Said (2014) examined how creativity and idea generating concepts are applied in upmarket hotels in Egypt. Additionally, the study aimed to pinpoint the internal obstacles that prevent hotels from using creativity

principles to their fullest potential. The findings demonstrated that hotels highly valued innovation and that the environment and culture of the workplace generally encouraged it.

A study was conducted in North Cyprus by *Elidemir et al.*, (2020) and it was opined that hiring managers or professionals should take into account a candidate's capacity for creativity, their ability to come up with solutions for difficult problems or circumstances, or their ability to make constructive adjustments to a task when determining whether to hire them. Front – line employees in hotels are more prone to stress owing to the nature of their duties *Faulkner and Patiar (1997)*. Life skills can be used to assist individuals successfully deal with stressful life events, even before they occur.

Communication is the life - line of every organization. The four – sides model also referred to as the four – ears model (*Friedman Schulz von Thun, 1981*) must be assimilated by young graduates for a successful career as it assists in encoding and decoding of communication.

The quality of inter – personal relationships between men and women in a working environment was studied by (*Lee et al.*, 2015). The results indicated that gender is an

important factor in relationships in both – superior subordinate interaction as well as team member interactions; women display more interrelatedness with co-workers and superiors whereas men are very assertive in interpersonal relationships with their superiors and co-workers.

Self - awareness is the ability to appreciate oneself including strengths and weaknesses of character. *Kordnoghahi & Pashasharefi (2005)* are proponents of self - awareness skills as being inclusive of awareness of one's rights, values, attitudes, as well as strong and weak points. Proper understanding of oneself enhances the ability to use other life skills effectively. One aspect of personal growth for young individuals is the development of empathy (*Gano-Overway, 2013*). By developing empathy, individuals learn to attend to emotional cues, listen, become sensitive to others.

Positive emotions were increased by studying emotion control skills that improve resilience. These tactics were crucial for overall well-being as well as for developing positive emotions in order to establish resilience for dealing with unpleasant emotional experiences (*Tugade and Fredrikson, 2007*). Based on the above, the psychosocial competencies framework is excerpted below:

Table 1. Psychosocial Competencies Framework

Source	Psychosocial competencies	Relevance
Kose & Sencan (2006)	Decision making	Managerial performance
Mainert (2015)	Problem solving	Predict position in hierarchy
Casner & Barrington (2006)	Critical thinking	Productivity per expectation
Kattara & El-Said (2014)	Creativity	Finding solutions to problems
Faulkner & Patair (1997)	Stress	Dealing with pressure situations
Friedman Schulz von Thun (1981)	Communication	Encoding & decoding messages
Lee et al., (2015)	Interpersonal relations	Interrelatedness
Kordnoghahi & Pashasharefi (2005)	Self-awareness	Identifying values, attitudes, strong and weak points
Gano-Overway (2013)	Empathy	Sensitivity to others

Tugade and Fredrikson Handling emotions and Resilience in unpleasant
(2007) feelings situations

3.1 EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN HOTEL/HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY EMPLOYERS' EXPECTATIONS

Employers encourage individuals who possess a broad variety of employability abilities to go along with their education and job-specific talents. According to King *et al.*, (2003) graduates were more dependent on general business courses than on specialized courses related to hotel and catering. An Australian study by Raybould and Wilkins (2005) stated that managers value interpersonal, problem-solving, and self-management skill domains as being the most important when hiring hospitality graduates. According to a study of hotels in Northern Ireland, the domestic labour market offers soft skills like communications that are market-related. It is stated that employers are of the opinion that individuals hired from outside labour markets may not be able to provide market related skills, Baum *et al.* (2007), Another Irish study by Nolan *et al.* (2010) showed that interpersonal and professional knowledge skills domain were important for employers. The value of soft skills and their dearth among recent graduates looking for work in Malaysia was examined by Chan (2011) and soft skills were viewed as essential for employability. In the Macau hospitality sector, applicants were screened for communication abilities as opposed to only selecting those with relevant training or degrees Chan and Kuok (2011). Leadership was identified as the most crucial ability for hospitality management graduates Gursoy *et al.*, (2012). In a study of Nairobi hotels, there was a substantial correlation between employers' expectations of employee competencies such as customer care, communication, and recognizing the quality of service required by international customers, Kamau *et al.*, (2012). Communication, teamwork, and multitasking, were important in learning and job scenarios Lenihan and Sheridan (2014). The process of learning from experience is referred to as experiential learning. It is a learning process that converts apparent knowledge into significant knowledge. Employers look for employability qualities such as core knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. Yang *et al.*, (2016) looked into how experiential learning activities affect the employability and revealed that experiential

learning is connected with employability skills. Adeyinka-Ojo (2018) concluded that there are 14 employability skills gaps in rural hospitality and tourism, such as, "Communication, Problem Solving, Interpersonal skills, Time management, Teamwork, Emotional and aesthetic, Planning, Initiative, Coaching and mentoring, Executing instructions, Digital literacy." Dhaliwal and Mishra (2020) identified various employability skills required by recruiters, such as, "Leadership, communication, problem-solving, interpersonal, oral and written communication, personality development, teamwork, positive attitude, customer service, professional and ethical standards, personnel management, professionalism or professional attitude, hard and soft skills, time management, decision-making, and information technology."

Across the hotel and hospitality sector, various skills have been identified which are required by graduates for employability. Employers are placing an increased emphasis on soft skills. Significant variations in how soft skills are prioritized have also been found, indicating varied levels of importance for different employers. Life skills have not taken precedence over soft skills or competencies.

Table 2. Framework of Life Skills for Employability in Hotel/Hospitality Industry

Domain	Life skills	Functions
Personal	Self-awareness	Understanding strengths, weaknesses personally
	Coping with stress	Resilience, adaptability
	Managing emotions, feelings	Handling feelings for excellent customer service
Social	Communication	Listening, exchange for customer satisfaction
	Interpersonal relations	Building rapport with customers
	Empathy	Display understanding and concern for customers
Cognitive	Creative thinking	Lateral thinking, new ideas for generating footfalls
	Problem solving	Resolving issues for excellent customer service
	Decision making	Customer satisfaction

Source: Developed by authors for the study

Life skills such as self-awareness, managing stress, and managing emotions and feelings are highly relevant to employability in the hospitality sector. This industry is centered around providing exceptional customer service and creating positive experiences for guests. Therefore, the personal domain of life skills directly influences and individual's ability to succeed in this sector.

Self-awareness is a crucial skill in the hospitality sector as it allows individuals to understand their strengths and weaknesses and personal values. This self-awareness enables employees to effectively communicate with guests, identify their needs and preferences, and provide personalized service. It also helps them understand their role within the larger organization, fostering a sense of accountability and responsibility.

Managing stress is essential for success in the fast-paced and high pressure environment of the hospitality sector. Employees in this industry often face demanding schedules, last minute changes and challenging customer situations. Individuals who can effectively manage stress are better able to stay calm and composed, make quick decisions, and maintain a positive attitude even in difficult situations. Such employees are more

likely to deliver exceptional service to guests and handle any issues that arise in an efficient and professional manner.

Furthermore, the ability to manage emotions and feelings is crucial in building strong relationships with both colleagues and guests in the hospitality sector. Employees need to be aware of their own emotions and reactions as well as those of others, to effectively navigate social interactions. This includes showing empathy towards guests, actively listening to their needs and responding appropriately. Being able to effectively manage emotions also helps in conflict resolution and teamwork, fostering a positive work environment. Employers in the hospitality sector value individuals who possess these life skills because they contribute to an organization overall reputation and success. Guests are more likely to have positive experiences and returned to establishments where they feel understood, supported, and well taken care of. By demonstrating self-awareness, managing stress, and effectively managing emotions and feelings employees can enhance their employability by becoming valuable assets to their organizations. In the social domain communication, strong interpersonal skills, and empathy are central for employability. In the

fast-paced and customer focused world of hospitality, employees need to possess these skills to ensure exceptional customer service and maintain a positive working environment.

Effective communication is paramount in the hospitality industry. The ability to convey information clearly and concisely is essential when interacting with guests, colleagues and supervisors. Communication skills enable employees to comprehend and fulfill guest needs, handle inquiries and complaints, and work collaboratively. Strong communication skills also facilitate the ability to provide accurate instructions and receive feedback. Interpersonal skills are another crucial set of life skills required in the hospitality industry. These skills enable employees to build and maintain strong relationships with colleagues and guests, fostering a pleasant and cooperative work environment. A friendly and approachable attitude is essential for creating a positive first impression, establishing rapport with guests, and ensuring their satisfaction. Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, is particularly valuable in the hospitality industry. Employees who demonstrate empathy can anticipate guests' needs and respond accordingly, ensuring a memorable and personalized guest experience. Empathy also allows employees to handle customer complaints or difficult situations with understanding and patience, resolving issues and maintaining guest satisfaction. In the dynamic and fast-paced industry like hospitality, employees often encounter complex situations that require their cognitive abilities to navigate

successfully. Creativethinking is vital in the hospitality sector has it empowers employees to come up with innovativesolutions to challenge and provide unique experiences to guests. From designing creative menus to organizing themed events, employees who possess this skill can bring fresh ideas and add a competitive edge to the business.

Critical thinking is equally crucial in the hospitality industry, where employees need to analyze information, evaluate options, and make informed decisions. By examining different perspectives and considering various factors, critical thinkers can assess the consequences of the decisions and minimize potential risks.

Problem solving skills are highly valued in the hospitality industry due to the diverse range of issues that can occur on a daily basis. Employees who are adept at problem solving can address guest complaints, resolve conflicts and handle operational challenges effectively. Ultimately, guest experience and loyalty gets enhanced.

Decision making is another cognitive skill that significantly impacts employability in the hospitality sector. The ability to make sound decisions under pressure is crucial for employees at all levels. Whether it's deciding on room allocation, allocating resources, or implementing new strategies, employees who can make well informed decisions contribute to the efficient functioning of the organization. menus to organizing themed events, employees who possess this skill can bring fresh ideas and add a competitive edge to the business.

HOTEL/HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

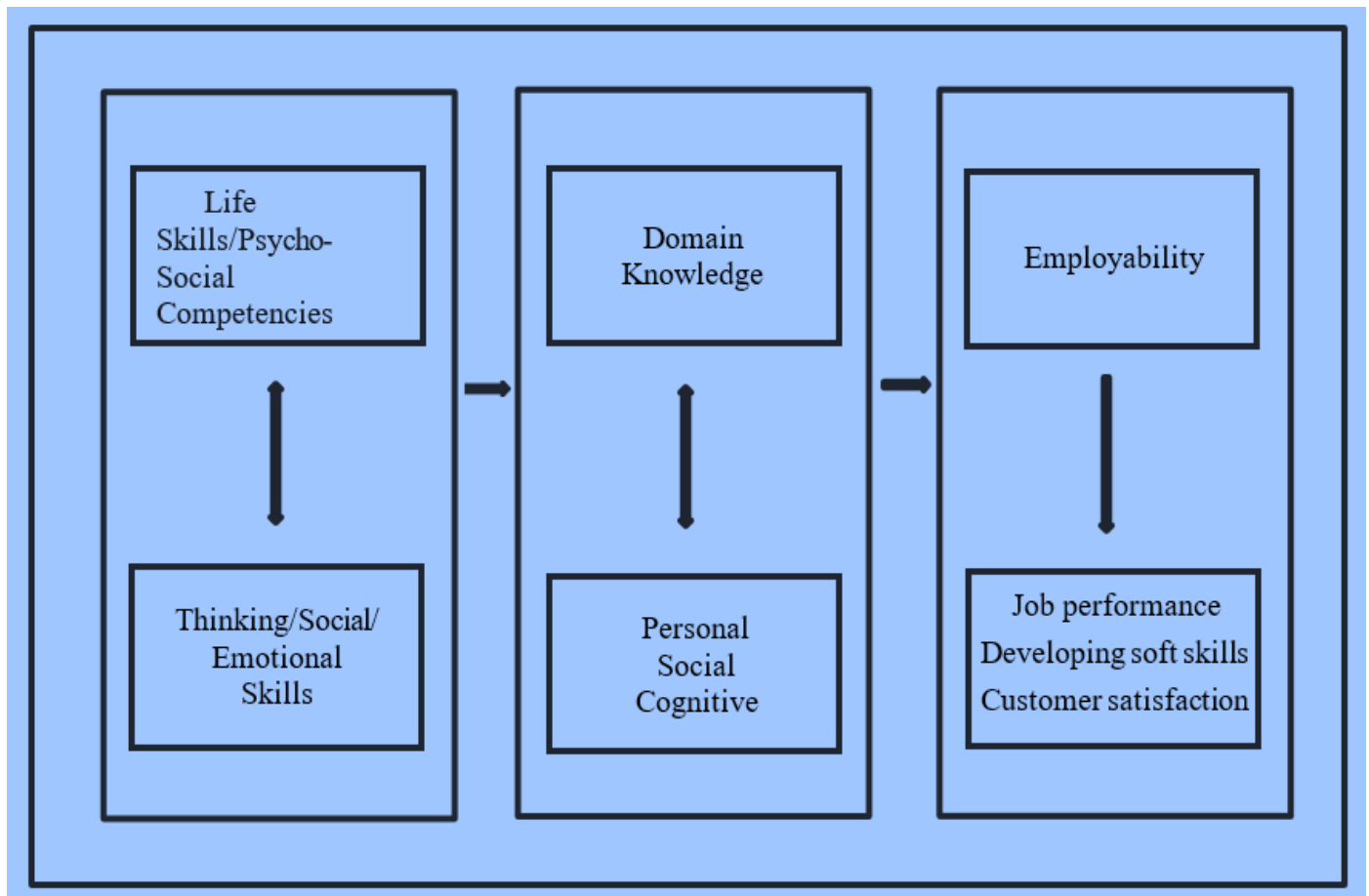


Figure. 1 Framework of Life Skills for Employability in Hotel/Hospitality Industry

4 IMPLICATIONS

Findings from the psychosocial competencies framework (Table 1) and functions of life skills (Table 2) have been conceptualized to devise a framework of life skills for employability in the hotel/hospitality sector which is presented in Fig. 1. The main contributions to the theory from this study are: 1. Life skills have an impact on job performance. 2. Life skills have an impact on the job function. 3. Knowledge of life skills will enhance employability, eventually leading to customer satisfaction with training and development programs. This can have far reaching implications on customer loyalty resulting in repeat business for the organization. The decision makers have the responsibility to implement the life skills program. By organizing training and development programs as well as workshops to improve the individual's personal, social and cognitive domain knowledge, individuals can become more competent and employable in the hospitality sector.

5 . CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The distinction between life skills, soft skills and competencies must be maintained. These terms have been used randomly in literature and often overlap thereby minimizing the significance of each. Life skills encompass a wide range of abilities and behaviour required for personal development while soft skills and competencies are more job focused and are related to performing specific tasks at hand. Understanding the distinctions between these terms is crucial for personal growth, professional success, and effective workforce development. Individuals can benefit from developing the combination of all three to enhance their overall employability and performance in various aspects. Life skills can be considered as a forerunner to soft skills. Life skills provide a foundation upon which individuals can develop and enhance their soft skills. By first developing a strong foundation of life skills, individuals are better positioned to acquire and cultivate the necessary soft skills while on the job. There should be a strong customer centric industry – academia interface to develop the life skills curriculum through joint consultations. Such a study emphasizing the relevance of life skills on employability in the hotel industry has not been conducted earlier.

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