

European and North American International Branch Campuses: Hospitality Management Students' Perspective

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European and North American International Branch Campuses: Hospitality

Management Students' Perspective

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Abstract

Every country has a dispute over the quality of education given in hospitality management schools. With the economy growing at a quick pace, the quality of hospitality management education available in Europe has become a subject of much interest. The rising expansion of this industry, with an increasing amount numbers of "branch campuses" springing up across Europe, has prompted policy makers to consider the relevance of providing high-quality hospitality management education. The major goal of this paper is to look into the quality of hospitality management education and its students' satisfaction offered at European and North American international branch campuses (IBCs) located in Europe. The research approach is based on the SERVQUAL's 5 dimensions of service quality (responsiveness, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and dependability). A questionnaire survey was conducted with more than 50 university students from more than 10 different branch campus institutions in Europe who majored in hospitality management. The study's main findings indicated unexpected results in terms of student satisfaction in all 5 dimensions of service quality, which contradicted my main hypothesis.

Keywords: Hospitality Management, International Branch Campuses, IBC, Students' Satisfaction, SERVQUAL, Higher Education

European and North American International Branch Campuses: Hospitality Management Students' Perspective

One of the most notable trends in the internationalization of higher education over the last decade has been the establishment of international branch campuses (IBCs) throughout the world. According to the most current study for the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE), there are roughly 200 IBCs currently operating throughout the world and another 37 which are planned to open during the upcoming years. According to Heyley (2015), The Middle East has become a leading host region since the mid-2000s. Education City in Qatar, for instance, is a home to branches of many American and UK educational institutions as the Ivy League Cornell University, Texas A&M System, Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University, University College London (UCL), and others. On another hand, some of the IBCs of the most popular universities as Heriot-Watt University, Curtin University, and Middlesex University are all located in Dubai International Academic City which is just a small fragment of all branch campuses located in the Dubai metropolitan area (Heyley, 2015). The first IBC was established and financed by John Hopkins University in 1955 in Bologna, Italy and, since the 2000s, when they have become more popular, the primary purpose of these educational institutions has been to provide world-class graduate education in the field of international relations (Siltaoja et al., 2019)

The concept of a branch campus is perceived as a concept that is still undergoing changes, it has been accepted as a significant new trend in higher education even though there does not seem to be any unanimous agreement on its real value and importance, nor is there one universal definition of this concept. According to the research, the term IBC itself refers to a higher education institution's offshore business, which is either administered by the university

itself or is a joint venture in which the institution is a partner and the branch campus solely utilizes the name of the foreign institution. Students receive a degree from a foreign university, by successfully completing a study program in their home country (Verbik, 2007). Some researchers even claim that having one definition would prove to be problematic because of the ongoing developments in how universities present themselves worldwide in their quest to stay competitive and relevant, and as new education providers from other regions of the world enter the market (Lawton and Katsomitros, 2012). However, the two leading organizations which monitor the growth of IBCs, Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) and Cross-Border Education Research Team (C-BERT), have tried to provide their definition of IBC, having identified in this definition certain main characteristics of the concept: ” an entity that is owned, at least in part, by a foreign education provider; operated in the name of the foreign education provider; engages in at least some face-to-face teaching, and provides access to an entire academic program that leads to a credential awarded by the foreign education provider” (C-BERT, n.d.).

Transnational education is often regarded as the most advanced level in the internationalization of higher education nowadays (Healey, 2015). IBCs are part of a broader movement in transnational or cross-border higher education, in which institutions establish a physical presence in different countries and continents. In 2016, Kinser and Lane identified the role of C-BERT from the State University of New York at Albany which has been observing the development and challenges of those throughout the world since 2009. The same authors provide relevant and constantly updated data for estimating potential future opening or closing of different IBCs. According to the same source, another leading institution that monitors the development of IBCs is OBHE. Since 2002, the OBHE has

conducted frequent surveys and released its findings every several years which is thus also become an excellent source of data for the research on IBCs. (Heyley, 2015).

Benefits for choosing an IBC

In many aspects, IBCs could be regarded as “a win-win-win phenomenon” since they imply, according to many researchers, more applicants, and more successful international relations for the home institution (Mazzarol et al 2003, Hatakenaka 2004, Marginson and Van der Wende 2007, Doorbar and Bateman 2008, Healey 2008). The research has also provided evidence to conclude that due to the development of new IBCs, the host country’s quality of higher education raises, and more local and foreign students are motivated to enroll. The main advantage for the students is to be able to earn a top-ranked degree from a reputational institution, in addition to the lower tuition cost provided by the host university, which in many situations represents just a fragment of what it would cost at the home university. Students thus have the option to get a degree from the Ivy League Cornell University while they are in Qatar, the Ivy League Harvard University’s Medical School in Dubai, or earning a UK degree from Lancaster University in Leipzig, Germany.

One of the most prestigious accreditations within management education is the “triple crown” accreditation. It consists of the accreditation granted by three main official institutions for the accreditation in higher education: Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) in the US, Association of MBAs (AMBA) in the UK, and European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) in the EU. Only around 1% of the business schools have received triple accreditation. IBCs allow students to receive a “triple crown” even in their home country: INSEAD (France) in Dubai, ESSEC Business School (France) in Singapore,

London Business School (UK) in Dubai, and many others. However the majority of IBCs is located in China, UAE, Singapore, Malaysia, and Qatar. Nowadays, branch campuses can be observed all over the globe- from Croatia to Poland, Cyprus to Egypt, Rwanda to the Seychelles, and many others (Bridgestock, 2012).

Bridgestock also defines another motivation to enroll in an IBC: the ability to study in an exciting and exceptional environment often introduced as multicultural educational cities. The concept was developed for the first time in Dubai when Dubai's International Academic City was founded. A similar structure can still be found in educational cities in Qatar and Malaysia. These academic hubs combine many institutions by providing the students with more pleasant experiences and larger student communities. The author names these centers as "multi-versities" and claims that another advantage of these centers is that resources and facilities tend to be shared among the institutions within the Academic City. For instance, students from Georgetown University in Qatar can enroll in classes at Qatar's Educational City's other foreign branch universities, and the credits will be added to their home university's degree (Bridgestock, 2012).

The tuition of the IBCs is oscillating, and it depends on the geographic locations. If a home institution is publicly sponsored, branches do not often receive any financial support either from the local government or from the parent university. This might imply that sometimes public universities charge higher tuitions in comparison to their home universities because they are more reliant on tuition fees in order to prevent the branch university from bankruptcy and shutdown (Bridgestock, 2012).

However, in many cases, the tuition costs of the branch universities are drastically lower in comparison to the “parent” institutions. For instance, at Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, NY, undergraduate students are currently charged \$52,030 per year. This amount is almost 7 times bigger (\$7,400) than the yearly cost of the students pursuing the same degree at their branch campus in Croatia (RIT Croatia). Another example is Clark University in Worcester, MA. Graduate students who are pursuing a master’s degree in Communication at this university are currently charged \$29,850 which is several times higher than the tuition cost at their branch campus in Poland. At the same time, the cost for a graduate student outside of the European Union currently is \$9,970 and for a student coming from the European Union (including Ukraine and Belarus) is \$5,917 which is 5 times lower than in Worcester. Nowadays, one of the most valuable postgraduate degrees that can ensure a rewarding starting salary is the Master of Business Administration (MBA). Coventry University’s MBA degree in Coventry, UK costs \$25,144 which is the same amount for international and UK students. On another hand Coventry University’s MBA degree in Warsaw, Poland for European Union students costs \$7,148, and for Non- European Union students \$12,994. However, most of the branch universities cost precisely the same amount/ or similar as their home institution: New York University in NYC, New York University in Abu Dhabi, and New York University in Shanghai.

The sustainability of IBCs as institutions of higher education

Altbach (2010) claims that the major issue that can increase the problem in the sustainability of IBCs is the shortage of academic staff able to relocate from the parent university to its branch. It is challenging and physically impossible to keep the instructors from the host institution on branch campuses for an extended length of time. Another potential problem in

the credibility of these institutions comes from the fact that some IBCs hire faculty members with limited or no work experience in the academia which ultimately leads to differentiation in teaching quality and lack of meeting home institution's standards. For instance, when an American university opens a branch campus overseas, attempts have been made to hire American professors in the IBC's region. Furthermore, local instructors with American expertise are prioritized in the hiring process of the US IBC. It has been always potentially damaging to the main campus to attract professors from home campuses to the branches. For instance, faculty members are concerned that the teaching activity overseas would damage their chances of advancement prospective. Additionally, senior lecturers who are actively engaged in scientific research are hesitant to leave their workplaces for relocation. Although when high compensations and other incentives are provided, it also becomes challenging to induce faculty to relocate to another country (Altbach, 2010). The same source also claims that IBCs often provide study programs and degrees with significant enrollment. Popular degrees are in Business Management and Information Technology. These majors do not require high setup costs but are in high worldwide demand. However, branches often teach a limited number of programs and rarely replicate the home institutions in terms of infrastructure and overall experience (Altbach, 2010).

In order for an IBC to provide a model of higher education that is comparable to that delivered at the parent institution, the class enrollment must be similar or close in terms of selectivity. This paradigm will be hard to implement, particularly for prestigious universities like Harvard, Duke, UCL, and other similar leading universities since managing an IBC of a lower-ranked university will be less difficult than managing an IBC of Carnegie Mellon University or INSEAD. Nowadays, it is arguable if any of the branches select students who are only admissible at the parent institution. This is proved by the fact that while every year

many American universities publish official results of the acceptance rate of their home institutions, it is very difficult to find similar data about acceptance rate at the branch campuses (Altbach, 2010)

Development and diversification of IBCs

The research shows that the number of IBCs continues to increase and that the overall market is growing at a faster rate than ever before. According to C-BERT, in the period between 1996 and 2015, more than 200 branch campuses were operating worldwide.

The data provided data from the OBHE confirms a 44 % increase from the reported 160 IBCs in 2009. It is evident that the permanent development is impressive; however, it does not come without declines. According to the data from another source, in 2015 at least 27 IBCs stopped operating globally. In comparison with the total amount of branch campuses, the shutdown rate is therefore approximately at 10%. Taking into consideration the fact that the IBCs are entrepreneurial organizations similar to start-up companies, the percentage is surprisingly lower than this closure percentage of high-tech start-ups, which show a very high risk of closures (Kinser and Lane, 2016).

On another hand, there are IBCs that are quite successful which have developed large branch campuses outside of the home countries with significant enrollment rates and the current data show that there are more than 25 branch campuses with over 2,000 students enrolled. Some of the largest institutions with over 6,000 students are Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University in China, Monash University in Malaysia, and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Vietnam. It is interesting to observe that the growth of IBCs occurs even in locations that are

not current trend of IBCs occurs even in locations that are not generally associated with branch campuses: Georgia Institute of Technology in France, Westminster International University in Uzbekistan, Carnegie Mellon University in Rwanda, Lancaster University in Pakistan, the University of Bologna in Buenos Aires, and others. C-BERT thus provides relevant data that indicate the diversification of exporting and hosting institutions of higher education. In their research, Kinser and Lane (2016) thus define that 32 countries export programs and degrees in higher education to 75 countries and conclude that a new trend is not only West-East flow, but rather a mixture of multiple directions. For instance, the same research also reveals some surprisingly interesting facts according to which Russia is the 3rd largest exporter of IBCs, sponsoring around 20 international campuses, including 5 in the United States (Kinser and Lane, 2016)

IBCs and the Local Government

Some of the first universities which introduced the concept of branch campuses such as Florida State University with its campus in Central America, John Hopkins University with its campus in Italy, and Webster University with multiple campuses around the globe, tended to function as wholly owned subsidiaries of the mother institution. These institutions typically operated without much regulatory oversight from the host nation. However, nowadays, the government's involvement has increased by playing a substantial role in IBC management. It is currently uncommon for local governments to be uninvolved in some way. They adopted various techniques and strategies ranging from laissez-faire to meticulous planning. One of the leaders in importing IBCs is Dubai, where a so-called "a free-market approach" was developed to enhance the growth of IBCs. The government planned to import a respectful

number of IBCs to educate the country's community, which gave them the freedom to establish their own viable business models (Kinser and Lane, 2016).

On another hand, a far more organized and planned strategy is used in Qatar. The government involvement is considered to be rather excessive, since the government chooses which institutions of higher education to partner with, also determining which programs and degrees can be delivered as well as the amount of substantial financial support to cover the operational costs (Kinser and Lane, 2016).

According to the same source, another leading importer of IBCs is China. China adopted a different strategy in comparison with Dubai and Qatar. The focus is on institutional partnership rather than the actual establishment of IBCs. For instance, Duke Kushan University established a strong partnership with Duke University in the US. However, the institution Duke Kushan University was recognized as an independent university in the Chinese educational system, and the graduated students can only receive a degree from that institution and not the one from Duke University (Kinser and Lane, 2016).

The online database of IBCs of C-BERT is updated regularly every several months. Table 1 below shows statistics for the top 5 exporting countries and the provided number of active branch campuses in November 2020. The data eliminates IBCs that are known to have closed as well as those that are currently in the planning stages. By observing the data, it can be concluded that IBCs are mostly established by higher education institutions from the countries such as: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Australia. According to the latest updated data from C-BERT, unusually Russia enters the statistics as the 4th largest exporter of IBCs. The exported IBCs of the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, and

Australia account for 71% out of the total number of these institutions (Heyley, 2015). On another hand, the data in the same table indicate that China, United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Malaysia, and Qatar are the top 5 destinations for IBCs. The sum of IBCs in these 5 countries accounts for 38% out of all 304 IBCs (Heyley, 2015).

Table 1: International branch campuses by 5 leading home and host countries, November 2020

	Export Country	Number of IBCs	Import Country	Number of IBCs
1	United States	86	China	42
2	United Kingdom	44	UAE	33
3	France	38	Singapore	16
4	Russia	29	Malaysia	14
5	Australia	20	Qatar	11
6	Other	87	Other	188
	Total	304	Total	304

Source: C-BERT (updated November 20, 2020)

Table 2: International branch campuses by 5 leading home and host countries, March 2014

	Export Country	Number of IBCs	Import Country	Number of IBCs
1	United States	85	UAE	34
2	United Kingdom	25	China	24
3	Australia	16	Singapore	15
4	France	12	Qatar	10
5	India	9	Canada	7
6	Other	54	Other	111
	Total	201	Total	201

Source: C-BERT (updated March 2014)

The data confirm the increase of French exporting universities with more than 3 times in comparison to 2014. Furthermore, it is evident that Russia was not even part of the top 5 exporting countries in 2014, but, nevertheless, in 2020, Russia reaches the 4th place with branch campuses mainly located in the ex-Soviet Union countries. Another impressive result was achieved by the United Kingdom. The number of the UK branch campuses outside of the UK almost doubled for only 6 years in comparison with the data from 2014.

On another hand, the ranking for importing countries for the period between 2014 and 2020 has changed too. The data shows that in 2020, China was the most desirable destination for importing IBCs. China almost doubled the branches founded in their territory for 6 years similarly to Malaysia which also increased the number of IBCs opened in its region. In 2020, Malaysia became a host for more than 12 new IBCs while in 2014 its results were not selected in the C-BERT ranking.

Method

In order to collect the data relevant for measuring the level of satisfaction of students with IBCs, the author of the research decided to use the SERQUAL method which has already been accepted and identified by many other researchers such as Al-Alak & Alnaser (2012), Stasiak- Betlejewska, Kaye, Dyason, Stachová, & Urbancová (2014); Yousapronpaiboon (2014); Zeshan, Afridi, & Khan (2010). This method has been chosen since previously mentioned researchers have already evaluated whether SERVQUAL as a potentially valid tool in the assessment of education and educational programs. Since the prior studies showed some inconsistencies and the lack of validity when measuring the students' perceptions of service quality, this research is primarily focused to explore and define the level of satisfaction with IBC programs and education offered at IBCs of American and European institutions located in Europe. The questionnaire created included therefore statements based on five dimensions of the SERQUAL method: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

The survey includes 2 short-answered questions, 16 Likert scale statements, 3 demographic questions, and 1 comment area for any additional information. Some of the original wording of the statements has been altered to fit the terminology utilized in the field of education but the format of the questionnaire was adapted from the original questionnaire used in 2017 by Datta and Vardhan. The analysis of the results was based on calculating the mean and standard deviation of each of the statements in the survey and comparing it to the 5 Likert scale scoring.

The population for this study Students enrolled in hospitality courses at an IBC in Europe was considered. For the aim of data analysis, the survey was distributed online through social media such as LinkedIn and Facebook. Additionally, personalized emails were sent individually to each of the targeted universities and hotel schools. The final amount of fulfilled surveys was 56.

Sample Design and Data Collection

In order to collect the data, undergraduate and postgraduate students from more than 10 IBCs of American and European institutions located in Europe completed a self-administrated questionnaire. The results from the survey show that the leader of exporting IBCs was US 29 (52%), followed by France 14 (25%), Switzerland 9 (16%), and the UK 4 (7%). On another hand, the collected data for hosting institutions was much more diverse: Croatia 29 (52%), Spain 11 (20%), Bulgaria 4 (7%), Montenegro 4 (7%), the UK 4 (7%), Andorra 2 (4%), and Belgium 2 (4%).

Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

The demographic information of the participants was listed below, including their gender, level of studies, and region of origin. The demographic data was based on a frequency and percentage distribution. There were 23 (41%) male students, 32 (57%) female students, and 1 (2%) non-binary student. The majority of the respondents were undergraduate students 38 (68%) and 18 (32%) postgraduate students. Participants' most common region of origin was Europe 48 (86%), followed by Asia 6 (11%), and North America 2 (4%).

Results

The analysis of the study was done by calculating the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of each of the statements. Each of the allegations was structured based on SERVQUAL's five dimensions of service: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The statements in the questionnaire were chosen to represent viewpoints of students in hospitality management education and identify corresponding five categories of service quality.

The overall experience of the survey's attendees was measured using a rather high general agreement level of satisfaction based on a 5 Likert scale (M=4.05, SD=0.88). The results obtained show the lowest level of agreement with the statement that the IBC's Career Services staff provided job placements and career assistance (M=3.55, SD=1.08). Over 30% of respondents agreed but at the same time stayed neutral with that statement, while 21% strongly agreed, followed by 13% of disagreement. Interestingly, the results show that postgraduate students had a better experience with the Career Services at their IBC (M=3.62, SD=1.07), in comparison with undergraduate students (M=3.47, SD=1.14). The gender factor did not illustrate an important role in analyzing the result because male and female students had similar results (M1=3.58, SD1=1.08, M2=3.55, SD2=1.08).

Among the statements with a low level of agreement was also the statement which explored whether IBC's facilities were used to develop students' interests and talents. Disregarding the overall low level of agreement (M=3.61), the variety of received answers was rather high (SD=1.17), especially in reference to undergraduate students (SD=1.21). Overall, 27% of the undergraduate students agreed with the statement, and 18% strongly appreciated IBC's

facilities. However, 32% neither agreed nor disagreed, followed by 18% of disagreement and 5% with a high dissent.

In general, all attendees agreed that the IBC campuses they attended provided them with a safe studying environment ($M=4.45$, $SD=0.71$). The high level of compliance was observed separately not only by males and females ($M_1=4.42$, $SD_1=0.72$, and $M_2=4.45$, $SD_2=0.72$) but also by undergraduate and postgraduate students ($M_3=4.47$, $SD_4=0.77$, and $M_4=4.38$, $SD=0.74$). However, postgraduate students at IBCs seemed to express a slightly less agreement with this statement and the results show that their satisfaction level with a safe environment studying environment was lower if compared with graduate students.

Discussion

The primary goal of this research was to identify the characteristics that mainly influence the quality of service and education offered by hospitality management branch campuses of European and North American institutions of higher education located in Europe. Another goal of the research was to present a conceptual and practical framework for a decision-making process that could be beneficial for institutions of higher education when deciding to open a new IBC. The research shows that adequate evaluation and assessment of services and overall management at IBCs is essential for enhancing the quality of service and education at any institution of higher education. The conventional five aspects identified by SERVQUAL of responsiveness, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and reliability were used to evaluate the quality of overall educational service provided by these institutions. The findings of this survey revealed that hospitality management students in IBCs from 7 different countries (Croatia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Belgium, Andorra, Switzerland and the UK) had a favorable

overall experience with the level of education they received at these institutions. The initial hypothesis was that students of hospitality management programs at IBCs will be less satisfied with the overall quality of education and services offered which will require changes in the programs and the organization of the studies has thus not been confirmed.

The research has however shown that the major level of dissatisfaction of students was related to the work of the Career Services staff at IBCs. According to the data collected, the majority of students were dissatisfied with the career counseling they received during their undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. This finding can be interpreted with a common belief according to which most students believe that only obtaining a university degree from a reputable institution will guarantee them immediate job placement and a successful professional career. The research has also shown that many universities that offer degrees in hospitality management do not organize specialized career-related events such as career fairs, which could potentially increase their visibility and help their students, find their place on the job market. It is also clear that the main responsibility of institutions of higher education in this area should be to provide excellent education and service to students, while the responsibility of the students is to apply the knowledge and the skill set they have learned in their search for jobs. It is clear that IBCs also should strive to make this process of job search easier to students and more organized, offering a respected legitimacy to potential employers. The main responsibilities of career services teams have been limited to assisting students with updating their CVs and offering assistance with writing strong motivation letters. Any additional organized career fairs are typically a tradition for specific colleges and schools that offer programs in hospitality. Another factor to potentially consider is that IBCs rarely have access to the same career services data as their parent institutions. As a result, students are not

satisfied since they expected to be able to network with the same number of potential employers as their home institutions, for example in the US.

Interestingly enough, the results have shown that the overall satisfaction among postgraduate students is slightly better than the level of satisfaction of undergraduate students. I believe that this gap is understandable since the length of these educational programs is different, which makes the overall engagement of the students lower, including their expectations. In most cases, Master's programs (or postgraduate programs) last up to two years, whereas bachelor's programs (or undergraduate programs) last up to four years. As a result, it could be safe to conclude that postgraduate students generally do not have enough time to adjust to their new learning environment in the institution, which could also then prevent them to have higher expectations.

The research has shown that most students at IBCs are not satisfied with the level of quality of IBCs' sports facilities and with the overall student life experience. The data show that outside college activities are better organized in some geographic locations than in others. The results of the survey thus show that the students from IBC in Croatia are less satisfied in comparison to their peers in Western Europe. I believe that the cultural aspect is critical for students' perception, which is connected also with the level of intercultural competence and the understanding of the environment in which the students study.

Furthermore, some IBCs are financially constrained by their parent institutions, which can potentially result in a lack of investment in student life activities and thus lower level of students' satisfaction in this category of evaluation. Some of the comments that the participants entered show that students believe that IBCs should invest more in the

organization of activities and programs for international students. It is safe to assume that foreign students have different expectations than local students and these need to be taken into consideration when organizing programs and activities related to the student body. Their expectations are considerably higher due to the fact that they have left the comfort of their country to receive a higher quality education abroad.

The overall students' satisfaction at IBCs was influenced by the safe environment for educational purposes which these institutions provide. Understandably, students' safety will be the main priority. Of course, the IBC's geographical location, based on the nation or city of origin, has a major influence on it. The majority of respondents in the survey agreed that the level of security provided at their branch institutions was adequate, implying that mother universities carefully and cautiously select the hosting locations in order to create a positive experience and high satisfaction for their students.

The limitation of the study was the small pool of hospitality institutions that were included in this research. Half of the participants in the survey were from Croatia and were approached in a snowballing manner which did not allow me to receive broader and more accurate results from the research.

Hospitality management education in the field of higher education clearly contributes directly to the economy of a nation ensuring professionals with well-defined skill sets and knowledge in hospitality. It is important to understand how particular programs in hospitality could be beneficial to a specific location of IBC and make sure that the quality of these educational programs matches the level of students' satisfaction in order to increase the overall quality of education in this field, and, most specifically at IBCs. For future studies, an intriguing field of

research could be to investigate students' satisfaction in IBC hospitality management education in other continents such as Asia and compare it with leading hospitality management institutions in Western nations, based on the fact that Asia is a leading country in the number of IBCs globally.

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