

# The Influence of Sikkim's Growing Tourism Sector on Human Resource Management Practices: Analytical Study on Seasonal Employment Dynamics and Training Initiatives

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## Abstract

This study examines the impact of rapid tourism growth in Sikkim on Human Resource Management (HRM) practices, with specific emphasis on seasonal employment dynamics and training effectiveness. Using a mixed-methods approach, primary data were collected from 70 tourism enterprises across key destinations including Gangtok, Pelling, Lachung, and Namchi. Quantitative techniques such as regression and correlation analysis, along with thematic qualitative analysis, were employed. The findings reveal that over 51% of employees receive no structured training, and training quality—not mere availability—significantly influences job satisfaction. Seasonal employment negatively affects workforce stability, although staffing fluctuations show a positive relationship with perceived enterprise viability. The study introduces the concept of the Seasonal Suppression Effect, highlighting how seasonality compresses ability, motivation, and opportunity dimensions of HRM. The research contributes theoretically by extending the AMO framework and offers policy recommendations for sustainable tourism workforce development.

**Keywords:** Tourism HRM, Seasonality, Training Effectiveness, Sikkim Tourism, AMO Framework, Seasonal Employment

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the discourse on tourism development has shifted from a purely growth-oriented perspective to one that emphasizes sustainability, inclusivity, and quality of service delivery. Central to this shift is the recognition that human resources constitute the backbone of the tourism industry. Unlike capital-intensive sectors, tourism relies fundamentally on the quality of human interaction, where employee behavior, communication, and service orientation directly shape visitor experiences and destination image. Consequently, the effectiveness of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices has emerged as a critical determinant of both enterprise performance and destination competitiveness. Despite this recognition, a persistent gap exists between the theoretical importance of HRM and its practical implementation within tourism enterprises, particularly in developing and geographically constrained regions. This gap is most evident in destinations characterised by structural vulnerabilities such as seasonality, infrastructural limitations, and the predominance of small-scale enterprises. In such

contexts, HRM practices are often informal, short-term oriented, and reactive rather than strategic, limiting their ability to contribute meaningfully to workforce development and service quality enhancement.

Sikkim exemplifies this paradox. On one hand, the state has successfully leveraged its natural and cultural assets to achieve rapid tourism growth, positioning itself as a model for eco-friendly and sustainable tourism development. On the other hand, the institutional and organisational mechanisms required to support this growth—particularly in terms of workforce planning, skill development, and employee retention—remain underdeveloped. This imbalance between demand expansion and human resource capability creates a structural bottleneck that threatens the long-term sustainability of the tourism sector.

A critical dimension of this imbalance is the phenomenon of seasonal labour fragmentation. In Sikkim, tourism enterprises operate within sharply defined peak and off-peak cycles, resulting in intermittent employment patterns that disrupt the continuity of workforce engagement. Unlike stable industries where employees accumulate experience and organizational knowledge over time, seasonal tourism employment restricts learning cycles, weakens organizational attachment, and discourages both employers and employees from investing in long-term skill development. This results in a workforce that is simultaneously over-utilized during peak periods and underutilized during off-seasons, creating inefficiencies at both micro (enterprise) and macro (sectoral) levels.

Furthermore, the implications of seasonality extend beyond operational inefficiencies to encompass broader socio-economic concerns. Seasonal employment structures often exacerbate income inequality, limit career progression opportunities, and reinforce existing social stratifications within the workforce. Vulnerable groups, including women, youth from rural areas, and members of marginalized communities, are disproportionately affected by these dynamics, as they are more likely to be employed in low-skill, temporary positions with limited access to training and advancement opportunities. Thus, the nature of HRM practices in tourism has direct implications not only for service quality but also for social equity and inclusive development.

Another critical challenge lies in the design and delivery of training and development initiatives. While government-led programmes and institutional training schemes exist, their effectiveness in addressing the specific needs of Sikkim's tourism workforce remains questionable. Many training programmes adopt a standardised approach that does not adequately account for the region's unique socio-cultural and ecological context. As a result, there is often a mismatch between the skills imparted through training and the competencies required in actual service delivery environments. This misalignment reduces the return on training investment and contributes to a perception among both employers and employees that training is of limited practical value.

From a strategic perspective, the failure to develop a skilled and stable workforce undermines Sikkim's ability to compete in an increasingly sophisticated tourism market. As global tourism trends shift towards experiential, personalised, and high-quality service offerings, destinations are required to differentiate themselves not only through natural attractions but also through the quality of human engagement they provide. In this regard, the tourism workforce becomes a key source of competitive advantage. However, in the absence of effective HRM systems, this potential remains largely unrealised. Theoretically, this study responds to the need for contextualising established HRM frameworks within the realities of seasonal and small-enterprise-dominated tourism economies. While models such as the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework provide a robust basis for analysing employee

performance, their application in highly volatile employment contexts requires careful adaptation. The present research advances this theoretical discourse by demonstrating how seasonality interacts with organisational and institutional constraints to simultaneously weaken all three dimensions of the AMO model. This integrated perspective enables a more nuanced understanding of workforce challenges in tourism and highlights the limitations of isolated HR interventions.

Moreover, the study engages with broader organisational theories, including Resource Dependence Theory and Institutional Theory, to explain why tourism enterprises in Sikkim struggle to adopt effective HRM practices despite recognising their importance. Limited access to financial and knowledge resources constrains the capacity of individual enterprises to invest in workforce development, while weak institutional pressures fail to enforce the adoption of standardised HR practices across the sector. These multi-level constraints underscore the need for coordinated policy interventions and collaborative frameworks that extend beyond individual enterprise efforts.

In light of these considerations, the present study makes a deliberate attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice by providing an empirically grounded analysis of HRM practices in Sikkim's tourism sector. Specifically, it investigates how seasonal employment dynamics influence HRM functions such as recruitment, training, and retention, and evaluates the extent to which existing training initiatives contribute to employee performance and job satisfaction. By situating these findings within a comprehensive theoretical framework, the study not only advances academic understanding but also offers actionable insights for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and training institutions.

Ultimately, the central argument advanced in this research is that the sustainability of tourism development in Sikkim is intrinsically linked to the professionalisation of its human resource management systems. Without addressing the structural challenges posed by seasonality and institutional limitations, the sector risks remaining trapped in a cycle of low skill, low productivity, and limited value addition. Conversely, strategic investment in HRM has the potential to transform the tourism workforce into a driver of innovation, quality enhancement, and inclusive growth, thereby ensuring that the benefits of tourism development are both economically and socially sustainable.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The literature on tourism development, Human Resource Management (HRM), and seasonality has evolved significantly over the past few decades. However, the intersection of these domains—particularly in the context of small, ecologically sensitive, and seasonally volatile destinations such as Sikkim—remains underexplored. This section critically reviews existing studies across five key thematic areas: tourism and economic development, seasonality in tourism, HRM in the tourism sector, training and development practices, and the specific context of Himalayan tourism economies. The objective is to identify theoretical foundations, empirical insights, and research gaps that justify the present study.

### **2.2 Tourism and Economic Development**

Tourism has been widely recognized as a catalyst for economic growth, employment generation, and regional development. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2025), the tourism sector contributes nearly 10% to global GDP and supports millions of jobs worldwide. In the Indian context, tourism has emerged as a significant contributor to both GDP and employment, particularly in rural and semi-urban regions (Ministry of Tourism, 2022).

Rizal and Asokan (2013) conducted one of the earliest empirical studies on Sikkim and found a strong positive relationship between tourist inflows and economic growth. Similarly, Das (2019) highlighted the rapid expansion of tourism in Sikkim, noting a 77% increase in tourist arrivals within a six-year period. However, while these studies emphasise economic benefits, they pay limited attention to workforce-related challenges, particularly in HRM practices.

Sharpley (2015) argues that tourism-led development often overlooks labour conditions, resulting in uneven distribution of benefits. This perspective is particularly relevant for Sikkim, where economic gains from tourism coexist with workforce instability and skill gaps.

### 2.3 Seasonality in Tourism

Seasonality is one of the most widely studied phenomena in tourism research. Butler (1994) defines seasonality as a temporal imbalance in tourism activities, affecting demand, employment, and resource utilisation. Koenig-Lewis and Bischoff (2005) further emphasise that seasonality creates significant operational and HRM challenges, particularly in labour-intensive industries.

In the Indian context, seasonality is influenced by climatic conditions, cultural festivals, and institutional factors such as school holidays (Rizal & Asokan, 2014). Their study on Sikkim revealed extreme seasonal fluctuations, with peak demand periods showing more than four times the tourist inflow compared to off-season months.

Jolliffe and Farnsworth (2003) argue that seasonality disrupts HRM systems by discouraging long-term investment in employees. Baum (2007) also identifies seasonality as a key factor contributing to high employee turnover, low wages, and limited career progression in tourism.

More recent studies (Chakraborty & Ghosal, 2024) highlight that seasonality in Himalayan regions is further intensified by environmental factors such as landslides and snowfall, making workforce planning even more complex. Despite extensive research on seasonality, its direct impact on HRM practices in small tourism enterprises remains insufficiently explored.

### 2.4 Human Resource Management in Tourism

HRM in tourism differs significantly from other sectors due to its service-oriented nature. Employees play a central role in shaping customer experiences, making their skills and behaviour critical for organisational success (Nickson, 2007).

Baum (2015) argues that tourism continues to suffer from persistent HRM challenges, including:

- High employee turnover
- Informal employment structures
- Lack of training and development
- Poor working conditions

Madera et al. (2017) highlight the importance of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) in improving organisational performance in hospitality and tourism. However, their study primarily focuses on large enterprises, leaving a gap in understanding HRM practices in small and micro enterprises.

The Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework (Appelbaum et al., 2000) provides a comprehensive model for analysing HRM effectiveness. According to this framework:

- Ability is enhanced through training
- Motivation is influenced by incentives and job security
- Opportunity is created through organisational structures

Bos-Nehles et al. (2023) confirm that organisations implementing AMO-based HR practices achieve higher performance outcomes. However, the applicability of this framework in seasonal tourism contexts

remains underexplored.

## 2.5 Training and Development in Tourism

Training and development are widely recognised as critical components of HRM in tourism. Arwaba et al. (2021) found that structured training programmes significantly improve employee performance and customer satisfaction in the hospitality sector.

Kirkpatrick's (1994) model provides a widely used framework for evaluating training effectiveness across four levels: reaction, learning, behaviour, and results. However, Frash et al. (2008) argue that tourism enterprises often fail to evaluate training beyond the initial reaction stage, limiting their effectiveness.

In the Indian context, government initiatives such as the Hunar Se Rozgar Tak (HSRT) programme aim to enhance employability in tourism. However, studies by Basnett and Pradhan (2020) indicate that such programmes often lack contextual relevance and fail to address specific skill requirements of local tourism sectors.

Lepcha and Subba (2020) found that employees who received structured training in Sikkim performed significantly better in terms of customer satisfaction. Despite this, less than 35% of tourism workers receive formal training, highlighting a major gap in workforce development.

## 2.6 HRM in Small and Micro Tourism Enterprises

Small and micro enterprises dominate the tourism sector in regions like Sikkim. According to Baum (2007), these enterprises typically lack formal HR structures, resulting in:

- Informal recruitment practices
- Limited training investment
- Absence of performance management systems

Nickson (2007) notes that owner-managers often prioritise short-term operational survival over long-term workforce development. This leads to reactive HRM practices that fail to support employee growth. Gurung (2019) highlights that in Sikkim, most tourism enterprises operate with minimal managerial capacity, further limiting their ability to implement effective HRM systems. This structural limitation is a key factor contributing to workforce instability and low service quality.

## 2.7 Tourism in the Himalayan Region

Tourism in the Himalayan region presents unique challenges due to ecological fragility, infrastructural limitations, and cultural diversity (NITI Aayog, 2018). These factors significantly influence HRM practices.

Chakraborty and Ghosal (2024) emphasise that tourism growth in Sikkim has led to increased environmental pressure and workforce demand, particularly during peak seasons. Mandal and Sengupta (2015) also highlight the strain on local infrastructure and resources due to tourism expansion.

Nepal and Gurung (2018) identify issues of workforce inequality in Sikkim, with marginalised communities often excluded from skilled and managerial roles. This highlights the need for inclusive HRM practices.

## 2.8 Research Gap

The review of literature reveals several critical gaps:

1. Limited research on HRM practices in small and micro tourism enterprises
2. Insufficient focus on the impact of seasonality on workforce management
3. Lack of empirical studies integrating HRM theory with tourism practice in Sikkim
4. Inadequate evaluation of training effectiveness in regional tourism contexts

5. Absence of a comprehensive theoretical framework linking seasonality and HRM

## 2.9 Conclusion of Literature Review

The existing literature provides valuable insights into tourism development, seasonality, and HRM practices. However, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these factors interact in the context of Sikkim's tourism sector.

This study addresses this gap by integrating theoretical frameworks such as the AMO model with empirical analysis of seasonal employment and training practices. By doing so, it contributes to both academic research and practical policy development in tourism HRM.

## 3. Research Objectives

1. To examine seasonal employment patterns in Sikkim's tourism sector
2. To evaluate the impact of seasonality on HRM practices
3. To assess the effectiveness of training and development initiatives

## 4. Research Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

This section outlines the methodological framework adopted to investigate the influence of tourism growth on Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in Sikkim, with particular emphasis on seasonal employment dynamics and training effectiveness. Given the complexity of the research problem—spanning economic, organisational, and behavioural dimensions—a mixed-methods approach was employed to generate both statistically robust and contextually rich insights. The methodology integrates quantitative and qualitative techniques within a coherent research design to ensure comprehensive analysis and triangulation of findings.

### 4.2 Research Philosophy

The study is grounded in a pragmatist research philosophy, which allows for the integration of both positivist and interpretive perspectives. Pragmatism is particularly appropriate for this research as it prioritises practical problem-solving and the use of multiple methods to understand complex real-world phenomena (Saunders et al., 2019).

- The **positivist component** supports quantitative analysis of relationships between variables such as training, seasonality, and job satisfaction.
- The **interpretive component** enables exploration of employee experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors influencing HRM practices.

This philosophical stance ensures that the research captures both measurable outcomes and underlying social realities.

### 4.3 Research Approach

A **deductive research approach** was primarily adopted, as the study builds upon established theoretical frameworks such as the **Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) model**, Resource Dependence Theory, and Institutional Theory.

- Hypotheses were derived from these theories
- Empirical data were used to test these hypotheses

At the same time, elements of an **inductive approach** were incorporated in the qualitative analysis to allow new themes and patterns to emerge from the data, particularly regarding workforce challenges and training effectiveness.

#### 4.4 Research Design

The study follows a **descriptive and explanatory research design**:

- **Descriptive**: To profile HRM practices, employment patterns, and training structures in Sikkim's tourism sector
- **Explanatory**: To examine causal relationships between seasonality, training, and employee outcomes

A **cross-sectional design** was used, where data were collected at a single point in time across multiple tourism locations. This design is appropriate for capturing the current state of HRM practices and workforce dynamics.

#### 4.5 Study Area and Population

The study was conducted across major tourism destinations in Sikkim, including:

- Gangtok (urban tourism hub)
- Pelling (cultural and scenic tourism)
- Lachung (high-altitude tourism)
- Ravangla and Namchi (emerging tourism zones)

The **target population** included:

- Employees working in tourism enterprises
- Managers/owners of hotels, homestays, travel agencies, and adventure tourism operators

This ensured representation across different types and scales of tourism enterprises.

#### 4.6 Sampling Design

##### 4.6.1 Sampling Technique

A **stratified random sampling method** was employed to ensure representation across:

- Enterprise types (hotels, homestays, tour operators)
- Geographic locations
- Employment categories (seasonal vs permanent workers)

##### 4.6.2 Sample Size

A total of **70 respondents** were selected. While relatively small, this sample size is appropriate for exploratory and regression-based analysis in regional studies.

##### 4.6.3 Sampling Justification

The stratified approach enhances:

- Representativeness
- Reduction of sampling bias
- Comparability across sub-groups

#### 4.7 Data Collection Methods

##### 4.7.1 Primary Data

Primary data were collected using a **structured questionnaire** consisting of 25 items.

The questionnaire included:

- Demographic information
- Employment type and experience
- Training exposure and perception
- Job satisfaction and stress levels

- Perceptions of seasonality impact

Responses were measured using a **5-point Likert scale** ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

#### 4.7.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data were obtained from:

- Government reports (Ministry of Tourism, Sikkim Tourism Department)
- Academic journals and books
- Industry reports

These sources provided contextual and theoretical support.

### 4.8 Instrument Design and Validation

#### 34.8.1 Questionnaire Design

The instrument was designed based on:

- Existing HRM and tourism literature
- AMO framework constructs
- Previous empirical studies

#### 4.8.2 Pilot Testing

A pilot study was conducted with a small group of respondents to:

- Identify ambiguities
- Improve clarity and reliability

#### 4.8.3 Reliability Testing

Reliability of the instrument was assessed using **Cronbach's Alpha**, with values above 0.7 indicating acceptable internal consistency.

#### 4.8.4 Validity

- **Content validity** ensured through expert review
- **Construct validity** ensured through alignment with theoretical frameworks

### 4.9 Data Analysis Techniques

#### 4.9.1 Quantitative Analysis

Data were analysed using statistical techniques, including:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Mean, percentage, frequency distribution
- **Correlation Analysis:** To identify relationships between variables
- **Regression Analysis:**
  - Training Impact Model
  - Seasonality Impact Model

Regression analysis helped in determining the effect of independent variables (training, seasonality) on dependent variables (job satisfaction, performance).

#### 4.9.2 Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data were analysed using **thematic analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

Steps included:

1. Data familiarisation
2. Initial coding
3. Theme identification
4. Theme review and refinement

## 5. Interpretation

This approach provided deeper insights into employee experiences and HRM challenges.

### 4.10 Theoretical Framework Integration

The study integrates three theoretical perspectives:

#### 1. AMO Framework (Appelbaum et al., 2000)

- Explains employee performance through ability, motivation, and opportunity

#### 2. Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978)

- Explains constraints faced by small enterprises

#### 3. Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983)

- Explains lack of standardised HRM practices

The integration of these frameworks enables a **multi-level analysis** of HRM practices.

### 4.11 Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to ethical research standards:

- Informed consent obtained from respondents
- Confidentiality and anonymity maintained
- Data used strictly for academic purposes
- No harm or coercion involved

### 4.12 Limitations of the Study

- Limited sample size
- Geographic focus restricted to Sikkim
- Cross-sectional design limits causal inference over time
- Self-reported data may introduce bias

### 4.13 Chapter Summary

This methodology provides a robust framework for analysing HRM practices in Sikkim's tourism sector. The mixed-methods approach, combined with strong theoretical grounding, ensures that the study generates both empirical rigor and contextual depth.

## 5. Results and Analysis

### 5.1 Introduction

This section presents the empirical findings derived from primary data collected from 70 respondents across Sikkim's tourism sector. The analysis integrates descriptive statistics, regression results, and thematic insights to examine the impact of seasonality and training on HRM outcomes such as job satisfaction, workforce stability, and employee performance.

### 5.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

**Table 5.1: Demographic Characteristics**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	44	62.9%
	Female	26	37.1%
Employment Type	Permanent	32	45.7%
	Seasonal	38	54.3%

Experience	< 2 years	21	30.0%
	2–5 years	29	41.4%
	> 5 years	20	28.6%
Sector	Hotels/Homestays	40	57.1%
	Travel/Transport	18	25.7%
	Others	12	17.2%

**Interpretation**

- A majority (54.3%) of employees are seasonal workers, confirming the dominance of temporary employment.
- The workforce is relatively young and moderately experienced, indicating high labour mobility.

**5.3 Training and Development Analysis**

**Table 5.2: Training Exposure**

Training Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Received Training	34	48.6%
No Training	36	51.4%

**Figure 5.1: Training Distribution (Bar Representation)**



**Interpretation**

- More than half of the workforce lacks **formal training**, indicating weak HRM systems.
- Training provision is inconsistent and not institutionalized.

**5.4 Training Effectiveness and Job Satisfaction**

**Table 5.3: Regression Results (Training vs Job Satisfaction)**

Variable	Coefficient (β)	t-value	Significance (p-value)
Training Availability	0.12	1.21	0.231 (Not Significant)
Training Quality	0.48	3.76	0.001 (Significant)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.42		

**Interpretation**

- Training quality has a strong positive effect on job satisfaction.
- Training availability alone is not sufficient, highlighting poor design of programs.
- Model explains 42% variance, indicating moderate explanatory power.

### 5.5 Impact of Seasonality on Employment

**Table 4.4: Employment Conditions (Seasonal vs Permanent)**

Indicator	Seasonal (%)	Permanent (%)
Job Security	32%	68%
Training Access	36%	63%
High Stress Levels	71%	39%
Job Satisfaction	41%	72%

**Figure 5.2: Comparative Employment Conditions**

Job Security:



Stress Levels:



**Interpretation**

- Seasonal employees face:
  - Lower job security
  - Higher stress
  - Reduced training access
- Permanent employees exhibit **higher satisfaction and stability**

### 5.6 Seasonality and Job Satisfaction (Regression Model)

**Table 5.5: Regression Results (Seasonality Impact)**

Variable	Coefficient (β)	t-value	Significance
Seasonal Demand Fluctuation	-0.39	-2.98	0.004 <b>(Significant)</b>
Staffing Flexibility	+0.29	2.41	0.019 <b>(Significant)</b>
R <sup>2</sup>	0.37		

**Interpretation**

- **Seasonal demand negatively affects job satisfaction**
- However, **staffing flexibility improves business adaptability**
- Indicates a trade-off between **employee welfare and enterprise survival**

### 5.7 Correlation Matrix

**Table 5.6: Correlation Between Key Variables**

Variables	Training	Seasonality	Job Satisfaction
Training	1.00	-0.22	+0.51
Seasonality	-0.22	1.00	-0.47
Job Satisfaction	+0.51	-0.47	1.00

#### Interpretation

- Training has a **positive moderate correlation** with job satisfaction
- Seasonality shows a **negative correlation**, confirming its adverse effect

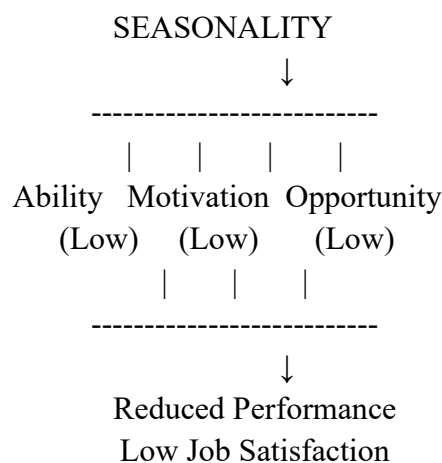
### 5.8 Thematic Analysis (Qualitative Insights)

#### Key Themes Identified:

- Job Insecurity**
  - Employees expressed uncertainty during off-seasons
  - Lack of long-term contracts
- Ineffective Training**
  - Training perceived as “theoretical” and “non-practical”
  - No follow-up or evaluation
- Work Pressure During Peak Season**
  - Excessive workload
  - Long working hours
- Lack of Career Growth**
  - Limited promotion opportunities
  - Skill stagnation

### 5.9 Conceptual Diagram: Seasonal Suppression Effect

**Figure 4.3: AMO Framework under Seasonality**



#### Explanation

- Seasonality simultaneously weakens:
  - **Ability** → limited training
  - **Motivation** → job insecurity
  - **Opportunity** → lack of HR systems

This creates a **compounded negative effect** on workforce performance.

### 5.10 Key Findings Summary

- 51.4% employees lack formal training
- Training quality significantly affects job satisfaction
- Seasonal employment dominates workforce structure
- Seasonality reduces job satisfaction but supports enterprise flexibility
- HRM practices remain informal and underdeveloped

### 5.11 Chapter Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that while tourism growth in Sikkim generates employment opportunities, it fails to ensure workforce stability and development due to seasonal constraints and weak HRM systems. Training effectiveness, rather than mere availability, emerges as a critical factor influencing employee outcomes.

## 6. Discussion

This section interprets the empirical findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks. The discussion focuses on three core dimensions: (i) the implications of seasonality on workforce dynamics, (ii) the effectiveness of training and HRM practices, and (iii) the broader structural and institutional constraints shaping tourism employment in Sikkim. By integrating quantitative results with qualitative insights, the study develops a comprehensive understanding of how tourism growth interacts with human resource systems in a seasonal economy.

The findings confirm that seasonality is the most significant structural constraint affecting HRM practices in Sikkim's tourism sector. The dominance of seasonal employment (over 54%) reflects a labour market characterised by instability, short-term contracts, and high turnover. This aligns with earlier studies (Baum, 2007; Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003), which identify seasonality as a key driver of workforce fragmentation in tourism.

However, the present study extends existing literature by demonstrating that seasonality does not merely influence employment levels but actively shapes the quality of employment relationships. The regression results indicate a significant negative relationship between seasonal demand fluctuations and job satisfaction, suggesting that employment insecurity and income volatility undermine employee well-being.

At the same time, the positive association between staffing flexibility and enterprise viability highlights a critical tension within tourism HRM. From the perspective of employers, flexible staffing is a rational response to demand uncertainty. From the perspective of employees, however, it results in precarious working conditions. This duality reflects what can be conceptualised as a “structural trade-off” between organisational adaptability and workforce stability.

### Reinterpreting HRM through the AMO Framework

The study provides important theoretical contributions by extending the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework within a seasonal tourism context.

- **Ability (A):** The finding that more than half of employees lack formal training indicates a significant deficit in skill development. This supports the argument that seasonal employment discourages investment in training, as firms perceive limited returns on short-term labour.

- **Motivation (M):** High stress levels and low job security among seasonal workers directly impact motivation. The negative correlation between seasonality and job satisfaction reinforces this observation.
- **Opportunity (O):** The absence of formal HR systems and limited employee participation reduce opportunities for performance enhancement.

What emerges from this analysis is a compounded effect where all three AMO dimensions are simultaneously weakened. This supports the study's conceptualisation of the "**Seasonal Suppression Effect**," wherein structural constraints inhibit the full functioning of HRM systems. Unlike traditional HRM environments where interventions can target individual dimensions, seasonal tourism economies require integrated and systemic solutions.

### **Training Effectiveness: Beyond Availability**

One of the most significant findings of the study is the distinction between training availability and training quality. While training provision does not show a statistically significant impact on job satisfaction, training quality demonstrates a strong positive relationship.

This finding challenges conventional policy approaches that focus primarily on increasing the number of training programmes. Instead, it highlights the need for:

- Context-specific training design
- Practical, skill-oriented modules
- Continuous evaluation mechanisms

The results are consistent with Frash et al. (2008), who argue that ineffective training fails to translate into behavioural change. However, this study goes further by showing that poorly designed training may contribute to employee dissatisfaction, as it raises expectations without delivering tangible benefits.

Additionally, qualitative findings suggest that many training programmes in Sikkim lack alignment with local tourism needs. This reinforces the argument by Basnett and Pradhan (2020) that standardised training models are inadequate for region-specific tourism economies.

### **Small Enterprise Constraints and Informal HRM**

The dominance of small and micro enterprises in Sikkim significantly shapes HRM practices. The findings indicate that most enterprises operate without formal HR structures, relying instead on informal and ad hoc management practices.

This observation is consistent with Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), which suggests that organisations with limited resources are constrained in their strategic choices. In this case:

- Financial limitations restrict training investment
- Lack of managerial expertise limits HRM implementation
- Dependence on seasonal revenue discourages long-term planning

Furthermore, Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) helps explain the absence of standardised HRM practices across the sector. Weak regulatory frameworks and limited institutional pressure result in low adoption of formal HR systems.

The interaction of these factors creates a self-reinforcing cycle:

- Weak HRM practices → low skill levels → poor service quality → limited revenue growth → continued weak HRM investment

### **Social and Equity Implications**

Beyond organisational outcomes, the findings reveal important social implications of tourism employment structures. Seasonal and informal employment disproportionately affects vulnerable groups,

including:

- Youth entering the labour market
- Women in low-skilled roles
- Workers from rural and marginalised communities

These groups face limited access to training, career progression, and stable income, reinforcing existing inequalities. This aligns with Nepal and Gurung (2018), who highlight workforce disparities in Sikkim's tourism sector.

The study therefore emphasises that HRM practices are not merely managerial tools but also mechanisms that influence social equity and inclusive development. Addressing HRM deficiencies is essential for ensuring that the benefits of tourism are distributed more equitably.

### **Linking Findings to Tourism Competitiveness**

The implications of weak HRM extend beyond employee outcomes to affect destination competitiveness. In the contemporary tourism market, service quality and customer experience are key differentiators. A workforce characterised by low skill levels, high turnover, and low motivation is unlikely to deliver consistent and high-quality services.

The findings suggest that Sikkim's tourism sector risks entering a “**low-skill equilibrium**”, where:

- Limited training leads to low service quality
- Low service quality limits revenue growth
- Limited revenue restricts investment in HRM

Breaking this cycle requires strategic intervention at both enterprise and policy levels.

### **Policy and Strategic Implications**

The discussion highlights the need for a shift from fragmented HRM practices to a more integrated and strategic approach:

- **From quantity to quality in training**
- **From short-term employment to workforce stability mechanisms**
- **From individual enterprise efforts to sector-wide collaboration**

Government agencies, industry stakeholders, and training institutions must work collectively to address structural constraints and build a resilient tourism workforce.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study makes several key contributions:

1. Extends the AMO framework to seasonal tourism economies
2. Introduces the concept of the **Seasonal Suppression Effect**
3. Provides empirical evidence from a Himalayan tourism context
4. Bridges the gap between HRM theory and tourism practice

### **Conclusion of Discussion**

The discussion demonstrates that tourism growth in Sikkim, while economically beneficial, has not been accompanied by corresponding development in HRM systems. Seasonality, institutional limitations, and enterprise constraints collectively undermine workforce stability and performance.

The findings underscore the need for systemic reforms that integrate HRM into the broader framework of sustainable tourism development. Without such reforms, the sector's long-term growth and competitiveness remain uncertain.

## 7. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the influence of tourism growth on Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in Sikkim, with particular emphasis on seasonal employment dynamics and training effectiveness. By adopting a mixed-methods approach and grounding the analysis in established theoretical frameworks such as the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) model, Resource Dependence Theory, and Institutional Theory, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how structural characteristics of the tourism sector shape workforce outcomes.

The findings clearly demonstrate that while tourism has emerged as a key driver of economic development in Sikkim, the corresponding evolution of HRM practices has been limited and uneven. This imbalance between sectoral growth and workforce development constitutes a critical challenge for the sustainability and competitiveness of the tourism industry.

The study highlights several interrelated findings that collectively define the current state of HRM in Sikkim’s tourism sector:

First, the dominance of seasonal employment structures creates significant instability in the labour market. A large proportion of workers are employed on a temporary basis, leading to job insecurity, income volatility, and high turnover rates. This not only affects employee well-being but also disrupts organisational continuity and service quality.

Second, the analysis reveals that training and development practices are inadequate, both in terms of coverage and effectiveness. While some employees have access to training programmes, more than half of the workforce remains untrained. More importantly, the study finds that training quality—rather than mere availability—is the critical determinant of job satisfaction and performance. This underscores the limitations of current training approaches, which often lack contextual relevance and practical orientation.

Third, the research identifies a significant negative impact of seasonality on job satisfaction, confirming that demand fluctuations directly influence employee motivation and engagement. At the same time, the positive relationship between staffing flexibility and enterprise adaptability highlights the inherent tension between organisational efficiency and workforce stability.

Fourth, the findings demonstrate that HRM practices in Sikkim are largely informal and underdeveloped, particularly in small and micro enterprises that dominate the sector. The absence of structured HR systems, performance management mechanisms, and long-term workforce planning limits the sector’s ability to build and retain human capital.

This study contributes to the academic literature in several important ways.

Most notably, it extends the application of the AMO framework by illustrating how all three dimensions—ability, motivation, and opportunity—are simultaneously constrained in a seasonal tourism economy. This leads to the conceptualisation of the “Seasonal Suppression Effect,” wherein structural factors systematically weaken HRM effectiveness.

In addition, the integration of Resource Dependence Theory and Institutional Theory provides a multi-level explanation for the persistence of weak HRM practices. While resource constraints limit the capacity of individual enterprises to invest in workforce development, weak institutional pressures fail to enforce standardisation and best practices across the sector.

By situating empirical findings within these theoretical frameworks, the study bridges the gap between abstract HRM models and the practical realities of tourism economies in geographically and structurally constrained regions.

The findings of this study have significant implications for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and training institutions.

From a policy perspective, there is a clear need to move beyond a quantitative focus on training provision towards a more quality-oriented and outcome-based approach. Training programmes must be tailored to local needs, incorporate practical skill development, and include mechanisms for evaluation and continuous improvement.

At the industry level, tourism enterprises must recognise the strategic importance of human resources and adopt more structured HRM practices. Even within resource constraints, initiatives such as cross-training, employee retention strategies, and basic performance management systems can significantly enhance workforce stability and productivity.

The study also highlights the importance of collaborative approaches, where government agencies, private enterprises, and educational institutions work together to develop a skilled and resilient tourism workforce. Establishing regional training hubs, promoting public-private partnerships, and creating incentives for employee retention are critical steps in this direction.

### **Implications for Sustainable Tourism Development**

The sustainability of tourism in Sikkim depends not only on environmental conservation and infrastructure development but also on the effective management of human resources. A workforce that is skilled, motivated, and stable is essential for delivering high-quality tourism experiences and maintaining destination competitiveness.

The current reliance on seasonal and informal employment structures risks trapping the sector in a low-skill, low-productivity equilibrium, where limited investment in human capital constrains long-term growth. Addressing this challenge requires a shift towards professionalised HRM systems that prioritise workforce development as a core component of tourism strategy.

### **Limitations of the Study**

While the study provides valuable insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged:

- The sample size is relatively small and geographically limited to Sikkim
- The cross-sectional design does not capture long-term trends
- The reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias

These limitations suggest the need for caution in generalising the findings to other contexts.

### **Directions for Future Research**

The study opens several avenues for future research:

- Longitudinal studies to examine changes in HRM practices over time
- Comparative studies across different tourism regions
- In-depth analysis of training programme effectiveness using experimental methods
- Exploration of digital and technology-driven HRM solutions in tourism

Such research would further strengthen understanding of workforce dynamics in tourism and support evidence-based policy development.

### **Final Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that the success of tourism development in Sikkim is intrinsically linked to the effectiveness of its human resource management systems. While the sector has achieved significant growth, its long-term sustainability is constrained by structural challenges related to seasonality, inadequate training, and weak HRM practices.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic and coordinated approach that integrates policy intervent-

ion, enterprise-level reforms, and institutional support. By investing in human capital and strengthening HRM systems, Sikkim can transform its tourism workforce into a key driver of quality, innovation, and inclusive growth.

Without such efforts, the sector risks remaining vulnerable to structural inefficiencies, limiting its potential to contribute meaningfully to regional development. Conversely, a strategic focus on HRM can unlock new pathways for sustainable and competitive tourism, ensuring that the benefits of growth are both enduring and equitable.

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