GRADUATES EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: WHAT ARE THE PERCEPTIONS OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY?

[1]AZLAN ZAINOL ABIDIN, [2]NURHAZANI MOHD SHARIFF, [3]AHMAD EDWIN MOHAMED, [4]ABD RAHIM JAGULI, [5]ROSHITA ABD RAZAK

[1,3,5] School of Tourism, Hospitality & Event Management, UUM COLGIS, Malaysia
[2] School of Languages, Civilization & Philosophy, UUM CAS, Malaysia
[4] School of International Studies, UUM COLGIS, Malaysia
Email: [1]azlan@uum.edu.my

Abstract - The main purpose of the study was to investigate the industry perceptions on the tourism and hospitality graduates skills required for the successful employability. A total of 100 tourism and hospitality sectors within the industry were selected as respondents. They were identified in the Northern area of Malaysia which involved Penang Island and Langkawi Island. The findings of the study conclude that three skills are required by the industry as major skills which may lead to successful graduates' employability namely, the work readiness and work habits skills, the interpersonal skills, and the learning, thinking and adaptability skills. On the other hands, the enterprises and innovation creativity skills are considered by the industry as the less important skill needed for successful graduates employability. Additionally, these skills are also important and should be taken into account by the educational institutions in preparing and designing the course curriculum.

Keywords - Employability, Skills, Tourism and Hospitality, Graduates, Industry

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, it is essential for graduates to be equipped with skills which enable them to maximize their potential for successful career. Hence, this is also in line with a competitive graduate employment market in the tourism industry. It was found in several studies that most tourism employers often recruit non tourism graduates based on the fact that few tourism graduates who are dedicated to the industry and committed to their jobs [1, 2].

Further, successful graduates must also possess greater tourism employability skills to cope with economic upheavals in the industry. A recent study in Malaysia indicated that the local Malaysian universities are still lacking relevant soft skills competencies which lead to their unemployment in a highly competitive job market [3]. Previously, it is also found that there is a mismatch of competency between the industry requirements and the graduates produced by the universities [4]. Study also has found that employers are critical about graduates and their preparedness for work [5]. Hence, development of curriculum intervention would enable graduates to make clear connections between their education and work and at the same time enhancing their employability.

In Malaysia, the tourism education is developed tremendously to fill in the gaps between education and the industry needs in line with the expanding of the industry. With so many institutions offering the program, the quality of the curriculum structure has become major issue for the industry. The educational institutions believe that a balance between theory and practice must be enhanced as basic component in the curriculum to enhance employability of the graduates. The Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism (MOCAT) Malaysia has embarked on the development of National Occupational Skill Standard (NOSS) in 1993 which comprising of 33 job areas in the hotel industry, 30 job areas in the tourism and travel sector, eight job areas in the theme park sector and six job areas in the recreational scuba diving. Thus, it is high time to conduct a study looking into the graduate employability skills to fulfill the requirement of the tourism industry.

II. METHODOLOGY

1) Research Design

The study used a quantitative method where data and related information were gathered through the distribution of questionnaire survey.

2) Population and Sample

For the purpose of achieving the objective and answering the research questions of the study, a total of 100 tourism and hospitality sectors were selected as respondents. They were randomly selected using a list of tourism and hospitality organizations obtained from the Centre of University-Industry Collaboration (CUIC), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). Since the total number of respondents is limited to 100, the organizations were only selected in the Northern area of Malaysia which involved Penang Island and Langkawi Island.

3) Instrument Design

The questionnaire utilized for this study included three sections. However, this paper presented the second section of the questionnaire which involved asking the respondents to indicate their perceptions of

the tourism and hospitality skills for successful graduates' employability in the industry.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 depicts the findings regarding the work readiness and work habits skills. It was noted that all the six items in the work readiness and work habits skills derived with high mean value ranged from 4.38 – 4.51. The respondents perceived the practicality skill as the most vital skill required by the industry (m = 4.51) whilst the self-management skill was considered as the least vital skill (m = 4.38).

In details, the findings further noted that majority of the respondents also rated the practicality skill as the most important skill (51%). This was then followed by the basic skill and planning and organizing skill (57%). Using technology skill (45%) and business orientation skill (42%) were also perceived by the respondents as somehow most important skills required by the industry. Finally, the findings of the survey showed that only few respondents indicated the self-management skill as the most important skill required by the industry (38%).

TABLE 1
WORK READINESS AND WORK HABITS SKILLS

Work readiness and work habits skills	Mean Value	Important (%)	Most Important (%)
Practicality skill	4.51	49	51
Basic skill	4.47	53	47
Planning & organizing skill	4.47	53	47
Using technology skill	4.45	55	45
Business orientation skill	4.42	58	42
Self-management skill	4.38	62	38

As depicted in Table 2, all the six items in the interpersonal skills also derived with high mean value ranged from 3.65 – 4.84. The team skill was rated as the most important skill required by the industry (m = 4.84) whilst the cultural understanding skill was rated as the least important skill (m = 3.65). Majority of the respondents agreed that the team skill is the most important skill (84%) which may lead to the successful employability in the industry. Further, they also noted that the communication skill was the second most important skill required for graduates' employability in the industry (74%). Two other skills namely self-understanding skill (26%) and emotional intelligence skill (24%) were both rated by the respondents as somehow most important. Only few respondents rated customer service skill as the most important skill (13%) whilst the cultural understanding skill was perceived as the less important skills required by the industry (7%).

TABLE 2
INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Interpersonal skills	Mean Value	Important (%)	Most Important (%)
Team skill	4.84	16	84
Communication skill	4.74	26	74
Self-understanding skill	4.26	74	26
Emotional intelligence skill	4.04	66	24
Customer service skill	3.99	80	13
Cultural understanding skill	3.65	72	7

Table 3 presents the findings of the survey regarding the enterprise and innovative creativity skills. It was found that all the four items in the skills derived with low mean value ranged from 2.38 – 2.61. The respondents perceived the enterprise skill as the most important skill (m = 2.61) for the graduates employability whilst the innovation skill as the least important skill (m = 2.38). Further, the findings highlighted that majority of the respondents found two items in the skills namely enterprise skill and creativity skill as the less important skills required by the industry (61%). Moreover, majority of them also rated the entrepreneurship skill as the less important skill for graduate employability (74%). Similarly, the innovation skill was also rated by the respondents as the less important skill for graduate employability (69%).

TABLE 3
ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATIVE CREATIVITY SKILLS

Enterprise & innovative creativity skills	Mean Value	Less Important (%)	Important (%)
Enterprise skill	2.61	17	22
Creativity skill	2.54	24	15
Entrepreneurship skill	2.38	14	12
Innovation skill	2.38	24	7

Finally, Table 4 presents the findings of the survey regarding the learning, thinking and adaptability skills. All the five items in the skills derived with high mean value ranged from 2.59 – 4.65. The findings indicated that the analytical capability and problem solving skill presented as the most important skill required by the industry for the successful graduates employability (m = 4.65) whilst the system thinking skill derived as the least important skill (m = 2.59). In line with this findings, it was noted that

majority of the respondents perceived the analytical capability and problem solving skill as major skill required by the industry from the graduates (65%).
Even though only few respondents perceived the thinking skill as the most important skill, most of them still rated it as important skill which the graduates must possess (77%). This was then followed by the adaptability skill (70%) and the learning skill (46%). On the other hands, the system thinking skill was perceived by the respondents as the less important skill (65%) required by the industry for the successful graduates employability.

TABLE 4
LEARNING, THINKING AND ADAPTABILITY SKILLS

Learning, thinking & adaptability skills	Mean Value	Important (%)	Most Important (%)
Analytical capability & problem solving skill	4.65	35	65
Thinking skill	4.23	77	23
Adaptability skill	3.52	70	-
Learning skill	3.08	46	3
System thinking skill	2.59	11	24

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study highlight the level of importance for the four category of skills as perceived by the tourism and hospitality industry for successful graduates' employability. It is noted that three of the skills are perceived by the industry as important skills for successful graduates employability namely, the work readiness and work habits skills, the interpersonal skills, and the learning, thinking and adaptability skills. The findings are similar to the previous studies where these skills were also noted important for graduates' employability such as communication, work culture and customer relationships [6, 7], business functional skills, hospitality functional skills, analytical skills and personal skills [8], management competencies [9] and interpersonal skills [10].

The study is also consistent to a study on the competencies index development where the researchers noted that management and technology, leadership, organizational, personal effectiveness, business-oriented, self-oriented, customer related and innovative are important skills which the graduates must have for successful employability within the industry [11]. However, in the current study, the industry considers the enterprises and innovation creativity skills as the least important skill required from the tourism and hospitality graduates. This is in contrast to the previous studies where the enterprises and innovation creativity skills were perceived as important skill which the graduates should possess in order to work in the industry [12].

Further, all the six items in the work readiness and work habits skills are perceived by the industry as important skills which the graduates should possess to become successful. The technical skills and self-development are also considered important skills in the business [13]. Other study also find that the interpersonal skills are important to the successful graduates' employability in the tourism and hospitality industry [14]. Additionally, the learning, thinking and adaptability skills also play important roles for the successful graduates' employability such as problem solving, communication and customer relations [15].

The findings eventually would assist the educational institutions offering tourism and hospitality program to plan and design better curriculum to cater the needs of the industry. By developing a comprehensive and effective tourism and hospitality curriculum and taking into consideration all the required skills perceived by the industry, the educational institutions would produce graduates who are professional in their field and at the same time would lead to successful graduate employability within the industry.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The study was sponsored by the Universiti Utara Malaysia under University Research Grant Scheme S/O Code 13783.

REFERENCES

[1] C. Dale, N. and Robinson, "Theming of tourism education: a three domain approach". International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 13(1): 30-35, 2001.
[2] K. Dewar, J. Sayers, J. and D. Meyer, "Hopes, dreams and reality". Journal of Teaching in Travel Tourism, 2(1): 1-18, 2002.
[3] F. Hairi, M. N. Ahmad Toee, and W. Razzaly, "Employers' perceptions on soft skills of graduates: A study of Intel elite soft skill training". A Paper Presented at the International Conference on Teaching & Learning in Higher Education (ICTLHE), 2011.
[4] National Economic Action Council. Retrieved from www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan.2003.
[5] P. Leon,. "Graduates say degree leaves them short of skills". The Times Higher Education Supplement, 22, Nov. 6, 2002.
[6] W. Archer, and J. Davison, "Graduate Employability: What do employers think and want?" London: The Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) 2008.
[7] A. Martin, J. Fleming, L. Ferkins, C. Wiersma, C. and R. Coll, "Facilitating and intergrating learning with sport studies cooperative education: exploring the pedagogies employed by students, academics and workplace supervisors". Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport Tourism Education, 9(1): 24 – 38, 2010.
[8] S. A. Bach, and A. Milman, "A novel technique for reviewing a hospitality management curriculum". Hospitality and Tourism Educator, 8 (1), 37-40, 1996.

[9] J. Wang, H. Ayres, and J. Huyton, "Job ready graduates: A tourism industry perspective". Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Management, 16, 62-72, 2009.
[10] D. Wilks, and K. Hemsworth, "Soft skills as key competencies in hospitality higher education: matching demand and supply". Tourism & Management Studies, 7, International English Edition, ISSN: 1646-2408. 131-139, 2011.
[11] N. Mohd Shariff, K. Kayat, and A. Zainol Abidin, "Tourism and hospitality graduates competencies: industry perceptions and expectations in the Malaysian perspectives". World Applied Sciences Journal, 31(11), 1992-2000, 2014.
[12] N. Mohd Shariff, K. Kayat, N. Zainol, and A. Zainol Abidin, "Competencies index development: the case of Malaysian tourism and hospitality graduates". International Journal of Education and Research, 3(1), 191-206, 2015.
[13] B. Chung-Herrera, C. Enz, and M. Lankau, "Grooming future hospitality leaders: a competencies model". Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly, 44 (3), 17–26, 2003.
[14] M. R. Testa, and L. Sipe, "Service-leadership competencies for hospitality and tourism management". International Journal of Hospitality Management, 31, 648-658, 2012.
[15] Y. Li-Ting, C. G. Partlow, J. Anand, and V. M. S. Shukla, "Assessing the competencies needed by hospitality management graduates in India". Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education, 26:4, 153-165, 2014. DOI: 10.1080/10963758.2014.959963

★★★