

The Generic Skills Required by Malaysian Hotel Industry: A Study of Perception and Needs

Wan Nazriah Wan Nawawi¹, Wan Nor Hafiza Wan Sulaiman², Nurazlina Mohd Razali³,
Jazira Anuar¹, Noorazlin Ramli¹

¹Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia

²Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Department, Politeknik Merlimau, Melaka, Malaysia

³Faculty of Hotel and Catering Department, Kolej Komuniti Bukit Beruang, Melaka, Malaysia

Received: February 21, 2017

Accepted: April 30, 2017

ABSTRACT

The aims for this research were to identify the generic skills considered important within the Malaysian hotel industry and the perception of tourism and hospitality faculty lecturers and students about the industrial requirement of generic skills. Since education curriculum should produce graduates that meet the demand of the industry, the research has tried to bridge the gap among the needs of the Malaysian Hotel operators as well as, the perception of the lecturers and students from the department of tourism and hospitality. This study utilized the 13 generic skills adopted from the Hospitality Skills Standards. Three groups of respondent were invited to participate in this research namely the 13 state chapters, committee members of the Malaysian Association of Hotel (MAH), the tourism and hospitality lecturers and final year diploma students from the Politeknik Johor Bahru and Politeknik Merlimau. The relationship was significance between the lecturer's and student's perception toward the understanding of the generic skills requirement.

KEYWORDS: Generic Skills, Graduates, Perception, Polytechnic, Hospitality

INTRODUCTION

Service sector has been highlighted as the main contributors in galvanizing the country's economic growth towards becoming a developed nation by year 2020 [6]. The service sector indeed plays an important role in enhancing economic growth. The contribution of this sector to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the highest compared to other sectors, an increase from 47% in 1990 to 54% in 2000 and 58% in 2005, this sector has the potential to continue to grow at par with developed countries especially in the field of tourism, finance, education, healthcare and telecommunications [3]. Developments in the hospitality industry in Malaysia have led to the development of knowledge in the field. This provides an opportunity to educational institutions in Malaysia including the Polytechnic which is under the management of the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE) to provide semi-professional workforce that is capable in the hospitality sector, especially in the field of hotel and catering. Admission to the Polytechnic has held a total of 2 times a year that provides nearly 18,200 polytechnic places of study for SPM holders, graduate certificate and graduate certificates Polytechnic Community College to pursue various courses. There are 24 courses at certificate level and 40 courses at diploma level in a variety of fields offered by the Polytechnic. Polytechnics offer educational opportunities as a platform for students to a career enhancement or furthering studies to higher category [10]. In line to produce students equipped with generic skills or also known as soft skills, management Polytechnic has introduced a soft skills module specially designed for students who will undergo industrial training starting July 2006. Industrial Training Module is mandatory for all students, whether at the certificate or diploma level. Industry training is intended to expose students to the real nature of staff and through this training, students will be able to practice the theory learned in actual occupation thus contribute to performance improvement [11]. In addition to mastering the technical knowledge and skills gained from educational or training institutions, the generic skills are also very important to ensure that Malaysia workforce produced quality work/ output. Generic skills are an important asset for graduates as it can convince employers to hire graduates as employees. Students must equip themselves with the ability to perform a job effectively, not only in the context of hospitality but also in the larger context that includes the entire tourism sector. Graduates not only need to exhibit good performance in terms of vocational and technical skills, but they also need to master generic skills required by the industry.

The hospitality industry is known as one of the oldest service industry in the world. It starts from ancient times, when the adventurers, traders, politicians and businesses need a break and food during their journey. Thus, the local community has taken this opportunity to open houses, stalls and their kitchen to travellers and traders who want a break. Hospitality industry has experienced phenomenal development up to today [7].

Additionally, Datuk Fong Chan Onn spoke at Wisma Genting in January 2001 highlighting that the workers who involved in this sector need to focus more on service commitments to ensure customer satisfaction from both domestic as well as international tourists. Meanwhile, Minister of Tourism Malaysia, Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor reiterated that hotel industry has expanded rapidly compared with the past. He said this when launching the Marina Cove Resort in Perak on 2006. Growth in the number of hotels has increased in parallel with the arrival of tourists from abroad. Malaysia has managed to attract more foreign tourists to the country. In the Annual Budget 2007, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that the number of tourist arrivals increased by 61%, from 10.2 million in 2000 to 16.4 million in 2005 income from industry tourism has also increased from 17.3 billion ringgit Malaysia in 2000 to 32 billion Ringgit Malaysia in 2005, this sector has also created 451 thousand jobs to the local community. Thus, increasing the level of skills among employees is extremely important for the industry to increase productivity [8].

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have played an important role in producing skilled manpower equipped with skills, knowledge, attitudes, and the commission to meet the needs of the industry. Polytechnic is one of the institutions of higher education that is able to provide semi-professional workforce. Currently, almost 59,000 students were studying at certificate and diploma courses in polytechnics throughout Malaysia including Sabah and Sarawak. Each year the polytechnic produce graduates who are semi-professional workforce for the country [10]. Polytechnics also provide semi-professions workforce in tourism and hospitality. There are 5 Polytechnic that provide programmes in Hotel and Catering Management at the certificate and diploma level which are Polytechnic Johor Bahru in Johor, Politeknik Merlimau Melaka, Politeknik Tunku Syed Sirajudin in Perlis, Politeknik Sultan Idris Shah in Selangor and Politeknik Kota Kinabalu in Sabah. Polytechnic Johor Bahru is the first to introduce this programme to students who began their study in July 1998 session. Initially, this programme is open only to the certificate level only. However, in July 1999, the Polytechnic has offered education diploma level to students who are interested in the field of tourism and hospitality [10]. Politeknik Merlimau was commissioned in October 2002 to the present. The goal of the polytechnic is to realize national vision in producing more semi-professional workforce. Special education related to the hospitality industry can be seen in terms of emphasis, enhancement and implementation hospitality philosophy into the lives of every student. Polytechnic, students will be exposed and applied to a wide range of skills required by the industry [10].

In line with the importance of generic skills that must be mastered and given emphasis in the implementation of the curriculum needs, industry have identified that most graduates have low score and incompetent in generic skills [15]. Unemployed graduates in the country are clearly upsetting too many including the graduates, their parents and the government. The National Statistics has estimated that approximately 22,000 unemployed graduates in 2005 [14]. Unemployment occur involving university graduates and polytechnic. Based on studies done by Job Street.Com over 3,300 people in the Malaysian Human Resource Officer found that most graduates find employment because they do not can communicate well, especially in English. Communication skills is one of the elements in the generic skills needed by graduates, especially graduates in the field of hospitality with emphasis on approximately 90% of the work involve individual communication: verbal or non-verbal [15]. While the report in [5] explained that the industry expects its students to have a high knowledge of the hospitality industry, does not have an attitude problem and skilled in communicating in at least 2 or 3 languages. According to [1], promotion of employment is strongly influenced by an individual's ability to communicate effectively. A job or position of an individual is dependent on 3 items of their performance in the interview, his skills and report writing ability or talents. Three of these abilities depend on the extent of an individual's mastery of communication skills is. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to evaluate the relationship between the skills needed by graduates in hotel industry as well as the perception of lecturers and students in the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Polytechnic. In addition, this study also identifies generic skills needed in hotel industry in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

This study involves lecturers and students in the Department of Hotel Catering from Politeknik Johor Bahru and Politeknik Merlimau only. Students involved in this study are from the end of the semester students of Industrial Training. Questionnaires provided were distributed to 54 lecturers from hotel and catering department and 123 final semester diploma students in Politeknik Johor Bahru and Politeknik Merlimau. Questionnaires were distributed and collected on the same day. The questionnaire utilized the 13 generic skills adopted from Hospitality Skills Standard [9, 12] using 5-Likert scale. Questionnaires consists of three parts namely Part A is for respondents profile, Part B is the level of importance of generic skills in the hospitality industry in Malaysia and Part C is the opinion of respondents against other generic skills which need to be owned by an employee in hospitality field. While for the industry, the researchers posted a questionnaire to 40 hotels involved. The respondent was selected to industry, lecturer and students in order to close the gaps of between generic skills needed by the industry and lecturers and students' perception towards generic skills. The descriptive analysis and Pearson Correlation was used to analyze those variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of a study found that 93.75% of respondents believed that to be a hotelier, good oral communication skills is more important compared to written communication. This is because, the hospitality industry is the industry that provide services to its customers and as a hotelier, the employee must have skills in communicating orally well to convince the customers with the services to be given to them. As explained by [13] that more than 90% of an individual's working time communication involves either orally or in writing. Communication not only involves the relationship between subordinates and superiors workers, but it also involves the relationship between workers and customers. Industrial training experience will also helping opening the students mind on the importance of communication. From these findings, it portrayed that verbal and good interaction between members of the group were interrelated. In addition, in [1] highlighted that promotion of an employee are also influenced by the ability to communicate effectively. Additionally, 93.75% of respondents said that the skills to analyze complaints received from customers before taking any action was essential and extremely needed. Customer care needs should be treated as soon as possible. Therefore, before taking any action, each employee must examined and analyzed each complaint received in order to produce results meet customer needs as best as possible. Customers always have the perceptions that 'Guest is always right' as a basis for preparing and provide services to them. Thus, to ensure good image and reputation of a hotel, skilful staffs were needed by the industry. Furthermore, the study also discovered that 73.7% of the respondents stated that interaction with good skills among group members is needed in an organization's hospitality. This is consistent with the requirements of the industry that required workers to work in a team with harmony. As explained by [2], the hospitality industry is a business which involves a 'labour-intensive or people-intensive', thus good rapport between each worker will produce quality work and productivity. The industry offered a lot of job opportunities that required knowledge as well as good communication skills [4]. Good relationship between each employee will also lead to smooth and seamless management. It is required to consolidate the strength and unity of a hospitality organization. Each hospitality department within an organization are interlinked and mutually need each other. Therefore, a good interaction between the departments will create a good working environment and healthy for the workers and thereby to improve productivity and service will provided to customers. For example, the front office department should stay in touch with the housekeeping department to ensure that each room has been cleaned and trimmed been updated to the system has been provided. This is to facilitate the receptionist to know certainly room which can be sold to the next customer and to prevent the occurrence of any dropout information. In conjunction with that, a total of 71.1% of respondents said that the skills in time management is essential. An individual who works in the hospitality industry should managed the time between work and personal wisely. When on duty, personal matters should not be confused with the work. This is to ensure employees can concentrate on tasks and the responsibilities given. They must be committed to any responsibilities granted. Any personal problems that occur, should not be involved during working time. Findings have also identified that, empowerment is important in day to day operation. A hotelier should be able to decide what is relevant for the management. 68.75% of respondents said these skills are very important, while 31.25% said these skills are important at the beginning service stage in the hospitality industry. These is due to hotel characteristics that the demand fluctuates and primarily focus on servicing and satisfying guests. Thus, though the hotel have standard operating procedures but empowered employees are needed especially during busy periods like checking in guests or high turnover seat at the restaurant. Customers satisfaction must be maintained as far as possible due to a slight mistake would revamp the reputation of the hotel. However, 6.25% respondents disagreed and indicated that the skills to work under minimal supervision is not applicable. Overall, the industry is more focus on the needs of generic skills such as communication skills, proficiency in analyze information, ideas and new concepts, being open to new challenges and skills in making a decision. It is important to ensure that each worker can provide the best service to their customers. Therefore, the employer must constantly monitor and supervise their employees from time to time. In addition, the size of the hotel also influence the respondent's decision because if the size of the hotel were medium or small, then it is easier for the employer to monitor. Listed below are the generated list of generic skills (based on the skills list released the [9]) needed by the hospitality industry in Malaysia.

Table 1: List of generic skills required by the industry hotels in Malaysia

No.	Generic Skills
1.	Skills in analyzing information, new ideas and concepts
2.	Be open to new ideas and opportunities
3.	Decision making skills
4.	Communication skills
5.	Skills to solve the problem
6.	Teamwork skills
7.	Learn new skills and procedures
8.	Think logically and creatively
9.	Skills in adapting knowledge in new situations
10.	The time management skills
11.	Work with minimal supervision
12.	Matured judgment and be responsible
13.	The ability to use technology

Table 2: The correlation evaluation between the perception of lecturers and students towards the practices of the generic skills

		Practices of Generic Skills According to Perception of Lecturers	Practices of Generic Skills According to Perception of Students
Practices of generic skills according to perception of lecturers	Pearson Correlation	1	0.649*
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	13	0.016 13
Practices of generic skills according to perception of students	Pearson Correlation	0.649*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.016 13	13

According to Table 2, the correlation evaluation between the perception of lecturers and students towards the practices of the generic skills in the Polytechnic is significant because significant p value is 0.016 which is smaller than 0.05. The findings show is a simple correlation ($r = 0.649$).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study conducted, the researchers hope that the results of this study can be used to help students identify generic skills urgently needed by the hospitality industry in Malaysia before they graduate and understand the nature of work in the future. With the list of generic skills that are generated of the findings of the hospitality industry in Malaysia, it is hoped that the graduates can prepare themselves physically and mentally to acquire all element of generic skills required in order to provide greater opportunities for them to become a hotelier. From the results of studies, researchers found that study extension is very necessary to look at the context of generic skills from the point of view of the array. Among the suggestions for further research in the future are as follows: taking samples and more extensive particularly on behalf of the hospitality industry to represent each zone in Malaysia. Additionally, a detailed analysis of the effectiveness of subject's generic taught at the Polytechnic in meeting the needs of hotel industry in Malaysia is essential.

REFERENCES

1. A. Hassan and A. Mohd, 2006. Komunikasi di tempat kerja. PTS Professional.
2. Amrik S. Sudan, 2002. Hotel management. Anmol Publications.
3. Badawi, A.A., 2007. The 2007 budget speech: introducing the supply bill (2007)-Implementing the national mission towards achieving the national vision. Retrieved from www.treasury.gov.my/pdf/budget/speech/bs07.pdf.
4. Chan, Y.F., 2000. Preparing knowledge workers for the knowledge economy in technology and vocational education: Globalization and future trends.
5. Doherty, L., Y. Guerrier, S. Jamieson, C. Lashley and A. Lockwood, 2001. Getting ahead: Graduate careers in hospitality management. Higher Education Funding Council for England.
6. Ghazali, Z., N.A. Ibrahim and F.A. Zainol, 2012. Factors Affecting Entrepreneurial Intention among UniSZA Students. *Asian Social Science*, 9 (1): 85-93.

7. Gu, H., C. Ryan and L. Yu, 2012. The Changing Structure of the Chinese Hotel Industry: 1980-2012. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 4: 56-63.
8. Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia, 2016. Home. Retrieved from <http://www.motour.gov.my>.
9. Kurikulum Kementerian Pelajaran dan Latihan Ontario, 1997.
10. Kolej Poly-Tech MARA, 2017. Home. Retrieved from <http://www.kptm.edu.my>.
11. Pan, F.C., 2015. Practical Application of Importance-Performance Analysis in Determining Critical Job Satisfaction Factors of a Tourist Hotel. *Tourism Management*, 46: 84-91.
12. Paton, M.A., 1996. Full Report: Generic skills survey. University of Western Australia.
13. S. Z. Syed Abdul Rahman, 2004. Teknik komunikasi dalam organisasi. Pemikir.
14. Trading Economics, 2016. Malaysia unemployment rate: Forecast 2016-2020. Retrieved from <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/malaysia/unemployment-rate/forecast>.
15. Weber, M.R., A. Crawford, J. Lee and D. Dennison, 2013. An Exploratory Analysis of Soft Skill Competencies Needed for the Hospitality Industry. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism*, 12 (4): 313-332.