STUDENT READINESS TO ENTER TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

[1]Mira A. Alivio, [2]Jade Kathleen P. Parra, [3]Deogracias E. Esplanada

[1,2] Proponents, [3]Research Adviser

De La Salle University - Dasmariñas

College of Tourism and Hospitality Management

Tourism Management Department

Abstract: **The occurrence of pandemic had shaped the landscape of how individuals make their living, how businesses operate, and how products and services are availed. Various restrictions are made; thus, social institutions such as schools were forced to close their physical operations and adapt to a new teaching system, thus online classes became the norm. With this change came new challenges for both teachers and students. It is also deemed that the occurrence of the pandemic had made a learning gap between students and what is demanded by the current market despite the effort of schools. The study is anchored on the Theory of Readiness for learning and pedagogy since the level of readiness among students is the focus of the study. The design is descriptive, and a survey-questionnaire adapted from the work of Verdadero, D. et.al. (2020) is utilized. Mean, frequency, and percentage are used to treat the data gathered. It is found out that bachelor's program in tourism and hospitality is dominated by women since women are more focused on personal development than men. The usual age bracket of fourth year students is 20-25 which is considered 'young or early adulthood'. It is the usual point where an individual finishes bachelor's degree. The level of preparedness to enter tourism and hospitality industry is high among fourth year students. Attitude seems to be the core component of readiness over skills and knowledge. However, a readiness-support intervention program must be drawn up to provide balance between the areas or readiness.**

Keywords: **fourth year students, readiness, tourism, hospitality, industry.**

Readiness for opportunity makes for success. Opportunity often comes by accident; readiness never does."

-Sam Rayburn

1. INTRODUCTION

21st century has brought drastic and significant changes on how academic progress is defined. The essentiality of having the students to have the 21st skills intended to keep them with the lightning-pace of   modern markets nowadays is vital (Stauffer, 2022). Major corporations, as well as the contexts in which they function, are undergoing a dramatic shift now. As a result of this shift, the concept of employability has grown increasingly significant. Moreover, the higher education sector is similarly changing, due to the greater expectations, more competition, and increasing student diversity (Fraser & Raddan, 2016)

Furthermore, the demand to enter the hospitality and tourism industry is quite high. Like academic institutions, the industry also requires a set of competencies and skills to be hired (Capua, 2021). As to Puhr (2021), resilience, perseverance, self-efficacy, and adaptability skills are focus points on work readiness preparation for students. It is critical that the curriculum develops employability skills that will be valuable in the students' future careers. Several studies have been undertaken to determine if students are prepared for their future careers, either from the standpoint of students and employers or from the perspective of industry. As a method of refining the curriculum, input from students and employers is considered (Kurniawati, 2015).

According to the research of Buama 2018 students can employ within 6 months after graduating college when they have made themselves ready and prepared at school. Thus, the need for an objective and evidence - based data assessment of the readiness of the Fourth-Year students of BS in Tourism and Hospitality at DLSU-D is based on the four standard skills: generic skills, curriculum related skills, concentration area skills, and functional area specific skills career readiness illustrated by Verdadero D. et.al. 2020 and that is like Conradie 2012 which is vital to produce a globally competitive professional. It is imperative to produce such an assessment of readiness as the insufficiency of this kind of data may hinder the production of critical, competitive, and creative professionals in the industry of tourism and hospitality. The significant changes of education required to hone the students to become critical professionals cannot be established if the objective testing is not properly concluded. Thus, the study aims to produce and provide established data to the insufficient information available on the readiness of 4th-year students specifically entering the tourism and hospitality industry. The study's objective is to collect data on the readiness of 4th-year DLSU-D students using an adapted and modified Likert scale instrument from scale questionnaire that is adapted from the study "Students' Preparedness to Enter Tourism Industry" of Verdadero, D. et.al. (2020). Moreover, this instrument will determine specifically the demographics of each respondent as well as how they assess their readiness through different indicators which are also deemed to be basic essential skills for tourism students   which are generic skills, curriculum related skills, concentration area skills, and functional area skills. The sufficiency of factual data from the study will be a necessary foundation in determining readiness through other methodologies and settings.

The study will measure the level of readiness of the respondents during online class through self-assessment of the indicators instrument. In addition, the study will only focus on the level of preparedness that the respondents have based on Verdadero, D. et.al. (2020). This will determine the overall readiness of students specifically in Tourism and Hospitality sector using the Likert scale scoring technique. Likewise, tourism and hospitality skills and competencies that are not within the parameters of the instrument and will not be covered.

The study will only use the adapted and modified instrument to draw data that will quantify to provide meaningful results for the purpose of the study. Additionally, the results that will be generated from the study are only conclusions and illustrations of the level of preparedness based on the generated data and not projections for the possible preparedness level.

Due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, social institutions such as schools were forced to close their physical operations and adapt to a new teaching system, thus online classes became the norm. With this change came new challenges for both teachers and students. It is also deemed that the occurrence of the pandemic had made a learning gap between students and what is demanded by the current market despite the effort of schools.

The DLSU-D community rose to the challenge and provided students with the necessary tools for online learning. Tourism and hospitality is quite high demand and has a high expectation, the researchers aim to determine whether students are still learning and have the competence and skills during online class and will assess the skill level and readiness of 4th year BS Tourism and Hospitality students if the students have a powerful educational background and if they are able to compete globally that can boost the tourism industry.

Again, the study is focused on determining the readiness level of 4th year tourism and hospitality industry.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:

a. age

b. gender;

2. What is the level of readiness of fourth year from college of tourism and hospitality management in the following areas:

a. knowledge/learning;

b. skills and;

c. attitude;

3. What area is considered the most influential on their readiness to enter tourism and hospitality industry?the least influential?

4. What student - readiness support intervention could be drawn based from the results?

The scope of the study is limited to 100 Senior BS Tourism and Hospitality students of DLSU-D, SY 2019-2023. The results of the study will be of great benefit to the following:1) Incoming 4th year BS Tourism and Hospitality Students to be aware and knowledgeable on the processes involving the readiness to enter Tourism and Hospitality industry; 2) BS Tourism students in determining the student's readiness; and 3) It can serve as basis or reference for future researchers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The COVID-19 pandemic, which started in 2020, ultimately affected everyone's daily lives, including the educational system (UNESCO, 2020). Both students and instructors experienced the burden and stress of having a new mode of class delivery in which most of the classes are practiced online (Lei & So, 2021). Preparing hospitality and tourism management students for the workplace in a global health crisis context should be an entire line of action (Puhr, 2021). With this, it is vital to know objectively the students' preparedness for the latest educational setup to be professionals. Thus, indicators and determinants of preparedness from students concerning the hospitality and tourism management industry will develop to arrive at factual data. Several studies have recognized the significance of workplace preparation skills for graduates' employment (Bakar et al., 2013; Makki et al., 2015; Musa et al., 2011; Peltola, 2018). Workplace preparedness skills are the personal essential academic preparation and life skills required to sustain employment, according to McClarty et al. (2017). Graduates preparing for the workplace can contribute to attaining the organization's goals through knowledge, attitudes, and commercial awareness (Mason et al., 2009). According to Raftopoulos et al. (2009), alternative perspectives on workplace readiness include graduates' confidence, leadership, self-discipline, problem-solving, and numeracy skills. However, employers reportedly have doubts about the effectiveness of higher education programs in enhancing graduates' employability abilities, according to Peddle (2000). The industry has high expectations for HEIs regarding their ability to produce qualified workers. HEIs must carefully examine these students' developing competencies. As the most significant factor in developing students' skills, educators must also be aware of and appropriately prepared for the rapidly evolving technological world. According to Bakhru's (2018) study, teachers can integrate the skills into their curriculum and instruction to increase their efficacy in the classroom, advance student knowledge, and better equip students for the business world (Bakhru et al., 2013). Some consider employability abilities fundamental, essential, transferrable, general, non-technical, and soft skills (Robinson, 2006).

On the other hand, one of the industries with the fastest growth rates worldwide is the hospitality sector.

\Nonetheless, there are still significant issues in finding and keeping skilled staff (Burton, 2008). Similarly, two persistent trends in the sector are (1) frequent employee turnover, which negatively impacts the capacity to provide a consistent brand experience, and (2) a lack of workers who perceive the expanding sector as a chance to further their careers (Druce, 2007).

According to Conradie's (2012) research, experiential learning and coursework focusing on the hospitality industry help students become prepared. The best way to assess the efficacy of a curriculum is to comprehend students' judgment. Rahman (2010) likewise conducts a comparative investigation into students' readiness and the efficacy of hospitality education. While Conradie looks at it from the student's perspective, other studies investigate it from the employer's perspective. In a study conducted by Lowden (2011), employability skills are the abilities practically everyone requires performing in nearly any profession that shows core competencies or critical abilities. These are the abilities needed to employ the more technical information and skills required by a person's specific workplace. These consist of problem-solving, teamwork, effective communication, effective use of information technology, numbers, and self-management. It is also vital to strictly follow the emphasis on skills and competencies to produce equipped professionals in the industry (Shariff, Kayat, & Abidin, 2014). According to Shyju (2021), applying a utility will construct that includes various empirical elements, and system-centred operational capabilities are vital for students' successful career goals. In this way, the student's preparation efficacy will quickly determine, and specific skills will be assessed through a peer-reviewed instrument concerning hospitality and tourism management. The abilities needed for future effective employees in the hospitality industry have been the subject of much research. For instance, Conradie (2012) employed a conceptual framework comprising four components: general skills, skills fundamentally related to the curriculum, skills particular to functional areas, and skills particular to concentration areas. He evaluated the hospitality program and the student's career readiness using this paradigm. He mentioned generic skills include interpersonal, teamwork, leadership, conceptual, and analytical abilities.

Additionally, he said that comprehending contemporary concerns and practices in the hospitality business and using experimental and experience-based learning are essential curriculum-related abilities. He added that the functional areas in the curriculum's courses, which include marketing, human resources, finance, hospitality operations, and technical

information, serve as the foundation for the functional skills. Five concentration areas with comparable abilities should include the study of the curriculum courses: convention and events management, club management, food and beverage management, and hotel management.

Further, a local study conducted by Gevana (2021) also as referenced to Conradie's paradigm and found that professional readiness and employability abilities are high, suggesting that the variables' measures are usually present in hospitality students. The study's findings also revealed a strong relationship between career readiness and employability abilities. This statistically significant positive correlation indicates that an improvement in the professional preparedness of hospitality students will probably increase their employability abilities. Moreover, regression analysis revealed that the generic career readiness abilities have the most substantial influence on and ability to predict employability skills. The CareerEdge model, which outlines how career development, experience, professional knowledge and abilities, generic skills, and emotional intelligence assist students and graduates in preparing for the workplace, reinforced the significance of these findings (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Sumanasiri et al., 2015). Another local study by Verano (2017) demonstrates that students who graduate from HRM have acquired the skills necessary for the sector. Based on the study's results, the university's HRM curriculum needs improvement in various areas, notably those that do not have solid adjectival ratings. It should concentrate on providing its students with top-notch on-the-job training that will undoubtedly aid in honing the graduates to become better professionals in their chosen sector. The university must be knowledgeable about globalization and competency to generate graduates who are productive, highly skilled, and ready for lucrative work.

It is noted that most assessments of career preparedness focused on prior knowledge, on what students had learned in school, with little attention to how to apply the knowledge and skills obtained to new experiences and issues (Bissell, 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to study this sector, particularly the hotel sector, renowned for its conventional approach to human resource management. The way that training and skill development are provided in the hospitality sector needs to change. However, academics frequently advocate for these changes, and the business community may sometimes have differing views. All focus group participants agreed that higher-level and general skills must be included in the curriculum design for employees to be more adaptable to changing settings. A balance between practice and theory is fundamental (Verano, 2017). Moreover, most of the studies use conventional methodologies such as demographics and educational profiles; nevertheless, this study looked at the relationship between the career readiness of students, which is relevant to the latest educational setup experienced by the graduating students due to the pandemic. On the other hand, reviews like these are beneficial, especially as ASEAN integration progresses and businesses find it challenging to find graduates with the essential abilities and attitudes who are also globally competitive (Verma et al., 2018).

The Bandura Theory of Social Cognitive Development is the foundation for this research. According to this hypothesis, students' perceptions of their capacity to complete academic activities forecast their capacity to complete the tasks. However, there are numerous ways in which retribution and reinforcement affect behaviour and learning. One of the methods is through the impact that "expectation about likely future repercussions has on people's cognitive processing of new information" (Ormrod, 2003). Paying attention and effectively processing information in mind is necessary to reinforce learning (Ormrod, 2003). Considering that notion, students learn a great deal that they never express because there is no reinforcement.

Furthermore, it could argue that if students are not directly tested or evaluated on many employability skills that are not specific technical skills. Likewise, if their grades are not affected by those skills (extrinsic reinforcement) and if they are not intrinsically motivated to master those skills for future use. On the other hand, if students are tested or graded on some employability skills if their grades are affected by those skills (extrinsic reinforcement). Additionally, if they intrinsically master those skills for future use, they may be very competent in such activities. Before entering employment, graduating senior students in hospitality management programs must prove a certain degree of competence due to the industry's rapid transformation and emphasis on employability skills that appeal to employers.

The schematic diagram, as shown in figure 1, shows that students must possess skills adapted from the Conradie (2021) paradigm. It is a modified Conradie's research instrument to make it more suitable for this study. As a result, the researchers omit questions that will not be relevant to the study's scope to avoid ambiguous results. It is critical to understand that the instrument modification accommodates the new learning mode in the context. These include Generic Skills, which are the following: (a) Communication skills, the students must know how to interact with other people; (b) Conceptual Skills, the students can react to certain situations or problems they meet, how and what they should if they are in that situation; (c)

Analytical Skills, the students would be able to evaluate and could be able to find answers to the possible problems; (d) Teamwork, the students could be able to tie up with other persons; (e) Leadership Skills, the students have the power or ability to lead other people; and (f) Interpersonal Skills the students relate to or build the relationship between people. Another factor to consider is that students already possess the fundamental competencies related to the curriculum from their prior coursework, employment, and training, including experimental learning and application, experience-based learning and application, and comprehension of current issues and practices in the hospitality sector. The students also have knowledge and abilities in additional fields that are crucial to consider. They must be knowledgeable in functional areas, including marketing, information technology, human resources, hospitality management, and finance. Also, there are skills in the concentration areas of lodging, tourism, food and beverage, events, Etc. Several elements may affect how well-prepared the university and its students are for careers in the hospitality sector. The Social Cognitive Theory and, under it, the Reciprocal Determinism of Albert Bandura inspired the framework of this investigation. This study seeks correlations between the skills developed by tourism students from the new mode of learning and how it may reflect on their career preparedness. Just like in reciprocal determinism, the variables mentioned above directly influence each of the other variables and vice versa, thus explaining the two-headed arrows in the diagram. The new modalities of learning in the hypotheses may or may not influence each variable of the study.
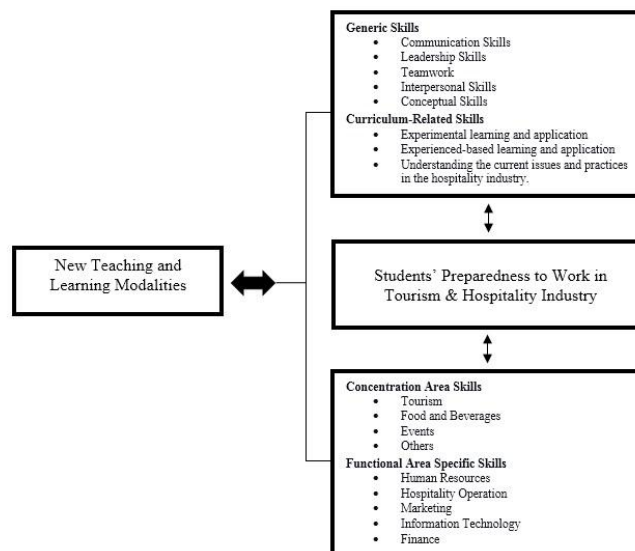

Figure 1. Conceptual Paradigm of the Study

3. METHODOLOGY

The fact that there is only one sample, and no comparison group is a typical feature of descriptive research designs. (Omair, 2015). Thus, utilizing the descriptive design for the assessment of the readiness of the respondents is significant as it will likely illustrate the information concerning the present state of the phenomenon, as well as to express "what is" in terms of variables or conditions in a scenario.

The respondents included senior Bachelor of Science Tourism and Hospitality students of DLSU-Dasmariñas SY 2019-2023. The researcher applied purposive sampling - a type of non-probability sampling, following the statistician's recommendation of sampling 100 respondents from the population size of 219 participants. As prescribed by most research, the use of 100 is even needed for an acceptable accuracy of results.

Survey questionnaires adapted and modified from the study of Verdadero, D. et.al. (2020) is used to gather meaningful data related to the present study. Said survey questionnaire underwent an expert validation conducted by a statistician. The study's questionnaire is divided into two (2) segments. The first segment highlights respondents' demographics which include gender and age. The second segment focuses on the respondents' readiness assessment in entering the Tourism and Hospitality industry, which will include the identified essential skills as per Verdadero D. et.al. 2020 as: generic skills; curriculum related skills; concentration area skills; and functional skills; these areas of specific skills were measured using a 4-point Likert Scale that were marked as follows: 4- very prepared; 3-somewhat prepared; 2-somewhat unprepared; and

1-very unprepared this segment. The means obtained using the tool take verbal interpretation as follows: 1.00 -1.49 very low; 1.50-2.49 low; 2.50-3.49 high; and 3.50-4.00 very high. This is used to determine and describe the level of readiness among the participants.

To cater for flexibility and convenience, data gathering will take place either face to face or online since students and researchers will not be able to attend school due to some schedule conflicts. The researchers will secure a signed letter and coordinate with the chairman of the College of Tourism, Hospitality and Management (CTHM) of the university for their study. Following a clearance from the CTHM Department, the researchers will use Google Forms or either deliver it to the respondents one by one via Facebook Messenger and face-to-face handling over if applicable.

The survey questionnaire is made simple for the respondents in a way that concepts are defined clearly as well as the directions on accomplishing it. The questions shall be presented and further explained by the researchers in such cases that the respondents misinterpret or misunderstood some questions. Again, questions that are focused on their readiness to enter the tourism and hospitality industry are only included in the study. Gender and age profiles of the respondents will be determined using frequency and percentage metrics. The specific skills portion of the questionnaire aims to determine how respondents assess their personal skills specifically: generic skills, curriculum related skills, concentration area skills, and functional area specific skills shall utilize mean scores for interpretation.

The data that will be gathered from the survey will be analyzed using a statistical treatment, which is the weighted mean only. In analysis for the computation of the data, a statistician shall be consulted accordingly. This will further establish the findings of the study and help the researchers in formulating the recommendations for further studies, in addition to the findings of the study.

The researchers' ethical considerations will be focused on four characteristics. respondents must meet the following: (1) of legal age (18 years old and above); (2) do not belong persons with disabilities (PWD) community; (3) are not of indigenous origin; and (4) a bonafide senior Tourism and Hospitality Management student of DLSU-D. Prior to sharing the survey questionnaires, the researchers will observe the above stated ethical considerations. And the paper proposal was subjected to the screening of the ethics committee together with the consent and the actual research tool. This is to ensure that no human rights are violated or disregarded.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first part of the inquiry investigates the profile of the respondents. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of the respondents' age.

Table 1. Age of the Respondents

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage
18-20	8	8
21-25	92	92
Total	100	100%

From this, it is evident that most respondents were 21-25 years old, which are the common ages for graduating students. In a study by Chavda and Trivedi (2015) said that the components of life skills are communication, inter-personal skills, decision-making, critical thinking, coping and self-management skills. They develop as people mature or come of age. On the other hand, Williams, Perron, and Biemiller (2016) as they relate age on measures of readiness. They assumed that reaching a certain age defines development of certain skills which gives the concept of readiness. Given that many of the participants belong to 21-25 which is categorized as young adults. At this age, young adults start to think more critically and are better able to balance their emotions while making choices. As they begin their transition to adulthood, many people will also experience a strong sense of optimism because they are often free from the constraints of their families, schools, and parents that they felt as adolescents.

With this fact, this brings the respondents best fit for the study which focuses on determining the readiness level.

However, few belong to 18-20 still they are considered on their young adulthood stage. The ages of 20-25, the average age too of those graduating with a bachelor's degree by tradition in most colleges and universities.

Table 2. Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	41	41
Female	59	59
Total	100	100%

Table 2 shows the number of male and female respondents who are 4th year students and expected to enter the tourism and hospitality industry soon. The female group dominants the number of respondents. In an inquiry by Whitelaw and Gillet (2015) they have mentioned that females are much more likely interested and involved in personal and professional development than males. Similarly, Shivakoti (2022) pointed that more women are employed in tourism and hospitality industry worldwide. These realities just reveal that it is no surprise that female group will rule this bachelor program as revealed based on the gathered data.

Table 3. Areas of Readiness and Its Levels

Area of Readiness	Mean	Interpretation
Knowledge/Learning	3.23	High
Skills	3.36	High
Attitude	3.56	High
Average	3.39	High

With regards to the readiness level of the respondents to enter tourism and hospitality industry, Table 3 shows the means of the areas attributed to readiness as related to Verdadero et.al. (2020) and Conradie (2021) and as to what level of readiness it stands for. The participants display 'high' level of readiness to enter tourism and hospitality industry. This means that they have the necessary tools to succeed in the next learning opportunity as well as to live. Again, readiness is distinct from intellectual capacity since it denotes the entry point of a learner that is relative to a particular concept or skill at a particular time (Blythe, 2015).

From the table, it is also evident that 'attitude' plays an important role in students' readiness. McFarlane (2022) argued that having quality skills is vital to industries but when it comes to hospitality industry, when someone has poor attitude, it is no doubt that they will brawl to interact with people and go along with such service sector. The students likewise recognize this reality, which shall be a very vital factor that will allow them to survive on their chosen career path. They also agreed that having a good sense of responsibility in the work area must be the core perspective to cope with the sector of tourism and hospitality. Yet, the students still lag on demonstrating commitment to quality service, they still do not have the good feel on such aspect of attitude. Even so, the students are considered attitude-ready, and this area is considered the most influential on their readiness in entering the commerce of tourism and hospitality.

Conversely, the area of knowledge/learning although remarked as with 'high' level appeared to be the least influential to readiness of the respondents.

Perhaps this could be explained further by Achterberg's work (1988) wherein she mentioned 'information overload' and that human capacity to process information is limited. Being overloaded with information refers to the feeling of having too much information to digest or pay attention to. Perhaps, the advent of various required subjects for the bachelor's degree as required among the participants led to the lower average mean compared to the areas of attitude and skills.

Furthermore, the possibility that most of them favor attitude and skills over knowledge-based subject matters or school activities. An article by Furlow (2017) stated that having the right attitude is more important than possessing the skills. Also, most of the research has shown that the most important factor in determining how well one will be performing in life.

Possibly too, that the respondents are in the fourth year of their course where they are more exposed on the outside world through their on the-job-trainings (OJTs) and other forms of work immersions at the same time on their young adulthood ages they start to value for attitude than knowledge they learned inside the four corners of their classrooms.

Given the prior details, the creation of a Readiness-Support Intervention Program (RSIP) for 4th year students is suggested. The program must feature a balance among the identified areas of readiness: knowledge/learning, skills and attitudes. These three are considered crucial components of readiness. Prakash (2016) emphasized that all three elements should be put together to achieved true success among individuals.

It is also suggested that the intervention must be like a refresher course that will allow the students to be reviewed and get updated on the basics or essentials, trends, and issues before they engage in the field of tourism and hospitality.

In terms of knowledge and learning, the support program must also consider the exposure of the students in an international context like for instance introducing to them how ticketing and fare are done. They must also be allowed to have more trainings with other foreign languages aside from English. And third, with the principles of food production since this also coincides with the services under tourism and hospitality.

For skills, the readiness support program must review the enhancement of thinking strategies among students when they encounter work-related problems and must be able to develop solutions for it. Moreso, they must be equipped too with managerial, planning, and staffing skills even though they are not considered managers right after they finish their bachelor's degree. At least, they have an idea of what managers do so that they can respond accordingly too when they start their career in the field.

Lastly, in attitude, the program must focus on letting the students to realize more the spirit of commitment for quality customer service. It must also train students to communicate with respect and pleasing personality that includes grooming to be more approachable as they provide hospitable service.

Again, the combination of knowledge, skills and attitude are pre-requisites for readiness of students. Attitude is considered the most influential factor which allows the students to have that felt of readiness for the business of hospitality and tourism followed by skills and knowledge.

5. CONCLUSION

Fourth year students are usually in the age bracket of 20-25 years of age which is considered the normal age of those who are identified to be graduating students and the transition age from academic to professional career. This is also the age known as 'early or young adulthood'. Again, at this age, young adults start to think more critically and are better able to balance their emotions while making choices. This is also a threshold of human development that is good to explore to determine their level of preparedness.

Tourism and hospitality are primarily governed by female than male which is attributed for the desire of women to grow more personally and professionally than men.

Knowledge/learning, skills and attitude are the areas that define level of readiness. Attitude is considered the powerful component that corresponds to readiness among the students. While knowledge has the slightest effect on their readiness which should be the primary focus of the suggested readiness-support intervention program.

But still, the balance of the three must be considered and the students must be refreshed through a program that will present and expose them to context not only locally but internationally. With these, they could be more prepared for entering the tourism and hospitality industry.

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