

CAREER PREPAREDNESS AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS OF HOSPITALITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to identify the domain of career preparedness that best influences the employability skills of hospitality students. The study utilized a quantitative, non-experimental research design and the correlational technique. A total of 250 randomly selected fourth-year College students taking up hospitality programs from five identified HEIs in Davao City were surveyed using a contextualized questionnaire. Data were analyzed using the mean, Pearson's r and regression. Results showed that the career preparedness and employability skills of the respondents are at a high level suggesting that the measures of both variables are often manifested. The findings of the study also revealed that career preparedness is correlated with and has significant influence on employability skills. When independently regressed, it was found that the generic skills of career preparedness best influences employability skills.

Keywords: management, career preparedness, employability skills, hospitality students, regression, Philippines.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rationale

Recent hospitality graduates seeking entry-level jobs in the industry face the dilemma of keeping abreast and aligning their skills with their needs and expectations. Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) records show the percentage of the hired college graduates decreased from 32% (255,498 employed out of 798,000 applicants) to 28% (135,59 out of 487,640 applicants) in the job fairs conducted in 2014 and 2015 (The Manila Times, 2018). Employability skills are of primary concern for job seekers and employers nowadays. According to the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Human Resources Development Foundation Inc. (PCCI HRDF), employers are also hesitant to recruit new graduates because they lack the necessary skills and training. Employers are increasingly seeking skills from graduates, even though they are not in their field of knowledge or have universal skills. In the same way, a person who can apply and exercise the knowledge and skills they've acquired to a specific situation is more marketable than someone who has the knowledge but lacks the necessary skills. (Fleming, 2016).

Employability skills are essential and essential in today's workforce, as it needs employees who are qualified and professional and have the character and mindset to meet the demands and challenges of a rapidly changing economy and society (Fleming, 2013). Thus, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) face the pressures of preparing their graduates to address such a challenge. HEIs have been serious about forging close and robust links with their industry to educate and keep their students up to date with current trends in the industry. On the other hand, students must have been taught and equipped with essential behavioral skills and knowledge that are necessary for enhanced employee efficiency, continued development, and success. This may also include time management, patience, adaptability, and communication ability (ACT, 2013; Bridgstock, 2009). From this context and concerns, studies on employability skills are relevant as they help HEIs and workforce agencies. All organizations, in general, identify effective practices and gaps in graduates' preparation,

recruitment, and training. Further, these studies have been instrumental in promoting essential skills set in the workplace, such as thinking outside the box, solving problems, and analyzing situations (Bangser, 2008; Tudy & Garcia, 2014).

The study is based on social cognitive career theory in the understanding of career preparedness and employability skills. This theory suggests that preparing students is a developmental process in which they (students) explore different careers. They may also provide advice on their progress, develop career self-efficiency and expectations of outcomes, and advance educational or occupational objectives (Lent & Brown, 2013). During the last decades, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been extensively pressured to offer students courses that are matched with the skills and attributes needed by the industry and employers. In the words of Harvey (2010), he posited that HEIs provide a variety of employability enhancement opportunities for students. Some of these developments are implied in college courses.

In contrast, others are prominent and developed as add-on modules or value-added learning opportunities. Nevertheless, education itself is not a panacea to ensuring successful careers. It may give an advantage but never a surety. The researcher has not come across studies that discuss the topic in the context of hospitality students and the hospitality industry. Further, it had been noticed that most of the reviews of career preparedness centered on the prior content knowledge, on what students learned in school, with minimal emphasis on how to apply the acquired knowledge and skills to new experiences and problems (Bissell, 2017). Besides, the standardized approaches employed by most studies are demographics and educational profile, which is different from this study where it explored the link between career preparedness and employability skills (Rahman, 2010; Sunday, 2013). On one hand, reviews like this are of great help, especially in the advent of ASEAN integration where industries found it challenging to hire globally competitive graduates who possess the necessary skills and attitudes (Verma, Nankervis, Priyono, Moh'd Saleh, Connell, & Burgess, 2018). Essentially, the call for further learning and development in this area has encouraged the researcher to work on this domain to add fresh insights and discourse about the topic at hand.

Research Objectives

Generally, the primary objective of this study is to determine which domain of career preparedness best influences the employability skills of hospitality students.

Specifically, this study aims to describe the level of career preparedness of hospitality students in terms of generic skills; and hospitality-related skills. To determine the level of employability skills of hospitality students in terms of communication skills; problem-solving skills; teamwork; planning and organizing; creativity/innovation; working with others; independent study; numeracy skills; ICT skills; and self-management skills. To establish the significance of the relationship between career preparedness and employability skills of hospitality students. And lastly, to identify which domain of career preparedness best influences the employability skills of hospitality students.

II. METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative, non-experimental research design employing the correlational technique. It aptly used correlational method because it aims to establish the statistical significance and the relationship that exists between two quantitative variables (Johnson, 2001), as in the case of this study, the two variables are the career preparedness and employability skills. Similarly, Faltado et al. (2016) further described the correlational design as a systematic investigation of the nature of relationships or associations between and among variables without necessarily investigating into casual reasons underlying them.

Research Locale

The research was carried out in Davao City, which is situated in southern portion of Mindanao, Philippines. There are 12 identified Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Davao City offering hospitality programs. Eleven are private universities and colleges and one state university. However, this study focused on the five prominent universities and colleges in Davao City regarding the number of enrollees under hospitality programs.

Population and Sample

A total of 250 fourth-year students taking up hospitality programs (Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Management, Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management) from five identified HEIs in Davao City were surveyed for

this study. The identified HEIs are selected based on the number of enrollees under the hospitality programs (Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Management, Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management, 2-year Hotel and Restaurant Management, and TESDA qualifications).

Stratified random sampling was utilized by the researcher in selecting the study participants. Stratified random sampling is used when selecting sub-samples proportionate in size based on some significant characteristics of the total population (Faltado, Bombita, Boholano, & Pogoy, 2016). The respondents were fittingly selected because of their qualification and their aptness to achieve the study objectives.

III. RESULTS

Level of Career Preparedness

Table 1 reveals the level of career preparedness of study participants. The overall mean of career preparedness among hospitality students is 3.68, described as high based on the data gathered. The result implies that career preparedness is frequently manifested. When taken individually, hospitality-related skills posted a higher mean score of 3.75 than generic skills, with a mean score of 3.61. Both are considered at a high level. This means that both skills are often manifested among study participants. Further, the standard deviation of .69, which is less than 1, signifies consistency in the responses.

TABLE I: LEVEL OF CAREER PREPAREDNESS

Indicator	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Generic skills	0.57	3.61	High
Hospitality-related skills	0.80	3.75	High
Overall	0.69	3.68	High

Level of Employability Skills

Shown in Table 2 is the level of employability skills among hospitality students. The overall mean score of employability skills is 3.84 described as high. This suggests that employability skills are often manifested among respondents. When analyzed the indicators separately, it must be noted that all measures of employability skills are at high levels except independent study, which posted at a very high standard (mean = 4.21). This result denotes that while all other skills are manifested often, study participants demonstrate independent study always or at all times. Moreover, all standard deviation scores are less than one which indicates consistency or similarity of answers in the given measures.

TABLE II: LEVEL OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Indicator	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Communication	0.74	3.73	High
Problem-solving	0.85	3.51	High
Teamwork	0.73	3.99	High
Planning and organizing	0.80	3.79	High
Creativity or Innovation	0.78	3.82	High
Working with others	0.79	4.18	High
Independent study	0.83	4.21	Very High
Numeracy skills	0.89	3.59	High
ICT skills	0.87	3.82	High
Self-management skills	0.82	3.80	High
Overall	0.81	3.84	High

Significance of the Relationship between Career Preparedness and Employability Skills

The test of the correlation between career preparedness and employability skills is reflected in Table 3. The data revealed that the overall computed r -value is .434 with a p -value of less than 0.05. Given the $p < 0.05$, this indicates that career preparedness is significantly associated with employability skills; hence the null hypothesis is aptly rejected. Accordingly, a close examination of the data further revealed that all the indicators of the career preparedness have a positive correlation with the signs of employability skills. The result implies that the increase in career preparedness would also likely increase the employability skills of hospitality students.

TABLE III: SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAREER PREPAREDNESS AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Career Preparedness	Employability Skills										
	Communication	Problem-solving	Teamwork	Planning and organizing	Creativity or Innovation	Working with Others	Independent study	Numeracy skills	ICT skills	Self-management skills	Overall
Generic skills	.886** (0.00)	.387** (0.00)	.461** (0.00)	.556** (0.00)	.524** (0.00)	.504** (0.00)	.459** (0.00)	.499** (0.00)	.247** (0.00)	.315** (0.00)	.383** (0.00)
Hospitality-related skills	.879** (0.00)	.492** (0.00)	.508** (0.00)	.596** (0.00)	.505** (0.00)	.465** (0.00)	.428** (0.00)	.353** (0.00)	.290** (0.00)	.348** (0.00)	.393** (0.00)
Overall	1 (0.00)	.448** (0.00)	.541** (0.00)	.599** (0.00)	.574** (0.00)	.511** (0.00)	.449** (0.00)	.406** (0.00)	.274** (0.00)	.361** (0.00)	.434** (0.00)

* $p < .05$ **Regression Analysis of the Influence of Career Preparedness to Employability Skills**

Presented in Table 4 is the regression analysis made to ascertain the extent of influence of career preparedness to employability skills. The test had further identified the domain of career preparedness that best predict employability skills. Overall, the results revealed that the obtained F -value is 30.544 with $p < 0.05$, which indicated a model fit and suggests that in every unit increase in career preparedness, a corresponding unit increase is affected into employability skills. Conversely, the R -squared value of .385 suggested that the F -variance in employability skills is ascribed to the indicators of career preparedness specified in this study, while the other .695 or 69.5% of the variance could be attributed to other things not covered by the investigation.

When regressed further, it can be inferred that in their singular capacities, generic skills and hospitality-related skills of career preparedness best influence employability skills given their computed t -values of 3.155 and 3.138, respectively. Also, both indicators yielded a p -value of .002, which is less than the p -value of significance. However, between the two indicators, it was found that generic skills best influence employability skills with a higher β -coefficient value of .328 as against hospitality-related skills.

TABLE IV: REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF CAREER PREPAREDNESS TO EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Career preparedness (indicators)	Employability skills		
	B	t	Sig.
Generic skills	.328	3.155	.002*
Hospitality-related skills	.282	3.138	.002*
R	.621		
R^2	.385		
F	30.544		
p	.000*		

* $p < .05$

IV. DISCUSSION

Career Preparedness of Hospitality Students

The overall level of career preparedness of hospitality students is high, derived from the responses of the study participants, which were mostly at high levels. Both the two indicators, *generic* and *hospitality-related skills*, yielded high ratings which imply that hospitality students manifest such skills often.

This result is aligned to the views of Abdien (2017), Muslim et al., (2012); Rahman (2010); Raybould and Wilkins (2005); and Tudy and Garcia (2014), that hospitality students are well-prepared with the generic skills for their career. These skills are transferable skills that are essential for employability at certain level. Identifying the hospitality students' generic skills is vital as it predicts their propensity to succeed in their profession. This set of expertise goes beyond the narrower management competencies but extends to communication, conceptual, analytical, teamwork, leadership, and interpersonal skills.

The study findings also confirm the idea proposed by Angelo and Cross (1993) and Conradie (2012); Tudy and Garcia (2014); and Thomas (2018), that fundamental to developing curricula and education programs is the promotion and integration of generic skills among student's academic preparations apart from the professional, industry-needed skills. They argued that before learning some technical skills specific to the hospitality industry, one must possess the necessary and generic skills like communication, interpersonal, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, among others.

Likewise, the results coincide with the observation of Alexakis and Jiang (2019); De Castro (2017); Gopalakrishnan et al., (2016); Razak, et al., (2018); and Verano (2017) that students must have expertise in generic and functional area skills in addition to concentration area skills such as lodging, tourism, food and beverages, events, and others. These factors must form part of the student's preparation so they would have better chances to get employed and succeed in the workplace. Most of the technical skills can be learned during the actual work experience, while the generic and functional skills are best acquired and honed during academic and education years.

Employability Skills among Hospitality Students

The overall level of employability skills of hospitality students is high. The great extent of employability skills is because of the ratings given by the respondents, which are mostly high. The indicator with a very high score is independent study. The other indicators of communication skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork, planning and organizing, creativity or innovation, working with others, numeracy skills, ICT skills, and self-management skills have high ratings. This result denotes that hospitality students manifest the ability to learn new things, to learn from mistakes, to accept feedback, and to identify and access learning opportunities always or at all times. Meanwhile, all other employability skills are being manifested often.

The result of the study corroborates with the views of Bissell (2017); Harvey (2010); Sunday (2013); and Thomas (2018), that life-long learning skills are key employability capabilities that must be held by hospitality students. He further accentuated that the ability to become independent, self-regulating learners are skills that will be essential for success in any chosen path.

Similarly, the findings of the study prove the assertion of Fleming (2013); Tudy and Garcia (2014); and Wrahatnolo and Munoto (2018), that companies look for an identified set of skills which are specific to their operational requirements. These skills could be generic or highly concentrated. Although, recruitment managers are also interested in other functional, multidisciplinary skills like computer literacy, oral and written communication, interpersonal, accounting, marketing, engineering, and culinary arts.

On the one hand, the result of the study opposes the idea of Griffin (2012); Jonck (2014); and The Manila Times (2018) that new employees lack needed employability skills such as teamwork, decision-making, and communication. In fact, employers are confronted with the pressing concern on hiring fresh graduates who lack skills and experiences that they need. Most organizations find it hard as well to recruit new employees whose skills match the required job specifications. Their works highlighted the claim that underemployment and job mismatch is among the common HR problems of industries in recent times.

Significance of the Relationship between Career Preparedness and Employability Skills

The test of the relationship between career preparedness and employability skills revealed that the two variables are significantly associated. This means that the career preparedness of hospitality students is positively and statistically associated with their employability skills, providing less than the threshold set on measuring correlation. In other words, the increase in the career preparedness of students would also likely increase their employability skills.

This result conforms to the findings of Pool and Sewell (2007); Rahman (2010); and Sumanasiri, et al., (2015), that there is a clear and strong link between the actual learning activities and career preparations that the students have engaged with and experienced during their stay in a university for their degree programs and their employability after. With the CareerEDGE model, a practical and straightforward framework has been established to look at relevant factors included in the employability process, including career preparations.

Similarly, the findings of the study are parallel to the propositions of De Castro (2017); Huang (2016); Losekoot et al. (2018); Prashanti, (2019); Tudy & Garcia (2014), that employability skills which include knowledge and technical skills, oral and written communication skills, human relation skills, problem-solving skills, and information technology skills, among others are useful and relevant to the employment needs of the industry. These skills are best learned in higher education institutions (HEIs) and are outcomes expected to be manifested by graduates, as indicated in various industry-based curricula and programs.

Regression Analysis of the Influence of Career Preparedness to Employability Skills

When regressed, it was found that career preparedness significantly influences employability skills. This means that one effective way to improve the employability skills of hospitality students is to increase their career preparedness through the enhanced curriculum, meaningful academic experiences and industry-based learning activities and opportunities.

This result is parallel to the pronouncement of Wellman (2010) on the "Integrated Competence Model of Employability," which demonstrates the interaction between various elements of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes to create an improved level of employability. The model combines the functional and own characteristics, the generic and technical expertise, as well as various micro, macro, and meta-competencies into an "integrated topology" that would allow students and graduates to become competent and efficient at work. Also, the model considers enabling factors such as policies, strategies, systems, and resources that promote practical employability among students and, most especially, graduates.

On the other hand, when taken individually, it was found that generic skills best influence and predict employability skills. These findings confirm the idea of Losekoot et al., (2018); and Pool and Sewell (2007), that a well-defined career development plan, meaningful education experience, relevant professional knowledge, and skills, acquired generic skills, and emotional intelligence allow students and graduates to be attractively ready with the workplace.

The concern of students' readiness for the world of work has led to the concept of "employability skills". Enough arguments and propositions of researchers were rendered on various descriptions and interpretations of career preparedness and employability skills (Yorke, 2005). While there may be different interpretations of employability skills based on the stakeholder's perceptions, and how career preparedness impact graduates' employability, it is worth noting that the findings of this study focused on the hospitality students. On a final point, it should be noted that in this study, the researcher focused on the ten employability skills of students adopted from the works of Sunday (2013) namely, communication skills, problem-solving, teamwork, planning and organizing, creativity or innovation, working with others, independent research, numeracy skills, ICT skills, and self-management skills. In order to further study the relationship between variables, the framework should be further examined in different contexts and verified by empirical data.

V. CONCLUSION

As can be gleaned from the study's findings, conclusions are drawn in response to the study objectives. Results of the study revealed that career preparedness and employability skills are at a high level, which suggests that the measures of the variables are frequently manifested among hospitality students. The findings of the study also showed that career preparedness significantly associated and related to employability skills. This positive statistical relationship denotes that an increase in the career preparedness of hospitality students will likely post a corresponding increase in their

employability skills. Moreover, when regressed, it was found that the generic skills of career preparedness best influence and predict employability skills.

The implications of these findings were supported by the CareerEdge model which explains how career development, experience, professional knowledge and skills, generic skills, and emotional intelligence allow students and graduates to get ready with the workplace (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Sumanasiri et al., 2015). Although the generic skills alone were not enough to fill the gap of students' employability, employers were specific on the skills they required for their future employees. And many of these generic skills were listed by employers as vital in the recruitment process. As such, they can be developed within the curriculum that can help the students to prepare for their career while still in the university. Moreover, skills development and attainment of required competencies during school days contribute to individual career interests and pathways; and how they will manage career-related tasks and navigate the landscape of career growth. Furthermore, understanding the educational aspects would help graduates advance and grow in their careers and dream jobs (Lent and Brown, 2013).

VI. RECOMMENDATION

The preceding findings and conclusions gave way to several recommendations. Since there is a high level of career preparedness and employability skills among hospitality students, it is suggested that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) may further enhance and strengthen their curricula to increase their level of career preparedness and employability to a very high standard. This can be done by continuously updating and keeping their education program abreast of the current trends, developments, and innovations in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Similarly, administrators, heads of schools and program implementers may strengthen their partnerships and linkages with private and public hospitality and tourism organizations to get the most recent and relevant skills and competencies expected and required in the actual workplace and the process, students and graduates are well prepared and equipped; hence underemployment and job mismatch can be avoided.

Alternatively, since the results showed that career preparedness and employability skills are positively and significantly correlated, HEIs may strengthen its programs and activities that build and nurture the generic and hospitality-related skills of the students. They may subject students to various events, competitions, and conferences that will help them showcase and enhance their communication, conceptual, analytical, teamwork, leadership, interpersonal, and problem-solving skills, among others.

In a similar view, because generic skills were found to be the best predictor of employability skills, both students and HEIs may exert conscious effort to provide themselves and their students' opportunities that will improve the generic skills which will eventually impact the extent of employability skills. HEIs need to give more importance to developing the fundamental, functional, and technical skills of their students through an outcomes-based and industry-tailored course curriculum. Likewise, faculty members may continue to subject themselves to training and seminars to get updated and impart new knowledge to their students.

Lastly, as this study focused only on the perception of hospitality students, future researchers may conduct similar or related studies that will take into consideration the perception of the industry in terms of the employability of hospitality graduates. Furthermore, future researchers may conduct associated studies that may strengthen the results of this paper or may explore and investigate other variables that can influence employability skills such as life skills, soft skills, and technical skills.

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