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Employers and Tourism Students Perception of Employability in Cruise Industry

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ABSTRACT

Despite challenges on the employability of tourism graduates, cruise industry emerged as potential labor market for aspiring tourism graduates in the field. This study aimed to understand the perception of employers and tourism students on employability and explore possible career opportunities. The mixed method research design was utilized such as survey and interview to gather data. The respondents were the 285 graduating tourism students in selected higher education institutions in Metro Manila and five recruitment officers of the three manning agencies, such as United Philippine Lines, Philippine Transmarine Carrier, and Magsaysay Shipping. The Phase I of the study focused on conducting the survey to know the respondents' perception on employment while Phase II concentrate on interview with the recruitment officers from the various manning agency to explore cruise tourism career opportunities. Results showed that tourism students perceived highly competent on cruise tourism jobs such as front office, food and beverages, housekeeping and cruise staffing expect for ship star reservation system and bar mixology. Also, they perceived high on graduate attributes such as customer expectation, innovative spirit, communication skills, organizational skills, self-management skills, self-awareness, self-reliant, leadership and assertiveness. Interestingly, employers perceived employability with outstanding skills on the front office, food and beverages, housekeeping and cruise staffing section. Recruitment officers from manning agency rated high on identified graduate attributes highlighting the importance of exceeding customer expectations, aligned work experience, communication skills, demanding customers and volume of workload and multicultural workplace during the interview. This article has implication on curriculum development particularly in tourism program.

Keywords— Career in cruise tourism; graduate attributes; employability; mixed method; Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the biggest and emerging international industries. Travel and tourism generated US$7.6 trillion (10% of global GDP) and 277 million jobs (1 in 11 occupations) for the international economy in 2014 (Turner, 2015). In the Philippines, tourism sector shared 8.7% of its total GDP in 2015.

According to the Department of Tourism (DOT), there is an increasing number of Filipinos directly employed in the tourism sector from 4.1 million in 2010 to 7.4 million in 2016 (Tourism, 2015). And it has been estimated to generate more jobs for Filipinos in the local and international labor market, for example, the cruise industry.

The cruise industry emerged as the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry (Hall, 2001; Toh, Rivers, & Ling, 2005). Cruise refers to a specific type of ocean trip in which the vessel begins and ends at the same place which the main purpose is the leisure and recreation of its passengers (Douglas, 2004). Recently, it has increasingly doubled the rate of cruise tourism globally (Wood, 2004). The Northern part of America dominates the cruise industry while the European and Asian markets are presently growing faster than the United States (Butler, De Lavalle, & Wild, 2003). This expansion is not only geographically but also socio-demographic, for example, cruise organizations targeting new market niche such as new age groups, families, and population segments with lower and higher levels of income. Thus, modern cruise industry offers an option for everyone.

According to (Butler, 2003), the modern cruise tourism focuses on ship's accommodation rather than transport service. Recent cruise is bigger and can offer as many activities, for example, swimming pools, theatres, shopping centers, tennis courts, ice skating, rock climbing facilities, golf courses, libraries, internet-cafes, gyms, spas and art galleries than any land-based accommodation type (Weaver, 2005). The ships' nautical nomenclature is being replaced by hospitality terms, for example, decks are being called floors and cabins are now rooms on some cruise ships (Ward, 2015). There are two distinct areas of operation such as a) technical and navigation department and b) hotel operations (Lois, Wang, Wall, & Ruxton, 2004).

Employability

The global growth of tourism industries resulted in a rapid expansion of tourism education at various levels including higher education (Tribe, 2005). The interdisciplinary aspect of tourism is becoming more important in the labor market, for example, the potential employment for non-maritime seafarers such as hotel personnel in charge of housekeeping, food and beverage, casino personnel and entertainers and the expectations of the tourism industry specifically on the set of knowledge and competencies of managers and employees (Zehrer, Siller, & Altmann, 2006).

Employability is a set of skills, attitudes, and behaviors and technical capability that enable an individual to engage and advance in regular changing work demands (Buck & Barrick, 1987). Other explanation for employability can be pinned down into three components such as skills, abilities, and knowledge (Sonntag & Schmidt-Rathjens, 2004). However, completing an academic degree does not secure employability of graduates. Alignment of graduate attributes to employer requirements increases chances of graduates to secure job employment (Cox & King, 2006). Interestingly, employers are looking for a more flexible and adaptable workforce, with proactive mindset (Bennett, 2002; Cox & King, 2006); creative, problem solvers, and independent (Fallows & Steven, 2000). In addition, scholars (Anderson, 2005; Bagshaw, 1996; Byrne, 2001; Cassidy, 2006; Cotton, 2001; Llenares Raybould & Sheedy, 2005; Zinser, 2003) identified important qualifications such as high communication skills, empathy, motivation, decision-making, problem solving skills or cognitive skills, planning abilities, work values and improvisation abilities as a requirement for tourism-related fields. The high rates of employability require graduates with aligned work experience (Edwards et al., 2001).

The suitable skills and attributes have always been critical for successful participation in the tourism workplace. However, the amount of research published on the employability of tourism graduates on cruise tourism is very limited in comparison with another profession, for example, hotel and restaurant management, engineering and sciences. The research gap on cruise employment of tourism graduates has been the interest of the researchers. Understanding the industry needs would help the academe to improve the delivery of tourism education in the Philippines and to ensure employability of graduates.

Specifically, this study sought to identify the perception of employers and tourism graduates on employability in cruise tourism and finally present the implication of cruise jobs on curriculum designing and employability of tourism graduates

FRAMEWORK

According to (Spady, 1994), outcome-based education (OBE) is an educational theory that can enhance the employability of graduates through a clear and organized school system from defining outcomes, curriculum designing, delivery of instruction, and assessment based on the desired outcomes required in the job while outcomes is defined as a broad performance capability, knowledge or skill learned at the end of learning process, for example, specific skills required

to perform engineering work, etc. OBE has two purposes; (1) developing a clear set of learning outcomes around which all of the system components can be focused (2) establishing the conditions and opportunities within the system that allow and boost all students to achieve those important learning outcomes. In the OBE framework, various stakeholders (employers, alumni, professionals, educators, and other key community leaders) participate in designing learning outcomes and performance standards. According to (Jenkins & Unwin, 2001), learning outcomes help teachers tell students what is expected from them, for example, students are informed on what they can gain after the lecture. Learning outcomes also help the teachers plan the content of their teaching, design teaching materials and select appropriate teaching and learning strategy.

OBE framework is based on the three ideas that; (1) all students can learn and succeed in various way (2) successful learning strengthen optimal learning, and (3) school control the conditions that directly affect successful school learning. OBE framework has four guiding principles to ensure successful facilitation of learning; (1) clarity of focus on culminating exit outcomes of significance (2) expanded opportunity and support for learning success (3) high expectations for all to succeed (4) design down from your ultimate, culminating outcomes. There are also five elements important for school operation and facilitate learning success of students such as for define outcomes, design curriculum, deliver instruction, document results, and determine advancement. OBE can be traced in personnel training, apprenticeship training, and military training and flight schools in the past.

The higher education institution (HEI) perceived the need to redesign and rethink the set of core competencies parallel to industry desired needs for graduates to compete in global labor market, in this case, the tourism graduates. OBE is a holistic platform for educators to effectively develop graduates beyond the curriculum design learning.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to; a) describe the profile of the respondents b) assess the level of job competency and graduate attributes of graduating tourism students c) determine the job competency and graduate attributes aligned to the needs of manning agency d) explore the rating of manning agencies on the graduate attributes required in cruise industry; and, e) suggest enhancement program to improve employability of tourism graduates.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a convergent parallel mixed method research design (Classen, Lopez, Winter, Awadzi, & Ferree, 2007; Creswell, 2011). This method focuses on collecting, analyzing, relating or comparing quantitative and qualitative data to provide a better understanding of research problems (Classen et al., 2007).

Research Setting or Locale

This study was conducted at Centro Escolar University (CEU)-Manila and Makati campuses on SY 2015-2016. CEU is one of the institutions offering Tourism Management program that is committed to providing quality education see Figure 1.

Figure 1. Map vicinity of Cento Escolar University located in Mendiola, Manila, Philippines

Also, this study was conducted in the various manning agencies such as United Philippine Lines (UPL), Magsaysay Shipping and Philippine Transmarine Carrier (PTC) as main shipping industry in the Philippines see figure 2.

Figure 2. The manning agencies and cruise ship facilities and amenities. Picture a) Philippine Transmarine Carrier (PTC) b) Magsaysay Shipping c) 13 bars and restaurants d) VIP lounge e) grand piazza f) outdoor swimming pool, Jacuzzi, waterslide, and esteem sauna.

Respondents

The respondents were the 285 graduating tourism students from Centro Escolar University- Manila and Makati campuses in SY 2015-2016 and the five recruitment officers from the manning agencies such as United Philippine Lines (UPL) (Holland America), Magsaysay Shipping (Princess Cruises) and Philippine Transmarine Carrier (PTC) (Royal Caribbean). The respondents of the study were purposively selected based on the following criteria; a) graduating tourism students at Centro Escolar University and b) major shipping industry with the most number of cruising vessels.

The respondents for the interview were the three (3) recruitment officers from manning agencies based on their survey rating. The respondents with very high rating were purposively selected to understand the job requirements for the shipping industry.

Survey Instruments

A survey questionnaire was used to obtain respondents' demographic information such as age, gender, civil status and university affiliation and company affiliation. A researcher made instrument "Cruise Training Assessment

Scale" (CTAS) was utilized to determine the potential employability of graduating tourism students through skills audit and training assessment using a 5 point likert scale; *"5 as to greatly extent"* to *"1 as to no extent"*. The questionnaire went to series of consultations from expert in manning industry and academe for its face validity and content validity however, no report on the CTAS internal reliability.

This study used absolute approach on scale interpretation:

Score	Verbal Interpretation	Range
5	Very High	4.50 – 5.00
4	High	3.50 – 4.49
3	Average	2.50 – 3.49
2	Low	1.50 – 2.49
1	Very Low	0.00 – 1.49

A semi-structured guide instrument was prepared for the interview with the recruitment officers of the manning agencies. The semi-structured questionnaire was prepared based on their rating on the survey questionnaire they answer.

Table 1. Operational and conceptual definition of the variables in the study

Variables	**Definition**
Bar Mixology	Refers to the skill of mixing wine and non-alcoholic beverages including cocktails, spritzers and shandies
Cruise Industry	Refers to the travel and tourism sector
Cruise Staff Department	Refers to the office responsible for all the entertainment activities on board and ashore
Food and Beverage department	Refers to the department responsible for maintaining high quality foods and service and managing all the dining rooms, restaurants, bars, the galleys (kitchens), clean up and provisions.
Front office/Purser department	Refers to the office directly dealing with customers.
Housekeeping Department	Refers to the department responsible for maintaining the cleanliness and sanitation of cabins, rooms and messenger service, and laundry pick-up and delivery.
Outcomes Based Education	An educational theory that can enhance the employability of graduates through a clear and organized school system from defining outcomes, curriculum designing, delivery of instruction, and assessment based on the desired outcomes required in the job (Spady, 1994).

Variables	Definition
Graduate Attributes	The generic set of qualities and skills among undergraduate students set by the institution (Hill, Walkington, & France, 2016)
Shipstar system	Refers to the booking system use specifically on ship or cruise

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was communicated to the learning institution and manning agencies. To ensure the respondents received the questionnaire and accomplished the instrument, personal visitation was conducted. Consenting respondents were handed the pen and paper. Prior to the administration of the survey questionnaire, the respondents were given an orientation on the purpose of the study and were told; a) that there were no right or wrong answers, b) not to leave any items unanswered and c) take time in answering the survey d) confidentiality on their identity will not be divulged.

After the conduct of survey, an interview was conducted to the recruitment officers of the manning agencies to explore their rating on the graduate attributes and skills required on the cruise industry.

Ethical Consideration

Prior the conduct of the study, ethics approval was obtained from the research ethics committee of the CEU Manila. The consent form and waiver were prepared and given to the respondents prior the administration of the survey and interview.

Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage were used to describe the profile of the respondents and required skills of the manning agencies. Mean and standard deviation were used to determine the perception of the respondents (tourism students and recruitment officers of manning agencies) on employability using SPSS version 21.0.

Thematic analysis was used for analyzing the themes based on the interview transcripts of the recruitment officers of the manning agency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

The respondents in the study were divided into two; a) graduating tourism students and b) recruitment officers from the manning agencies. The graduating tourism students aged 20 (range: 19 – 25), single (100%), female (84.2%) and from CEU Manila (66.30%) and CEU Makati (33.7%) while the recruitment officers aged 34 (range: 30-40), female (75%) from the three manning agencies namely UPL, MS, and PTC.

Perceived Job Competencies of Graduating Tourism Students

The graduating tourism students were knowledgeable on front office work responsibilities. This implies that the graduating tourism students were knowledgeable about accommodation services, for example, reservation terms and procedures, online booking promotion, and check-in and out processes. They were also knowledgeable about types of lodging and classification standards for example, hotel standards and standard amenities and facilities, etc. They were also knowledgeable with reservation system except for shipstar reservation system. The shipstar reservation system was regarded highly important in the operation of cruise industry.

As regards food and beverages, the graduating tourism students were familiar with the food and beverages services. They were knowledgeable about the dining and bar services, purchasing, and food and sanitation safety except for bar mixology. The graduating tourism students were not familiar with bar mixology which they didn't encounter during their academic training.

In terms of housekeeping services, the graduating students were knowledgeable on basic room sanitation, different types of room and typical floor plans, proper storage of hazardous cleaning materials and proper cleaning method. However, it appears that they were not familiar with bed-making, parts and skirting, pest management, and control, and basic laundry procedures.

Also, the graduating tourism students emerged knowledgeable on cruise staffing. They were familiar with basic cruise terminology, safety and survival, and crowd and crisis management specifically on the ship's safety and emergency equipment and communication. Also, they were aware of the basic work opportunities in the cruising industry.

Perceived Graduate Attributes of Graduating Tourism Students

To describe the perceived graduate attributes of graduating tourism students, mean score and standard deviation were computed. Based on the self-survey report, the graduating tourism students rated good customer relations as their top skills (*M* = 4.48; *SD* = 0.59). They perceived that they can exceed customer expectations and prompt in handling customer request and concerns. They also rated self-management as second on the hierarchy of their soft skills (*M* = 4.47; SD = 0.60). They perceived that they have high ability to control one's feelings, and emotion, and manage time to achieve one's goal. The graduating tourism students have high rating on communication skills (M = 4.46; SD = 0.61). They can express themselves in oral and written communication in the English language. Data also showed that graduating tourism students have high rating on organizational skills (*M* = 4.44; *SD* = 0.64). They perceived that they were organized and can effectively plan for their personal and work-related activities.

In addition, they also perceived that they have high innovative spirit (*M* = 4.40; *SD* = 0.61) and self-awareness (*M* = 4.40; *SD* = 0.61). They were capable of finding new ways or method to reinvent their job. They have new ideas that may help improve the processes or procedures in doing their job. The graduating tourism students were aware of their strengths, feelings, and motivation. They were also aware of their weaknesses and opportunity for learning.

Findings also revealed that among all the soft skills self-reliant was part of the bottom three although relatively high in description. The graduating tourism students perceived that they were self-reliant (*M* = 4.39; *SD* = 0.61). They perceived that they were independent and capable of performing their job on their own. Interestingly, they rated themselves high on leadership (*M* = 4.30; *SD* = 0.69). They perceived that they have the potential to lead and direct the team. They perceived that they can influence people to do some work for them. Lastly, the graduating tourism students rated high on assertiveness (*M* = 4.25; *SD* = 0.64). They seemed not shy on defending what they believe was important for them or for other people in a calm and positive manner.

Industry desired needs

To determine the needs of the manning agency in terms of job competency, the recruitment officers from the identified manning agency rated the survey questionnaire provided to them. They rated high on the following cruise operational function such as front office, food and beverages, housekeeping services and cruise staffing. Data showed that manning agencies consider

graduates who are competent on front office department. They prefer college graduates in general who have practical knowledge on reservation, procedures, online booking, familiar with different type of promotion, standard amenities, and facilities in hotel and hotel standard based classification. Also, they look for graduates who are familiar with global distribution system particularly, Amadeus or Galileo system, shipstar system, visa and passport application and processing procedures and airline ticketing and reservation procedures.

Based on the data, the recruitment officers from manning agencies look for graduates who have practical knowledge on dinning and bar food service such as bar mixology, different food service types, dinning setup, and presentation. They prefer graduates with knowledge on basic costing procedures, techniques yield in food conversion and standard procedure for banquet and daily breakfast buffet setup. They also prefer graduates who are competent on food sanitation and safety, proper temperature and measures for food storage, and kitchen ethics, grooming, and basic house rules.

With regard to house-keeping related training, the recruitment officers from the various manning agencies preferred graduates knowledgeable with bed making parts, and skirting, pest management and control, different types of room and typical floor plan. They prefer basic housekeeping procedures in makeup rooms, vacant and dirty rooms, and room sanitation ethics for employees. They also prefer graduates with practical knowledge on laundry procedures and guidelines, proper storage of hazardous cleaning materials and proper cleaning methods.

Cruise-related training was found crucial in cruise operation. The manning agencies expect highly competent graduates in the cruise ship department specifically on the basic safety training for passengers, and principles of cruise transportation, principles of safety and survival such as basic fire prevention, basic safety requirements, social responsibility and crowd and crisis management.

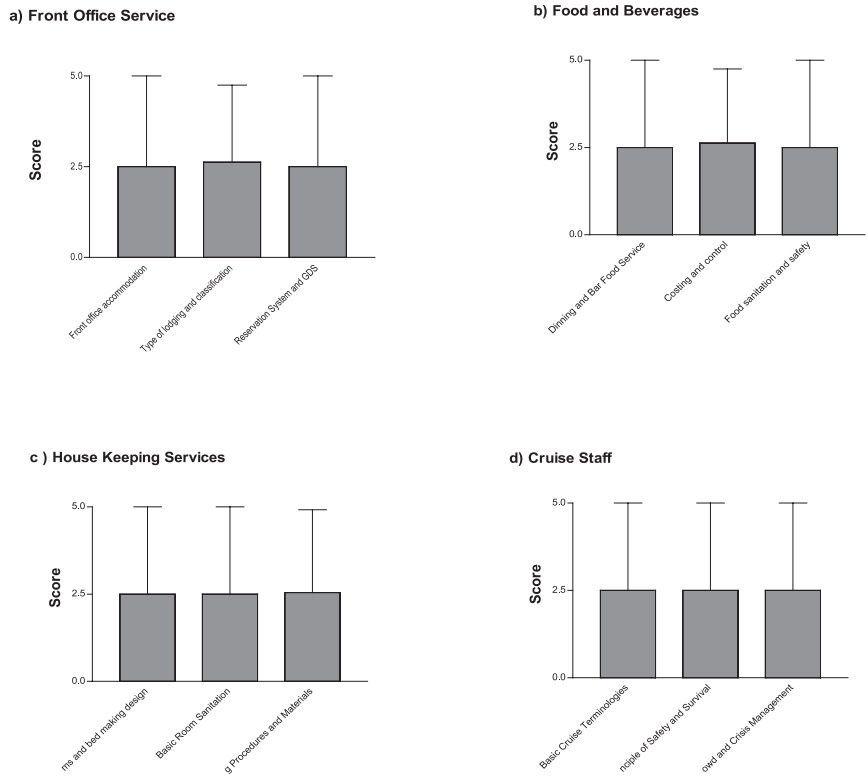

Figure 3. Job Competency required by the Manning Agencies in Graduating Tourism Students. Shown above are the ratings of the recruitment officers of various manning agencies on the crucial work activities in cruise industry such as; a) front office service b) food and beverages c) housekeeping services d) cruise staff.

Perceived Graduate Attribute Required by the Manning Agencies

The recruitment officers from the various manning agencies provided an overall rating score of 5 (range: '1' as low to '5' as high) on the nine identified soft skills (see Figure 4). They hold the position that graduates who would like to work on cruise industry should possess outstanding soft skills specifically on leadership, assertiveness, communication skills, customer relations, self-reliant, self-awareness, self-management, innovative spirit and organizational skills to work effectively in cruise industry.

After the rating assessment provided by the five recruitment officers from various manning agencies, three consenting respondents allowed the researchers to conduct the interview. The interview was conducted to understand their rating on the following soft skills highly required in the cruise industry.

Table 1. Themes based on the interview with Recruitment Officers of the Manning Agency

Identified Graduate Attribute required by the Manning Agency	
Themes	Subthemes
Exceeding customer expectation	▪ Customers from elite and middle- class society ▪ VIP Customers
Aligned work experience	▪ Cruise related experience ▪ TESDA Certification related to cruise industry
Bilingual or Multilingual Communication	▪ Customers from Asian countries ▪ Customers from Western countries
Demanding customer and volume of workload	▪ Customers are demanding ▪ Volume of workload and task at hand is 24/7
Multicultural workplace	▪ Customers from foreign countries ▪ Workers from foreign countries

Exceeding Customer Expectation

The three recruitment officers based on a separate interview affirmed that:

"*It was really important to have high customer relation skills in cruise industry. The customers are not ordinary customers; they came from elite and middle-class society, people who can pay and afford cruise ship luxury. Indeed, customers come from various parts of the world*".

One recruitment officer added:

"Some customers are known personalities; some are owner of businesses from different part of the world".

In this case, establishing a good relationship with the customers is a must to provide quality service in cruise industry.

Aligned work experience

One of the recruitment officers mentioned that:

"If tourism graduates have plan to work in cruise industry, they have to acquire experience related to cruise industry for them to be accepted in the job". "Manning agencies prefer graduates with previous work experience in cruise industry".

Other recruitment officers added:

"if the tourism students want to get employed in cruise tourism, they can request their on the job training (OJT) to be in cruise… that's the only way they can gain knowledge and experience in cruise related jobs". "It's a moving hotel they have plenty of things to do on the cruise during their immersion or practicum".

These statements clarify how the tourism students can acquire work experience related to cruise tourism and may enlighten educators to collaborate with shipping companies for students practicum.

Bilingual or Multilingual Communication

The three recruitment officers have similar opinion on:

"We hire graduates who have excellent communication skills or can speak bilingual or multi-language like English and Mandarin, English and Nihongo, etc. since the customers are coming from different parts of the world. Filipino crews learned other languages aside from English to communicate with other nationality, for example, conversing with Chinese national. The manning agency also hires other nationality aside from Filipinos to cater the needs of customers who cannot speak the English language".

This affirmed the importance of academic training on bilingual or multilingual language in the tourism and hotel and management programs for its employability.

Demanding customer and volume of workload

One of them said:

"Working in cruise differs from airlines. The aircrew personnel from airlines can relax after they reach their flight destination unlike with the cruise personnel from shipping lines. After they reach their first destination, the cruise personnel prepare the itinerary for the tour of the customers. The front office and food and beverages office work 24/7 among all the department or unit in shipping line."

Other recruitment officer added:

"Crew personnel in housekeeping division are busy maintaining cleanliness in contrast to personnel working in ordinary hotel where they can relax. Working in cruise requires initiative, self-reliant, and aggressive to attend customer needs or serve customers. So when customers call and ask to clean the room promptly, you attend to customer request. Cruise personnel should be knowledgeable or well-experienced".

Multicultural Workplace

The three recruitment officers agreed that:

"It is challenging to work in cruise because it's multicultural – people come from different races across the globe. Aside from the foreign customers, the manning agency hires other nationalities for example, Malaysian, Chinese, etc. to address customer needs which added to work complexity".

One recruitment officer added:

"The crew personnel should be flexible and culturally sensitive in dealing with their co-workers. You have to have high emotional control and self-awareness while working under pressure. You have to be aware of the body language and gestures in dealing with customers and co-workers to work effectively. The crew should be sensitive to the needs of his/her colleagues for example, being punctual during break and shifting schedules". The crew personnel should be an excellent team player.

Figure 4. Soft skills required by the Manning Agencies in graduates. Shown above are the five- star ratings of the recruitment officers on the soft skills crucial in the cruise based on the Likert scale of 1 as *low* to 5 as *high*.

Employability is measured by both personal competency and job competency known as *graduate attributes*. Personal competency is related to self-awareness, self-reliant and self-management. Job competency refers to specific employability including leadership, technical skills, communication skills, assertiveness, customer relations, organizational skills, and innovative spirit. The present study affirms previous studies findings on employers' perspectives in recruiting graduates such as communication skills, team work, integrity, intellectual ability, confidence, character or personality, planning and organizational skills, literacy skills, numeracy and decision-making skills, potential leaders and managers, technical skills, general intellectual ability and fast learner, fresh ideas and innovativeness (Archer & Davison, 2008; Pollard et al., 2015). Interestingly, there are other critical job requirements in hiring graduates specifically on cruise tourism such previous work experience related in cruise tourism, flexibility on multicultural work setting, bilingual or multilingual communication skills, and customer relations.

Furthermore, this paper suggests that curriculum design should be modularized to meet industry needs, for example, front office service required ship star reservation system in cruise operation and bar mixology on food and beverages section. Tourism students interested to work on cruise should learn to use ship star reservation system and develop bar mixology skills such as mixing

non-alcoholic drinks like cocktails, etc. The HEI should also consider collaborating with shipping industries for the practicum or *on the job training* of tourism students. The exposure of tourism students in on-the-job training is helpful to gain practical knowledge and skills based on industry needs. Collaboration with shipping agency could provide meaningful inputs for identifying learning outcomes; enhance curriculum design and setting performance standards.

CONCLUSIONS

Employers and tourism graduating students have different views on employability. There is a job shortage on particular skill required by the cruise industry such as bar mixology, shipstar reservation system, strong communication skills, and aligned work experience.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

A partnership was established between HEI and shipping agencies through Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the practicum of tourism students. The partnership between HEI and shipping industries should be maximized for curriculum enhancement, setting program educational objectives which led on identifying learning outcomes and performance standards. Furthermore, the partnership may be maximized by inviting and allowing seasoned personnel in shipping lines to prepare graduates in cruise tourism jobs.

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