



Tourism and hospitality management degrees as perceived by the industry: a necessity or just a worthless option

Mark Gabriel Wagan Aguilar

School Director, ABE International Business College-Quezon City, Philippines
markgabrielaguilar@gmail.com

Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 29th April 2020, revised 5th January 2021, accepted 15th April 2021

Abstract

The Tourism and Hospitality Industry- being one of the largest employers- is assumed to provide employment to tourism and hospitality management degrees completers who in the first place pursued the programs to establish a successful career in the said field. However what if the Industry is not solely for the graduates of these degrees? What if aside from consideration given to graduates of other courses, graduates of these directly aligned courses are not prioritized? Does this mean these degree courses are not worth it? This study carefully analyzed the necessity of Bachelor's Degrees in Tourism and Hospitality Management through the viewpoint of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry. Results show that a baccalaureate in Tourism and Hospitality Management is not necessary in establishing some well-to-do career in the Industry, particularly in the accommodation, food and beverage, and air transport sectors, and is just an advantage and additional credential, as human resource managers and staffs of Hotels, Restaurants, and Airlines do not see it as a requirement. It was also found out that the aforementioned field is a major contributor to job mismatch and the probable cause of the unemployment of graduates of the degrees. Nevertheless, the Accommodation Sector compared to the Food and Beverage, and Air Transport Sectors has been determined to likely recognize Bachelor's Degrees in Tourism and Hospitality most as they put more weight to College Degrees than what the two sectors do, thus, degree holders in the mentioned studies are more likely on succeeding in the Industry granting that a hotel work is opted, while the food and beverage sector is less recommended as an employer.

Keywords: Tourism and hospitality education, tourism and hospitality industry, college degree, educational institutions, employment opportunities.

Introduction

Proficiency in order to carry out tasks in relation to functions of the management and other operative duties in the sector of the hospitality and tourism industry can be cultivated through degree programs linked in the area of hospitality and tourism studies¹. According to the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services^{2,3}, Jobs directly aligned to a Hospitality Degree encompass Hotel and Accommodation Manager, Food Service Manager, Professional Cook, Conference Center Supervisor, Event Coordinator, Fast Food and Restaurant Manager and Public House Manager; whilst position in jobs where the previously mentioned degree could be serviceable covers Flight Attendants, Client Service Manager, Fire Risk Overseer, Human Resources Officer, Marketing Director, Store Manager, Tour Director and Tourism Officer. A graduate earning a Tourism and Travel degree could steer them in the path of a Cabin Crew, a Holiday Representative, Tour Director, Tourism Officer, Visitor Center Manager, Travel Agent and even a Hotel Manager; other works deemed as appropriate for the degree can also be Conference Centre Supervisor, Client Service Manager, Event Manager, Marketing Director, Sales Manager and Outdoor Activities/Education manager.

While there are a lot of benefits in working in the service of Tourism and Hospitality; competent wages, networking opportunities, free meals and travel, a diverse and fun environment that can develop you holistically^{4,5}, graduates in the field of hospitality who have already undergone through internship backgrounds and such are prospected to not be involved in the industry any longer⁶, and there are several factors that have affected the perspective of Hospitality graduates from staying in the industry such as limited growth opportunities, low salary compared to the work they perform, products seasonality, poor working condition⁷, and sexual harassment^{8,9}.

There have been several opinions toward the significance and insignificance of a College degree in Tourism and Hospitality but researches are barely found. Analyzing articles posted in websites of universities and colleges, and blogs of people, opinions toward the importance of the said degree were focused on the perks of working in the Industry despite the title of the articles stating that it is about the benefits of having the degree, obviously was meant since to work in the Industry does not require an individual to have a College Degree in Tourism and Hospitality.

In line with opinions, Theron et al¹⁰ found out that graduates of tourism and its industry both agree that client service and awareness, work ethics, competence in spoken communication and time management, motivation, detail-orientation, responsibility affirmation and ability to work well in difficult situations are crucial components essential when entering the profession of tourism. This however has increased the questionability of a degree in tourism and hospitality as a necessity, given that these set of knowledge and skills obviously do not require four years to learn and the fact that these are also thought to students who are pursuing other courses and in High School level. In addition, job satisfaction in the industry experienced by Hospitality Graduates despite being high between six to nine years of experience declines sharply after¹¹, which creates an image that the industry is not for a lifetime employment. This was supported by Costa et al¹² as they have found out that most of those who finished with a bachelor's degree in tourism are employed outside the field where they are expected to be, in spite of the majority of them who started their professional career within it.

One problem as well in the tourism and hospitality industry is job mismatch. According to Marchante et al¹³ workers in the hospitality industry could recompense for educational inadequacies through substantial work experiences. On contrary, an educational plethora does not become an alternative to internships and incumbency thus, allowing graduates of other fields access to a position in the field. In the Philippines, the Tourism Vice Chairman of the 2016 Business Month during the Tourism Job Fair even said in an interview with Lorenciana¹⁴ that Employers usually evaluate the interviewee's verbal skills and willingness and capability to be trained, thus, accepting other applicants who graduated from other degrees and not only those who finished with courses related to tourism. As the Industry continue to open opportunities to others, a huge number of tourism and hospitality degree graduates faces unemployment and in some cases underemployment where they are being paid lower than what they should be getting as a 4 year course graduate.

In the study of De Castro¹⁵, 12% of their Hospitality Management Graduates faces unemployment a year after finishing college, while 11% faces underemployment. The study showed that it was caused by few job vacancies or the lack of available positions in the Industry. Even Lyceum of the Philippines University-Batangas Campus, despite being one of the most prestigious educational Institutions in the Philippines in the field of Tourism and Hospitality Management have 37.90% unemployment rate among its 2013 Bachelor of Science in Tourism Graduates¹⁶, while according to Buama¹⁷ 7% from the Los Banos Campus of Laguna State Polytechnic University who finished with BS Tourism degrees from 2009-2013 were unemployed and almost half of them were engaged to a job or an Industry that are not aligned to their degree.

In connection to unemployment and underemployment, Hwang¹⁸ argues that the reasons behind graduates' unemployment are market condition or economic recession, the established gaps between the perspective and personal priorities of graduates and the industry, dispensable instructional services leading to educational surplus, and a shortage of skills and ability. This was further justified by Sparber and Fan¹⁹ in their study after finding out that the traditional curricula provided by schools are incompatible with the pragmatic demands of the society, and those discrepancies give rise to people being between jobs, in fact, according to Mason et al²⁰, a two-year course offered by institutions or vocational colleges is more likely to be favorable compared to four-year degree courses offered by institutions which curriculum structure and design are inclined in ignoring a graduate's experiential capabilities and actual work background. A graduate's educational level is less likely to contribute to the chances of getting unemployed but lack of skills does, and in a societal views the imbalance between skills demand and skills supply²¹.

The Tourism and Hospitality Industry is among the largest employers according to World Travel and Tourism Council on 2017 alongside with manufacturing and service²². WTTC also claimed that there is a 9.9% of careers associated with travel and tourism, whereas 20% of those were created from 2008 to 2017. Sofronov²³ further argues that there is a very high percentage of people all over the world which are depending on this sector in terms of being employed, while to most island economies, travel and tourism is not only deemed as the employer that is the most considerable but is surmised as a sole employer. As employment contribution and the need for more people in the Industry increases, the number of graduates of aligned degrees also grows. In the Philippines for example, the courses with the most number of graduates from academic year 2010-2011 to 2018-2019 are Business related Courses which includes Tourism and Hospitality Management; 207,178 Graduates for Academic Year 2018-2019 to be precise²⁴.

As debates about the significance of a College Degree particularly in Tourism and Hospitality continues in several platforms and with the information from researches and published articles, a formal study about the necessity of these degrees is highly interesting. Though is already obvious to some, a formal analysis is needed to be considered as a fact.

Methodology

An online survey and job vacancy postings of establishments were used and assessed to gather data for this study. Only three among the five sectors under the Tourism Industry were evaluated with focus on the operations division; Accommodation (Front Office), Housekeeping and Food and Beverage), Food and Beverage (Kitchen and Front of the House), and Air Transport (Ground Control and In-Flight Crew), as the most popular to graduates.

Respondents for the online survey were limited to 10 Human Resource Management Practitioners of 4-5 Star Hotels and 10 Human Resource Management Practitioners of Fine Dining Restaurants in Metro Manila, Philippines, while the job vacancy postings of the 3 major Airlines in the Philippines were evaluated. Respondents were randomly selected and were messaged through a professional social network website and electronic mail, and job vacancy postings were searched online. Data were qualitatively and quantitatively treated as the survey is consist of multiple choice and open-ended/subjective questions. Answers for the aforementioned type of questions were accumulated thematically while frequency and percentage were computed for the questions that have multiple choices.

Data Gathering took 2 months and 4 days from February 23 to April 27, 2020, and took the author to message 43 HRD Practitioners to convince 20 to answer the survey, equivalent to 46.51% response rate.

Results and discussion

Figure-1 shows that among the 10 respondents from each sector of the Industry, 15 are HRD Associates while 5 are Managers, 7 of which are HRD Associates of Hotels, 8 are HRD Associates of Restaurants, while 3 are HRD Managers of Hotels and 2 of Restaurants.

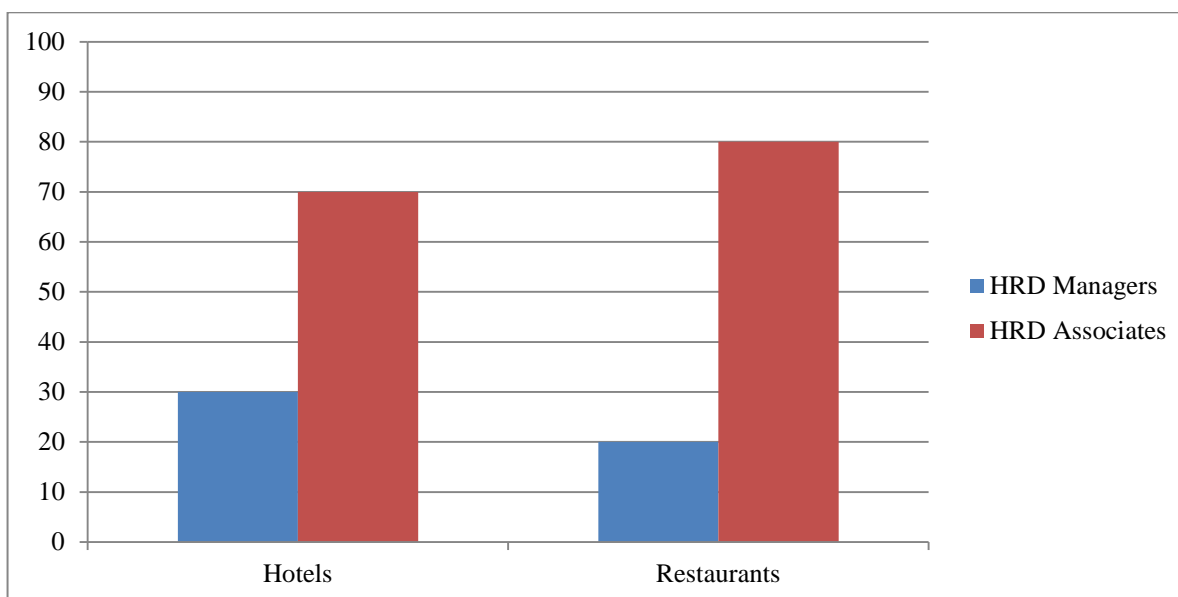


Figure-1: Classification of respondents in terms of rank/ position level.

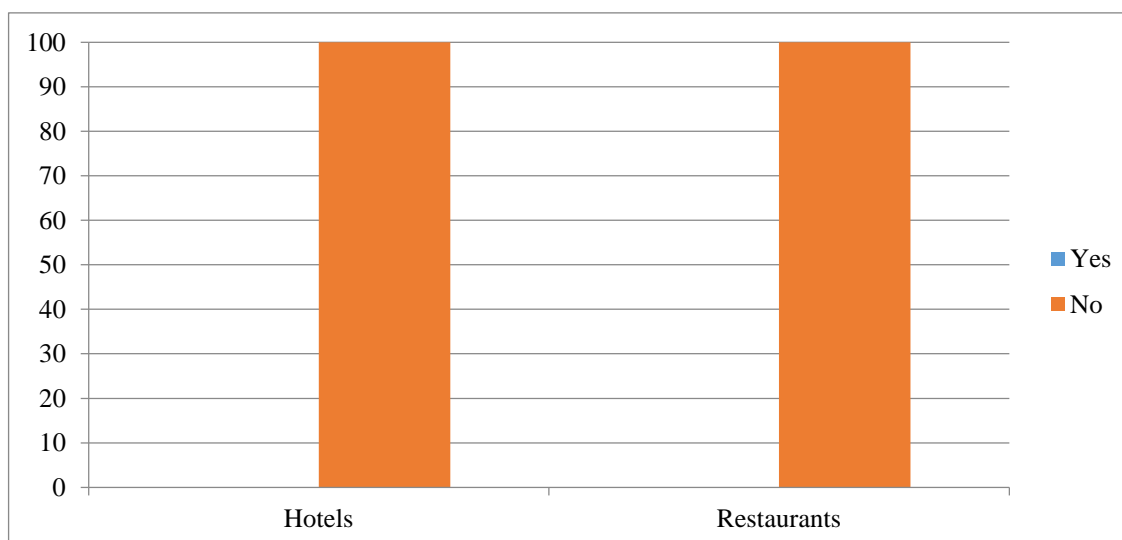


Figure-2: Responses to the question that aims to determine whether a College Degree in Tourism and Hospitality is a requirement to land a job in the Accommodation, and Food and Beverage Sectors.

Figure-2 shows that 100% of the respondents remarked how a College Degree in Tourism and Hospitality is non-mandatory in terms of landing jobs in the Accommodation, and Food and Beverage Sectors.

Figure-3 shows that all the Online Job Vacancy Posts made by the three major Airlines in the Philippines do not state that a College Degree in Tourism and Hospitality is a requirement to land a job in the Air Transport Sector.

Figure-4 determined that 100% of the respondents remarked how a College Degree in Tourism and Hospitality is non-mandatory for an entry level position in the Accommodation, and Food and Beverage Sectors, while all the 3 major airlines do not require that said College Degree for the same rank of position.

Figure-5 shows 80% of the respondents from the accommodation sector said that a College Degree in any field is a requirement for an entry level position, 20% on the other hand said it is not. In the Food and Beverage Sector, only 30% of the respondents said that a College Degree is needed for an entry level position, while 80% said that is not necessary.

Figure-6 shows that one among the three airlines had stated in their Job Vacancy Posts that College Degree is a requirement for an Entry Level Position particularly as a Cabin Crew, while the two only requires an experience of at least 2 years in College, one of which stated that high school graduates could be considered as well.

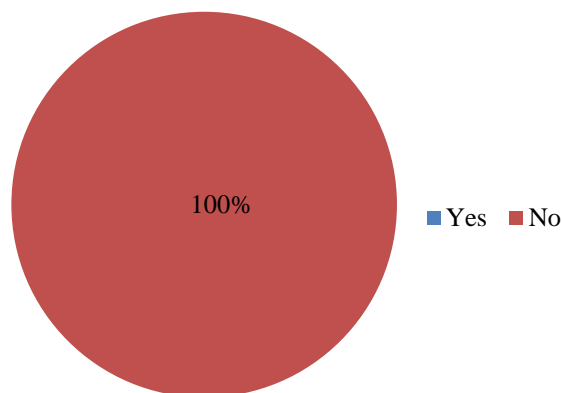


Figure-3: Result of the assessment on Job Vacancy Posts of 3 Major Airlines in the Philippines towards the need of College Degree in Tourism and Hospitality to land a job in the Air Transport Sector.

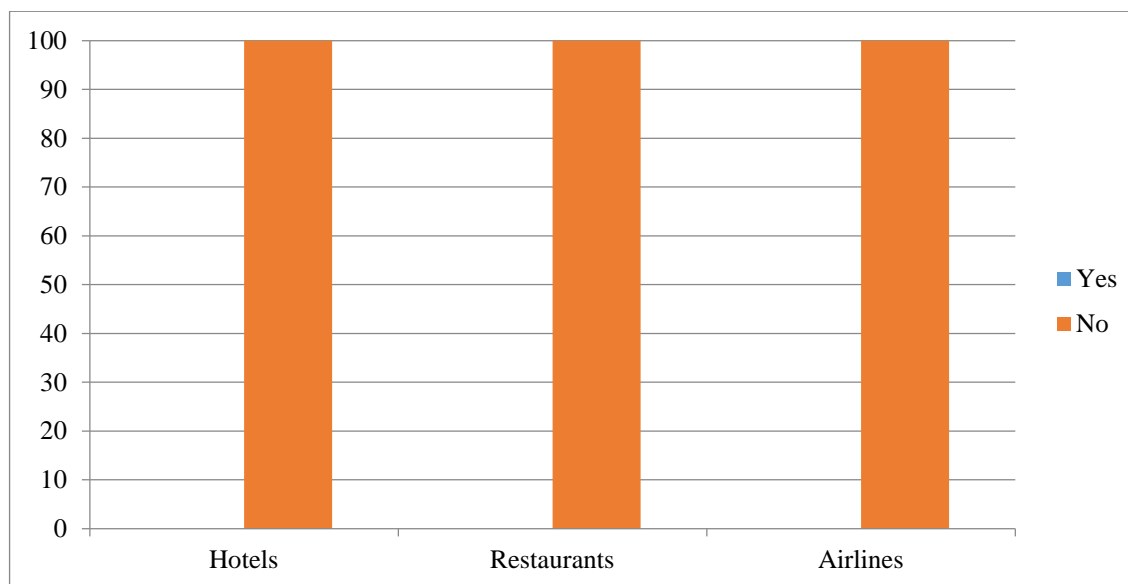


Figure-4: Responses to the question that aims to determine whether a College Degree in Tourism and Hospitality is a requirement for an entry level position, and the result of the assessment on job vacancy posts of the 3 major airlines in the Philippines.

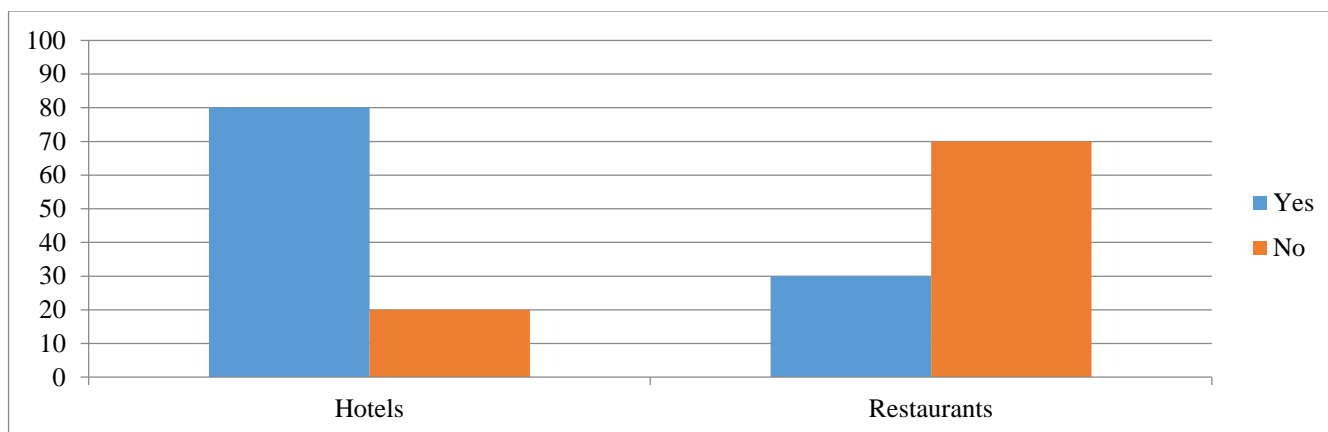


Figure-5: Responses to the question that aims to determine whether a College Degree (disregarding the field of study) is a requirement for an entry level position in the Accommodation, and Food and Beverage Sectors.

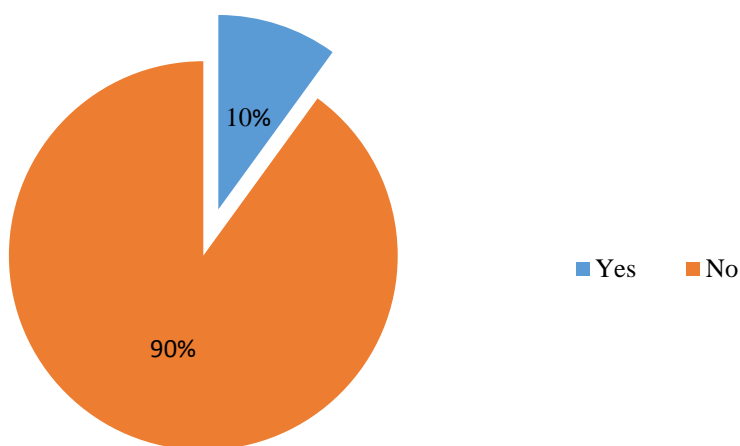


Figure-6: Result of the assessment on Job Vacancy Posts of 3 Major Airlines in the Philippines towards the need of College Degree for an Entry Level Position.

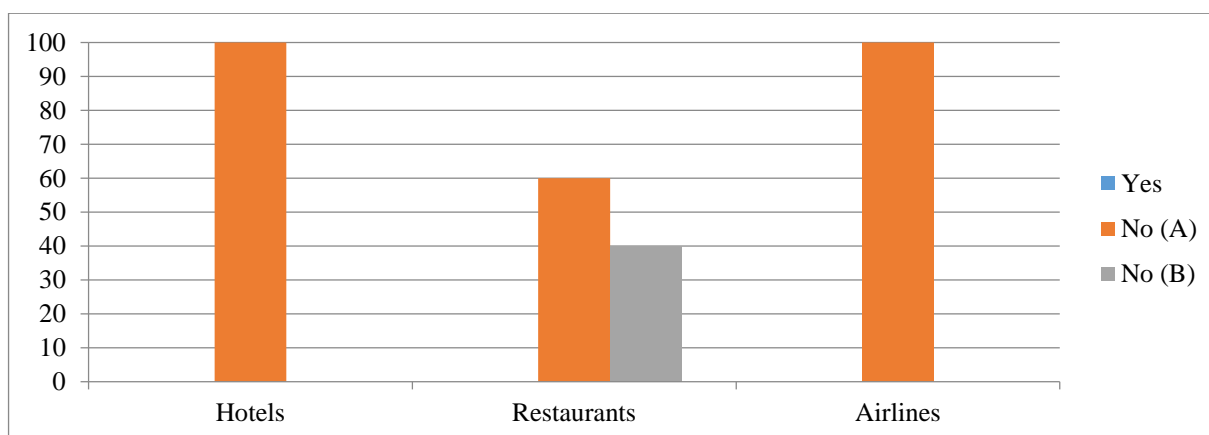


Figure-7: Result of the assessment on the responses of human resource managers and staffs of hotels and restaurants, and the job vacancy posts of 3 Major Airlines in the Philippines towards the need of a College Degree in tourism and hospitality for a Managerial Level Position. No (A): A College degree in Tourism/ Hospitality is not a requirement, however a College Degree in any field and relevant experience are. No (B): A College degree is not a requirement; the experience, attitude, and skills are what matters.

How to be successful in the industry and the worthiness of a tourism and hospitality degree holder: Through thematic analysis, three dominant advices came out from the responses to the question “What should a person do in preparation if he/she wants to enter and establish a successful career in the tourism and hospitality Industry”; i. Develop Soft Skills, ii. Improve Interpersonal Skills, iii. Never stop learning. While in the question “What is the worth/ weight of a College Degree in Tourism and Hospitality towards the recruitment and promotion of someone for a position in the operations division”, two terms appeared in the answers of most of the respondents, i. Additional Credential/ Qualification, ii. Advantage.

In addition to the data that have been gathered and analyzed, the author would like to add another justification why a four year degree course in tourism and hospitality is not really a necessity. Real Life stories include friends who are now Professors in renowned Colleges and Universities, Managers of popular Hotel and Restaurant Brands, and successful Chefs in Hotels, Restaurants, and Cruise Ships but are not holders of a degree in tourism and hospitality, in fact, some are not even college graduates. The question is how did they become successful in the tourism and hospitality line? They worked to gain experience; they established tenure of service; they attended Seminar-Workshops; and they pursued Certificate Courses aligned to their jobs. They are not holders of a degree in tourism and hospitality, yet they are more successful than a number of holders of the said degree who are also working in the industry. Several technical schools and academies that have complete facilities needed are offering Certificate Courses specifically on skills required by the Industry; Culinary, Food Services, Tour Guiding, Front Office Operations, and Housekeeping among others, which usually takes 6 months to 1 year to finish. These certificates are proven to be valid as proof of competencies compared to a College Diploma in Tourism and Hospitality Management that are awarded by Universities and Colleges, which in the Philippines for example are mostly lacking of facilities needed by students to fully develop their skills, thus, learning is more theoretical than actual.

Conclusion

The Field of Tourism and Hospitality though expected as an employer of the degree holders of Tourism and Hospitality Management is not solely for them, for it is also open to graduates of other courses including certificate courses with support of a relevant work experience, thus, creates a general perspective that graduates of other degree courses are more employable. Moreover, this establishes a belief that a degree acquired from the course is not necessary, and that anybody who has the relevant experience, sincere desire, and pertinent skills can perform tasks and responsibilities in the operations of tourism and hospitality aligned establishments, which courses in the same degree are actually devised for.

What is a degree in Tourism or Hospitality for if one can work and get promoted in the industry without having it? What is it

for if graduates of other courses including undergraduates are sometimes seen as more qualified for a position? As result dictates, the author hereby concludes a College Degree in Tourism and Hospitality is not necessary to establish an eminent position in the industry it was deemed designed for, and is just an additional credential and an advantage since it is assumed that adjustment won't be too much of a challenge to graduates as they are already somehow familiar with the operations. The industry itself has been found also as a major contributor to job mismatch. Through data collected from published researches, it was further determined that as non-tourism and hospitality management graduates are being considered for a position in the Industry, the more people would believe that choosing a degree in College carefully is not important and one could just throw away the four years he/she have spent studying if after graduation he/she realized that it was not the right field for him/her. It was also determined that despite the large number of tourism and hospitality management graduates, unemployment should've not been a problem since the industry has been considered as one of the largest employers; one of the probable cause of this is the Industry considering non-tourism and hospitality management degree graduates than to focus on providing employment to graduates of the field. If the industry would not change this practice, the author suggests having tourism and hospitality management as a major of the Bachelor of Science in Business Management/ Administration instead of being degree courses. However, if the Industry would agree to prioritize or solely accept tourism and hospitality management degree graduates, Educational Institutions should make sure that they are able to produce competent graduates, while government offices responsible to manage higher education should strictly monitor the compliance of these Educational Institutions to the demands of the Industry, these includes facilities, competent professors, and the enforcement of an admission screening.

This study also found out that the Accommodation Sector compared to the Food and Beverage, and Air Transport Sectors is likely to recognize degree holder of Tourism and Hospitality most as they put more weight to College Degrees than what the two sectors do, thus, the forenamed graduates could more likely succeed in the Industry if a hotel work is what they opt to do, while the food and beverage sector is less recommended as an employer. It was further determined that to succeed in the Industry, one should possess soft and interpersonal skills, and should continuously learn for professional advancement.

The Commission on Higher Education-Philippines with the presence of Academic Institutions that offer courses in the field of tourism and hospitality without complete facilities are hereby questioned, while Educational Institutions that proudly promotes tourism and hospitality courses knowing that they are not capable of producing competent graduates makes the author wonder if they still care for their credibility and reliability or at least for the future of their students. These Institutions should also be apprehended for actively selling and promoting substandard products.

References

1. Commission on Higher Education, Memorandum Order No. 62, Series of 2017, <https://ched.gov.ph/cmo-62-s-2017/>. 2017
2. Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) Editors. Travel and Tourism/ <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/what-can-i-do-with-my-degree/travel-and-tourism>. 09/ 2019
3. Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) Editors. Hospitality Management/ <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/what-can-i-do-with-my-degree/hospitality-management>. 04/2019
4. Glion Institute of Higher Education. Nine reasons why you need a job in Hospitality. Internships and Career Blog/ <https://www.glion.edu/blog/9-reasons-hospitality-jobs>. 11/06/2019
5. William Blue College of Hospitality Management. 5 Benefits of a Degree in Travel & Tourism/ <https://www.williamblue.edu.au/blog/careers/5-benefits-of-a-degree-in-travel-tourism>. 28/08/2018
6. Richardson, S. (2008). Undergraduate tourism and hospitality students attitudes toward a career in the industry: A preliminary investigation. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, 8(1), 23-46.
7. Aynalem, S., Birhanu, K., & Tesefay, S. (2016). Employment opportunities and challenges in tourism and hospitality sectors. *Journal of Tourism & Hospitality*, 5(6), 1-5.
8. Simon S. Hospitality Workers and Sexual Harassment/ <https://www.npr.org/2017/11/25/566438853/hospitality-workers-and-sexual-harassment>. 25/11/2017
9. Ineson E., Yap M., Whiting G. (2013). Sexual discrimination and harassment in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Volume 35, pp. 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2013.04.012>
10. Theron N., Ukpere W., Spowart J.(2018). Perception of tourism graduates and the tourism industry on the important knowledge and skills required in the tourism industry. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, Volume 7, (Issue 4), pp. 1-18.
11. Kang S., Gould R.(2002). Hospitality Graduates' Employment Status and Job Satisfaction. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Education*, Volume 14, (Issue 4), pp. 11-18. DOI: 10.1080/10963758.2002.10696748
12. Costa C., Breda Z., Malek A., Durao M. (2013). Employment Situation of Tourism Graduates Working In and Outside the Tourism Sector. *GSTF International Journal on Business Review*, Volume 3, (Issue 1), pp. 141-146. DOI: 10.5176/2010-4804_3.1.298
13. Marchante A., Ortega B., Pagan R.(2007). An Analysis of Educational Mismatch and Labor Mobility in the Hospitality Industry. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, Volume 31, (Issue 3), pp. 299-320.
14. Lorenciana C. Skills mismatch hounds upbeat tourism industry. <https://www.philstar.com/the-freeman/cebu-business/2016/06/16/1593431/skills-mismatch-hounds-upbeat-tourism-industry>. 16/06/2016
15. De Castro G.(2017). Tracer Study of Hotel and Restaurant Management Graduates of One State College in the Philippines from 2014-2016. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, Arts and Sciences*, Volume 4, (Issue 1), pp. 41-47.
16. Dimalibot G., Diokno J., Icalla M., Mangubat M., Villapanda L.(2013). Employment Status of the Tourism Graduates of Batch 2013 in Lyceum of the Philippines University-Batangas. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*, Volume 11, (Issue 1), pp. 46-56.
17. Buama C.(2018). Tracer and Employability Study: BS Tourism Graduates of Laguna State Polytechnic University Los Banos Campus. *KnE Social Sciences*, Volume 3, (Issue 6), pp. 243-253. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v3i6.2383>
18. Hwang Y.(2017). What Is the Cause of Graduates' Unemployment? Focus on Individual Concerns and Perspectives. *Journal of Educational Issues*, Volume 3, (Issue 2), pp. 1-10. DOI:10.5296/jei.v3i2.11378
19. Sparber C., Fan J. (2012). Unemployment, Skills, and the Business Cycle since 2000. *Economics Faculty Working Papers*, Paper 20. https://commons.colgate.edu/econ_facschol/20
20. Mason G., Williams G., Cranmer S.(2009). Employability skills initiatives in higher education: what effects do they have on graduate labour market outcomes?.*Education Economics*, Volume 17, (Issue 1), pp. 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09645290802028315>
21. Hossain M., Yagamaran K., Afrin T., Limon N., Nasiruzzaman M., Karim A.(2018). Factors Influencing Unemployment among Fresh Graduates: A Case Study in Klang Valley, Malaysia/ *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, Volume 8, (Issue 9), pp. 1494-1507. <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v8-i9/4859>
22. Spinks R., Kopf D. Is tourism really the world's largest industry?/ <https://qz.com/1419103/is-tourism-really-the-worlds-largest-industry/>. 11/10/2018
23. Sofronov B. (2018). The Development of the Travel and Tourism in the world. *Annals of Spiru Haret University*, Volume 18, (Issue 4), pp. 123-137.
24. Commission on Higher Education. Higher Education Data and Indicators: AY 2009-10 to AY 2018-19.