

The Hospitality Stakeholders' Perception toward Industry and Education Relationship: Strategies for Effective Curriculum Design

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Abstract

This qualitative research aims to investigate the perception of hospitality stakeholders view toward the existing relationship between hospitality education and the industry in Bangkok, and to propose strategies in order to reduce the gaps within and among the hospitality stakeholders for more effective curriculum design. This study employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with a sample of 5 hospitality educators, 5 hospitality managers, and 5 hospitality undergraduate intern students, in a total of 15 respondents. For the sampling method, a non-random purposive sampling technique was used with hospitality educators from the participating universities and colleges deemed to have the strongest qualifications, expertise, and knowledge required for the research. From the interview result, it was found that there are links between the hospitality industry and education. This implies that there is a need to incorporate all three stakeholders to establish quality relationships between the hospitality industry and education. Moreover, the findings indicate that the success of students depends on the curriculum content which prepares them for the real industry with effective training programs. To ensure survival, therefore, the curriculum designers need to meet the needs of the industry to have a core discipline, which can be achieved by more practical skills training, more case-study work based on the world of hospitality, and by industry representatives being closely involved in all aspects of course development.

Keywords: Hospitality Employability Competencies, Hospitality Stakeholders, Hospitality Education

Introduction

In the current rapidly changing socio-economic and technological environment, with challenges from global competition, together with changes in teaching and learning, there is a growing need for education in hospitality employability competencies. Hospitality and tourism growth can generate positive benefits in terms of employment, and directly impacts the hospitality industry; more tourist arrivals lead to higher demand for accommodation, along with the improvement of the tourism facilities and infrastructure needed to support the expected burgeoning growth in the hotel and tourism sector. Growth in the country's hospitality and tourism sector is projected to continue. Additionally, By 2023, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) expects Thailand to generate total tourism revenue of THB1.73 trillion with THB970 billion from the international market and THB760 billion from the domestic market (for the base case scenario) and THB2.38 trillion with THB1.50 trillion from the international market and THB880 billion Baht from the domestic market. This represents about 80% of Thailand's tourism performance in 2019. The Thai Tourism Authority released details of its Action Plan for 2023, which is very similar to its earlier Corporate Plan 2023-2027 (TTR Weekly, 2022). These changes will have an impact on many enterprises and employees, not only in Thailand's travel industry but also in upstream and downstream businesses. Hence, it is important to focus on the people industry: Human Resource Management (HRM). Long-term economic success is heavily dependent on a high competency level for all staff throughout the hospitality and tourism sectors.

In addition, Thailand, a popular global tourist destination, has an increasing need for highly competent human resources in the hospitality and tourism sector (Tejavanija, 2002). The growing demand for skilled professionals in this industry has pushed Thailand's hospitality and tourism study programs to expand significantly during the past decade. In Thailand, there are 54 universities have opened their curricula to support the growing demand (Admission Premium, 2017). Unfortunately, Tejavanija (2002) pointed out that most educators lack professional skills and actual working experience in this field. Most of them progressed directly from college/university to academic posts but have no direct practical experience in the industry. In addition, she noted that most curricula seem to be out of date, without qualified and capable people to meet the requirements and expectations of the industry. On the other hand, Zopiatis and Constanti (2007) found the mismatch between the educational experience delivered to hospitality students and the real-world practice they experience. Additionally, Jugmohan (2010) observed that there is a rising need for personnel who have received professional training and education in the hotel and tourism industry. The skills required by the industry and the education that is offered by universities in the field of tourism, however, differ significantly. The assessment of industry needs or requirements and the inclusion of industry in curriculum design is a significant problem for universities providing tourism education. Moreover, Anito and Morales (2019) suggested that the curriculum for higher education be redesigned to meet the newly emerging competency standards of the labor market.

According to Bakhru's study (2018), educators can include the competencies into their curriculum and instruction to increase their efficacy in the classroom, boost student understanding, and better prepare students for the workplace (Bakhru et al., 2013). Effective curriculum design has a great impact on the success of the hospitality industry as it related to human resource development. Hence, there is an insistent need for the creation of outstanding and relevant curricula for hospitality and tourism management, which are appropriate for both local and international markets.

The results of this research will contribute to the hospitality industry by investigating the importance of employability competencies required for working in the Thai hospitality industry and exploring the gaps between each stakeholder group. There are strategies for each stakeholder to make an effective curriculum as well as conducting semi-structured interviews to explore their perceptions toward the employability competency used in the hospitality industry and investigate the industry-education relationship. This knowledge can also be used in the recruitment of staff to ensure a good fit between employability competencies among prospected employees and the demand of the hospitality workforce. The educational institutes can provide an industry-informed curriculum based on the understanding of gaps revealed by the evaluation of importance-performance analysis. The government sector, specifically the Ministry of Education, can develop policies to support this issue such as internship support and education development for the future economy.

Literature Review

Previous studies (Kuol et al., 2011; Lu, 1999; Ogbeide, 2006; Wood, 2003), show many research methodologies have been applied to conduct research in the area of hospitality and educational relationships. Most of the researchers employed quantitative methods to investigate the perceptions of competency needs of stakeholders in the industry. Another study explored what skills graduates of higher education institutions need to be successful in the hospitality industry (Shariff & Abd Razak, 2021). Based on Competency-Based Education, these skills include abilities to interact effectively with others and to manage and work within a team.

Moreover, previous studies (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005), looking at the relationship between the hospitality industry and education, demonstrate that Likert scale questions as part of a survey have been a frequently used quantitative method. They surveyed hospitality managers' expectations of the skills of graduates and compared them with the perceptions of students using self-completed surveys. Each group rated the importance of specific skills using a self-completion survey instrument that required each group to rate the importance of a range of hospitality-related skills, which were then compared to create a pattern of expectations-perceptions called "gap analysis". Similarly, Ogbeide (2006) also employed Likert scale questionnaires to explain students' self-perceptions of competency levels that were important for working in the hospitality field. Ashley et al. (1995) used brainstorming-focus group interviews by hospitality professionals to identify the skills, knowledge, and competency that students

needed to obtain before their graduation. Others, such as Breiter and Clements (1996), investigated 301 hospitality professionals with the necessary skills, while Enz et al. (1993) conducted a quantitative method in an investigation on internship students, hospitality educators, and managers to identify the skills needed for careers.

Nolan et al. (2010) undertook surveys comparing the expectations and performance of competency needs, and then compared the results to identify possible gaps. The research methodology involved both questionnaire distribution and interviews to supplement the primary data. Another study (Tas, 1988; Tsai et al., 2006), employing a questionnaire survey focused on hospitality management competencies (Tas, 1988), and determined thirty-six essential competencies for management trainees. Tsai et al. (2006), also applied Sandwith's (1993), competency domain model to compare the differences between the perceptions of hospitality professionals and educators in Taiwan toward competency needs. They used a mixed method by using Delphi questionnaires for the first round and a Likert questionnaire for the second and third rounds.

Other researchers (Millar et al., 2008; Monica Hu et al., 2009; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007), conducted research regarding tourism and hospitality education employed qualitative methods. For instance, Millar et al. (2008) used semi-structured interviews to identify competencies that graduates should have before graduation. The respondents were asked, "What skills or competencies do you think hospitality students should possess before they graduate?" Some studies chose another approach such as gap analysis and using IPA, (importance-performance analysis), (Monica Hu et al., 2009), which will also be utilized for this research. Zopiatis and Constanti (2007) employed methodological triangulation in the investigation of the three primary stakeholders, using questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The integration and triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods helped to address issues of validity and reliability commonly associated with using any single method alone (Jick, 1979). Hence, building upon previous research, this study will employ qualitative methods with the three primary stakeholders.

Many studies (Kamau & Waudo, 2012; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005; Lu, 1999; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007) in the hospitality industry have investigated the relationship between the industry and education from various aspects. Most of the previous studies aimed at examining the relationship between the three primary stakeholders. For instance, Kamau and Waudo (2012) investigated the expectations of employers regarding the employees' competencies. Similarly, Raybould and Wilkins (2005) surveyed managers' perceptions of graduates' skills and compared these expectations with students' perceptions of what managers value. Lu (1999) identified the competencies expected for entry-level positions in international tourist hotels in Taiwan based on human resource managers and student perceptions. Zopiatis and Constanti (2007) investigated the relationship between hospitality education and the industry as related to students' internship practices in Cyprus.

In addition, Kuol et al. (2011) surveyed 338 students in higher education to identify the critical education elements and to help provide recommendations for the programs. Kamau and Waudo (2012) surveyed 106 human resource managers to determine the expectations of industry employers on employees' competencies; they also conducted semi-structured interviews to follow up on the results. Some researchers employed only qualitative methods using interviews with hospitality professionals and hospitality educators. Lu (1999) found that most human resource managers identified people skills as being more important than general knowledge skills, while operational skills were perceived as least important. Cooperative team building, communication, and harmonious guest relations were found to be the top three skills. Nolan et al. (2010) suggested that the results emphasized the importance of having more collaboration between education and industry in order to prepare students to meet industry needs. Moreover, Ogabeide (2006) described the self-perception of the students' competency in terms of employability skills which are important for hospitality careers. These skills consist of the ability to work independently, helping others, and the ability to obtain new knowledge from daily experiences. The study also identified that problem-solving skills were performed well by the respondents. Results reinforce the importance of the human-relations skills required by the industry.

According to Millar et al. (2008), there were found to be some gaps between professionals and hospitality educators, and it was suggested that lines of communication are not open between hospitality educators and professionals. Faculty internships, industry forums, and interaction with graduating students are suggested means to open communication. The comparative findings also indicated that specific skills are best learned in the workplace while the smaller skill sets were needed from hospitality education (Wood, 2003).

The cultural context in which this research is the minor study which takes place also needs to be considered. There is a difference between the framework proposed for this research and the previous research employing the model proposed by Zopiatis and Constanti (2007). This research model is adapted from the investigation in Cyprus, exploring the industry and education relationship. However, Thailand, as an Asian cultural context, is different from a Western context. It may be that the Cyprus model is unique and different, as Cyprus borders both Asian and European continents and cultures. To compare the service styles between Asia and the West, Asia tends to be more people-oriented and highly values service efficiency (Matilla, 1999). Research shows that cross-culturally sensitive employees provide their foreign customers better service through their capability to adjust serving styles to meet the needs of foreign customers. Western customers prefer time saving and efficient service, while Asian customers give priority to the service quality of interpersonal relationships and focus on the quality of interaction and good manners. From a Thai hospitality manager's point of view, the service from Thai employees tend to be more personal and focused on detail more than Western hospitality service. This

reflects the theory of Hofstede's power distance, which states that Asians exhibit a higher power distance than Europeans. Regarding personal communication, high-power distance means a high level of hierarchical structure with clear tiered lines of authority and prescribed interactions according to rank (Hofstede, 1994).

To conclude, the novel contribution from this research is how to implement strategies to narrow down the gaps between the importance and performance of employability competency needs in the hospitality industry.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative method of in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2007) which were conducted with respondents in each group. Fifteen respondents made up the target population of this study, which comprised five hospitality educators, five hospitality managers, and five undergraduate intern students. For the sampling method, a non-random purposive sampling technique (Jennings, 2001) was used with hospitality educators from the participating universities and colleges deemed to have the strongest qualifications, expertise, and knowledge for the research. As they know their students' competencies and have experience with the internship program and curriculum, they are well-positioned to give comments and criticize the results. The data collection and analysis continued until saturation, which refers to the eventual absence of new data that may affect the results. Sampling continued until the researcher sensed saturation had been reached. The first use of the term "theoretical saturation" was by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Glaser and Strauss intertwined data collection and analysis for one category until saturation, before moving on to collect and analyze data for another category. Therefore, in this research, there are altogether 15 participants (5 from each group), who provided data until there was theoretical saturation, and there was no change depending on the nature and consistency of the data obtained. Personal face-to-face interviews were conducted to reveal hospitality educators' perceptions on issues based on their extensive experience and knowledge of the industry, by the use of interview questions that aimed to explore additional issues in greater depth than those listed in the broader questionnaire of the survey.

Research Objectives

RO1: To investigate the perception of hospitality stakeholders view the existing relationship between hospitality education and the industry in Bangkok

RO2: To propose strategies to reduce the gaps within and among the hospitality stakeholder groups for a more effective curriculum design

Research Questions

RQ1: How do hospitality stakeholders view the existing relationship between hospitality education and the industry in Bangkok?

RQ2: What are the proposed strategies to reduce the gaps within and among the hospitality stakeholder groups for a more effective curriculum design?

Research Framework

As discussed in the literature review, there is an agreement between industry professionals and hospitality educators in terms of the importance of work experience, which is considered to be essential for students' preparation before becoming hospitality professionals (Morrison & O'Mahony, 2003). Therefore, to achieve a balance between theory and practice, higher education needs to be concerned with the internship components to be included in the curriculum. In this research, there will be the investigation of gaps 1, 2, and 3, consisting of gaps within each group, and gaps between the groups. The following discussion shows the relationship between the hospitality industry and academic environments.

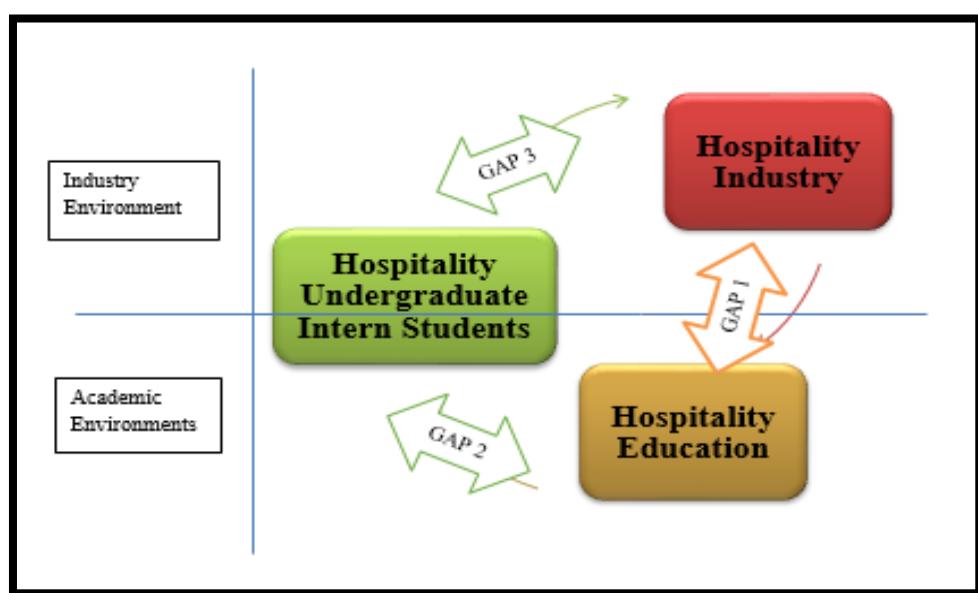


Figure 1 Research Framework

The Gaps between Stakeholders in the Industry – Academic Environments

According to the research framework in the above figure, Gap 1 is the gap between industry and education. Gap 2 is the gap between education and undergraduate intern students, and gap 3 is the gap between undergraduate intern students and industry.

Sampling for the Qualitative Method

This study employed the qualitative method of in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2007) which were conducted from small respondents in each group. Fifteen respondents make up the target population of this study, which consists of five hospitality educators, five hospitality managers, and five undergraduate intern students.

For the sampling method, a non-random purposive sampling technique (Jennings, 2001) was used with hospitality educators from the participating universities and colleges deemed to have the strongest qualifications, expertise, and knowledge required for the research. As they know their students' competencies and have experience with the internship program and curriculum, they are well-positioned to give comments and criticize the results. The data collection and analysis continue until saturation, referring to the eventual absence of new data that may affect the results. Sampling continues until the researcher senses saturation has been reached. The first use of the term "theoretical saturation" by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Glaser and Strauss intertwined data collection and analysis for one category until saturation, before moving on to collect and analyze data for another category. Therefore, in this research, there are all together 15 participants (5 from each group), who provided data until there was theoretical saturation, and there was no change depending on the nature and consistency of the data obtained. Personal face-to-face interviews were conducted in order to reveal hospitality educators' perceptions on issues based on their extensive experience and knowledge of the industry, by the use of interview questions which aim to explore additional issues, and in greater depth, than those listed in the broader questionnaire of the survey.

Sample Size Determination

The interviews were conducted to acquire an understanding of the deeper dimensions and open opinions regarding the research results and the issues under investigation, based on their extensive experience and knowledge of the industry. The hospitality educators and managers need to have long-term experience and knowledge of the topics and issues, which can enhance the significance and value of the current research study. It is important that only hospitality undergraduate intern students of accredited hospitality and tourism programs in Bangkok are included in the research study since they are prime targets for recruitment by most hospitality industries. Their qualifications are also enhanced by graduation from a high-profile, accredited university. Initially, the issues were discussed by industry experts related to competencies, and then the research objectives were applied to produce effective questions.

Research Instrument

The qualitative semi-structured interview questions were tested for “face validity”, which is a part of content validity. It is evaluated by collecting the respondents’ opinions on whether the instrument is valid. The 5 experts were asked to measure how much the items in the instrument could be understood by the respondents so that the researcher can draw conclusions about the survey results. Tests for which it is shown that the purpose is clear are said to have high face validity. Accordingly, tests for which the purpose is unclear have low face validity (Nevo, 1985). The experts rated the interview questions and decided whether they could meet the research objectives. The score range was assessed as (5 - the test is extremely suitable for the given purpose, 4 - the test is very suitable for that purpose, 3 - the test is adequate, 2 - the test is inadequate, 1 - the test is irrelevant and therefore unsuitable)

Table 1 Face Validity Test

Interview Question	Expert Opinion					Total
	A	B	C	D	E	
1	5	4	5	5	5	24
2	5	5	5	5	4	24
3	5	5	4	4	5	23
4	5	5	5	5	5	25

Source Expert's Assessment

The results presented above show that most experts agreed that the interview questions corresponded with the research objectives and that the questions were understood, with scores ranging from 4 to 5. This study employed similar interview questions to Zoppiatis and Constanti (2007). The research involved all three primary hospitality stakeholders; students, educators, and hospitality professionals. The unique characteristics of the three groups under investigation necessitate the utilization of different research methods and techniques, which is an approach known as methodological triangulation.

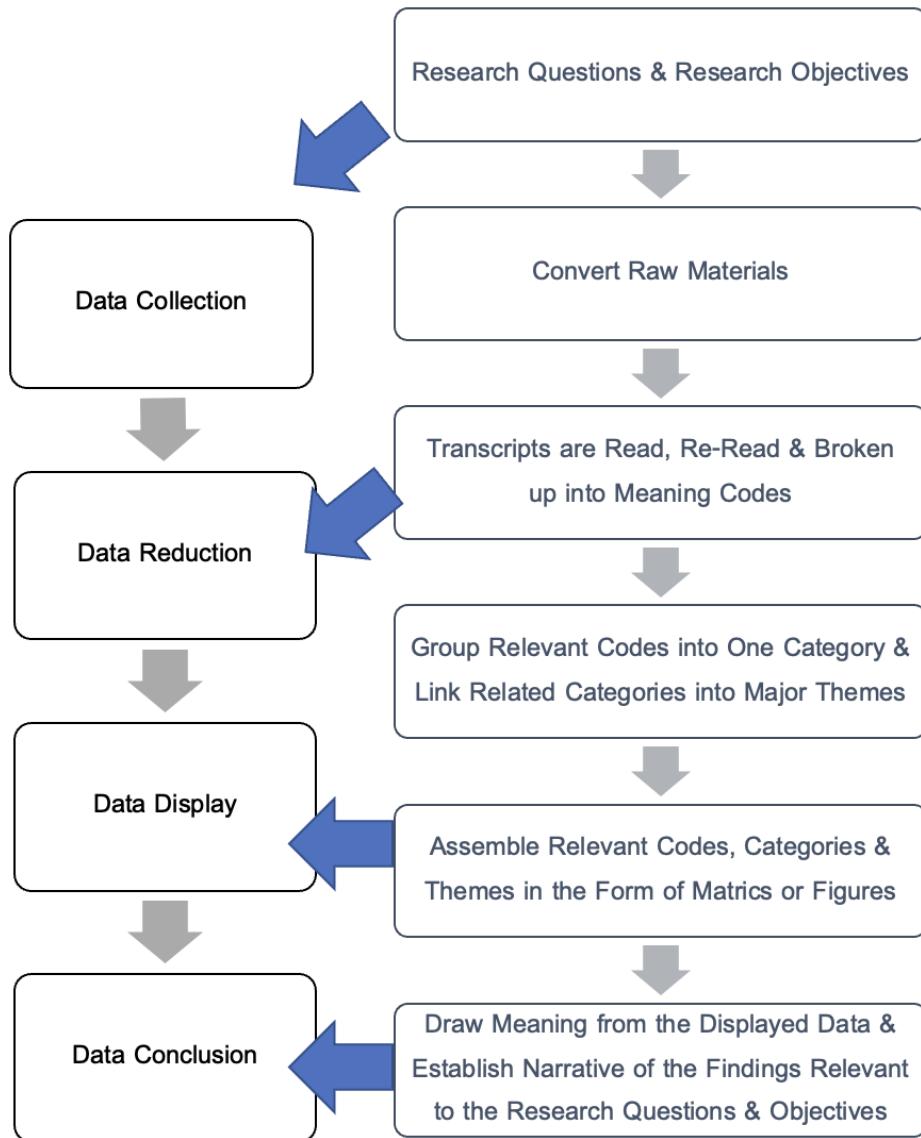
Qualitative Data Analysis Procedure

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), content analysis is a subjective interpretation method for the content of text data through a systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. The major goal in conducting content analysis is to gain knowledge and insight via study through valid inferences from text to the study context (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In this research, content analysis was undertaken based on the textual data from semi-structured interviews with 15 informants. The interview questions were developed from

concepts examined in the conceptual framework. The interviews aim to investigate hospitality stakeholders' perception of the education and industry relationship, which may allow subsequent curriculum development. This research adopts Glaser and Strauss (1967)'s constant comparison analysis method to analyse the interview data. The figure below shows the steps taken in analysing the qualitative data, which were based on Miles and Huberman (1994) and Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007).

At the beginning, the data were collected via semi-structured interviews to discuss the research objectives and the questions. The data reduction and conversion phase then began by using interview results from recordings and interview forms, which were then extracted for further analysis. Qualitative data need to be reduced and converted to make them accessible, and understandable, and to identify themes and patterns. Each sentence was extracted to identify meaningful words and phrases that are linked to the research questions and then to transform them into CODES > CATEGORIES > THEMES.

The data reduction process was conducted from the answers to the semi-structured interviews using a tape recorder. The total duration of interview recording lasts for 1 month, around 45-60 minutes per respondent. All three hospitality stakeholders provided answers which were transcribed into dialog wording, and then similar wording phases or keywords became codes, which were grouped together to acquire the categories. Then several categories were classified to be themes.



Source Adapted from Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007), Miles and Huberman (1994)

Figure 2 Qualitative Data Analysis Process

Findings and Analysis

This part presents the findings and analysis of the qualitative phase of the study drawn from 15 semi-structured interviews. The qualitative method was conducted to gain inside perspectives. The three primary stakeholders made up the target population of this study, which consists of 5 hospitality educators, 5 hospitality managers, and 5 hospitality undergraduate intern students from international bachelor's in hospitality degree programs in Bangkok. Data collection was required to provide more detailed descriptions of how the three primary stakeholders viewed the importance of each hospitality competency, and how they viewed the existing relationship between the hospitality industry and education in order close the gaps for a better hospitality curriculum in the future.

Profiles of Interviewees

The table below presents a summary of the interviewee profiles relating to their demographic characteristics. With reference to gender, there was a balanced composition between female (9) and male participants (6). All 5 hospitality educators were female. The ages of both hospitality managers and educators were in the range of 35-45 years old. For the education level, the hospitality undergraduate intern students were in undergraduate internships, while the hospitality managers and educators were postgraduate. In terms of occupation, position, years of experience, and the participants comprised the three primary stakeholders; hospitality managers, educators, and undergraduate intern students who were all Thai.

Table 2 Demographic Profiles of Interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Age Group	Position	Experiences (Years)	Education Attained
Educator 1	Female	36-46	Chairperson	16	Postgraduate
Educator 2	Female	36-46	Lecturer	9	Postgraduate
Educator 3	Female	36-46	Lecturer	10	Postgraduate
Educator 4	Female	36-46	Lecturer	12	Postgraduate
Educator 5	Female	36-46	Lecturer	14	Postgraduate
Manager 1	Male	36-46	HR Director	15	Postgraduate
Manager 2	Female	36-46	HR Director	10	Postgraduate
Manager 3	Male	36-46	HR Director	20	Postgraduate
Manager 4	Male	25-35	HR Director	12	Postgraduate
Manager 5	Female	25-35	HR Director	16	Postgraduate
Student 1	Male	15-24			Undergraduate
Student 2	Male	15-24			Undergraduate
Student 3	Female	15-24			Undergraduate
Student 4	Female	15-24			Undergraduate
Student 5	Male	15-24			Undergraduate

Source Interviewee Samples

Qualitative Data Analysis Results

The analysis of the interview data for the three primary stakeholders employed a content analysis approach. Fifteen interview transcripts were transcribed and then manually analyzed which finally produced 111 codes during the first data iteration process. The majority of codes were related to the hospitality education and industry relationship (22 codes), and strategies to close the gaps (21 codes). The rest of the codes related to personal effectiveness competencies, the relationship between hospitality education and industry, strategies to

close the gaps, the cultural context, industry-wide technical competencies, academic competencies, workplace competencies, industry-sector competencies, and additional competencies. Following the identification of the above codes, a second data process was conducted to determine the similarities and relationships between the codes by grouping and classifying data that seemed to correspond with the main theme. Similar codes were then grouped into categories after organizing the relevant data; the 111 codes were clustered into 9 themes and 28 distinct categories as presented in the following table. Nine themes are relevant to the participants' perceptions of each employability competency and strategies to narrow the gaps based on the hospitality and industry relationship. These themes are:

1. Personal Effectiveness Competencies
2. Academic Competencies
3. Workplace Competencies
4. Industry-Wide Technical Competencies
5. Industry-Sector Competencies
6. Hospitality Education & Industry Relationship
7. Cultural Context
8. Strategies to Close the Gaps
9. Additional Competencies

The following is the semi-structured interview schedule which guided the interviews with hospitality undergraduate intern students, hospitality educators, and hospitality managers. These questions were set according to the research objectives, which aim to determine the importance of hospitality competencies, the relationship between hospitality education and industry, the cultural context, and the strategy to close the gaps in performance as perceived by all three stakeholders.

1. Which employability competencies do you believe the hospitality undergraduate intern students should possess upon graduation?
2. How do you view the existing relationship between the hospitality education and the industry?
3. In terms of the different cultural context, do you think there are any different expectations about competencies?
4. If there are gaps between importance and performance between stakeholders, what suggestions would you make to improve the curriculum and create benefits for all stakeholders?

Each quotation is numerically assigned, for example, "M1 refers to hospitality manager 1, E1 refers to hospitality educator 1, and S1 refers to hospitality undergraduate intern student 1, while Q1 refers to a response to interview question1. Therefore, M1, Q1 indicates "manager 1, response to question 1".

Results and Discussion

Based on the semi-structured interview, the following shows the result to answer the research question and discussion as follows:

RQ1: How do hospitality stakeholders view the existing relationship between hospitality education and the industry in Bangkok?

The result from research question 1 is related to the relationship between hospitality education and the industry. From the interview results, it is found that stakeholders are important in developing student competencies. Training is a crucial factor that the hospitality industry provides to students who prepare themselves for the real workplace. The theories learned in class are not enough to yield professionalism among the students. There should be cooperation between the hospitality industry and education to yield the best outcomes.

1. Internship and Training

In general terms, an internship is viewed as a short-term practical work experience where students receive training and gain experience in a specific field or career area of their interest. The interviewees claimed that internship and training are very necessary prior to work in the real hospitality industry. Internship experience enables students to apply classroom theory in the actual world of work thus bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Internship involvement provides huge advantages to educational institutions and their faculty members. According to Leslie (1991), better communication and collaboration between hospitality educators and the industry could improve the industry's input into course development and help educators stay up to date on current and upcoming advances in the sector. The following statements from hospitality managers confirm the importance of training in the hospitality industry.

From experience and the observation of many trainees, I think that internship is 60% crucial since the theory that they have learned in class or textbooks sometimes cannot be used in real situations (M1, Q2).

For example, while training, they need to understand how to be patient and understand customers' demands very well. Even though sometimes they cannot provide what customers need and get negative feedback, they should still have a good attitude (M2, Q2).

There should be good cooperation when there are some problems while students take the internship to find mutual solutions (M3, Q2).

Hospitality education is the first step in preparing undergraduate intern students for real-life situations and ways to handle situations relating to hospitality (S5, Q2).

Hospitality educators and students indicated the importance of the following responses. Education is the foundation to work in a real workplace. Hospitality undergraduate intern students learn practical skills such as how to deal with the various demands of guests, or how to be patient in unexpected situations. Attitude is most important to work in the hospitality industry.

Of course, both hospitality education and industry are very important because, in the field of hospitality, we must have an internship process. So, if we have a relationship with the hotel industry, it would be easy to send our students to do internships (E1, Q2).

Students need to train in the hotel every semester. For example, in the first year, students need to know the basic foundation in order to train in a real workplace (E2, Q2).

I think it is very close as the hospitality department that we are teaching always encourages our students to go outside of the campus to gain some experience from internships like that (E3, Q2).

Training and field trip are the key necessary for preparation the students to explore in real experience (E4, Q2).

Many universities have internship programs that give students real experience before they get a job (S2, Q2).

Yes, it is very important because I am a member of staff that had little experience in the hospitality industry, so they have to spend more time to train me. In hospitality and tourism management, there are many skills and training at the restaurant that I can easily understand from the internship (S3, Q2).

All theories can be applied to the real situation we face at work (S4, Q2).

Curriculum planning should be designed based on mutual agreement between hospitality education and industry, while hospitality educators should cooperate with the industry when there are problems during the internship. Theory from textbooks is somewhat different from real case situations, such as students do not know how to cope with emotional guests. Hence, internship experience is important in addition to classroom learning.

2. Theory and Curriculum

From the interview responses, all hospitality educators agreed that hospitality education and industry should have a close relationship since internship practice is required. The hospitality curriculum impacts students as they can apply theory in practice in a real workplace. It can be said that the success of the curriculum depends

on whether students can link hospitality concepts to real operations. Guest speakers from the hospitality industry should work with hospitality undergraduate intern students as it provides great benefits, as professionals from the industry can convey direct experience to students. Field trips to hotels can also provide students with insights into the real world of hospitality. The following responses were expressed by all stakeholders.

From the experience and observation of many trainees, I think that internship is 60% crucial since the theory that they have learned in class or textbooks sometimes cannot be used in real situations. For example, if the guests are emotional, staffs don't know how to cope with them. Therefore, they need to rely on their supervisor to support and guide them how to do it, which cannot be learnt from the textbook. Each student will have to learn it by themselves (M1, Q2).

I think hospitality education should be supported by teaching basic knowledge and knowledge about what customers need. For example, while training, they need to understand how to be patient and customers' demands very well. Even though sometimes they cannot provide what customers need and get negative feedback, they should still have a good attitude (M2, Q2).

I think the first and most important factor is the theory that universities provide to students, which usually is general basic knowledge. But in real working conditions, there are many things that change, in terms of theory. The curriculum should be updated to include "customer centric" theory as a service management (M2, Q4).

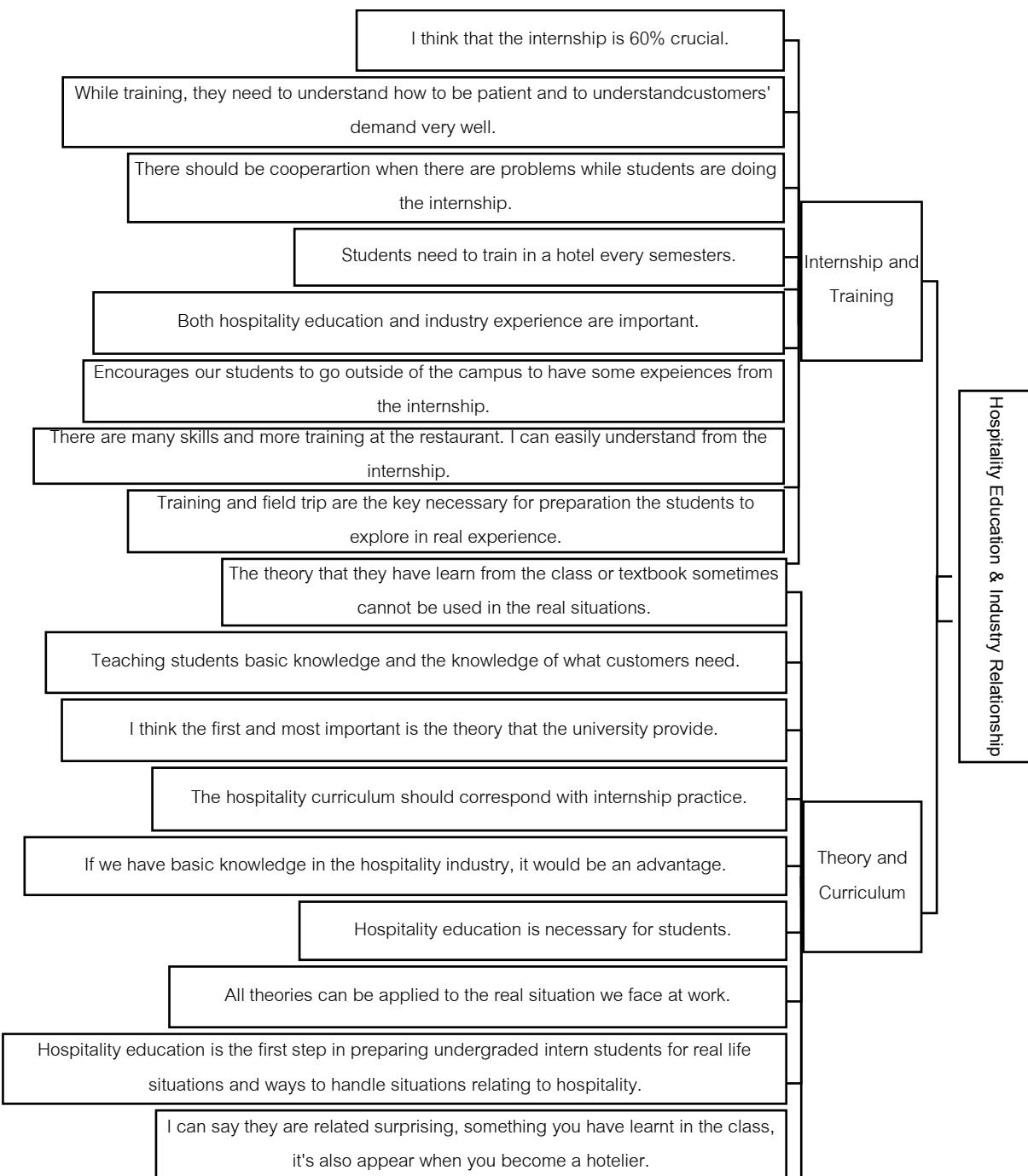
I can say they are related surprising, something you have learnt in the class, it's also appeared when you become a hotelier (M5, Q2).

The hospitality curriculum should correspond with internship practice. Hence, the theory in the curriculum should be linked with the practice based on clustering, and then they can know how to perform their job based on the application of theory. If it links as a cluster then the students will see how they develop from the smallest scale to the biggest scale (E2, Q2).

I think it is related because hospitality education teaches students their roles in the hospitality industry and students must know their roles in every department of the hotel. Moreover, if we have basic knowledge about the hospitality industry, it would be an advantage. The picture will be clear if each hotel has a system that includes different organizations (S1, Q2).

Hospitality education is necessary for students, since it provides students the basic foundation which can give them the knowledge required to work in a real workplace (S2, Q2).

Hospitality education and industry need to have a close relationship and internship practice is required. The hospitality curriculum impacts students when they can apply theory to practice in a real workplace. It can be said that the success of the curriculum depends on whether students can link hospitality concepts to real operations. Guest speakers from the hospitality industry should teach hospitality undergraduate intern students, which would provide great benefits, as professionals from the industry can convey the direct experience to students. Field trips to hotels can also introduce students into the real world of hospitality.



Source Interview Data Reduction

Figure 3 Data Analysis Process: Hospitality Education and Industry Relationship

RQ2: What are the proposed strategies to reduce the gaps within and among the hospitality stakeholder groups for a more effective curriculum design?

Strategies to Close the Gaps

From the interview results, all hospitality managers perceived that education is the basic foundation for work in a real workplace. Hospitality undergraduate intern students learn practical skills such as how to deal with the various guest demands, and how to be patient in unexpected situations. Attitude is most important for work in the hospitality industry. Curriculum planning should be designed based on mutual agreement between hospitality education and the industry, while hospitality educators should cooperate with the industry when there are any problems during the internship. Theory from textbooks is somewhat different from real case situations, such as students do not know how to cope with emotional guests. Hence, internship experience is important in addition to classroom learning. The effective strategies to merge gaps between industry and education can be discussed as follow.

1. Curriculum Contents (Theory to Practice)

According to the interviews, the hospitality managers revealed that hospitality education should always be modified and adjusted to correspond with industry demands which tend to change, especially when the ASEAN Economic Community has a role in the hospitality industry. In the real workplace, being customer-centric seems important, so students need to obtain the necessary skills to meet the different demands of individual customers professionally. Theory of operations in textbooks is not enough to work in the real world. There are many things students should understand from real practice. The following presents the interview results from hospitality managers.

Moreover, there are many factors affecting decision making about creating a new curriculum. We have to know about guest performance and guest complaints and compare them in order to know what we should do and where are we now (M1, Q4).

I think the first and most important thing is the theory that universities provide to students, which usually is basic, general knowledge. But in the real working situations, there are many things that change. In terms of theory, the curriculum should be updated to be “customer centric”. Therefore, the university must adjust the theory by adding new things. Now we focus on being customer centric, which it is a main skill that can make them professional, as some theories that they have learnt are different from real hospitality operations (M2, Q4).

Since hospitality education is like a human resource factory to produce qualified human resources for the hospitality industry, it is necessary to know what qualifications they need in terms of qualified labour, and what skills should be employed by students. The curriculum should be modified and adjusted based on the expectations of the hospitality industry, while students need to know what skills they need to work in their expected position and to follow their career paths. There should be more communication and cooperation between stakeholders to decide what

should be in the curriculum in order to prepare graduates for the real workplace. In particular, as the world changes, there needs to be a strong commitment by hospitality stakeholders. The following opinions are from hospitality educators.

As we are involved in hospitality education, we have to adjust some courses, subjects, or assignments. We must adjust the content in some courses to match industry expectations (E1, Q4).

The hospitality industry should specify the qualifications of workers and cooperate with schools to produce the right curriculum and competency training. Each student has different competencies, so students need to be clear about which position that they want to work in (E2, Q4).

My suggestion is that we, as hospitality educators, should interview or we should talk more to industry people, to adjust the curriculum (E3, Q4).

Stakeholders should cooperate to address gaps among the education and industry. (S4, Q4).

As the effects of ASEAN integration will impact a broad spectrum of companies in Thailand, it is important that language skills should be a focus, and cooperation between stakeholders is needed to help students to achieve them so that students can have greater mobility to work in other Asian countries. The following statements were the responses of hospitality students.

The stakeholders should cooperate to discuss gaps in the industry to match the expectations of entrepreneurs by asking hospitality managers in order to adjust the curriculum as hospitality managers know the competencies needed for the hospitality industry very well (S3, Q4).

Hospitality education should provide ideas about the skills and knowledge to apply in multi-culture hospitality industry (S4, Q4).

2. Cooperation (Industry-Education)

The hospitality industry and education should work together to help students succeed in their careers. This will benefit both parties, as students will be able to gain skills and experience that will help them in their careers, and businesses will be able to find talented workers. The hospitality industry and hospitality educators should work together to find solutions to any problems while training new staff.

We also have to have cooperation between the hospitality education and industry since problems that come from industry may occur such as complaints or the process of problem solving (M1, Q4).

I think universities should co-operate with the hospitality industry as we have MOU programs, which involve training students in real situations in terms of both theory and practice in situation that can make students more professional and upgrade them to the next step of competition (M2, Q4).

I think we have to talk to each other. The hospitality education and industry have to specify problems and why they happened. It might come from the students or it might come from working. So, we have to talk on a case by case basis to find the best solution for the next generation (M3, Q4).

At the same time, hospitality educators also agreed that there should be cooperation between the hospitality industry and education in order to enhance important student competencies.

The hospitality industry should specify the qualifications of workers and cooperate with schools to produce the right curriculum and competency training. Each student has different competencies, so students need to be clear about which position that they want to work in. I think everyone has to close this gap. Everyone has to be clear (E2, Q4).

There should be mutual cooperation among stakeholders to adjust the curriculum base on what the industry expects. Educator has a strong role to shape students' competency as they provide a foundation in hospitality knowledge (E4, Q4).

There should be a training class to check up on all stakeholders and make sure that they are all on the same page (S5, Q4).

3. Training Program

With regard to industry site-based training programs, Miranda (1999) looked into how hospitality recruiters view education and training in the field. Employers in the hospitality industry ranked employee relations, leadership, guest services, staffing, and conflict management as their top five talents for college graduates.

I need to know more details now about what's changing in terms of customer demands. As I am the direct manager, I must list the guests' complaints and determine their needs. If we know those needs, we must look at the training program and specify which one is suitable for the employees to learn in order to match customer needs, to impress the guest so that they become repeat customers (M1, Q4).

In addition, hospitality educators and students also agreed that language and training are important issues to enhance student competencies as the following statements indicate.

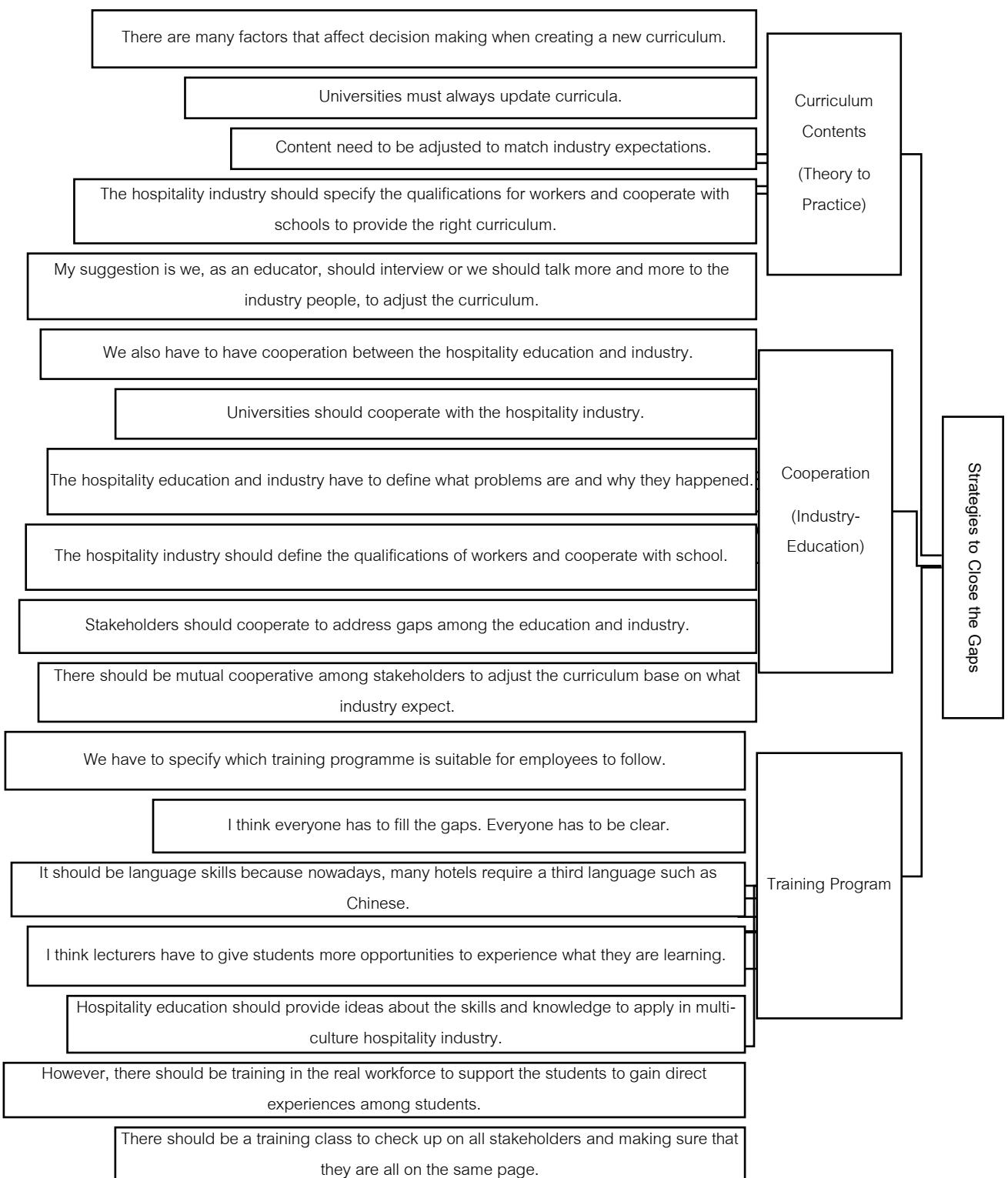
I think everyone has to close this gap. Everyone has to be clear. For example, the hotel industry needs students who are good at English. Hence, there should be language training from the very first year of study (E2, Q4).

However, there should be training in the real workforce to support the students to gain direct experiences among students. (E4, Q4)

It should be language skills because nowadays, many hotels require a third language like Chinese, while English skill is common nowadays. You must at least speak a third language; I have learned Chinese and French as well but only the basics. Therefore, I think there should be a focus on language skills as the AEC will also begin next year (S1, Q4).

First, in these kinds of situation, I think lecturers must give the students more opportunities to experience what they have learned because most students who learn in class have less chance to get real experience. In my opinion, we should have more activities to make students learn more (S3, Q4).

All three primary stakeholders have different experiences of training programs but agreed that to close the gap between all stakeholders, there must be training programs on languages and guest service details. As one of the research objectives is to identify the gaps between the importance and the performance levels for the competencies needed in the hospitality industry as perceived by the three primary stakeholders, their perceptions of competency needs reflect the gaps that exist. Finally, as an outcome of the above objectives, strategies will be proposed to close those gaps in order to improve the curriculum to better meet industry needs.



Source Interview Data Reduction

Figure 4 Data Analysis Process: Strategies to close the gap

Conclusions

RQ1: How do hospitality stakeholders view the existing relationship between hospitality education and the industry in Bangkok?

From the interview result, it was found that there are links between the hospitality industry and education. This implies that there is a need to involve all three stakeholders to establish quality relationships between the hospitality industry and education. The findings of the study indicate that the success of students depends on the curriculum content which prepares them for the real industry with effective training programs. Since the education curriculum plays important roles in the success of career services, it depends on the academic community and industry to work together to develop strategies to enhance student experiences. To ensure survival, therefore, the curriculum designers firstly need to meet the needs of industry in order to have a core discipline, which can be achieved by more practical skills training, more case-study work based on the world of hospitality, and by industry representatives being closely involved in all aspects of course development. The following issues are discussed in detail.

1. Curriculum Contents

The hospitality curriculum needs to be adjusted to match the needs of the industry, since the theory found in textbooks is not enough for real life. Communication and cooperation are important to make sure that the curriculum includes the right things that will help students be successful in the workforce. The curriculum should be developed in collaboration with the industry. This corresponds with Miranda (1999), who also found that the industry should play an instrumental role in developing an up-to-date and relevant curriculum. It is suggested that education should focus the curricular content to meet the current needs of industry, and industry should support education to develop educational programming that could, in turn, limit training costs and operational costs. More support is found in the findings by Roberts (2009), who confirmed that the quality of tourism and hospitality management training depends on three factors: the quality of the programme, the quality of the delivery and the perceived value of the qualification by key stakeholders. Continuous improvement is needed to close quality gaps and use all available resources effectively and efficiently.

2. Training Programs

The study found that industry should play a key role in developing an up-to-date and relevant curriculum by providing graduate training programs. In the hospitality industry, customer service training is arguably the most important category of training ever received by managers and employees. Training programs on languages and customer service details should be in place. Although the three main stakeholders have different experiences with training programs, there is consensus that training programs can bridge the gaps

between all stakeholders. This finding is supported by Tesone (2002), who examined the separation of education and practice in hospitality programs by examining the management skills acquired by graduates. A combination of educational methods is required for students to learn management skills, promoting the use of performance assessments specifically related to management skills development and future application.

3. Cooperation (Industry-Education)

The hospitality managers and educators gave their opinion on the collaboration. Learning about the different cultures of each customer is another challenge to serve them well and meet their needs. Therefore, the hospitality industry and education must work together to support student careers for win-win benefits. There should be collaboration between hospitality professionals and educators to find solutions to any problems that arise during the training. Much previous research (Nelson & Dopson, 1999; Nolan et al., 2010; Ogbeide, 2006) has examined hospitality recruiters' perceptions of hospitality education versus location-based training programs. It has been found that five of the most important skills needed by college graduates, as rated by hospitality recruiters, are: employee relations, leadership, customer service, staffing personnel and conflict management. The study also revealed that industry should play a key role in developing an up-to-date and relevant curriculum. The three main stakeholders have different experiences of training programs, but agreed that training programs on languages and customer service details are needed to bridge the gap between all stakeholders. As one of the objectives of the research is to identify the gaps between the importance and performance levels of skills needed in the hospitality sector as perceived by the three main stakeholders, their perceptions of skills needs reflect existing discrepancies. Finally, due to the above objectives, strategies are offered to address these gaps in order to improve the curriculum and better meet industry needs.

RQ2: What are the proposed strategies to reduce the gaps within and among the hospitality stakeholder groups for a more effective curriculum design?

The following table shows how each stakeholder has a role in gap merging to make the curriculum become more effective.

Table 4 Recommendations Strategies to Bridge Gaps among 3 Stakeholders

Hospitality Employability Competency	Hospitality Managers (Specific Changes Needed at Workplace)	Hospitality Educators (Specific Changes Needed in Curricula)	Hospitality Undergraduate Intern Students (Adaptation Required by Students)
1. Culture Context Competencies (Understanding the Differences)			
Language & Communication Skills	<p>Employees should communicate in a variety of languages to communicate with international guests.</p> <p>Coaching employees how to demonstrate effective written and oral communication and demonstrate listening skill with international guests.</p>	<p>The hospitality industry should specify the qualifications of workers and cooperate with schools to produce the right curriculum and competency training.</p>	<p>Students need to practice their language and communication skills as well as the guest service details.</p> <p>Students need to listen to customer needs and provide personalized assistance to meet those needs.</p>
Guest Service Details	<p>Employees should understand cross-culture service details.</p> <p>Employees need to know more details regarding changes in terms of customer demands.</p>	<p>The hospitality educators should cooperate to discuss gaps in the industry to match the expectations of entrepreneurs by asking hospitality managers to adjust the curriculum as hospitality managers know the competencies needed for the hospitality industry very well.</p>	<p>Students should understand the differences across culture, as Western culture focuses on task effectiveness, so workers tend to understand their roles very well. On the other hand, Asian culture is quite modest and soft service minded, and is charming and unique in the eyes of international visitors.</p>
2. Personal Effectiveness Competencies			
Interpersonal Skills	<p>Employees should be able to work with others and understand their roles and responsibilities and have the attitude to work in the team.</p>	<p>Subjects in curricula should include the objective to enhance interpersonal skills, that can be defined broadly as “those skills which one needs in order to communicate effectively with another person or a group of people”</p>	<p>Students should have sub-skills including self-awareness, effective listening, questioning, oral communication, helping or facilitating, reflecting, assertiveness, and non-verbal communications.</p>
Integrity	<p>Make sure employees are loyal, honest, and sincere-, being loyal to the co-workers as well as the customers.</p>	<p>Curricula should include courses to encourage students to accept social and work behaviors.</p>	<p>Students should be patient and have a service mind, meet a variety of different guests, and have the ability to control their temper.</p>
Professionalism	<p>Employees can work with others and understand their role and responsibilities.</p>	<p>Learning objectives should focus on enhancing students' punctuality and following regulations and self-discipline.</p>	<p>Students should be specialized on specific roles and responsibilities.</p>
Dependability & Reliability	<p>With careful planning, the hospitality manager can provide such experience, which can enhance employees' reliability.</p>	<p>The hospitality curriculum should correspond with internship practice.</p>	<p>Students should engage in training programs by the university before entering the real workforce.</p>
Willingness to Learn	<p>Encourage the participation in seminar discussions builds employees skill.</p>	<p>The curriculum should be written with the realization of the changes that have taken place in the past and the changes.</p>	<p>Be open to change (positive or negative) and to considerable variety in the classroom.</p>

Table 4 (continued)

Hospitality Employability Competency	Hospitality Managers (Specific Changes Needed at Workplace)	Hospitality Educators (Specific Changes Needed in Curricula)	Hospitality Undergraduate Intern Students (Adaptation Required by Students)
3. Workplace Competencies			
Teamwork	Employees should be able to work as a team player.	There should be learning objectives and activities to encourage teamwork, adaptability, flexibility, problem solving and decision making.	Students should develop teamwork skills by applying interpersonal skills to collaborate with others to meet customer needs.
Adaptability & Flexibility	Employees must be open to change and ready for adaptability and flexibility in the hospitality industry.	Course design should include activities to prepare students to be adaptable and flexible.	Students need to consider variety in the workplace.
Problem Solving & Decision Making	Employees can apply problem-solving and critical-thinking skills to help grow the business and/or to resolve workplace conflict.	Curricula should include exercises in resolving practical issues and come up with their own solutions and discuss the pros/cons of each idea.	Students should be able to have excellent management skills to resolve any uncomfortable situations.
4. Industry-Wide Technical Competencies			
Hospitality Principle & Concept	Employees need to have a foundation or good knowledge about hospitality industry.	Create courses to enhance students' knowledge of the basic common subjects that involve the different functions in hospitality.	The interns should know the basic knowledge in hospitality business e.g. difference between 5-star and other levels, departments in hotel business, functions & responsibilities of hoteliers, trends of business, technology required for the business, etc.
Hospitality Operations & Procedures	Employees can perform activities associated with setting up, monitoring, controlling and improving hospitality services.	Educators need to keep abreast of hospitality trends and future developments in terms of operation procedures.	Students should understand the functional areas of hotel operation and the organization structure, hotel services offered, and role in the functioning of the hotel.
Customer Service & Cultural Sensitivity	Employees should be able to understand the customer service principle and cultural sensitivity in the workplace.	The curriculum should be updated to include "customer centric" theory as a service management, as well as cross-cultural studies.	Provide workshops and professional speakers at the hospitality universities in order to share experience on operational procedures.
Quality Assurance & Quality Control	Quality assurance and quality control ensure materials, processes, services, and products meet quality specifications and customer expectations.	Guest speakers from the hospitality industry should teach hospitality undergraduate intern students.	Finally, students must have the skill to approach and be adaptable to different people and offer service quality based on the guests' expectations during their stay.

Table 4 (continued)

Hospitality Employability Competency	Hospitality Managers (Specific Changes Needed at Workplace)	Hospitality Educators (Specific Changes Needed in Curricula)	Hospitality Undergraduate Intern Students (Adaptation Required by Students)
5. Industry-Sector Competencies			
Guest Services	There should be training for intern students for important processes and measurement in guest services.	In terms of theory, the curriculum should be updated to be "customer centric".	Students should be able to classify services for different types of guests.
Health & Safety	Hospitality industry should provide seminars based on safety in law in hospitality industry.	There should be courses based on hospitality law and safety in the hotel industry.	Students should be trained on the matter of health and safety and law in the hospitality industry.
Law & Regulations	Enhance the knowledge on regulations governing hotel safety.	Add more relevant subjects with knowledge of relevant local, state and federal laws and regulations that relate to the provision of lodging.	Students should be able to understand laws and regulations in the working environment.
6. Additional Employability Competencies			
Emotional Intelligent Quotient (EQ)	Emotionally intelligent managers have effective social interactions with co-workers and customers. Hence, to manage people is an emotional process so managers should recognize employees' emotional state and for efficient performance react accordingly.	Curricular should embed course design to enhance students' EQ, which is the key to success, so that they know how to deal with various guests.	Students should have high EQ to deal with guests and co-workers. This needs to be learned over time. Since guests are from different countries, if staffs have high EQ, it will be easier to cope with difficult situations.
Leadership	Managers need to demonstrate leadership qualities by creating the atmosphere or opportunity for their employees to acquire leadership skills to achieve organizational objectives.	Create assignments to boost leadership skills in class. There should be training classes to check up on all stakeholders and make sure that they are all on the same page	Receiving such empowerment in decision-making is needed to have high self-confidence, so that is also important.
Self-Confidence	Managers need to encourage employees to demonstrate strong personal drive.	Course design should prepare students to be confident and believe in themselves by appreciating their initiatives.	Students should have a sense of self-confidence and leadership in order to work in a team.
Motivation	Employees should pay attention and concentrate on learning new things.	The educators should motivate students to be inspired in the working environment.	Students need to demonstrate an ability to work on their own initiative/without supervision.
Finishing off	Employees should be able to execute an assignment completely and properly, understanding the importance of quality control.	The curricula should be embedded in the specific domain in the course to enhance students' responsibilities.	Students should learn how to be responsible for their actions in the workplace.

Table 4 (continued)

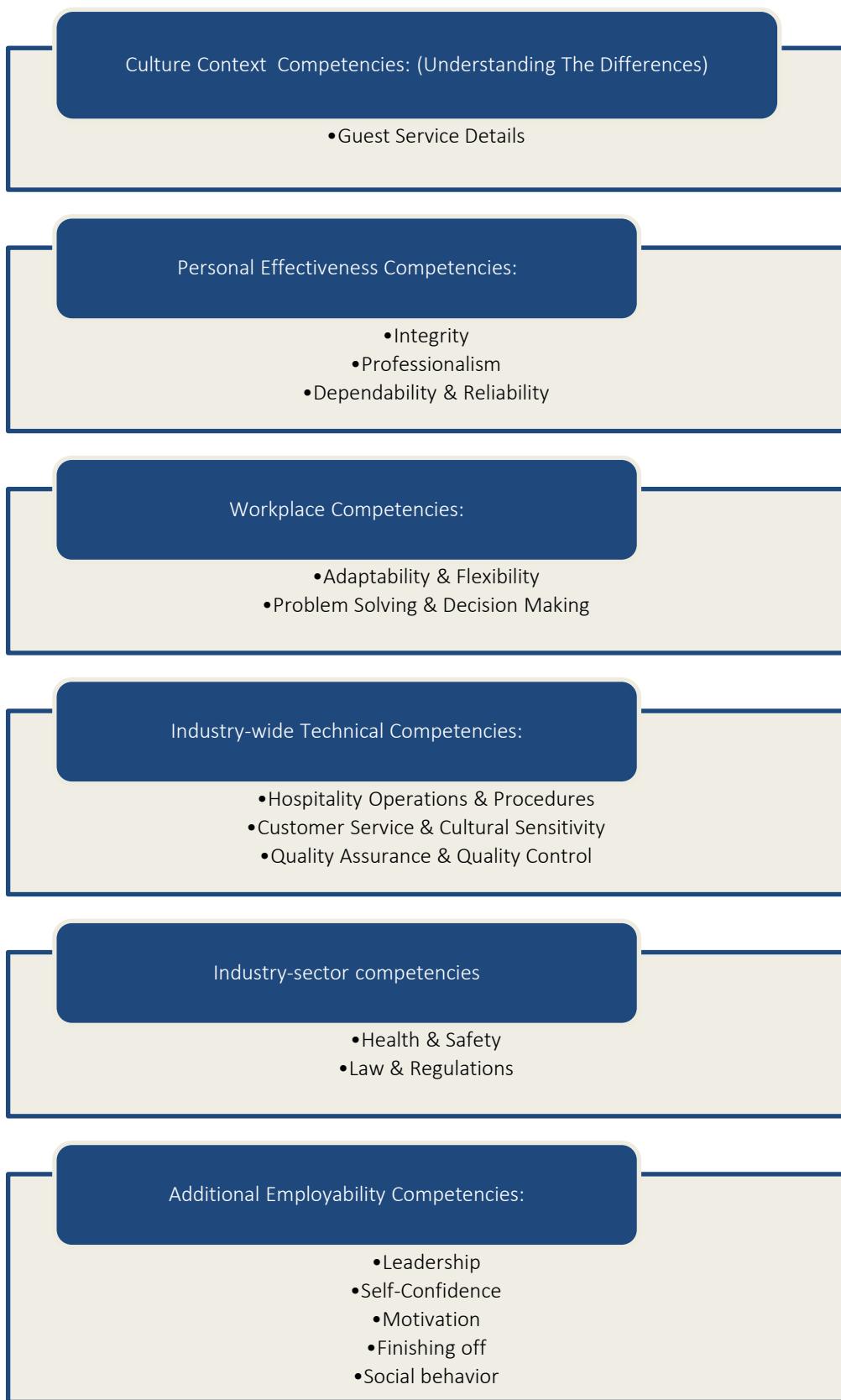
Hospitality Employability Competency	Hospitality Managers (Specific Changes Needed at Workplace)	Hospitality Educators (Specific Changes Needed in Curricula)	Hospitality Undergraduate Intern Students (Adaptation Required by Students)
Social behavior	Employees should be able to work in a group and have a good attitude towards co-workers, being friendly, cooperative, team spirited, honest, and open to equal opportunities.	Modify the hospitality curriculum by adding project-based learning that focuses on encouraging the practice of social skills.	Students need to know how to demonstrate the ability to make effective decisions in the workforce, social skills, as well as learn to demonstrate an ability to think creatively.

Source Qualitative Data Analysis Results

Recommendations

The curriculum should be modified and adjusted based on the expectations of the hospitality industry, while students need to know what skills they need to work in their expected position and to follow their career paths. There should be more communication and cooperation between stakeholders to decide what should be in the curriculum to prepare graduates for the real workplace. As the world changes, there needs to be a strong commitment by hospitality stakeholders. This research results implied that there should be training in every semester in order to get undergraduate intern students to practice the needed skills to enhance a specific employability competency. Different students got different talent and capability skill, there should be extra curriculum and extra free elective courses to suit with different individual. Professional from hospitality industry is a key to tell what a right direction for effective curriculum should be forming. Moreover, the industry and education link should be included in the critical evaluation from students' voice of how they think the hospitality curriculum really prepare them to the success in future career.

From the results, analysis, and discussion from qualitative methods, it was found that there were some missing links between stakeholders. Therefore, the hospitality managers suggested what are among the most important employability competencies as demonstrated in figure 5. These hospitality employability competencies can be used as a proposed hospitality competency model for Thai hospitality industry. As managers are those in charge of human resource development, so that they are the best professional people in the workforce who know well with experience of what are deemed necessary. The hospitality educators can apply these competencies to adjust the curriculum, add practical and theory, invite guest speakers from professional industry, as well as create the internship plan for undergraduate intern students. In the same way, the students can understand what are needed to focus on in order to gain skills to work successfully in the industry further.



Source The Research Result of Mixed Methods

Figure 5 Proposed Employability Competencies Framework

Remark Eventhough the cultural context is a crucial factor when emphasizing at employability competencies. That said, the competencies are in many ways, culture-bound, in one culture context's relevance may not necessarily apply in another. Hence, any significant competency result in a Thai context, may not be necessary generalised to other cultural context. The future researchers should consider the cultural context regarding other employability competencies research.

Limitations

The respondents in this study will be limited to the specific sample size of three primary hospitality stakeholders in only Bangkok area, consisting of the educators in the four international universities' hospitality and tourism programs, the human resource managers in the four to five-star hotels in Bangkok, and the undergraduate intern students from those chosen universities, who were about to finish internship training from those hotels and preparing for a job enrollment. Therefore, this study is limited in specific scope so the results cannot be generalized beyond the parameters of the study. The cultural context is a crucial factor when emphasizing employability competencies. That said, the competencies are in many ways, culture-bound, in one cultural context's relevance may not necessarily apply in another. Hence, any significant competency result in a Thai context, may not be necessarily generalized to other cultural context. The future researchers should consider the cultural context regarding other employability competencies research.

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