

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the study

The Ministry of Education (2008) has an education policy in The Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2007-2011) five year strategic plan, based on a collective vision of Thai society as a “Green and Happy Society,” where Thai people are endowed with morality-based knowledge and resilience against the adverse impacts of globalization. The main emphasis of The National Development Plan is to increase capacity for the improvement of quality of life of our people. In this regard, the Tenth Plan sets specific targets for education:

1. Increase the average period of education provided to 10 years.
2. Improve test scores (higher than 55%) in core subjects, at all levels.
3. Raise the percentage of mid-level workforce to 60% of the national labor force.
4. Increase the ratio of research personnel to population by 10:10000.

In addition, the Ministry of Education developed the quality and standard of higher education institutions to guarantee a high level of academic and professional services, to achieve excellence in research and innovation, and produce and develop a workforce that corresponds to structural changes within the manufacturing and services sector; accelerate the development of high quality workforce with clear career paths to enhance the country’s competitiveness in various sectors such as petrochemicals, software, food, textiles, health, tourism and logistics management; provide occupational and professional competence certification; and continue the expansion of the role of the Fix It Centre Project at the community level (The Ministry of Education, 2008)

In 1989-90 there were more than 150 courses which are grouped under the major areas of agriculture, business and commerce, engineering and technology health and paramedical, home science and humanities. The design consists of theory and practice relating to the vocational field, related subjects, language and general

foundation studies which includes entrepreneurship. During that time a total of 168,680 students were enrolled in the first year of the two year program. There are more than 5,000 full time teachers teaching these courses (The Ministry of Education, 2008).

In addition, the Education Policies of Mr. Chinnaworn Boonyakiat, Minister of Education of Thailand (2009-2011). Eight policies have been formulated to push forward a second decade of education reform. Emphasis is given to the provision of quality education and manpower development as the key to national development and enhanced competitiveness. Thailand aims to provide quality, student-centered, life-long learning opportunities. Clear indicators will be used to evaluate the performance of both teachers and learners.

Vocational Education is in accordance with government policy. The development of a creative economy will seek to add value to products and services through education which emphasizes problem solving, creativity and innovation. Public private partnerships in the form of Dual Vocational Education and Training (DVET) will ensure graduates are better equipped to meet the needs of industry or to establish themselves among a new generation of entrepreneurs. Good citizenship will be promoted. (Ministry of Education, 2009-2011).

The Technical / Vocational Education and Training are multi-sectorial in nature. Each ministry/department is responsible for manpower development in that sector. While some offer regular formal or non-formal courses, others draw from the general pool of educated and trained manpower.

The higher secondary vocationalisation program aims to develop skilled manpower through diversified courses to meet the requirements of mainly the unorganized sector and to prepare people for the world of work in general through a large number of self-employment oriented courses, not precluding wage employment orientation of many courses. Through diversification into production and service oriented courses, it is desired to reduce the aimless pursuit of higher education and thereby reduce pressure from the tertiary education (Vocational Education Commission, 2010).

Formal vocational and technical education is conducted at three levels: upper secondary (leading to the Lower Certificate of Vocational Education), post-secondary

(leading to a Diploma or Vocational Associate Degree) and university level (leading to a Degree). There are currently over 1 million students enrolled in the various vocational study pathways. Eight fields of study are undertaken as majors: trade and industry, agriculture, home economics, fisheries, business and tourism, arts and crafts, textiles and commerce.

The move toward lifelong learning and a learning society has been embodied in a credit transfer system to facilitate mobility between institutions; in the recognition of different types of qualifications from various institutions offering vocational training; and the evaluation of prior learning and work experience from within the formal, non-formal and informal sectors. Reforms are currently being implemented to remodel the system towards a Thai Vocational Qualification (TVQ) based upon industrial practices and needs (Bureau of International Cooperation, 2009).

This research seeks to explore what the tourism employer expects from tourism and hospitality students in vocational colleges in Thailand to develop their skills and knowledge after they graduate. According to the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) the primary purpose of higher education is to prepare students for the world of work. Graduates need to be given opportunities to develop generic attributes besides disciplinary knowledge. Generic attributes include communication skills, problem-solving skills, computer literacy, information literacy, ability and willingness to learn, and teamwork. The need to have skilled workers and not just knowledge is a factor that is highly demanded for any job requirement. As reported by the Thailand Industry Group report (2006), the demand for higher levels of skills, frequent updating of skills and excellent 'soft skills' as well as technical skills. The survey showed that over 90 per cent of the employers look for people who are flexible and adaptive, willing to learn on the job, team players, technically competent and committed to excellence (Thompson, et al, 2008). A skilled and adaptable workforce would enable employers to respond to the industry changes.

However, there has been a major concern raised by the employers that they are not able to find graduates with the required skills (Hesketh, 2000). In a survey reported by the Nation News, four out of 10 large employers in the Thailand struggled to fill graduate vacancies because of a shortage of applicants with the right skills. Another study done by Vocational Education Commission was showed that more than

one-third of student graduated from vocational college had very poor English skills. According to the study, all graduates tested had enough command of the language to cope with most situations but were still not capable of conducting a sophisticated discourse at a professional level. The study reported that 23.5% of students from Thailand did not meet the required English standard. In a survey conducted in 2004 by the Central Bank of Thailand, involving 44 companies, 77.6% of the respondents were of the view that Thailand graduates lack the required skills to function effectively at the workplace. This issue has been one of the debated issues discussed among the academia in Thailand, and other regions. Malaysia by comparison needs an education system that is market-driven in order to produce 'work-ready graduates'. The focus towards producing a 'work-ready graduates' should be on graduate attributes geared towards empowering graduates to thrive in the 21st century workplace and to function as productive and responsible citizens.

In a knowledge-based tourism and hospitality environment, graduates must bring more than technical knowledge to the job. The Higher Education Institutions (Universities and Colleges) are putting emphasis on higher education programs that will encourage and foster skills and qualities in addition to ensuring a sound understanding of subject matter. Many colleges nowadays, have adopted an outward-looking approach, and work closely with industries and employers. In the last ten years, the tourism and hospitality program has grown and become one of the famous higher education institutions in vocational college. Undertaking a research to gather employers' expectation and perception on its graduates is timely and important (Vocational Education Commission, 2009)

The aim of the study is to develop the nature of work and skills in the tourism and hospitality and construct an appropriate curriculum for tourism and hospitality in vocational education to meet the expectation of the workplace.

Problem statement

The Vocational Education Commission has signed an agreement with the Thai Hotel Association to be the trainer of the students in tourism and hospitality department of all vocational colleges. So, the vocational colleges have to develop the skills of the tourism and hospitality students. They are concerned with the social

construction the tradition; gender imposed on our interpretation of what is skilled work and what is not. Interpretation of the nature of tourism and hospitality work is predominantly a social construct and we appear to be more interested in how work in the sector is perceived than in what the actual operational tasks involve.

The research draws upon the curriculum of tourism and hospitality education, is informed by wider, generic considerations about skills in the context of changing employment, technology and vocational environment. Their approach is to consider skills in terms of personal attributes, job requirements and the setting of work.

The research is focused on the skills debate in tourism and hospitality education of the employers' expectations and perceptions of vocational student graduates is under review. The tourism and hospitality curriculum of vocational education is not designed for supporting the global career. Feedback from employers of vocational education graduates indicate that the employers are not satisfied with tourism and hospitality vocational students when they have been the job training at the hotel. They complain to the vocational college about communication skills and context hospitality and ethics for the international guests. This research will help the colleges to prepare the graduate students to be a good service to the right job and cannot construct the tourism and hospitality positions revise:

1. Curriculum that emphasizes service industry competency
2. Meet employers' expectation and perception
3. Demonstrate characteristics required by the tourism and hospitality industry

Research questions

What do employers expect from tourism and hospitality vocational student graduates?

Research objectives

1. To identify employers' expectations of vocational student graduates between pre and post working in 3-5 star hotel and tour agent.
2. To identify employers' perceptions of vocational tourism and hospitality student graduates in 3-5 star hotel and tour agent.

3. To determine a difference between employers' expectations and employers' perceptions of tourism and hospitality skills and knowledge.

Scope of study

This study focuses the employers' expectations and perceptions of tourism and hospitality student graduates of vocational colleges in Thailand. This research also helps the Vocational Education Commission understand employers' expectations and perceptions which is useful information to have when developing the students' image and tourism and hospitality program. Hence, the research needs to explore and examine follows;

1. Geographic and demographic of the study

1.1 The population of this study is 198 employers of 2-5 star hotels that had been trained the vocational tourism and hospitality students program. The sample of this study was taken from employers, whom were the manager of human resources, front desk clerk, housekeeping, and tour operators in Thailand.

1.2 The research draws on the employers' expectation of tourism and hospitality in these aspects; quality of knowledge: room division such as the front office, reservation, communication, transportation personnel, concierge and housekeeping, food and beverage division and human and recourses division (Ismail, 2002), skills of tourism and hospitality, and to study about professional demeanor, congenial nature, helpful attitude, flexibility, well groomed appearance and creates the employers' perception about ethical and moral: responsibility, honesty, being trustworthy, being royalty, being positive leaders, being fair, having integrity, caring about employees and customer, legality, impunity, conscience, respect for human life, self-control, and courage (Walker, 2006).

Basic assumption

Focusing on the research objective, the assumption on this study is as follows;

1. The employers' expectation and perception that influence the development of curriculum for tourism and hospitality vocational students graduates who will be the industry's employees of the future.

2. In this study, the term “perception” is used to explore how employers perceive tourism and hospitality vocational students as an employee. This study explores the positive and negative character of graduate students by tourism and hospitality industry employers.

Significance of the study

This study built on the character of the tourism and hospitality student graduates as perceived by the employer. The information on the employer’s expectations and perceptions is important in determining the tourism and hospitality curriculum of vocational college. In addition, knowing employer expectations is useful for focus on the vocational tourism and hospitality students’ performance.

Besides, the result of this study may encourage the Vocational Education Commission, the Ministry of Education and Thai Hotel Association to cooperate in improving the tourism and hospitality employees in order to achieve the long- term success.

Finally, colleges, educators, researchers and readers who have an interest in developing the curriculum and performance of the students graduated or employees’ image can use the information for further study and improving to be the Asian citizens.

Conceptual frameworks

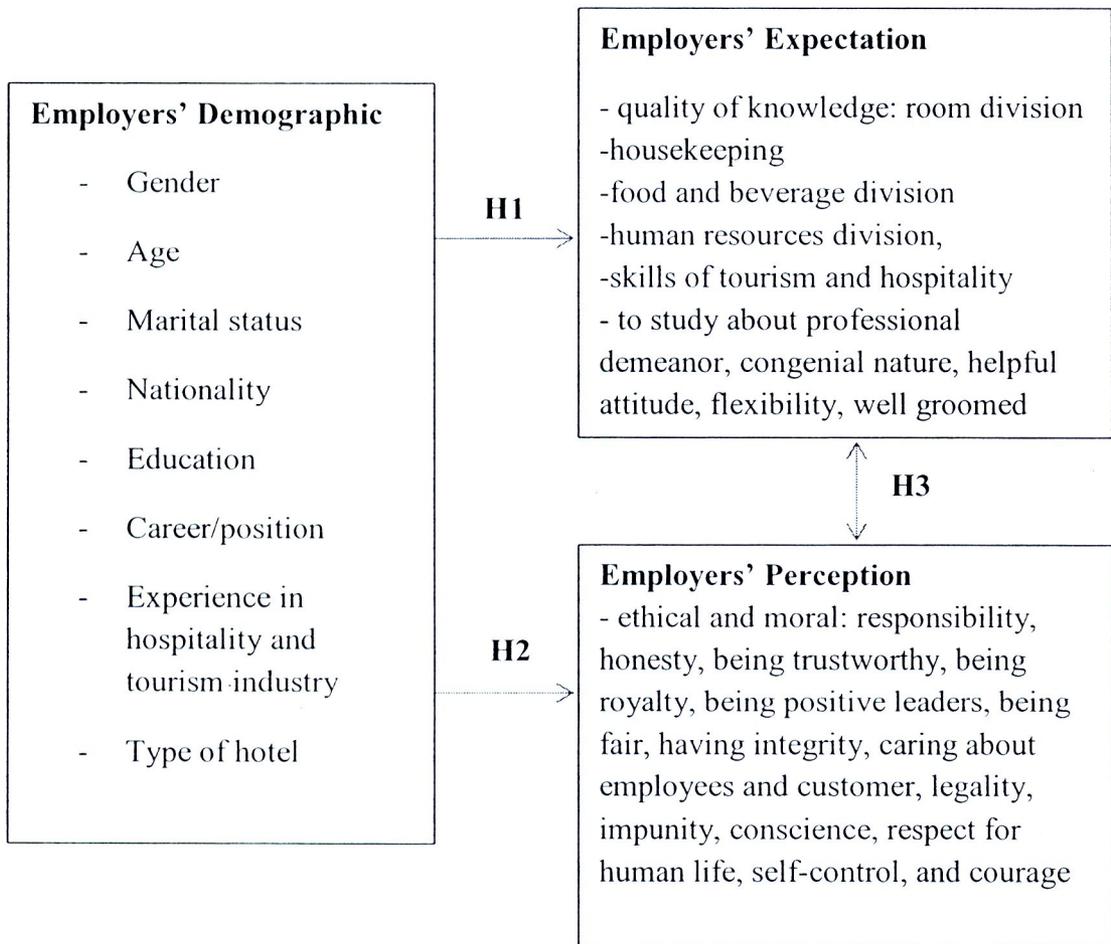


Figure 1 The conceptual model of the study

Research hypothesis

Based on the review of the literature, the study provides three hypotheses in order to analyze the relationship between employers' expectations and perceptions on vocational tourism and hospitality graduates. The following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: The employers with different demographic will demonstrate different expectations of vocational tourism and hospitality graduates.

H2: The employers with different type of hotel will different expectation of vocational tourism and hospitality graduates.

H3: There is a difference between expectations and perceptions of employers toward vocational tourism and hospitality graduates.

Definition of terms

Employers means the person who works at tourism and hospitality industry in act as the front office manager, food and beverage manager, housekeeping manager, human resource manager, room service and tour operators, owner, entrepreneur, and manage.

Expectation is used to refer to employer's predictions of the quality of tourism and hospitality graduates through their knowledge, skills that is to influence tourism and hospitality. This includes English communication, Internet technology, skills of tourism and hospitality, responsibility, honesty, self-confident, royalty and service minded.

Perception is described as the feeling, attitudes and ethical and morals of people have of different places, and environment defined perception as "the process of becoming aware of something through the senses and achieving understanding of it; the process of interpretation based on sensation." Thus, in this study, "perception" is used to refer to the employer's feeling, attitudes, and character they have toward tourism and hospitality vocational students graduates.

Student characteristics are a sum of attitudes, beliefs, emotions feelings and impressions which people possess toward hospitality employers. This characteristics is formulated are based on "organic" information such as communication skills, ethical and moral, tourism and hospitality knowledge performance, culture and traditional region that employee is shown.

Conclusion

This chapter is included to explore the employers' expectations and perception for vocational student graduates who work at the hotel and tour agencies in Thailand to identify employers' expectations and perceptions. The aim of this research develops the vocational curriculum of tourism and hospitality's knowledge, skills and ethic and morality. The study focuses on the employers of 3-5 star hotels that has been trained the vocational student in tourism and hotel program. The sample of this study

was taken from 84 employers in 20 hotel and 4 tour agencies by purposive sampling. The research was studied between October to December, 2011.