

Impact Study of Graduate Employability: A BSHRT Tracer Study

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Abstract

The conduct of this tracer study will help determine the employability competency of the BSHRT graduates from 2012 to 2016 as assessed by the employers. To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher used the descriptive method of research using the survey technique. The respondents of the study were the 226 Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Technology graduates of Western Visayas College of Science and Technology which were composed of 42 from batch 2012-2013, 50 from batch 2013-2014, 63 from batch 2014-2015 and 71 from batch 2015-2016. The study has provided the evidences on the importance of aesthetic skills or appearance as an employable competency in the hospitality service sector. Prioritizing appearance as the top most employability competency that a student must possess is indicative of its prime contribution to the success of the business. Thus, most of the respondents attributed significant importance to the image of customer-facing staff. With employees now becoming a crucial part of the company image and service quality strategies of service companies there is the potential for judgements *about the "right"* kind of employee to be seen to be well-groomed and good looking.

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INTRODUCTION

An important goal of higher education is to enhance the development of graduates' employability through the acquisition of skills and knowledge. More than getting a job, employability leads to an understanding of the needs of the labor market and the different opportunities that can help students acquire the needed competencies. Students may be highly employable as facilitated by the

development of a curricular process. They may exhibit employability in respect of a set of achievements through job acquisition.

The Economic Impact Report (EIR) of the World Travel and Tourism Council, revealed that the tourism sector is expected to create new jobs which is an attestation that the industry is accounting for more than one-third of the total global services trade, making it the fastest growing sector across the globe.

The International Labor Organizations' (ILO) forum addressed the high intensity of labor within the industry, making it a significant source of employment and placing it among the worlds' top creators of jobs that require varying degrees of skills that has allowed for quick entry of graduates into the hospitality and tourism workplace. Although each individual may learn differently, they all learn skills, abilities and knowledge that they take with them into the workforce. It is the classroom that students acquire their competencies, which in turn they will used as means to find employment in the industry.

During the 2022 Global summit, Julia Simpson, WTTC President and CEO, in her opening speech affirmed that the next decade of travel and tourism will create millions of new jobs worldwide. In every new job, three will be related for the tourism sector.

The conduct of this tracer study will help determine the employability competency of the BSHRT graduates from 2012 to 2016 as assessed by the industry partners.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Consensus Theory of employability which is based on the belief that human capital injection through generic skills development will ensure employability of graduates and accelerated career development (Selvadurai, et. Al., 2012). This theorizes that imparting competencies and skills at the university level will increase graduates' employability and therefore help them in their career advancement in the labor market.

Conceptual Paradigm

Independent Variables

Dependent Variables

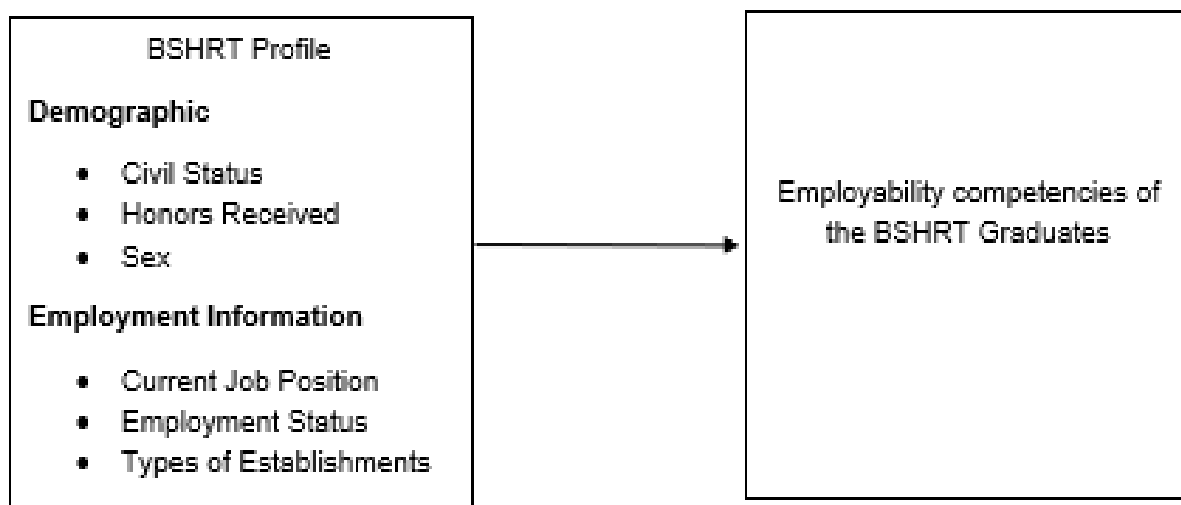


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Study to Determine the Employability of the BHRT Graduate

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tracer Study

Tracer study, was first developed when the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPECL), implemented in 2010 an important global project on the “Impact Assessment Framework: Follow up to Tracer and Tracking”. Defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO), tracer study is an assessment tool where the impact of a target group is traced back so that effective and ineffective project components are identified. In educational institutions, tracer study is often referred to as a graduate alumni survey where the target group are the former students. As posited by Herrera (2017), the data needed in a tracer study would include information on career and employment, type of work and its related competencies, professional experiences of the graduates, their income, job title, nature and years of employment.

Considered by the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) as a prime research activity, the first tracer study was done in 1971, with the inclusion of Norwegian scholars during years 2003 to mid-2008. The purpose of alumni tracing is for the updating of alumni directory and the data gathered may be used for the improvement of the curriculum, extension, research and other academic endeavor.

According to Regmi (2009), tracer studies of alumni are the primary means of building bonds between the graduates and their alma mater. Feedback of the alumni are important source of curriculum enhancement and is beneficial to the assessment of the professional career pursued by the graduates. The objectives would include finding the effectiveness and relevance of their degree as a resource and credential for job placement upon graduation, ascertaining the relevance of the curricular content to their current job function and professional development, and furthering academic pursuits, as well as determining the professional status and ranks of the graduates in their respective employment and assessing the level of networking among graduates with recommendations to strengthen the existing network.

As defined by Shongwe and Ocholla (2011), a tracer study is an alumni survey that attempts to trace activities of the graduates or previous students of educational institutions. Tracer studies enables the assessment of the result of the instruction and training provided by the institution of higher learning and the evaluation of the current and future job prospects of graduates. The findings concluded that the graduate is generally happy with the knowledge and skills they acquired from the department, but they are not happy with the overall curriculum offered. The study further recommended that the department should embark on a curriculum review process that will include an internship program with technology-related modules to cater to the needs of the students.

Tracer studies are empirical studies which provide concrete and essential information in evaluating the outcome of education and the trainings provided by the academic institutions, Aquino, et al (2016). Conducting tracer studies will provide favorable results in the design and development of an educational programs. They are evaluative measures of tracking the competencies if the graduates, where employment opportunities are the driving force of the labor market. Honing and developing students’ capabilities may also prepare graduates to be productive and distinguished members of the society (Cuadra, et al 2019).

A Compendium Guide on Anticipating and Matching Skills and Jobs by Schomburg (2016) defined tracer study as a standardized survey of graduates from education institutions, which takes place sometime after graduation or the end of the training. The subjects of a tracer study can be numerous

which would question include information on job career, learned competencies, work entrance, transition and current occupation.

It was disclosed in a study by Aquino, et al (2016) in One State University in Batangas that majority of the graduates opted to take up Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) than those taking up Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd). A tracer study was also undertaken on the graduates of Bachelor of Arts majors in English and Political Science. Notable findings revealed that majority of them are employed with job positions classified in the rank-and-file statuses (Gagalang, et al 2017).

In the tracking of graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Business and Computer Management at the Lyceum of the Philippines University, it brought to light that majority are employed in a permanent position in the manufacturing firms holding clerical positions, Buenviaje et al. (2015). Aguila et al (2016), on the other hand, found out that the graduates are highly employable in most manufacturing companies related to the engineering courses.

A study on the Hotel and Restaurant Management graduates of the Lyceum of the Philippines University, unveiled that most are working on a contractual basis in the rank-and-file positions, and got their first jobs from between one to two years after graduation, Celis, Festijo and Cueto (2013). Moreover, in the field of social sciences, Gagalang et al (2017), found that majority of the graduates taking up Bachelor of Science in Psychology were working in private institutions due to the numerous positions related to their program of study but are contractual or casual in status due to the limited positions not only in the private sectors but also in the government agencies.

Employability Competencies

The quality of education can be measured by means of indicators. With an increasing focus on academic standards, employability and competencies of graduates, there is a greater need for the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to constantly monitor that the academic and non-academic services they are providing may be in conformance with the local and international standards.

Coetze et al (2011), described graduate employability, as a person's capacity and desire to be and remain appealing in the global economy, or the relative possibilities of obtaining and maintaining certain types of work.

Finch, et al 2013, concluded that "Employability of graduates, has become an issue that is not easy to be ignored in the global economy." For graduates to be employable, they need to possess the necessary competencies and skills that are flexible in the changing labor market. Understanding the employment characteristics and factors influencing graduate employment status is critical for higher education institutions.

Moreover, employers in the tourism and hospitality industry worldwide are looking forward that the graduates are job ready, possessing various skills and competencies such as interpersonal skills, teamwork skills, communication skills, and problem-solving skills to make them employable (Balakrishnan, 2016)

Since the 1980s, there are numerous studies on the competency requirements of the graduates in the hospitality sector. From an Indian perspective, it was found out that the critical success factors for a career in the hospitality industry, are competencies on customer-focused, exceptional service, seamless operation management, marketing and cost management, Jauhari, 2006.

Chan and Coleman (2004) sought the views of human resource managers on matching the skills and competencies of the hospitality graduates with industry expectations. The Hong Kong hospitality industry found that aside from commitment to the industry and being service-minded, working experience is important than having a good educational background.

In addition, Kay and Russette (2000) concluded that the most essential managerial competences were leadership and interpersonal skills. The competencies needed by the graduate students put more emphasis on soft skills, genetic attributes and behavioral skills are the core competencies needed by the hospitality industry (Robinsons et al, 2005).

A similar study of Chen and Hsu (2007) found that being able to perform an operational analysis, on-the-job training, negotiation, management of service encounters, managing change and creativity were essential skills required from hospitality students.

Surveys on the essential competencies for the hospitality and business graduates confirmed that communication, human relation, leadership, problem-solving and conceptual skills are very important to the industry. Hospitality managers further identified job-related skills that highlighted solving guest-related problems, ethical standards, good communication, good relationships with customers and employees, and maintaining a professional appearance as applicable to the hospitality environment. Some of the studies on the competency requirement for the industry were undertaken with specific focus on a particular specialized area in the industry.

The study of Jaeou-Shyan and Lu (2006), ranked human relations as the number one competency requirements for the food and beverage segment of the hospitality industry. An exploratory qualitative approach was conducted by Millar, Mao and Moreo, 2008. As per the findings, educators and professionals in the food and beverage segment seem to agree on administrative, conceptual technical and leadership domain but not on interpersonal competencies. The group further claimed that this may be due to the fact that most of the educators involved in the study has industry experience and was able to impart the knowledge to the classroom.

Educators and industry professionals differed in the competencies required when compared to the lodging industry. While industry placed high premium on technical skills, educators emphasized conceptual competencies (Miller et al, in Commy 2019). In Ireland, a study was conducted to determine whether there is an agreement among hospitality management graduates and employers with regard to the very important competencies required in the hospitality industry. Both groups rated interpersonal and professional knowledge as very important competency domains. Moreover, employers regarded teamwork and cost control as important, while graduates rated managing poor performing staff and identifying training needs as important. Competencies on operational skills, information technology, and the financial knowledge of graduates were fairly rated as satisfied by all employers while leadership and communication skills were rated as the major factors used to determine how successful a graduate will be in the industry (Koppi et al, 2010).

For service industry like the hospitality and tourism, guest and employee interaction is crucial to create quality service encounter. Most research has focused on the employees' attitude but an increasing importance was seen on their aesthetic skills. That is, employers put premium on appearance and good looks as an important aesthetic skill. In agreement was the study of Nickson, et al (2012), that the employers in the retail and hospitality industry are not generally looking for front-line personnel but on soft skills encompassing aesthetic skills and with reference to appearance. Further supporting the idea were the studies conducted from the University of Houston

and University of Sydney which revealed that appearance is a crucial factor when applying for jobs. As further implicated, good looking candidates have a higher success rate in getting interview from prospective employers. A similar social experiment conducted by Italian researchers from the University of Messina in 2013 found that physical appearance plays a crucial part in the hiring process. An article published in New York Daily News further revealed that handsome men had a 54% callback rate compared to 7% of the less attractive ones.

In the recruitment process, a notable finding of Warhurst et al, 2016, revealed that the manager's preference for selection of service work in the retail and hospitality tended to be on the basis of personality, aesthetic and self-presentation. It is where the employers have the opportunity to consider appropriateness of appearance for the company image. Caiyod (2015), found that good grooming and hygiene play an important factor in the employability of fresh graduates as they are the integral part of the hospitality industry regardless of the nature of the business, appearance matters to the employers and guests.

Spencer and Spencer (1993) proposed that job performance is closely related to professional knowledge and personal motives and attributes. Therefore, competency can forecast job performance by providing a measure of endogenous factors (such as personal motives, traits, and self-concept) and exogenous factors (such as knowledge and skills). Mirable (1997) held that competency is useful for forecasting good job performance and objectively assessing knowledge, skills, abilities, and other personal characteristics.

This study approaches the employability concept from the competency perspective and that employability depends on job competency. The specific employability competencies of the BSHRT graduates to complete a task effectively may include appearance, cooperation, ability to follow instruction, cooperation, attitude towards work, observance of rules, expense consciousness, observance of rules, work area, job skills, quality of work, dependability, public relations, attendance and punctuality. They are essential attributes for all hospitality employees

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher used the descriptive method of research using the survey technique. According to (Caipang, 2000), descriptive research is a design which aims to describe the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of the study and causes particular phenomena. It also deals with everything that can be counted and studied and must have an impact to the lives of the people around you. This method is appropriate for the study in determining the employability of the Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Technology (BSHRT) graduates of Western Visayas College of Science and Technology, Lapaz Campus, Iloilo City consisting of batch 2012-2015 as the respondents of the study.

The respondents of the study were the 226 Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Technology graduates of Western Visayas College of Science and Technology Lapaz Campus, Iloilo City batch 2012-2016 were selected by accidental sampling. They were able to return the accomplished questionnaires out of 420 target graduates using a survey method. They were composed 42 out of 73 from batch 2012-2013, 50 out of 101 from batch 2013-2014, 63 out of 121 from batch 2014-2015 and 71 out of 125 from batch 2015-2016.

To gather the data for the study, the researchers constructed an instrument consisting of three parts. Part I was designed to gather the personal data of the respondents as to their sex, civil status, and

honors received while Part 2 consists of the employment information as to current job position, employment status, and types of establishments. Part 3 consisted of the different employability competencies as identified by the industry partners.

The instrument was submitted to three experts for face and content validation using the Good and Scates eight (8) point criteria for validation of research. The ratings of the three jurors were averaged and the obtained rating was very good (Mean =4.13) so the instrument was accepted as valid. The validated instrument was finally revised and pilot-tested to 20 respondents for reliability. These respondents in the pilot test were not included as respondents of the final survey. The data from the pilot test were summarized and the reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha. As a rule the instrument will be accepted as reliable if it has a reliability coefficient of .7 or higher. The obtained coefficients were high ($r = 0.852$ for Part 2)so it was accepted as reliable. The validated instrument was revised in its final form and reproduced for administration to the respondents.

Prior to the conduct of the study, the researchers secured a permit from the office of the University Presidentto conduct this tracer study. Upon approval, the researchers personally distributed the accomplished survey questionnaire to the different industry partners where the graduates are currently employed. The respondents were instructed carefully about the instrument. They were also informed that any information obtained herein will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Some respondents answered in a couple of minutes, but the majority requested to the researchers to leave the form and pick it up after they have accomplished it. Some questionnaireswas turned over by the graduates to the office of the Department of Hotel and Restaurant Technology.

After the accomplished questionnaires has been retrieved,it was checked to ensure the completeness of the responses. The data were encoded in Excel application to process a raw data for statistical treatment and analysis of data needed for the study.

The obtained results of the data were processed and analysed using the following statistical tools:

Frequency count - to show the number of the BSHRT graduates' responses according to the different variables of the study.

Percentage –to show the actual percent responses out of the expected target.

Rank – to describe the top 5 establishment where BSHRT graduates employ from year 2012-2015. It is used also to assess the employability competencies of the HRT graduates.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1. Number of Graduates Responded

Year	f	%
2012-2013	42	18.6
2013-2014	50	22.1
2014-2015	63	27.9
2015-2016	71	31.4
Total	226 (420)	100.00

As shown in table 1, the total number of graduates from 2012-2016 consisted of 420, however only 226 responded. There are 42or 118.6% of the total graduates responded the survey from batch

2012-2013, while about 50 or 22.1% responded from batch 2013-2014 From batch 2014-2015, 63 or 27.9% responded to the survey and only 71 or 31.4% responded from batch 2015-2016. This means that only about 54% of the graduates responded to the survey.

Table 2. Profile of the Respondents

Table 2 presents the profile of the respondents when grouped according to sex. Data shows that a large majority of the BSHRT graduates were female which is a little more than a third or 35.5% of the respondents while only 18% were male. Findings further revealed that female mostly preferred the hospitality and business courses and also occupies a large portion of the pie in terms of the hospitality workforce are female workers.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents as to sex

Sex	f	%
Male	78	18
Female	148	35.2
Total	226 (420)	

Table 3 presents the profile of HRT graduates as grouped in terms of civil status. Results show that a large majority of the graduates of HRT are single which is 198 or 87.61% of the respondents while only about 28 or 12.39% were married. Findings further showed that many of the graduates of HRT program are still single maybe because they are more focused on building their careers or some are still enjoying their jobs and being single.

Table 3. Distribution of the Respondents by Civil Status

Civil Status	f	%
Single	198	87.61
Married	28	12.39
Total	226(420)	100.00

As presented in Table 4, when respondents were grouped as to the honors or awards received, only a few of the graduates had graduated with academic awards while a large majority do not have any honor or awards received.

Table 4. Award Received by the BSHRT Graduates

Award Received	f	%
Summa Cum Laude	1	0.44
Magna Cum Laude	3	1.33
Cum Laude	6	2.66
Merit	2	0.88
None	214	94.69

Total 226(420) 100.00

Table 5 shows the distribution of respondents when grouped in terms of their employed establishments. More than a fifth were employed in hotels while others were employed in fast food restaurants, restaurants and cruise ships. Others have jobs in related hospitality establishments while others were employed in academe and other government agencies.

Table 5. Types of Establishments the BSHRT Graduates was Employed

Establishment	Frequency	%
Cruise ship	18	7.96
Hotel	64	28.32
Resort	12	5.31
Restaurant	28	12.39
Fast Food	32	14.16
Resto Bar	7	3.10
Coffee Shop	9	3.98
Spa	4	1.77
Seafarer	10	4.42
Casino	8	3.54
Sales	8	3.54
Retail Sales	9	3.98
Government	7	3.10
Medical	3	1.33
Call Center	7	2.65
Total	226 (420)	100.00

Based on the data presented, a large majority of the BS HRT graduates were on temporary employment while less than a fifth respectively were permanent and casual employees.

Table 5. Present Employment Status of BSHRT Graduates

Employment Status	f	%
Casual	36	15.93
Temporary	147	65.04
Permanent	43	19.03
Total	226 (420)	100.00

As presented in Table 6, results showed that a large majority of HRT graduates belonged to rank-and-file category and only a few of them have supervisory and managerial positions. Findings further revealed that majority of the HRT graduates occupies an entry level positions however others were able to have the middle level positions.

Table 6. Current Job Position of the BSHRT Graduates

Current Job Position	f	%
Managerial	11	4.87
Supervisory	19	8.41
Rank and File	196	86.73
Total	226 (420)	100.00

Table 7 presents the assessment of the competencies of BSHRT graduates as assessed by the industry partners. Results showed that ‘Appearance’ ranked number 1 which indicated that the BSHRT graduates are well-groomed and dressed appropriately at work. This is an indication that appearance matters to employers of the hospitality industry. This was followed by the ‘Ability to follow instruction’ which means that the BSHRT graduates are interested in their work and pays attention to the details of the assigned tasks. Ranked third is ‘Expense consciousness’ which further indicates that BSHRT graduates are extremely careful in using materials and equipment at work and ‘Cooperation’ where in BSHRT graduates showed extreme eagerness to be able to work together with their co-workers and a team-player. ‘Attitude towards work’ ranked fourth which further showed that BSHRT graduates have the willingness and the initiative to learn and try new things. Ranked fifth is the “observance of rules’ which showed that BSHRT graduates are always in observance of the rules and regulations of the industry. ‘Work area’ ranked sixth which shows that BSHRT graduates have the skills set to perform the competencies required in the hotel work areas. On the seventh rank is ‘Job skills’ wherein BSHRT graduates were found to have the specific learned abilities to perform a job well. On the eight rank is ‘Quality of work” wherein BSHRT graduates diligently attends to details to be able to perform tasks exceptionally. Ranked nine is ‘Dependability’ wherein the graduates of HRT can be trusted and relied upon the completion of tasks with less supervision while ‘Public relation’ ranked ten where BSHRT graduates were found to be extremely tactful and understanding in dealing with their colleague and guests. And ranked the least is ‘Attendance and Punctuality’ which means that none among the BSHRT graduates were absent in reporting to work.

Table 7. Assessment of Employability Competencies of BSHRT Graduates

Assessment of the competencies of BSHRT	Rank
Appearance	1
Ability to follow instruction	2
Cooperation	3
Expense consciousness	3
Attitude towards work	4
Observance of rules	5
Work area	6
Job skills	7
Quality of work	8

Dependability	9
Public relation	10
Attendance and punctuality	11

CONCLUSIONS

Employability competency is measured by the ability of the graduates to perform a job and qualify for a hospitality industry career. This study has provided the evidences on the importance of aesthetic skills or appearance in the hospitality service sector. The importance of aesthetics or the physical looks as an employable competency is evident in the findings. Prioritizing appearance as the top most employability competency that a BSHRT student must possess is indicative of its prime contribution to the success of the business. When asked to assess the centrality of employee appearance to the success of the hospitality organization, 53 per cent of the sample felt it was critical, 40 per cent felt it was important, and 6 per cent somewhat important. Thus, at least 93 per cent of respondents attributed significant importance to the image of customer-facing staff. With employees now becoming a crucial part of the company image and service quality strategies of service companies there is the potential for judgements about the “right” kind of employee to be seen to be well-groomed and good looking.

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