

Employer Perceptions on The Employability Skills of Entry-Level Employees of The Medium-Sized Hotels in Ilocos Norte

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Abstract — This study aimed to determine the Employer Perceptions on the Employability Skills of Entry-Level Employees of the Medium-Sized Hotels in Ilocos Norte.

This study used the descriptive-survey method in determining the demographic profile of the HR Staff, factors for employability, employability skills do employers perceive to be important in the entry-level positions, and the problems/issues encountered by the respondents in hiring entry-level job positions. According to the findings, the succeeding conclusions were drawn: the respondents are predominantly female, young adults, and have been working as Human Resource (HR) staff for a couple of years. Likewise, the HR staff in the hospitality industry does not usually give intensive eyeing to the demographic profile of the as it does not affect the applicant's capability to do work well in the industry. In terms of physical appearance, good grooming and hygiene are the most observable factors in hiring applicants. Other important factors are soft competencies as they give a positive impact to the applicants and also benefit the hospitality firms. Having related work experience is a very essential hiring factor for the HR staff as it gives them the bird's eye view of the applicants' capabilities to do a job well.

Based on the findings and conclusions deduced, adopting strategies by Higher Education institutions to improve the employability skills of entry-level job applicants in the hotel industry is recommended.

I. Introduction

Background of the Study

The changing demands of employability skills require highly skilled employees. It is in line with the study of El Mansour and Dean (2016) that "twofold challenge of a competitive business world and rapid technological advancement that demands for a transformation of the workplace requires a great focus on work that goes beyond task performance". More so, changes in technology, procedures or markets may all mean that jobs are reconfigured and become available to the external labor; hence it will thereby elicit the hiring and selection process" (Buenaflor, I. et al. 2015)

As such, in the present-day of a challenging and competitive work environment, the responsibility of institution is not only to churn out alumnae with certain areas of abilities, but then, it is more remarkably to produce graduates with skills that are looked for by businesses (Ali, Othman, & Ahmad, 2017). Therefore, schools are challenged to prepare graduates with skills other than academic skills, and able to face great pressure from potential employers and other stakeholders. El Mansour and Dean (2016) emphasize the fact that if an institution of higher

education fails to deal with this particular issue, then it could generate negative insights that would result in employers becoming more selective when hiring competent applicant.

According to Heery and Noon (2001), “hiring is defined as the process of generating a pool of candidates from which to select the appropriate person to fill a job vacancy.” “In the hiring process, administrations are seeking to entice and retain the interest of suitable candidates, whereas at the same time also seeking to depict a positive image to prospective applicants. Hiring is a dynamic process as within organizations, people are constantly retiring, resigning, being promoted, or, at times, being dismissed.

On the other hand, the tourism industry has to turn out to be one of the leading and fastest-growing economic segments in the world. Moreover, the hospitality industry largely depends on proficient employees to provide exceptional service to its guests. Hence, relevant employability skills and capabilities are of particular significance.

It is a challenge for employers to decide among the interviewees based on merits. The study conducted by T.S. Natarajan and G.P. Raman (2018) specified that with growing and better opportunities created by the government and interest by multinational hotel companies, there is a growing demand for hotels result in mandate for qualified and trained human capital, being well said, there is a really lot of opportunities in hotel employment Fresh graduates are curious individuals; they are brimming with enthusiasm and nervousness, they are excited and likewise unsure, they show unbridled passion and then go and doubt their energy, and many college graduates have no idea how to apply for a job the right way (Muneeb, 2012)

Yearly, competition for employment is getting harder and stiffer. Graduates need to be more notable in terms of academic educations to become more competitive in the employment world. An increasing number of fresh graduates of hospitality management shall be equipped with skills and knowledge to be competitive in their respective fields. A graduate may enter a different kind of work in the hospitality industry.

Tejan and Sabil (2019) revealed in their study that most of the employers in Morocco are contented with the proficiency and skills of the graduates they hire. However, Chbani and Jaouane (2017) stated that each year, approximately twenty-two (22%) percent of alumni fail to get hired in any organization, and this could be attributed to the deficiency of employability skills besides other reasons. Another immense concern is that a significant portion of these graduates is not employed because of the absence of the skills needed by employers. On the other hand, these former students are assumed to acquire good technical skills but insufficient critical and soft skills such as communication, leadership, creative thinking, and foreign languages (Ali et al., 2017). Owing to this, these students strive hard to get work when they graduate.

Numerous researchers have investigated the issue in other countries. For instance, in Sri Lanka, as pointed out by Rajapakse (2016), the problem is associated with the incompetence of the current educational system that somehow fails to equip graduates through appropriate training. Therefore, the present study is vital for it determines employers' perceptions concerning employability skills of entry-level employees in medium-size hotels in the province- Ilocos Norte.

The results of the study will be beneficial to the tertiary students by updating them about the necessary employability skills as perceived by employers. Besides, the outcomes of the research will support local universities to get a better understanding of the employability skills to equip their students based on industry preferences

Theoretical Framework

The study is positioned within the theoretical framework of the theory below:

Human Capital Theory, which contemplates the economic effects of education and training on individuals. Becker (1993) is an ancestor in the application of economic theories to social concerns. The core forms of the human capital theory are schooling and on-the-job training. He likewise conducted a study on human Capital that examined similarities of investing in a person's learning and training to invest in a business industry. Moreover, he demonstrates the way this theory evaluates the motivation of these investments.

Meanwhile, the study of Marimuthu, Arokiasamy, and Ismail (2009) emphasized that human capital is the process of training, offering knowledge that can improve the abilities, skills, and morals of the employees, in consequences to get an enhance job performance and competency of the individual and the general performance of the organization. Their study further noted that vocational training plays a crucial role in developing human capital. Enterprises shall hire and retain the ablest employees who extend a competitive advantage. Accordingly, companies occupy vast resources to guide and develop competitive human resources. However, this is expensive, and firms expect to lessen these expenses by employing graduates with desired employability skills. The human capital theory is appropriate in understanding employers' perceptions of employability skills in the current study. The theory seeks to depict why employers seek specific skills. Employers necessitate skills that can bring competitiveness and technical skills learned at the institution of higher education. Besides, human capital theory can explain how the education and training of individuals are imperative to any organizational setting. Employees can only become human capital in the sense that they can offer competitiveness when they possess the right skills preferred by their business industry.

Conceptual Framework

The research paradigm is intended to prepare job-entry-level job applicants to be competitive in the hospitality industry. Also, this will serve as a basis for the HR staff to hire new graduates to work on the premises. Figure 1 shows the research paradigm of this study, following the: Input-Process-Output (IPO) model.

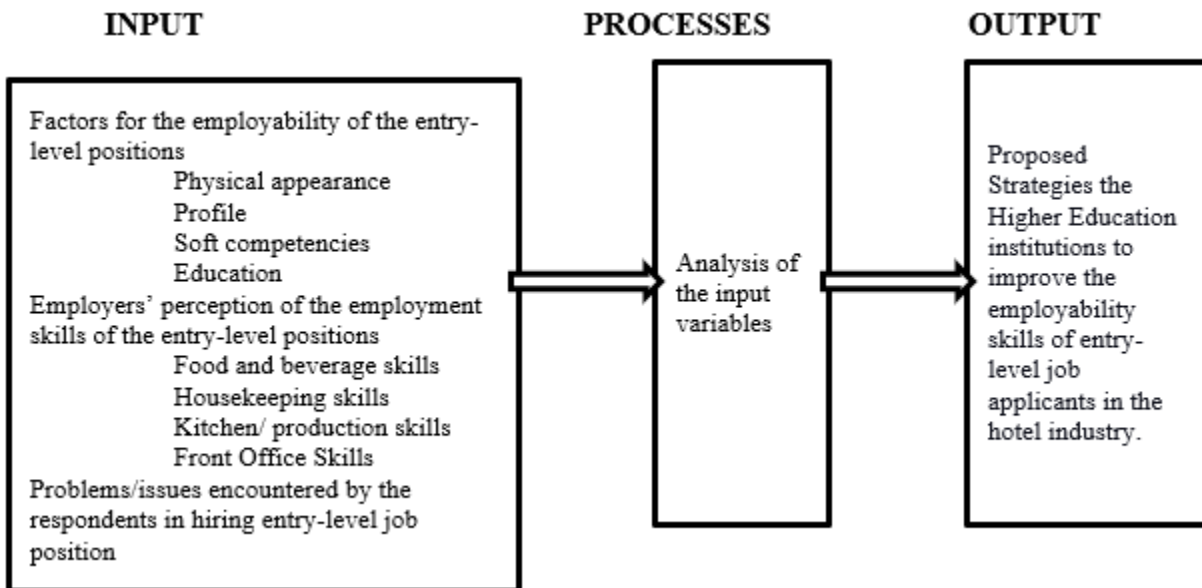


Figure 1. Research Paradigm

The first box is the input which includes the factors on the employability of the entry-level job, such as the physical appearance, profile, soft competencies, and education. These factors play a vital role in acquiring jobs in the hospitality industry. Likewise, employers' perception of the employment skills of the entry-level positions, which comprise food and beverage, housekeeping, kitchen/ production, and Front Office Skills, and lastly, the issues encountered in hiring entry-level job positions. It is somewhat interesting that professional, technical skills and knowledge of the various major department of hospitality were emphasized in the selection of an applicant. Also, work attitude and personal attributes are essential competencies for all hospitality employees.

Furthermore, the inputs will pave the way for the Higher Education Institution offering Hospitality Education to adopt the proposed strategies to improve the employability skills of entry-level job applicants in the hotel industry.

Statement of the Problem

The study aimed to examine employers' perceptions of the employability skills of entry-level employees of medium-size hotels in Ilocos Norte.

This research also sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the factors for the employability of the entry-level positions with regards to:
 - 1.1 Physical appearance;
 - 1.2 Profile;
 - 1.3 Soft competencies; and
 - 1.4 Education?
2. What employability skills do employers perceive to be important for entry-level positions in the hospitality industry in terms of:
 - 2.1 Food and beverage skills;
 - 2.2 Housekeeping skills;
 - 2.3 Kitchen/ production skills; and
 - 2.4 Front Office Skills?
3. What are the problems/issues encountered by the respondents in hiring entry-level job positions?
4. What strategies can be adopted by Higher Education institutions to improve the employability skills of entry-level job applicants in the hotel industry?

II. Methodology

Participants

The study respondents are the immediate supervisors or other human resources/recruiting staff members of the hotel industry. A judgmental or purposive sampling was considered in studying the entry-level jobs of the thirty (30) medium-sized hotels in Ilocos Norte.

Research Instrument

The researcher constructed a survey questionnaire as the major tool for gathering data. The questionnaire consisted of three (3) parts. The primary part is concerning the factors for the employability of entry-level job positions. The second part is the employability skills employers perceive to be of importance for entry-level positions in the hospitality industry. Lastly, it is about the issues and concerns encountered by the respondents in hiring entry-level job positions.

The 1st part of the questionnaire is patterned in the study of Caiyod, Escamillas, Guarina, and Gesmundo (2015) entitled “*Factors Associated to Fresh Graduates’ Employability in the Hospitality Industry*,”. However, an enrichment was made to fit the purpose of the study. While the employability skills are lifted from the Performance Evaluation Report (for Practicum Trainee) NWU-COBE-004 (2019) as to technical skills and soft competencies are concerned. In the last part of the questionnaires was where identified issues and concerns encountered during the hiring of entry-level job positions in the hospitality industry.

Data Analysis

To secure adequate information that is relevant to the purpose of this study, the researcher used a descriptive survey method to find out the employers' perception of the employability skills of entry-level jobs of the medium-size hotels in Ilocos Norte. The researcher floated questionnaires for gathering data and information.

Utilizing a 4-point Likert Scale, respondents were solicited to rate the factors for the employability and employers' perception of employability skills of the entry-level job position in the hospitality industry. On this scale, one stood for Strongly Disagree, 2 for Disagree, 3 for Agree, and 4 for Strongly Agree. Given a 4-point Likert Scale, the norms of interpretation for this part was:

Weighted Mean	Interpretation
3.25-4.00	Strongly Agree (SA)
2.50-3.24	Agree (A)
1.75-2.49	Disagree (DA)
1.00-1.74	Strongly Disagree (SDA)

III. Results and Discussion

FACTORS FOR THE EMPLOYABILITY OF THE ENTRY-LEVEL POSITIONS

The respondents are inclined to believe that **physical appearances** are needed in initial employment. Good hygiene (hair and nails clean and neat, clean clothes, no foul odor) plays a significant role in job ranked the highest with a composite mean value of **Strongly Agree** rated as 3.93. In terms of the **profile** of the entry-level positions, both gender and religion were rated **Strongly Agree** with a mean value of 3.37 and 3.5, respectively. There are characteristics, skills, attributes, and knowledge that managers valued. *Reports to work on time* garnered the highest mean among the **soft competencies** with a value of 3.97 and rated as **Strongly Agree**. Correspondingly, it can be understood from the table that the *ability to work with minimum supervision* ranked the least, although graded as **Strongly Agree**. In terms of **education**, the acquisitions of National Certificate is observed as revealed with the mean value of 2.8 and rated as **Agree** as it implies that NC Holders possessed multi-skilled such as communication skills both oral and written, mathematical skills, front office skills, food and beverage skills, housekeeping skill, and cooking skills. While having good grades are preferred ranked the least and rated as **Disagree**.

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS DO EMPLOYERS PERCEIVE TO BE IMPORTANT FOR ENTRY-LEVEL POSITIONS IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

The **Food and Beverage Department's** composite mean was 3.68, with a qualitative description of Strongly Agree. The "*Welcome customers*" skill ranked first as the department employee should possess. The "*Clean guestrooms*" skill was ranked first with a mean value of 3.9. Even though the HR Staff opts not to respond to some of the reports: "*accounts and replenishes minibar items*", the **Housekeeping Department** still obtains a composite mean of 3.81 with a qualitative description of "Strongly Agree." The "*Cleans and maintains kitchen premises*" and "*Organizes and prepares food*" garnered the same rating with a mean value of 3.9. The composite mean for **Kitchen Department** was with a qualitative description of "Strongly Agree". The "*Prepares guest arrival*" and "*Welcomes and register guest*" garnered the same rating with a mean value of 3.97. The composite mean for the **Front Office Department** was with a qualitative description of "Strongly Agree".

PROBLEMS/ISSUES ENCOUNTERED BY THE RESPONDENTS IN HIRING ENTRY-LEVEL JOB POSITIONS

The researcher collated the answers of the respondents on the specific questions in problems and issues faced by the respondents with respects to the hiring of entry-level job positions and stated as follows:

"Most job applicants have no experience yet our company is open for new job applicants. The company is looking for skills and abilities."

"No job experience related to work."

"Work experience vs. fresh graduate with the on-the-job record."

"Most applicants don't have any work experience aside from the on-the-job training. But it is not a problem for us because we have a solid training program for our new employees."

The respondents revealed the importance of having work experience related to the positions they are applying for as this experience worthy and helpful as they starts their work in the hospitality industry.

"Most applicants are now pride and choosy."

"Being selective of the positions they are applying for"

"The perspective of new graduates has very high expectations and pride and their college diploma and achievements. But their degree does not align with the job requirements vs. jobs and employers high standards of position demands."

There is a need to be addressed by both the owners of the industry or the HR Staff and the applicants, for the reason that there is often a mismatch between what the applicants and industry expect from one another. The newly graduates shall be adequately informed regarding industry's expectations, challenges, the demand of the work environment they can expect once they are employed in the industry, while others also showed that graduates nowadays are lacking in both technical know-how and generic skills.

“Some positions that they require to PESO, DOLE, are hard up for recruitment because of expansions and other employment opportunities.”

A competitive job market can be regarded as the amount of competition where there is for open positions. Since the job market is highly competitive, the graduates shall be equipped with the different factors and employability skills that this existing study has tackled to an edge among the applicants.

“Hiring a single parent is an issue sometimes. The problem is when there is an emergency or sometimes, not only an emergency but only because of their child's needs in their school like meetings, etc., they don't have a choice but to attend, even though it conflicts with their schedule. That's why we prefer single to married.”

“Individual needs to survive and as a means, they look for a job that sustains their living. This need is not apart from the single mothers who expressed a desire to be employed for existence.

“Some employees have no initiative, they want to be told what to do, some are dishonest, and absenteeism.”

Several instances, an employee's problematic behavior, and attitude indicates that the worker is not contented with the job.

First issue raised is **no initiative**. A worker who lacks initiative is usually missed up on valuable opportunities, which results in to decrease in the productivity and effectiveness of the organization. As management of the industry, it is necessary to know the root cause of why employees tend to have no initiative at work. Thus the initiative is regarded as when employees do things without being told and grab all opportunities coming to its ways.

Another issue is **dishonesty**. Keeping the trust among the employees of the organizations may result in fulfillment, less anxiety, and even inspire employees' commitment to stay longer in the company.

The last issue is **absenteeism**. Employee absenteeism is a major concern of the business industry. Employee absenteeism is defined as the frequent absence of an employee from their work (vantage circle, 2021). It is a finding that if companies fail to address these issues, it may result in low productivity.

STRATEGIES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS TO IMPROVE THE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS OF ENTRY-LEVEL JOB APPLICANTS IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

The strategies are intended to enhance the skills and attributes of entry-level job applicants in the hotel industry. The proposed plan is to ensure that students in the University are ready for employment right after graduation. It was developed as a result of the findings of the research study. Hence, it was intended for the Academic industry to produce quality and competent workers, and, on the other hand, for the HR staff to hire new graduates to work in hospitality world.

General Objectives	Specific Objectives	Strategies	Programs/ Activities	Expected Outcome	Main Proponent
To provide a competitive curriculum to students.	To offer subjects that will enhance both the personality and employability skills of the students.	The identified subjects by the partner agency shall be included in the curriculum with the approval of the Commission on Higher Education.	The enrolment committee prepares the necessary documents. Submit to CHED the revised curriculum. Monitor the approval of the curriculum. Offer the subjects to the students. Monitor the implementation of the program.	The Stakeholders involved will produce competitive subjects for the students.	University President Vice President for Academic Affairs University Registrar Dean/ Head of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management Program Faculty Members of the College Alumni Representative Industry Partner Representative Student Representative
To produce competitive students.	To assess/ evaluate the enrollees on their skills and attributes.	The identified skills and attributes shall align/match the student course	Admit the enrollees. Offer one-on-one career advising to the enrollees. Monitor the result of the career path. Process the student enrolment.	The competent and responsible students of the institution.	Registrar Personnel Guidance Center Personnel Dean of the College Head of the Department Faculty Members of the Department Enrolees/ Students

To produce competitive students.	To assess/ evaluate the enrollees on their skills and attributes.	The identified skills and attributes shall align/match the student course	Admit the enrollees. Offer one-on-one career advising to the enrollees. Monitor the result of the career path. Process the student enrolment.	The competent and responsible students of the institution.	Registrar Personnel Guidance Center Personnel Dean of the College Head of the Department Faculty Members of the Department Enrolees/ Students
To identify programs within the department to solve the “no related experience” issues.	To address the issues regarding the no related industry work experience before employment.	Have a strong linkage with an industry partner.	Discuss the objective of having the program during the department/college orientation. Endorse/ assist the students to the identified industry partner. Monitor the implementation.	Graduates will have an edge over the other applicant because of work experience aside from the on-the-job training.	University President Vice President for Academic Affairs University Legal Counsel Dean/ Head of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management Program Faculty Members of the College Practicum Coordinator Industry Partner Coordinator Students
To provide the student with the targeted training, they need to gain the skills necessary to fulfill the specific requirements of the hotel industry.	To provide relevant skills development and training to students	Invite lecturers from the industry.	Require students to attend skills-related training.	A student is equipped with proper and efficient management and operations of the hospitality industry.	University President Vice President for Academic Affairs Vice President for Finance Dean/ Head of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management Program Faculty Members of the College Industry Partner Representative Students

IV. Conclusion

The importance of the study is to determine the employer perceptions on the employability skills of entry-level employees of the medium-sized hotels in Ilocos Norte.

In terms of physical appearance, the researcher found out that good grooming and hygiene are the most observable factors in hiring applicants. Having a good set of teeth, height, good complexion, and weight also plays an important factor as they are an integral portion of the property. It is noteworthy to note that in the Philippines, an increase in enrollment in personality development courses has been observed, signifying growth in awareness of the advantages of having good grooming and pleasant behavior. Moreover, it's absolutely interesting that Filipinos are initiating to build upon their appearances by taking care of themselves with correct sanitation and building on their character, apart from their resumes, to get sighted by employers (Geneta, 2014).

Other significant factors are soft competencies indicated in this study as they give a affirmative influence to the applicants and benefit the hospitality organizations. Having related work experience is a very vital hiring factor for the Human Resource Staff as it gives them the bird's eye view of the applicants' capabilities to do a job well done. This is similar to the research conducted by Fay and Frese (2013), that the initiative of doing their work with rare supervision from the superior has become increasingly important in today's workplace. Organizations need employees who can think on their feet and take action without waiting for someone to tell them what to do. Afterward, this type of flexibility and courage drives the teams and organizations to innovate and overcome competition.

Another factor is the education, the institution where the applicant graduated is an advantage, and also being part with hospitality awards and recognition is a bonus to the fresh graduates' rate chances of getting employed as it contributes the company an outlook to applicants' capability to do more. Graduates shall possess multi-skilled such as communication skills both oral and written, mathematical skills, front office skills, food and beverage skills, housekeeping skill, and cooking skills. This is parallel to Obi (2017), who posited that the type of business education graduates is adequately armed with worthwhile skills, abilities, and competencies that can readily ensure they're surviving in the uncertain world of business and saturated labor markets.

Moreover, the employability skills of the different major departments in the hotel industry have been identified various skills possessed by the applicant are of great advantage on the part of the employer in the hospitality industry. Having multi-skilled will be an edge, a worker assigned in Food and Beverage Department can be transferred temporarily to the understaffed department which in need of housekeeping or cooking skills for instance. The result of the present study was highlighted in the research conducted by Acharya and Siddiq (2016), where the accomplishment of the hospitality industry is centered on efficient human resources. The efficiency of human resources is attained during demonstration of proper skills at the precise times during service. Besides, it is interesting to note that the success of the individual workers in the hospitality industry

is also decided by their “workplace skills” such as housekeeping operational ability, food and beverage management skill, lodging administration skill, front office working aptitude, and restaurant operational skill. Further, both people skills and workplace skills are vital for personal and organizational development (Acharya and Siddiq, 2016). Thus, it is indispensable for the hospitality industry, particularly the hotel employees, to have the precise abilities to be both employable and personally contented.

Furthermore, the following issues and problems required immediate action to meet the expectations of the employers of the medium-sized hotels in Ilocos Norte to the entry-level job applicants:

Work experience. The present study is similar to the research conducted by Schoffstall (2013) that to be successful in the hospitality industry; students need to obtain work experience and earned their degrees. Additionally, the study of Allan, Bamber, & Timo, 2006; Richardson, 2008) showed that students and graduates gained valuable knowledge from their work experiences and perceived their experiences as worthy when interviewing for positions following graduation.

Selective applicants. To deal with these issues, Kock and Strydom (2014) tackled in their study that industry stakeholders shall clearly articulate what is expected from graduates once they are employed, on the other hand, the newly graduates shall be adequately informed regarding industry’s expectations, challenges, the demand of the work environment they can expect once they are employed in the industry, while others also showed that graduates nowadays are lacking in both technical know-how and generic skills

Employment opportunities. Since the job market is highly competitive, the graduates shall be equipped with the different factors and employability skills that this existing study has tackled to an edge among the applicants. The previous statements are interconnected with the research of Bailey and Mitchell (2006), in which they stressed that to be successful in this ever-changing, increasingly competitive business environment, organizations must demand workforces with competencies that will lead to a high return on the employee investment”.

Hiring a single parent. “Individual needs to survive and as a means, they look for a job that sustains their living. This need is not apart from the single mothers who expressed a desire to be employed for existence. it’s good to know that women who were trying to obtain employment, increase their education, or improve their employability skills received negative comments from family and friends about their efforts, Youngblut, Brady, Brooten, and Thomas (2009).

No initiative, dishonest, and absenteeism. As management of the industry, it is necessary to know the root cause of why employees tend to have these kind of behavior. Mack (2009) cited in his study that employees who deal with these kind of behavior suggested solutions to overcome the problem; for instance, if the employee worries criticism from management for making a mistake, alleviate her fears by offering continual support and encouragement. A worker who lacks the skills required to perform job responsibilities, as well, shall be provided with further training.

Likewise, if laziness is the cause, employees shall enlighten that unwillingness to work can lead to dismissal.

Implications and Future Research Direction

The hospitality industry is in constant need of eligible applicants across the world. There is a growing demand for hotels result in the mandate for qualified and trained human capital. The changing demands of employability skills require highly skilled employees. Therefore, schools are challenged to prepare graduates with skills other than academic skills, and able to face great pressure from potential employers and other stakeholders. The said industry has to turn out to be one of the leading and fastest-growing economic segments in the world. Moreover, the hospitality industry largely depends on proficient employees to provide exceptional service to its guests. Hence, relevant employability skills and capabilities are of particular significance.

Thus, the Commission of the Higher Education (CHED), the policy-making body in the country higher education which reports directly to the Office of the President, has strongly supported and pushed for the offering of hospitality education programs such as BS in Hotel and Restaurant Management due to the booming industry in tourism, because of this, it leads the province of Ilocos Region, particularly the academic institutions to offer such program.

Northwestern University is always at the forefront of change and has an eye for the future. The institution aims at providing the needed human resource to the hospitality industry. More so, for their graduates to be chosen from the pool of applicants, the professors shall undergo assessment at the different qualifications to assure that they imparted the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to their students. Also, it is an edge for the students if they are title holders of National Certificates II on Housekeeping, Front Office Services, Food and Beverage Services, Bread and Pastry Production, Commercial Cooking, Bartending, and Cookery for them to be qualified on the hotel and restaurant standards.

Thus, hotel management institutes play a chief role in providing eligible and skilled people to meet the human capital requirement by the industry. Selecting and starting the premium educational degree for a satisfying job and successful career can be relatively challenging for a student, it is because choosing a degree and the decision to make will profoundly shape his future.

V. Recommendations

1. The Higher Education Institutions may adopt of the strategies to improve the employability skills of entry-level job applicants in the hotel industry.
2. In the medium-sized hotel industry in Ilocos Norte, the Human Resource Staff, in particular, may utilize the result of the study and consider the findings for a continuous improvement of their services and operations.
3. The future investigators to conduct further studies associated to this research topic.

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