

การเตรียมความพร้อมสำหรับบุคลากรวิชาชีพด้านการท่องเที่ยว ต่อข้อตกลงยอมรับร่วมคุณสมบัตินักวิชาชีพอาเซียน มุมมองจากธุรกิจการท่องเที่ยว

อุมาวสี ศรีบุญลือ¹
อรวี ศรีบุญลือ²

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) ศึกษาผลกระทบของข้อตกลงร่วมว่าด้วยการยอมรับคุณสมบัติบุคลากรวิชาชีพการท่องเที่ยวอาเซียน (ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals: ASEAN MRA - TP) ต่อมุมมองของผู้บริหารระดับสูงที่มีต่อ MRA-TP และการเตรียมความพร้อมสำหรับบุคลากรวิชาชีพด้านการท่องเที่ยว และ 2) ให้นำแนวทางสำหรับการพัฒนาบุคลากรวิชาชีพด้านการท่องเที่ยวตาม MRA-TP ระเบียบวิธีการวิจัยที่ใช้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพโดยใช้การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกด้วยแบบสอบถามปลายเปิดถึงโครงสร้าง โดยสอบถามผู้บริหารระดับสูง ผู้จัดการทั่วไป หรือผู้อำนวยการฝ่ายทรัพยากรบุคคลของธุรกิจบริการโรงแรม จำนวน 10 คน และเจ้าของธุรกิจหรือผู้บริหารระดับสูงของธุรกิจบริการด้านการท่องเที่ยวและนำเที่ยวในไทย จำนวน 10 คน ใช้การเลือกโดยไม่ใช้ทฤษฎีความน่าจะเป็น (Non probability sampling) ด้วยเทคนิคการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจง (Purposive sampling) โดยเน้นที่ธุรกิจที่ประกอบธุรกิจท่องเที่ยวมาแล้วอย่างน้อย 5 ปี

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ผู้บริหารส่วนใหญ่เชื่อว่า MRA - TP และมาตรฐานสมรรถนะนั้นดี มีประโยชน์มากมายสำหรับทั้งธุรกิจและพนักงาน และจะเป็นประโยชน์สำหรับกระบวนการจัดการและพัฒนาทรัพยากรบุคคล นอกจากนี้ เพื่อให้บุคลากรวิชาชีพด้านการท่องเที่ยวสามารถเคลื่อนย้ายงานได้ในประเทศอาเซียน พวกเขาต้องปฏิบัติตามคุณสมบัติและการรับรองสมรรถนะด้านการท่องเที่ยว โดยสมรรถนะที่สำคัญในการเสริมสร้างความสามารถในการแข่งขันของบุคลากรวิชาชีพด้านการท่องเที่ยวอาเซียน ได้แก่ การมีความรู้และสมรรถนะเกี่ยวกับตำแหน่งงาน การใช้ภาษาต่าง ๆ ที่หลากหลายเพื่อการสื่อสารที่เหมาะสม การทำงานอย่างเต็มความสามารถและด้วยความขยันขันแข็ง การมีใจรักการบริการและให้ความสำคัญกับลูกค้า และสามารถปรับตัวให้เข้ากับการเปลี่ยนแปลงต่าง ๆ ได้

คำสำคัญ: บุคลากรวิชาชีพด้านการท่องเที่ยว ความพร้อม ข้อตกลงยอมรับร่วม ประชาคมอาเซียน

¹ คณะบริหารธุรกิจ มหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีราชมงคลธัญบุรี เลขที่ 39 หมู่ที่ 1 ตำบลคลองหก อำเภอคลองหลวง จังหวัดปทุมธานี 12110

อีเมล: umawasee_s@rmutt.ac.th

² คณะบริหารธุรกิจ มหาวิทยาลัยเกษตรศาสตร์ เลขที่ 50 ถนนงามวงศ์วาน แขวงลาดยาว เขตจตุจักร กรุงเทพฯ 10900

อีเมล: orawee.sr@ku.th

READINESS PREPARATION FOR TOURISM PROFESSIONALS TOWARD ASEAN MUTUAL RECOGNITION ARRANGEMENT: A PERSPECTIVE FROM TOURISM BUSINESS

Umawasee Sriboonlue¹

Orawee Sriboonlue²

Abstract

The purposes of this research were 1) to investigate the effects of ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on tourism professionals (MRA-TP) on top executives' perspectives toward MRA-TP and readiness preparation for tourism professionals and 2) to provide guidelines for the development of tourism professionals based on ASEAN MRA-TP. The research methodology was qualitative research conducted using the in-depth interview with semi-structural open-ended questionnaire and asking 10 top executive officers, general managers or directors of human resources department in hotel services and 10 business owners or top executive officers in travel and tour services in Thailand. Non-probability sampling with purposive sampling technique was used by concentrating on businesses which have been operating in tourism industry for at least five years.

The research results showed that most of executives believed that MRA – TP and its competency standards were good, had many benefits for both business and workers, and would be useful for human resource management and development processes. Moreover, in order for tourism professionals to have job mobility across ASEAN countries, they must follow the tourism competency qualification and certificate. The important competencies to enhance competitiveness among ASEAN tourism workers included having knowledge and competencies related to job position, using various languages for appropriate communication, working with full capacity and diligence, having service mind and giving importance to customers, and being able to adapt to changes.

Keywords: Tourism Professionals, Readiness, Mutual Recognition Arrangement, ASEAN Community

¹ Faculty of Business Administration, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, 39 Moo 1, Klong 6, Khlong Luang Pathum Thani 12110 Thailand

Email: umawasee_s@rmutt.ac.th

² Faculty of Business Administration, Kasetsart University, Bangkok, 50 Ngamwongwan Rd, Chatuchak Bangkok 10900 Thailand

Email: orawee.sr@ku.th

Introduction

Travel and tourism sector plays an important role in ASEAN economic growth providing source of export income and employment opportunities across the ASEAN region. Numbers of visitor arrivals to ASEAN by country of destination showed that there were 81 million visitors in 2011 and grew to 143 million visitors in 2019. Even though the pandemic stopped all inbound and outbound travelling around the world in 2020, there were still 29 million visitors visited (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2021). The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community and Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) on qualifications in key professional fields aim to facilitate mobility of employment for professionals or skilled labors among ASEAN member countries. The ASEAN MRA on Tourism Professionals (MRA-TP) seeks to increase the international mobility of tourism labors across the ASEAN region in line with ASEAN policy. The ASEAN Tourism Professionals also aims to boost the competitiveness of the tourism sector. Therefore, qualifications, knowledge, abilities, and competencies of professionals or skilled labors in the tourism industry are necessary for all ASEAN countries. Tourism professionals include 32 job titles in two divisions as hotel services and travel services. Under hotel services, it consisted of 23 positions in the front office, housekeeping, food production, and food and beverage service. These hotel services positions are, for examples, front office manager, housekeeper, executive chef, and F&B director. Travel services consisted of 9 positions in travel agencies and tour operations, such as general manager and product manager (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2018).

According to the Establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community, Thailand as a member of ASEAN will benefit from strengthening the Thai labor market and creating more employment opportunities for Thai labors, but also increase numbers of competitors from ASEAN member countries (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2012). Therefore, the researcher would like to conduct exploratory research by interviewing top executive officers and business owner perspectives in tourism business toward readiness preparation in tourism professionals and organizations in order to compete in the ASEAN community.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the effects of ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement in Tourism Professionals on top executives' perspectives towards MRA-TP and readiness preparation for tourism professionals.
2. To provide guidelines for the development of tourism professionals based on ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual research framework was drawn as follows:

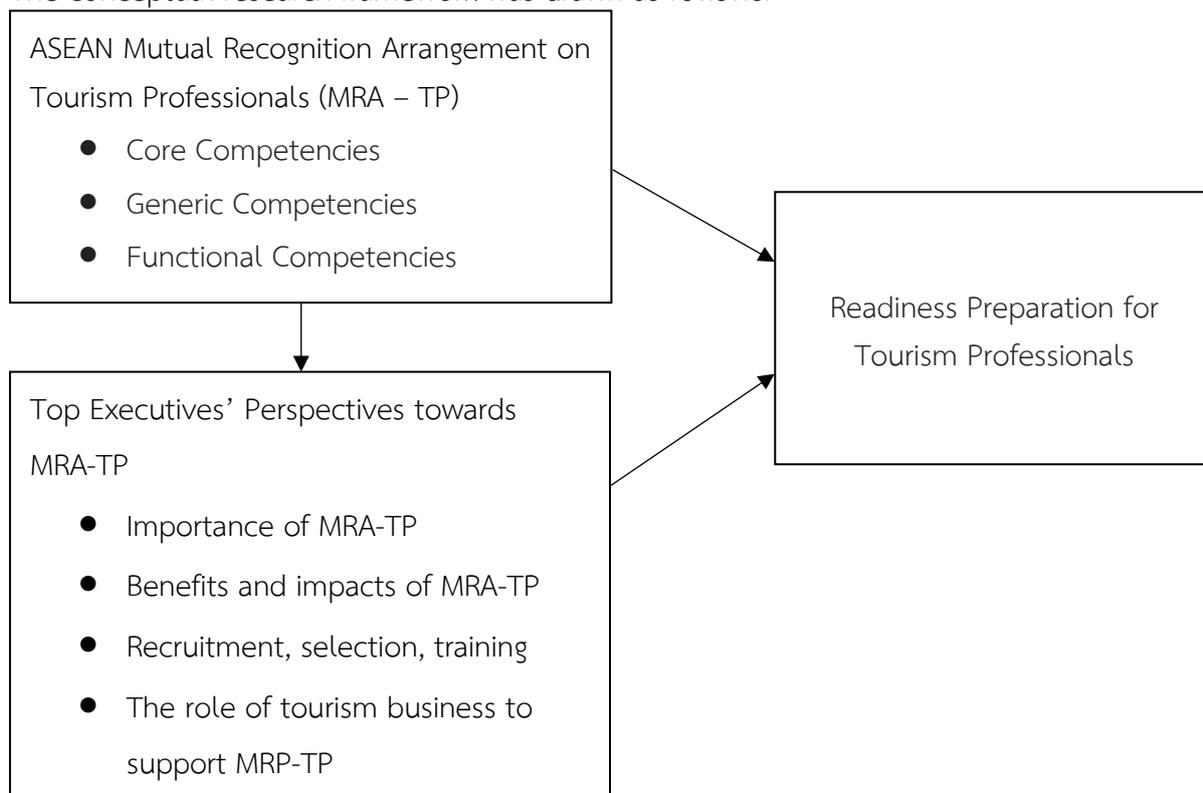


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Literature Reviews

ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangements

Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) are the framework arrangements established in support of liberalizing and facilitating trade in services. MRAs aim to facilitate the mobility of professionals/skilled labor in ASEAN. Through exchange of information, MRAs also work toward the adoption of best practices on standards and qualifications. ASEAN MRAs consist of 8 areas as follows: ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangements on Engineering Services (2005), ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Nursing Services (2006), ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Architectural Services (2007), ASEAN Framework Arrangement on Mutual Recognition of Surveying Qualifications (2007), ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Dental Practitioners (2009), ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Medical Practitioners (2009), ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals (2012), ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement Framework on Accountancy Services (2014) (The Official Investment Promotion Website of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2021)

The provisions of MRAs contain the obligations for the recognition of inspections, tests, certifications, and approvals, issued by qualified conformity assessment bodies between exporting and importing Member States. The establishment of an MRA is an independent of harmonizing standards and technical regulations among Member States. (ASEAN Consultative Committee on Standards & Quality, 2021).

ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals: MRA - TP

ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals (MRA – TP) is the Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) among ASEAN countries regarding qualifications of ASEAN tourism professionals. This arrangement is designed for seeking a mutual recognition point of acceptance for the qualifications of tourism professionals in terms of education and working experiences for each profession. It aims at facilitating ASEAN tourism professionals to move freely and more conveniently to work in other ASEAN countries (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2018).

ASEAN Common Competency Standards for Tourism Professionals (ACCSTP) was a framework drawn from the minimum common competency standards in terms of the knowledge, skills, and attitude that should be widely used in among ASEAN countries to allow tourism professionals to work effectively as well as to be assessed, recognized, and equated to comparable qualifications in other ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2018). The basic competencies set, based on the ACCSTP framework, are classified into competencies as follows. *Core competencies*: These refer to competencies that industry has agreed are essential to be achieved if a person is to be accepted as competent in a particular primary division of labor in order to be effective and achieve goals. *Generic competencies*: These refer to competencies that industry has agreed are essential to be achieved if a person is to be accepted as competent in a particular secondary division of labor in order to perform the jobs effectively. *Functional competencies*: These are specific to roles or jobs within the labor division, and include the specific skills as well as knowledge and expertise/know-how to perform the jobs effectively.

In addition to the ACCSTP framework, the minimal competencies required are arranged on a framework using common divisions of labor, and it comprised 32 job titles classified into 2 fields and 6 labor divisions (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2018). The first field is hotel services which are divided into 4 divisions as follows: 1) front office division which has 5 job titles including front office manager, front office supervisor, receptionist, telephone operator, and bell boy; 2) housekeeping division which has 6 job titles including executive housekeeper, laundry manager, floor supervisor, laundry attendant, room attendant, and public area cleaner; 3) food production division which has 7 job titles including executive chef, demi chef, commis chef, chef de partie, commis pastry, baker, and butcher; and 4) food and beverage service division which has 5 job titles including F&B director, F&B outlet manager, head waiter, bartender, and waiter. The second field is travel services which are divided into

2 divisions 1) travel agencies division which has 4 job titles including general manager, assistant general manager, senior travel consultant, and travel consultant and 2) tour operation division which has 5 job titles including product manager, sales and marketing manager, credit manager, ticketing manager, and tour manager.

Competency

Alonderiene and Navickiene (2009) studied on competencies and stated that competencies could be classified into three group of skills consisting of functional competencies, cognitive competencies, and core competencies. Specifically, regarding competencies in tourism industry, the research results showed that functional competencies were positively correlated with cognitive competencies (e.g., professional expertise, foreign language knowledge) and core competencies (e.g., problem-solving skill, responsibility, tolerance, and adaptability). Meanwhile, in order for the managers to have competency to welcome tourists, they must have various competencies including customer care, service quality and standard supervision, employee relations, and creation of the organization's profits and growth. Therefore, job competencies due to the research of Alonderiene and Navickiene (2009) consisted of four parts: knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes. Anderson and Stone (2005) suggested that cultural diversity competences, including awareness, knowledge, and skills, could enable people to better work in cross-cultural situations. Sarichun (2009) from the Supervisory Education Unit at the Vocational Education Research and Development Center 2 has proposed that competencies for employees working in the tourism industry consisted of three competencies including knowledge, skills, and working habits. For example, a tour guide should have competencies as follows: (1) Knowledge on resources for various types of tourism, Thai traditions and culture, business related to tourism industry, customs clearance, communication tools and photographic equipment, operational work, foreign languages, and global culture; (2) Skills in organizing general tour programs, coordinating and communicating by using foreign languages in speaking, reading and writing very well; (3) Working habit referring to good personality, service mind, having professional ethics and good human relations, and consciousness in conservation of tourism resources.

The previous studies on competencies in tourism industry focused on three fields as knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Since ASEAN proposed new competencies for tourism professionals for all member states to follow, the establishment in enhancing workers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes to obtain a minimal requirement on MRA – TP standards is crucial for tourism industry. The past research on MAR- TP were not proposed, so the research gap on perception and preparation for readiness toward MRA – TP shall be considered. Most Member States recognize that the free movement of labor will have an impact on local labors, and there will be a need to ensure that local employment is not affected by a flood of unskilled labor, while at the same time attracting needed talent to meet local skills shortages. Moreover, there are also questions to be asked about the readiness of Member States, all

tourism labors and tourism business in tourism industry to ensure their understanding toward the implications of MRA – TP and how they need to prepare and modify their training to meet the requirements of MRA – TP standards (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2018).

Readiness for Professionals to Step into ASEAN and Labor Mobility

Otto and Dalbert (2012) stated in their research that a short-term labor mobility is usually an employment contract involving travelling or construction work whereas a long-term labor mobility is relocation mobility of labors to work in another country or another place which is not their own country. Ng, Sorensen, Eby and Feldman (2007) stated that there are several reasons for labors to relocate, and these consisted of both macro views, including economic factors, social characteristics, industrial differences, and corporate policies, and micro view or individual view which come from different factors such as values, personality, and so on.

From the report of the study project on the cooperation framework for the potential development of Thai labors from 32 job titles under the ACCSTP framework, Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) suggested that developing skills in tourism and hotels as well as foreign languages would help skilled labors to have more capabilities and competencies and to be better qualified to become ASEAN Tourism Professionals (Paitoonpong, Tulyawasinpong, Akarakul, Chaksirinon, & Tasee, 2010). The research report from Thammasat University indicated that the Thai government sector needs to adjust its roles to prepare for becoming a part of the ASEAN Community in terms of core competencies including international, professional, and facilitator. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has proposed to establish an ASEAN Unit which is a working group directly responsible for issues related to ASEAN in each division. Furthermore, there is a need for developing government officers in terms of international working experience as well as English language and ASEAN Member States' languages. The most important issue is to prepare them to be knowledgeable, have skills in relevant fields, and be able to communicate in English with other nationals smoothly (Government Strategic Information Center, National Statistical Office, 2014).

Research Methodology

The research methodology was the qualitative research conducted using the 2-hour in-depth interview with semi-structural open-ended questionnaire asking questions related to ASEAN MRA-TP, top executives' perspectives toward MRA-TP and readiness preparation for tourism professionals. The samples were divided into two divisions: 10 top executive officers, general managers or directors of human resources department in hotel services and 10 business owners or top executive officers in travel and tour services in Thailand. Non-probability sampling with purposive sampling technique was used by concentrating on the business which have been operating in tourism industry for at least five years. The data collection for in-depth interview was held between January 2016 – June 2016.

The questionnaire divided into four parts. Part 1 asked about competencies that Thai tourism professionals shall have to be competitive in ASEAN Community. Part 2 was about readiness preparation for tourism professionals, part 3 was asking about strengths and weaknesses of Thai tourism professionals and how to strengthen and reduce weakness, and part 4 was about how tourism business in tourism industry and travel association can assist in building competitiveness among professionals. All the information obtained from the transcription and taking notes, select key words according to relevant issues and analyze the results as a summary. This research recognized the rights and protection of the interviewees, thus anonymously presenting the research results and the interviewed executives named, such as Executive A, Executive B, Executive C, etc.

Research Results

Summary of this research was divided into two parts as hotel services and travel services which could be shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Results of In-Depth Interview

Factors	Activities	Interviews from the Executives
Perspectives toward MRA-TP	1.Help in developing tourism professional to meet MRA-TP standards	A B D E G K N
	2.The rules and qualification must be clear.	A B D E G K N
	3.Create career advancement for tourism professional	E
Effects of MRA-TP on tourism professionals	1. Thai workers may move to other countries	A B C D E F G H J K M N O P S T
	2. AEC workers come to work in Thailand	B C D E F G H J K M N O P R S T
Effects of MRA-TP on business	1. Companies better find people with the skills they need.	A J K
	2. Consumer behavior has changed to more self-travel tourism which affecting business turnaround strategy.	B E G
	3. Entrepreneurs get employees with lower wages.	C E
	4. Entrepreneurs adjust to adhere to ASEAN standards by emphasizing on readiness preparation for employees.	K M Q R S

Table 1 Results of In-Depth Interview (Cont.)

Factors	Activities	Interviews from the Executives
Essential competencies which boost competitiveness	1. Have service mind, intention, knowledge in tourism or tourist attractions	A C D E F I J K M O P Q S T
	2. Know about business tools and technology	A B C D E F H I K
	3. Good adaptability, able to work with others	A B D H K M Q
	4. Be able to communicate in English	A B C D E F H I J K M O Q
Weaknesses of Thai tourism professionals	1. Lack of English language skills	A B C D F G L N O P R S T
	2. Cannot communicate with other local languages	B C E F G Q
	3. Lack of working experiences	C K
	4. Lack of other local countries knowledge	E
	5. Lack of service mind	G K P
Partnership network with stakeholders	1. Cooperation with foreign agencies to recruit workers.	B G
	2. The university must develop a curriculum that focuses on performance based on tourism professional standards	C F H L Q
	3. Encourage students' internships in real workplaces	L O P Q

A. Results of In-Depth Interview in Travel Services

Demographics for 10 tour operations as the samples used for this research consisting of 8 stand-alone tour operations, 1 wholesale tour operation, and 1 ground tour operation obtaining 5 – 20 years of experience in tourism industry. Most of these companies are domestic tour operations bringing Thai people to travel abroad (Outbound) and bringing foreign tourists from abroad to travel in Thailand (Inbound). At present, tourism is being organized among the ASEAN Economic Community more than before.

Perspectives of Top Executives toward ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals (MRA - TP) showed that the majority of top executives believed that MRA – TP and its competency standards were good for tourism business even though it was very new to tourism industry since Thailand participated in ASEAN MRA-TP in 2015. At the time of interviewing, majority of top executives heard about competency standards, had intention for further studies and were under considerations on how to apply to their business

and employees. They stated that knowledge, attitudes, and skills for tourism workers through the job were parts of competency standards; however, to meet the required standards as per the MRA - TP, the more details of each core, generic, and functional competency must be concentrated. The MRA - TP and competency standards will be guideline for tourism business in human resource management, especially for recruitment and selection processes. In order for tourism professionals to have job mobility across ASEAN countries, they must follow the tourism competency qualification and certificate. The compensation that the tourism business must pay will be fair due to the skill of the labor force. Recently, tourism professionals and skilled labors in tourism industry are not sufficient. The graduates who studied about tourism as their majors decided to work within the tourism industry for approximately 5 – 10 percent. Even though tourism business allows graduates from all fields of study to work, there is still local shortage in tourism skilled labors according to its strong service mind, high endurance, and career preferences.

Perspectives of Top Executives toward MRA - TP in terms of benefits and impacts showed that some top executives believed in lower wages of tourism professionals due to free movement of labors from other ASEAN countries. Since there would be many skilled labors from all ASEAN countries, they may drive down wage rates from skilled workers at negotiable rate. In contrast, Thailand may lose tourism professionals or skilled labors to ASEAN countries which actually pay higher wages, such as Malaysia or Singapore. In addition, tourism professionals or skilled labors with high experiences may be head hunted to work as executives in wholesale tour operators with a joint venture from companies in ASEAN countries. There are some possibilities in labor mobility from ASEAN countries, such as labors from the Philippines, Myanmar or Vietnam, to take positions in Thailand and get recruited over Thais because of their English proficiency.

Recruitment of employees from 10 tour operations showed that they preferred to recruit employees who graduated ranging from high school grade 12 or equivalent levels to the Bachelor's degree. This recruitment would be divided into two groups: 1) employees without working experience would be determined by educational qualifications and 2) employees who have long-term working experience with knowledge, skills, and experience obtained qualifications in all fields of study useful for real work.

The overall recruitment criteria, selections and training from the research indicated that essential competencies which all companies desire were well understanding of tourism business, having knowledge of tourism management, effective communication skills, well knowledge transfer, information technology and computers literacy, and proficiency in English and/or other foreign languages. *As for operation positions*, employees must be fluent in English, have good literacy rate and could communicate effectively. They must also understand the organization and its products and work neatly. *As for tour guide positions*, employees should have good personality, a trustworthy image, good attitude toward tourism

tasks, and service mind. Besides, they must know about travel routes and related contents of their works. If employees do not have much working experiences, on – the - job training would be used to increase working skills.

If Thailand would like to become ASEAN tourism hub, top executives stated that the country and all stakeholders in tourism industry needs to help in readiness preparation for tourism workers by raising human resources' capability in tourism industry in terms of service mind, communication with multiple languages, including Thai, English, and ASEAN members' languages. Moreover, there shall be a proper revision in regulations and standard to accommodate tourism and all related activities, such as environmental friendliness and logistics. Educational institutions also need to revise curriculum to have internships and professional experiences in fieldwork. More importantly, emphasis on creating graduates in accordance with industry requirements and labor standards shall be considered.

B. Results of In-Depth Interview in Hotel Services

Demographics for 10 samples used for this research consisting of top executive officers, general managers or director of human resources department from 8 hotels and 2 resorts operating in Thailand. The hotel types could be classified as one international chain hotel with executive from headquarter, one international hotel with Thai executives, two hotels from Thai Hotel Association, four hotels managed by a professional Thai business group and two resorts.

Perspectives of hotel executives toward benefits and impacts of MRA - TP revealed that MRA - TP established benefits for Thai hotel industry. At the time of interviewing, a majority of executives stated that in hotel business, the standards of acquiring new employees were quite similar to ASEAN MRA - TP. Many employees in their hotel came from abroad and had many years of working experiences in their positions. With MRA - TP standards, qualifications, and competency among ASEAN countries, it gives opportunities for foreigners and diverse skilled labors to get into recruitment process in Thailand. In addition, Thai tourism professionals or skilled labors who are certified with importers in terms of countries' qualifications would have competitive advantage in labor mobility. Nevertheless, increasing in inbound skilled labors from low - average - income countries to Thailand may cause difficulty for Thai labors. Tourism business may wish to lower their costs by hiring labors from lower wages countries.

Recruitment of employees from 10 hotels showed that there are many ways to recruit employees to work in hotels. The overall recruitment in hotel industry could be divided into three groups including 1) employees who have working experience without consideration in educational background, 2) employees who have working experience with qualifications according to job, and 3) employees who are new graduates and do not have working experience. However, regarding this sampling group, the recruiting employees' educational background depends on their job titles. It is required a minimum of high school grade 8 to

become housekeeper while other job titles required educational background ranging from high school grade 12 or equivalent levels to the Bachelor's degree. In perspectives of hotel management, all executives emphasized human development in new recruits with on-the-job training. Some hotels have developed online programs for their employees to learn out of the working time period. In addition, these hotels worked under cooperation with the Department of Skill Development, Ministry of Labour to send their employees on training programs to improve their working skills.

The overall recruitment criteria, selections and training from the research indicated that essential competencies which boost competitiveness of labors in hotel services were in line with core, generic, and functional competencies. The core competencies included to be able to work with others effectively under diverse environments, can perform tasks safely and in accordance with service standards. Other generic and function competencies included effective communication skills, languages, customer service, customer focus, being smart, solving problems at work, being able to adapt to changes, flexibility, good personality, enthusiastic in work, diligence, voluntary, liked to work with service, ready to work hard, and having good service mind, good emotional intelligence, and good attitudes toward work. Thai tourism labors have strengths in service mind, customer empathy, customer responsiveness and being friendly at very high level. The weakness is English proficiency as well as other languages used for communication.

The role of tourism business in tourism industry would assist in competitiveness in employees' development by determining required competency and skills to become tourism professionals. The preparation in training programs for organization and employees can lead to readiness to function their tasks effectively. Organizational supports are also important; thus, some important organizational supports include creating cooperative atmosphere among diverse cultures of employees, updating the workplace to be modern and consistent with global standards, training employees to develop multiple skills, to perform multiple tasks and to open their mindset through experiences and learning programs.

Discussions

The results of this research revealed that most of top executives were aware of importance of perceived competencies, consisting of core, generic, and functional competencies, on ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals (MRA – TP) affecting readiness preparation of tourism professionals within the industry as well as providing guidelines in working process of enhancing and developing their capabilities in three folds as knowledge, skills, and attitudes to meet with these competencies. They realized that skilled labors who have these competencies and skills at the level of standards and qualifications of MRA - TP would feel much confident and may have the effects on job mobility with both inbound and outbound of the industry. To perform job tasks effectively, majority of

top executives indicated that essential competencies driven to success include knowledge of tourism management, effective communication skills, well knowledge transfer, information technology and computers literacy, proficiency in English and/or other foreign languages, solving problems at work, being able to adapt to changes, working with full capacity, diligence, customer service skill along with service mind and knowing well about their tasks.

The research results were congruence with Alonderiene and Navickiene (2009) who stated that competencies consisted of functional competencies, cognitive competencies, and core competencies. It was also in line with Sarichun (2009) who proposed that competencies for employees working in the tourism industry consisted of three competencies including knowledge, skills, and working habits. The knowledge comprised factors, such as knowledge on tourism and all destinations, communication tools, operational work, foreign languages, and global culture. Skills included many factors, such as organizing their tasks effectively, coordinating and communicating by using foreign languages in speaking, reading, and writing very well, and working habit referring to many factors, such as good personality and service mind.

In order to generate readiness to work within tourism industry, progressive and acceptable professional competencies would encourage and promote tourism professionals to consider participating in free movement among ASEAN countries. This was in accordance with the study of Kalawong et al. (2017) which stated that tourism professional associations, hotels, travel service and tour operations would play an important role in determining the needs or characteristics of the tourism workforce in collaboration with the government agencies and educational institutions. With this collaboration among them, a mechanism would be created to drive the required tourism professional competencies and the human resource development process to more appropriately meet the need of the market. Furthermore, business organizations in the tourism industry also play a role in supporting on-the-job training for their employees and graduates to have the opportunity to develop themselves to be ready for working in the industry.

Limitation of The Research

The research solely looked at Thai top executives' perspectives toward MRAs on Tourism Professionals and their readiness preparation for tourism professionals, ignoring those who work in other MRAs industries. Furthermore, the researchers' focus in this research was on readiness toward the ASEAN Community of tourism professionals from hotel services and travel services in Thailand. Other stakeholders such as the governments and tourism business stakeholders from other countries were excluded from the research. In addition, the quantitative research and other variables were not taken into account.

Recommendations

- For Practitioners

In order to improve competitiveness and readiness for tourism professionals and skilled labors in tourism industry, the practitioners could apply the following recommendations:

1. To boost competitiveness for tourism professionals and skilled labors in this industry, those who are responsible for human resources development and all training programs within companies could consider implementing MRA -TP as standard and qualification in a long-term strategic planning. It may help increase capability of employees to perform tasks in tourism industry efficiently and effectively.

2. Educational institutions also need to revise curriculum to have internships and professional experiences in fieldwork. More importantly, emphasis on creating graduates in accordance with industry requirements and labor standards shall be considered.

- Further Studies

There are more opportunities for the future research to be developed by the following recommendations:

1. There should be a study related to service efficiency in the tourism industry, and other considerations that can positively promote and motivate tourism industry in Thailand.

2. Further studies can focus on cross-cultural comparisons in readiness of tourism professionals and top executives' perspectives from other ASEAN countries.

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