WORKING SKILLS TO PROMOTE THE TOURISM BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN THE CENTRAL COASTAL PROVINCES OF VIETNAM: A MULTI-SITE CASE STUDY

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Abstract: According to the statistics of the number of domestic and foreign tourists, the tourism growth in the central coastal provinces of Vietnam and the investigation results of the job situation and working skills in Quang Binh province and Da Nang city, the article analyses the trend of tourism development and the working skills of employees in the tourism business sector. The research employed the qualitative casestudy. The analysis results reveal there is currently a large shortage of working skills and high needs for improving working skills of employees in the tourism industry. Based on the analysis, the research provides some suggestions for related departments in order to apply solutions to promote the tourism development in the central coastal provinces of Vietnam.

Keywords: tourism business, occupational working skills, business sector

1. INTRODUCTION

In the world, many highly-skilled labourers remain unemployed, while at the same time businesses find it very difficult to recruit highly skilled positions. Disparities in the skills that are learned in the education and training system are not consistent with the labor market demand, leading to large economic losses for the society as well as negative effects on the labor force. Different fields need soft working skills like tourism. In order to meet the needs of the labor market, it is necessary to consider not only the skills that are in demand today but also the skills that will be needed in the future. The Central Party Executive Committee (2017) would like to develop tourism into a spearhead economic sector which is an important strategic direction for the development of the country and a driving force for the development of other sectors. In the context of globalization today, it is essential for workers to have the right skills in order for businesses or travel companies to succeed in business, and vice versa. The understandings of the business or the sector is also very important to be able to provide employees with the right skills. At the same time, working skills are the decisive factor that helps employees succeed in finding a good job and generating income.

The strategy for Vietnam's tourism development to 2020, with a vision to 2030, delineates the Central Coast into the 2 groups: (1) North Central Coast (including 6 provinces from Thanh Hoa to Thua Thien Hue) and (2) South Central Coast (8 provinces from Da Nang to Binh Thuan) (Prime Minister, 2013). The similarities and features of the central coast are marine tourism, associated with diverse cultural and ecological heritages. In recent years, the Central Coast tourism has become attractive in the near and far tourism market and is emerging as a highlight of Vietnam tourism. Tourism of those provinces affirms their key position in the local economic structure. However, achievements in the past time also show many weaknesses in the quality and efficiency of tourism activities. Many businesses do not show professionalism in business, employees have not showed much about the professional skills required for an employee involved in the field of tourism. This article

will cover working skills for staff in the tourism industry in the central coastal provinces.

2. OVERVIEW OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE CENTRAL COASTAL PROVINCES

With the natural strengths, the long-standing culture, unique lifestyle and activities of ethnic groups, many attractive gastronomy ... the central coastal provinces have extremely favorable conditions for diversification of tourism products, attracting many domestic and international visitors. According to the statistical yearbook of the central coastal provinces for the period 2010 - 2015, the tourism sector in the region has a very high growth rate, 9.7% in the period 2011-2015; This is accompanied by a growth in tourism income of 18%; The growth rate of tourism in the South Central Coastal region is expected to be 8.7% and 7.8% respectively, and a growth in tourism income of 14% and 9%, respectively, for the period 2016 – 2020 and 2021-2025 (People's Army Forces Newspaper, 2011). The contribution of tourism to total GDP and the state budget has been increasing more. Some localities such as Thua Thien Hue, Da Nang, Quang Nam and Khanh Hoa have annually welcomed around 1.5 million international visitors, with an average increase of over 17% per year (The summary data from the Statistical Yearbook, 2010-2016). The links are also formed between localities inside and outside the region such as tourism links between Da Nang - Quang Nam - Thua Thien Hue, between Khanh Hoa - Phu Yen - Ninh Thuan - Binh Thuan, between Binh Dinh - Gia Lai - Kon Tum, ... and these have contributed to the rapid development of infrastructure, centers, tourist destinations, diversifications for the Central Coastal region in particular, for the whole Central and Central Highland region in particular and the whole country in general.

Tourism is a comprehensive economic sector that not only brings direct revenue from services such as hotels, tours and attractions, but also generates revenue, contributing significantly to the development of other related industries such as transportation, food, entertainment, commerce and some other auxiliary services (communication, banking ...). Tourism is also an economic sector that contributes to the socio-economic development of the regions and localities without agricultural or industrial strengths such as Quang Binh and Da Nang.

However, actual exploitation of the past time shows that the competitiveness of the tourism industry in the central coastal provinces is not commensurate with the potential of the provinces and the country. Efforts to develop the tourism sector in the provinces have not fully promoted the capacity of the locality to change their competitive advantagecompared to other countries in the region and in the world. The basic issues of the tourism industry in the coastal provinces of Central Vietnam on long-term forecasting, long-term strategic planning, infrastructure, environment, hygiene, food safety, the quality of tourism products and services, the quality of tourism labor, the lack of cohesion in the development of travel between destinations, global issues such as the economic downturn and the rise of competitive tourist destinationthat have just emerged. Especially, the measures to attract international tourists only focus on the English-speaking market, not being interested in diversifying the potential markets such as China, Japan, Russia. In addition, occupational skills in this area have not met the demand of tourists as well as the tourist market. These have significantly affected the tourism development of the central coastal provinces as well as the whole country.

3. SELECTED LOCALITIES AND RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Research Methods

This research employed a qualitative, multi-site case study design. As Burns (2000) asserted, "[C]ase study is used to gain in-depth understanding replete with meaning for the subject, focusing on process rather than outcome, on discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 460). We used a multi-site research design because evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, robust, and instrumental than a single-site case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

3.2. Sample (Selection of localities)

We employed purposeful sampling of localities including Dang Nang city and Quang Binh provinceto yield

"information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 2015, p. 169). In the central coastal provinces, the tourism sector of Quang Binh and Da Nang is considered to be a major source of revenue (especially from foreign tourists) and creates a large number of jobs, But there is still much work to be done to improve service quality due to a lack of skilled laborers. These are also two provinces with relatively typical patterns for other provincies in Vietnam. Da Nang represents the major cities, Quang Binh represents the provinces which are growing increasingly in tourism. So the authors selected these two localities to carry out the investigations as a basis for providing suitable data for this article.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

This study was comprised of a case-study qualitative research method with several data collection techniques. First, it focussed on the survey of selected localities.The questionnaire survey was developed and sent to each leaders, managers and staff of hotels, tour operators, transportation companies, and restaurants.

The study also used the interviews with selected individuals working in tourism services, staff and teachers from tourism-related training institutions and officials from the Provincial Tourism Department of Quang Binh and Da Nang City (100 people per locality) to ensure independence and objectivity in answering and exchanging information. Secondary data analysis was carried out. From these three sources of data collection, we compared the opinions between the three parties: the supplier of part of the output human resources is the laborers (training institutions) - the employers (the tourist business enterprises) - the State management departments in the field of tourism. This triangulation of data collection increased the credibility and reliability and reduced biases in the collected data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2015).

Data analysis procedures involved coding the data based on the sources such as interview transcripts, questionnaires, and secondary data which were statistical reports published by the organizations on the website, information on the media, reports of the central and local departments. Next, we organized the data collected by categorizing, and arranging it into a case record (or data base) for each case study (Patton, 2015).

Then, the collected information is illustrated and analyzed through comparative tables. From there, the assessments clarify the problem and identify the factors that influence the working skills of the tourism industry to promote economic development.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Travel overview of Quang Binh and Danang

With its remarkable natural and cultural resources, Quang Binh and Da Nang are considered important destinations in Vietnam, tourism is also considered as a key industry in these two cities/provinces.

Quang Binh tourism is associated with the world heritage site Phong Nha - Ke Bang National Park with unique and attractive values such as the cave system, the national park landscape,ethnic cultural tourism,adventure and exploring tourism, and so on. With 116km coastline advantage, Quang Binh has exploited sea tourism including sea bathing, water sports, beach tourism, cultural tourism with fishing villages, sea areas and other forms of eco-tourism.

Meanwhile, Da Nang is known as the most "liveable" city in Vietnam, surrounded by mountains, rivers and the sea, considered as one of the most beautiful coasts of Vietnam (over 60 kmbeach). Da Nang is also favored by a rich and varied natural populations with many impressive landscapes such as Son Tra Peninsula, Ba Na Hills Tourist Area, Ngu Hanh Son Scenic Spot. Danang is also a center of the three world-famous cultural heritages including Hue Imperial Citadel, Hoi An Ancient Town and My Son Relics. Danang, in recent years, has got great investment and always leads the country in terms of healthy business environment and creating good image and trust from tourists.

With the advantage of air, sea, and land transport, Quang Binh and Da Nang have attracted millions of visitors each year, both at home and abroad. Compiling data from the operation results in 2015 and 2016, the direction and tasks of operation in 2016 and 2017 of the Tourism Department of Quang Binh and Da Nang city,

the average tourist growth of Quang Binh and Da Nang in 2011-2015 was 37.2% and 20.1% in 2015 respectively.

In 2015, Quang Binh had 2.935.000 domestic visitors and 65,000 international visitors. In 2016, the number of domestic tourists decreased by 29.35%, while international visitors decreased by 4.4% compared to 2015; This brought total revenue of 16,082.8 billionVND in 2016, decreased 30% compared that of 2015 and decreased 46% compared to the 2016 plan (Quang Binh Tourism Department, 2016). To meet the needs of tourists in Quang Binh, the sector has got about 4,000 direct laborers and 8300 indirect laborers so far, the total number of laborers in all establishments is around 3,400 people. (Quang Binh Newspaper, 2017). With the current status of tourism industry in Quang Binh and Quang Binh tourism development policy in the coming time, the demand for tourism human resources in Quang Binh province to 2020 need to develop comprehensively in size and structure, on both State management manpower and human resources in tourism businesses (People's Committee of Quang Binh Province, 2011). It is forecasted that the demand for laborers in Quang Binh by 2020 will be 42,600 people (of which 13,300 are direct laborers and 29,300 are indirect laborers), and 90,600 will be in 2025 (28,300 direct laborers and 62,300 indirectlaborers) (Research Institute for Tourism Development, 2015).

According to the Department of Tourism of Da Nang City, in 2016, the number of international tourists in Da Nang was 1.670.000 people, accounting for 16%

of international visitors to Vietnam, domestic tourists also reached a high level 3,860,000 out of a total of 62 million people in the country. The number of tourists to Da Nang in the 2011-2015 period increased by an average of 20.14% per year, of which domestic visitors increased 18.6%, total social income from tourism in 2015 reached 12.7 trillion, tourism revenue in 2011-2015 period increased 30.6% per year on average. Up to now, the city has 83 tourism and service projects and is investing more than 7.3 billion USD(26.8 trillion VND) and 63 domestic projects with the total capital of 6.02 billion USD(126,420 billionVND). In 2016, the total revenue from tourism reached about 16,000 billionVND, an increase of 24.7% compared to 2015, creating employment for some 27,000 direct workers in the tourism sector, increased 8.1% compared to 2015. By 2020, the sector will create jobs for over 35,300 direct workers (Financial Times, 2016). The growth in visitor arrivals to these provinces/cities has strengthened the province's position as a cultural, social and economic center, and a hub for tourists with convenient transportation and access points. famous tourist.

4.2. Employment and skills in Quang Binh province and Danang city

4.2.1. Situation of employment and skills

In the field of accommodation, the main work is rooms, reception, security and management. Questionnaires forbusinesses were conducted for this study. Major occupational requirements in Quang Binh and Da Nang
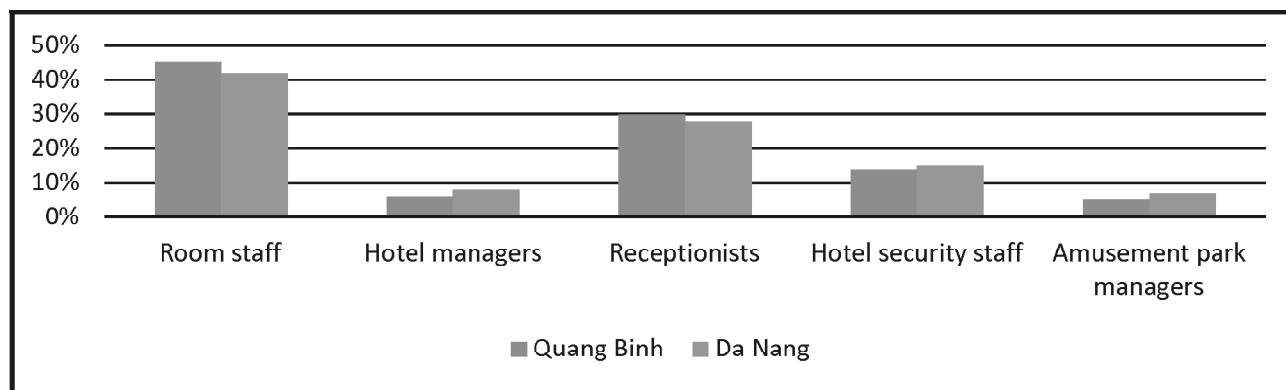

Figure 1: Employment in accommodation business in Quang Binh and Da Nang

Source: Summary of survey results

are mainly room staff, receptionists and hotel security staff.

Apart from accommodation businesses, the number of employees involved in the restaurant industry is also relatively high. The highest rate for this sector is the waitress, accounting for between 48% and 60% in these two locations. In general, meeting the knowledge or skills requirements has not received enough attention during the staff selection and for training; Next, chefs and kitchen staff, from 12% to 18%, are often recruited, and their skills are often required relatively high.
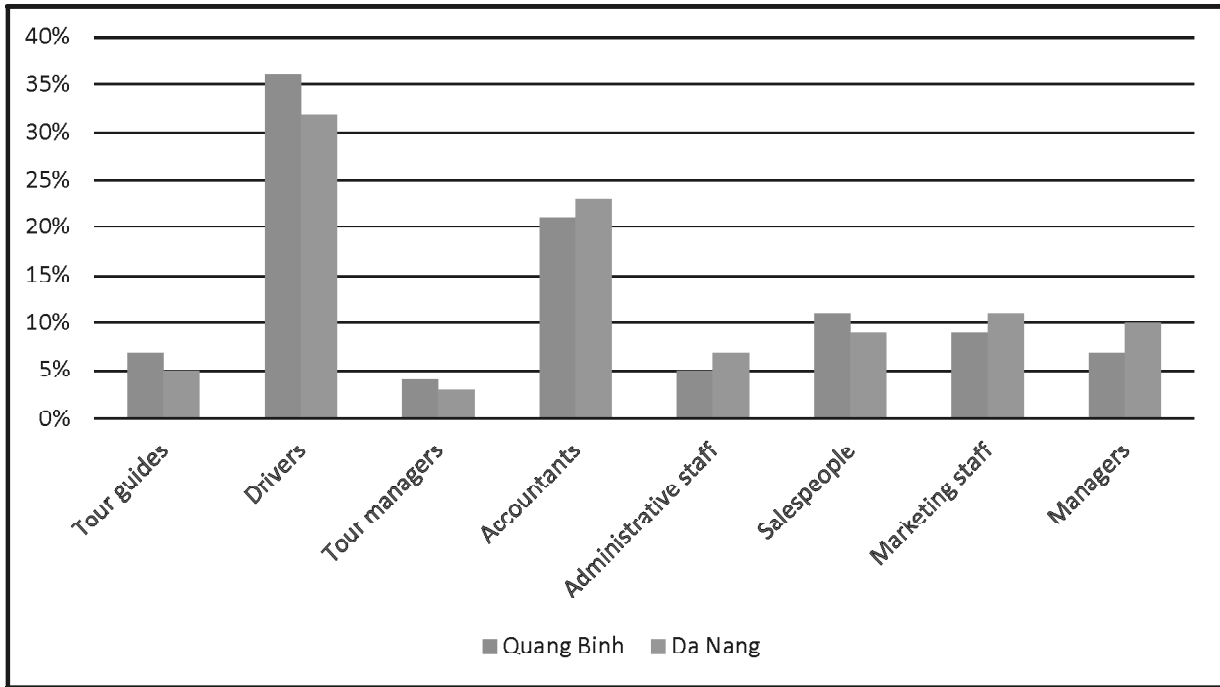

Figure 2: Employment in travel and transportation business in Quang Binh and Da Nang

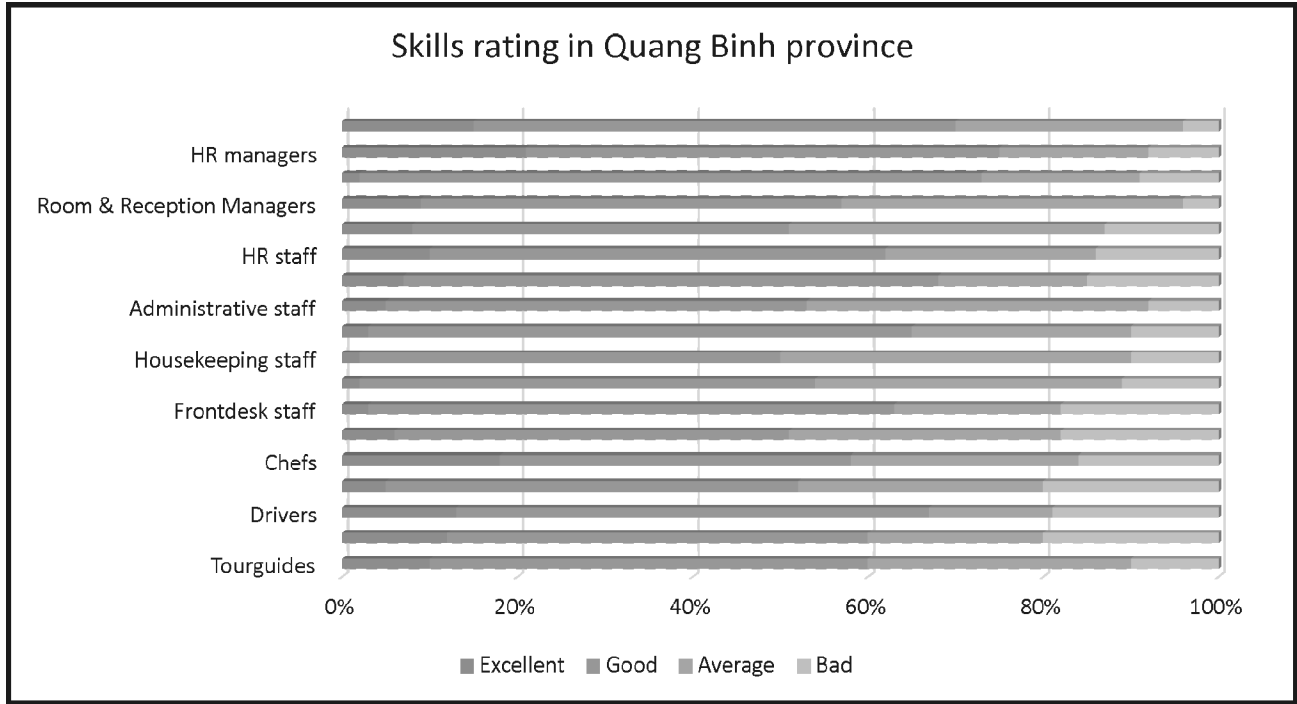*Source:* Summary of survey results

Most travel companies provide transportation services for tourists. In travel companies that provide both travel and transportation services, the driver occupies the largest share of the labor force. In Quang Binh, the percentage of drivers is 36% and in Da Nang is 32%. Some motorists provide the combination of transporting and introducing destinations to visitors. Drivers who have the knowledge of the relics or places of interest are often appreciated and rewarded. The number of tourist guides in Quang Binh accounts for 7% while the tourist guides in Da Nang only accounts for 5%.

In the survey, the employers were asked to evaluate the working skills of the employees. In general, in most jobs, the majority of businesses assess employee skills as well. In Da Nang, the rate of assessing the skills of employees in the "excellent" and "good" levels is higher than in Quang Binh, due to the fact that Da Nang has four to five star hotels (14 hotels of 5 stars and 26 hotels of 4 stars) than Quang Binh (2 hotels of 5 stars, 3 hotels of 4 stars). 1 or 2 star hotels, and the skills of staff are generally rated good or below, the average takes up a high proportion.

4.2.2. Shortage of skills in the field of tourism business

The lack of skills in the tourism sector in the two provinces appears in almost all locations of all types of tourism businesses. For example, many individuals open vacation homes or hotels when they have sufficient

Skills Rating in Quang Binh
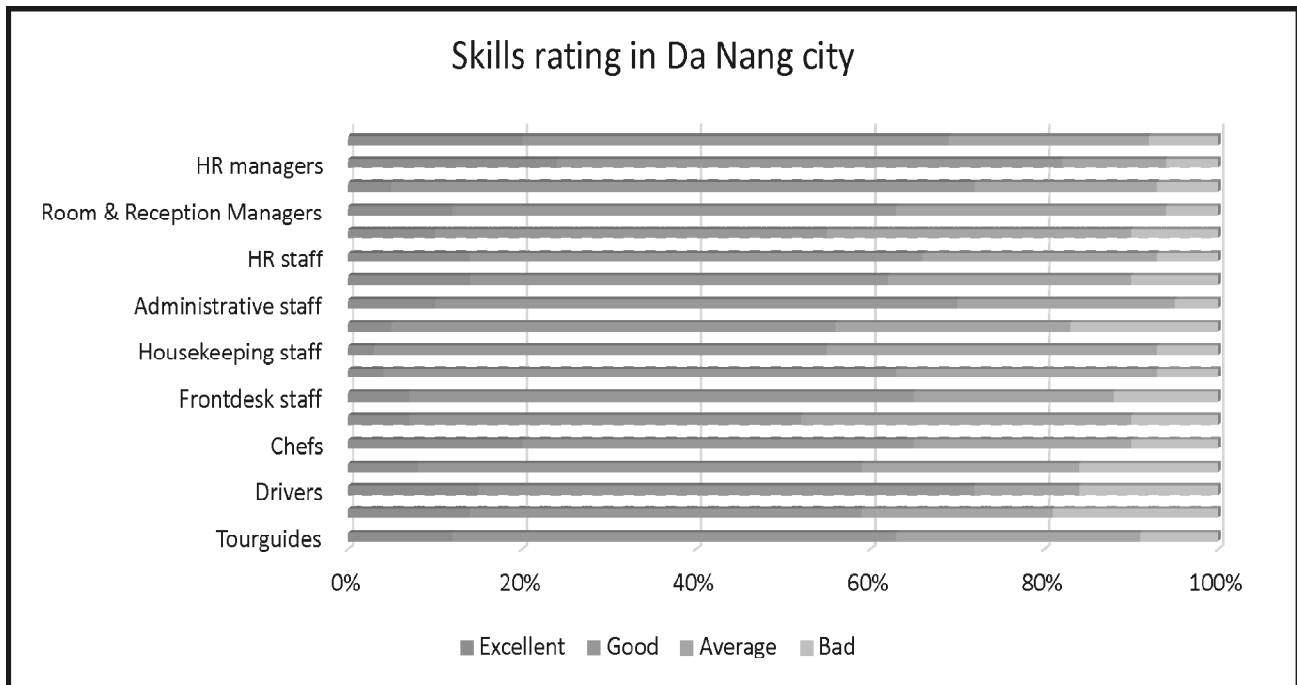
Skills Rating in Da Nang city - *Summary of survey results*

Figure 3: Rating of workers' skills in all enterprises in the two cities/ provinces

financial resources. However,they themselves or their staff have little training or skills in hostel or hotel management. Due to deficient skills and lack of self-study, they are not capable of making good use of the skills of employees to better serve their visitors and improve their own business performance.

These barriers mainly stem from the size of the businesses. Small businesses are mostly lacking in human resource management, having difficulty identifying skill needs as well as finding the right sources of funding and payment for training of their employees. For informal workers in the travel industry, for example, homestay operators, boatmen, etc., often lack the skills of customer service, low English competency and business marketing. This affects the ability to implement better market access strategies and create opportunities for other sources of income.

While large hotels and restaurants often complain about the difficulty of hiring employees for their businesses, graduates from vocational schools in tourism find it difficult to find a job in the industry. The reason most businesses blame for is that in the recruitment

process, the quality of training process or training programs is not adapted to the needs of enterprise demand. Businesses in the two provinces/cities always need skilled and experienced staff, especially for large enterprises and tour guides.

In addition to hotels, motels and restaurants, research and surveys also identify skill gaps in some other areas such as travel guides, travel drivers and tour operators. Travel guidance has been identified as a particularly important issue, as it greatly impacts visitors' experiences at World Heritage sites in the two provinces/cities.

4.2.3. Demand for skilled workers development in the tourism industry

Based on the survey from the enterprises, the five types of jobs need to be re-trained in these two provinces/cities. Managers of restaurants, hotels and waitresses are among the top five jobs in both provinces/cities. In Quang Binh, receptionists and marketing-related jobs are also in the top five jobs, while in Danang, they are the chefs and room staff.
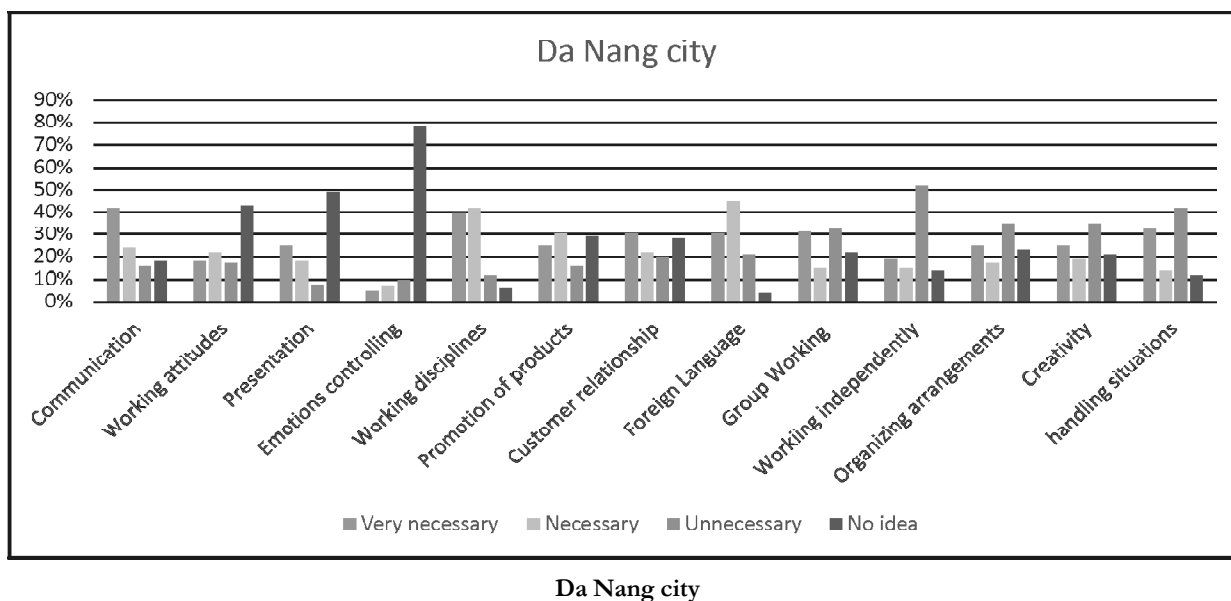

Quang Binh province

Da Nang city
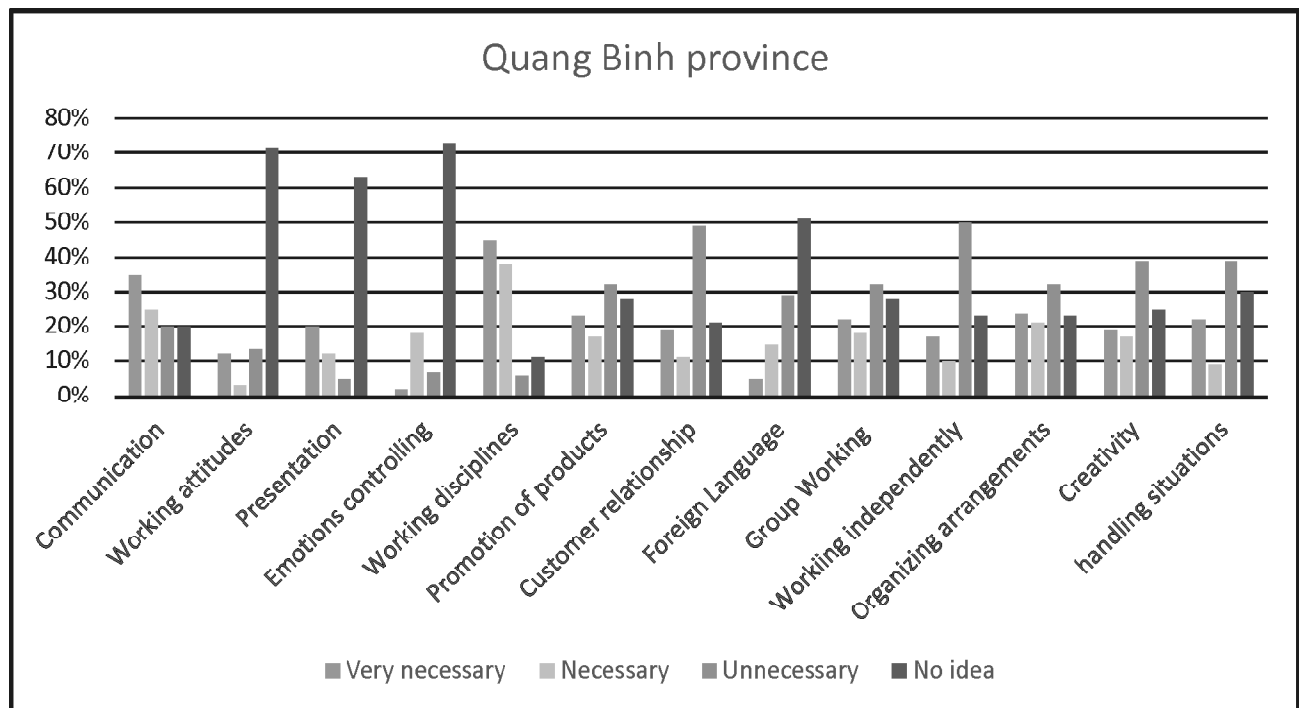
Figure 4: Ranking of the importance of basic working skills from the employers

Source: Summary of survey results

From the chart above, apart from the professional qualifications, employers are more interested in working skills for the tourism industry. Typically, companies recruit experienced staff to quickly understand the job, to have certain expertise, and to reduce retraining. However, it does not necessarily mean that the person must have experienced the same position at another company, but rather that person should understand the job is about to take. For example, the students who have worked part-time jobs such as part-time waiters will also able to have practical experiences, contact with clients, and good communication skills. Especially, if students have ever done extra work related to their positions, they will be prioritized. It is very important to be a guide. If you are a tour guide, you have a great deal of knowledge about culture, history, and have communication skills, good health, flexibility, and good situations handling. If you are involved inorganizing tours, they must meet many customers to get real comments.

4.2.4. The results of direct interviews with interested parties

- *Businesses*

When regarding the recruitment, 79% of companies in Quang Binh and 86% of companies in Da Nang preferred

to hire highly skilled staff, while the rest needed only manual laborers to reduce the cost of renting. More specifically, all employers from 5-star to 3-star hotels in both provinces/cities expressed their need to improve their working skills and knowledge of management and communication skills. All employers of 1-2 star hotels would like to improve their hotel management, marketing, and even their accountants. Almost every one-star hotel owner did not have any professional training before starting a business, so they thought that they also did not need to improve their skills.

In many businesses, the difficulty is that they are accustomed to old habits, so it is difficult for them to adapt to new ones, even they have "private lessons", they often like to do on their own. They sometimes impose others, haveexcessive demand, and are more concerned with basic skills such as communication, foreign languages, disciplines or sales skills, without paying much attention to business-related skills such as presentation skills, work attitudes, or emotion controlling skills.

- *The lecturers at training institutions*

When conducting interviews with managers and staffof the training institutions (Faculty of Tourism, University of Economics, University of Da Nang and Faculty of

Economics and Tourism, Quang Binh University, Da Nang Tourism College and Quang Binh Vocational Training College, it showed that they could not afford to send faculty lecturers to practise in tourism businesses, to improve their skills in realistic situations or to allocate funds for their lecturers to learn real exepriences in terms of tourism management practice. Most of the lecturers expressed their willingness to participate in courses on teaching methods and professional skills. Some others wanted to improve their foreign languages, communication skills and other soft skills. Bad practice skills were quite common among teachers/lecturers at vocational training schools. Many lecturers were unable to master the skills they need to teach their students. This seems to explain why the quality of vocational training at vocational training colleges/universitiescannot meet the social needs satisfactorily.

- *Local government officials*

In these provinces/cities, the interviews showed that many local government officials were not adequately trained in tourism management skills. Most staff were not trained in tourism. Local government officials were also not trained in tourism after recruitment. Local government officials interviewed wanted more opportunities to attend useful training courses for their work. Among the types of training they mentioned, top priority was planning, collecting data, analysing and developing tourist products.

This is important for the competitiveness capability of the tourism sector in the target provinces/cities because most of the strategic development decisions at the provincial level are made by local authorities and local governments also play an important practical role in promoting, managing, developing skills and infrastructure for the industry. Well-trained local government officials are important to all large and small tourism enterprises in the target provinces, especially for most small and micro businesses that need to coordinate and work together to move forward.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the quality of human resources, working skills are the most important factor that determines the success of employees working in the Vietnam tourism business. Improving and upgrading skills for employees is a long-term process and it is necessary to have the cooperation of three "parties": Colleges/universities - Businesses–the State. This article outlines the current demand for tourism in the two target provinces of Quang Binh and Danang Central Coastal provinces. More specifically, we conducted the survey of occupational sectors in the tourism business, analyzed the shortage of skills thereby assessing the "satisfaction" level of the employers to the employees. At the same time, the interviews with the training institutions and relevant government authorities clarified the skills required in the tourism sector, and what additional contributions they needed to make to improve these skills. From the above analysis, the authors provide a number of recommendations for the related stakeholders in order to promote the development of tourism business in Vietnam.

5.1. For businesses

Because of the lack of business capabilities, top priority is to intervene to help businesses improve marketing skills, customer care skills and internal training. Therefore, business owners, especially small and medium enterprises, need to learn how to effectively carry out marketing and product promotion activities. More specifically, online marketing is focussed, because in the era of information technology development as today, online advertising channels are considered as a fast-to-consumer channel. In terms of internal training, business owners first focus on sending staff to get training and re-training of a number of important skills, then, also ask the staff to learn how to care customers. Through the practice of self-improvement of professional skills, many skills are learned from the realistic experiences gained. At the same time, business owners learn how to manage finance and human resources effectively and start small and medium businesses successfully.

5.2. For training institutions

Current facilities have not met the expectations of employers in the tourism industry. The training areas where training institutions can focus on improving the

quality of training include curriculum development and materials, and improvement of teaching skills. Trainers/ lecturers in training institutions learn how to design a new program for emerging skill needs. It is necessary to diversify the training of foreign languages, in addition to the international language of English, to develop more languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Korean. Colleges/universities must actively improve their coordination skills, and closely associate with enterprises in the training process. Thus, they will have the opportunity to perform teaching activities more in line with their needs and seek to attract morestudents to participate in the training programs.

5.3. For local government officials

It is necessary to organize training courses that provide knowledge about tourism to local government officials, especially in planning and organizing events or in conducting deployed work orientations. Only when government officials are equipped with these skills, can they develop good strategies and policies for the sustainable development of the tourism industry. Accordingly, the Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs and the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism provide skillstraining courses in planning, implementing and plan evaluation skills, and the skills of collecting and analysing datato conduct planning fortheir staff. At the same time, training on management of tourism, human resource development, and tourism promotion should be provided.

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