

Tourism's Personnel Competency in the Eastern Economic Corridor

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The objectives of this research are to study the competency prototype of tourism personnel in the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), to study factors and conditions that affect the development of core competency of tourism personnel in the EEC, and to investigate the guideline promotion of the competency prototype of tourism personnel in the EEC. A mixed methods research methodology was used in the study to compose the quantitative research with qualitative research. The questionnaire was used as tool for data collection from 470 tourism personnel for quantitative research. In the qualitative research an in-depth interview was conducted with 5 groups of people that represent provincial tourism offices. The quantitative research results revealed that the research core of tourism's personnel competency in the EEC was at a moderate level. The prototype of tourism competency is composed of 3 core components are; knowledge competency, skill competency and attitude competency. The knowledge competency covers 3 aspects of 1) Basic knowledge in foreign language such as English and, Asian groups in the aspect of knowledge on basic Asian language, history of each country, local products. 3) Special knowledge of technology and tourism management and 4) analytical thinking and skill development including communication skills with tourists, place introduction skill, technological skill, traditional conservation or local value skill including the skill of facticity of administration and management. The attitude aspect covered awareness cultivation in aspects of human relationship and leadership. Most of the aspects were at a moderate level. Moreover, factors and conditions that affected development of the core tourism personnel competency in EEC were organization factors and personal factors, factor and condition of the organization. The guideline of core competency promotion of tourism personnel in the EEC also covered the upstream period, the governmental sector should build the alliance group and at the downstream period, the government sector should establish a work unit to monitor and evaluate the training results and competency development of tourism personnel by considering their achievements.

Key words: *tourism personnel competency, eastern economic corridor*

INTRODUCTION

The current tourism situation revealed that tourism among countries has been increasing. This is seen from the forecasting of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), who mentioned that in 2020 there will be more than 1,600 million outbound tourists and the income of tourism will be more than 100 million baht. The popular regions of tourism are Eastern Asia and the Pacific and a group of South-eastern Asian countries are included (Ministry of Tourism And Sports, 2010). Particularly, Thailand is recognized as one of the most popular tourism destinations, therefore the Thai government has continuously promoted and supported tourism with the expectation that the tourism industry will be a major source of income. This is evidenced within the national strategic plan for the 20 year period (2017-2037) and in National strategy No.2 in the aspect of competency building for competition of entrepreneur development and community economy. The Thai government has paid attention to huge tourism promotion as it will take part in the stimulation on competition and development of community enterprise sector. The eastern region of Thailand is located in the best strategic area of the Asia region because it can be connected to the Republic of China, and India which have high densities of population with rapid economic expansion with a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) of Asia region Pacific countries is 1 of 3 of world GDP. Additionally, 3 provinces of the Eastern region of Thailand (Chachoengsao Province, Chon Buri Province and Rayong Province) are important industrial production bases for the country. These are able to develop and extend as the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) to become a leading economic area of Asia to support and empower competency of competition in the county's economic expansion. The enhancement of quality of life and public income are included. This is considered in Table 1 that references tourist and tourism income.

Table 1. Statistics of Tourists of Pattaya City Chon-Buri, Rayong and Chachoengsao 2014-2015

	Pattaya City		Chon Buri (included Pattaya City)		Rayong		Chachoengsao	
	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015
Visitor	9,083,899	9,849,940	10,843,412	11,742,224	6,150,336	6,650,710	636,064	661,551
Tourist	8,526,786	9,223,060	9,246,430	10,002,914	3,854,783	4,171,188	122,672	127,100
Travelor	557,113	626,880	1,596,982	1,739,310	2,295,553	2,479,522	513,392	534,451
Total	18,167,798	19,699,880	21,686,824	23,483,448	12,300,672	13,301,420	1,149,579	1,323,102

Source: Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (2016, p. 6)

According to the result of a Cabinet meeting on 28 June 2016 which approved a resolution for a principle of project development of the Eastern Economic Corridor and assigned it to the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Somkiat Jatusripitak), together with Ministry of Transport, the Navy and related work units, to consider a project implementation plan and budget in the fiscal year of 2017-2018 They will complete the plan and present it to the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) to synchronize and integrate information from the related work unit to establish the working plan of the Eastern Economic Corridor development(2017-2021) In this regard, NESDB has completely implemented and summarized the important issues as follows the working plan of the Eastern Economic Corridor development (2017-2021) with the purpose of supporting and empowering competency competition of the county and promote economic expansion by increasing employment, enhancing quality of life, and enhancing public income with development target in the areas of Chachoengsao Province, Chon Buri Province and Rayong Province. This will include other areas that the Decree will be issued to by defining in the development plans of 3 provinces of; Chon Buri Province is identified in strategic plan 2 to improve and develop as a tourism site with diversity to meet universal standards. Rayong province is identified in the strategic plan 1 for agricultural product development associated with tourism and plan 2, for high quality and sustainable tourism competency. Chachoengsao province is identified in strategic plan 2 for development as a tourism site to meet standards, with identity and ability to increase the value added to community (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2016, p1).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How to promote core competency and guidelines for the competency prototype of tourism personnel in the EEC ?
2. What are the factors and conditions that affect development of core competencies of tourism personnel in the EEC ?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To study the competency prototype of tourism personnel in the EEC.
2. To study the factors and conditions that affect development of core competencies of tourism personnel in the EEC.
3. To investigate guideline promotion of the competency prototype of tourism personnel in the EEC.



RESEARCH SCOPE

1. Scope of research area

The data collection was conducted in EEC area which includes Chachoengsao Province, Chon Buri Province and Rayong Province.

2. Scope of the research population is as follows:

2.1 Tourism personnel such as hotel entrepreneurs

2.2 Personnel of tourism enterprises, personnel of governmental organizations such as the office of provincial tourism, the provincial chamber of commerce and tourism entrepreneurs such as hotel entrepreneur, site tourism entrepreneur and provincial tourism association.

3. Scope of research content

3.1 Competency of tourism personnel covers 5 aspects; foreign language competency, problem solving competency, computer literacy competency, work collaboration competency, and technology competency.

3.2 Type of personnel competency covers 6 groups; front office, housekeeping, food production, food and beverage service, travel agencies and tour operation.

3.3 Factors and conditions include; personal factors, age, education level, training experience and conditions, covers the internal factors composed of organizational policy, motivation, value, team work, leadership, and the external factors are composed of governmental policy, collaboration of partner agency, economic situation, social and political states.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Competency as a kind of tool was introduced as a basis of system arrangement or guideline for human resource development for an organization to congruence with strategy and achieve the goal. It is used for human resource administration to have organizational efficiency. Thus, the competency is important for human resource administration of the organization. The types of competency are divided into 3 types as follows (Arporn Poowitayapuntu, 2004).

- 1) Core competency means personality or behavioral expression of an employee in the organization that reflects the knowledge, skill, attitude, belief and habits of people in organization as whole. If everyone in organization has this type of competency, this will support the organization to be able to meet targets according to the vision. This type of competency is established through the vision, mission, main target or organizational strategy.

- 2) Managerial competency is the capability in all aspects of administration and it is the capability to work at both the levels of administrator and worker, who have different roles and functions for each responsibility. This competency must be able to take responsibility to work successfully and agree with the strategic plan, visions, and missions of the organization.

- 3) Functional competency is a workers knowledge and capability that reflects the different knowledge, skill and special characteristics of a role, such as an electrical engineer needs to have engineer knowledge, but an accountant will have knowledge of accountancy. The different functions have a different capability according to occupations, and is known as a functional competency or job competency. It might be said that this kind of capability is an individual capability. It is reflected into the knowledge, skill, behavior and special characteristics that occur according to function.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a mixed methods methodology. The research started with a quantitative study with data collection through a questionnaire from a sample group. Data was gathered through the questionnaire about competency of tourism personnel in aspects of tourism and factors that affected development of competency of tourism personnel in the EEC area. The sample groups are tourism personnel consisting of 470 persons. In the qualitative study, the in-depth interview with 5 groups of key informants are representatives of an office of provincial tourism, representatives of a provincial tourism association, hotel entrepreneurs with the award of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and prototype tourism personnel of 50 persons. The data analysis is a descriptive analysis or analytical description. This is inductive analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. The majority of the sample are 280 females (59.57%) and there are 190 males (40.43%) respectively. The majority of the sample are aged between 25-30 years old with 140 persons (29.79%) and subsequently there were more 49 year olds, 130 (27.66%). The sample group of the youngest was 43-48 years old with 10 persons (2.13%) respectively. In addition, most of the respondents were graduates at a bachelor level with 4000 persons (85.11%) and those that

graduated higher than a bachelor degree level with 20 (4.26%) and high school level with 10 (2.13%) respectively.

Moreover, the majority of respondents had no training experience with 250 persons (53.19%), and some respondents who had training experience less than 10 times with 180 (38.30%) and more than 10 times with 40 (8.51%) respectively.

The study revealed that competency of tourism personnel in the EEC was at a moderate level. Competency is composed of experts in foreign language communication with tourists, problem solving capability, computer literacy skill capability, tourism service capability, and team work / collaboration capability. In the related work unit of service and facility for tourists, the workers had knowledge and technical competency to service tourists. Observations from the study found that the order of tourism personnel competency was sorted by descending order. It was revealed that tourism personnel competency in the aspect of team work and collaboration and related work unit in service and facility for tourists, the computer literacy skill is in service and facility for tourism, knowledge and capability to use work technical on service for tourists, problem solving capability on service for tourists, and expert in foreign communication with tourist respectively. Most of all competencies were found at a moderate level. Therefore, the prototype competency of tourism personnel composed of 3 core competencies including knowledge competency, skill competency, and attitude competency.

From the above quantitative results, it needs to be investigated in more details of each competency, therefore the qualitative study was conducted to identify in each aspect of 3 core competencies of knowledge, skill and attitude by using in-depth interviews with 5 groups of key informants.

The in-depth interviews with 5 groups of key informants which are composed of representatives of the office of provincial tourism, representatives of provincial tourism association, hotel entrepreneurs with the award of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and prototype tourism personnel. Most of representatives of local work unit had the opinion that competency of the prototype tourism personnel by considering from 3 aspects as follows:

1. Knowledge competency

The opinion of representatives of key informants, revealed that the importance of knowledge competency are as follows:

Basic Knowledge of Foreign Language such as English language and Asian group Languages. It is due to policy of tourism promotion in aspect of tourism site development, action plan for tourism development and promotion in EEC are 2017-2021. The development of tourism personnel is congruent to universal standards such as Project of the establishment

of institute of tourism personnel development to prepare the readiness to establish institute of tourism personnel development and Tourism Education Center (Eastern Economic Corridor Office of Thailand, 2018b). Tourism Education Center is congruent to the demand of Thai labour force in EEC (2018-2027) in the issue of gap in the EEC area. It was found that use of foreign language skill is 38.0 percentage. It is recognized that the competency is the most deficiency as the third order follow from knowledge in law aspect and rules in the profession, and knowledge in aspect of science and technology (The Academic Office, The secretariat of The House of Representative, 2018).

2. Knowledge of Area History and Local Products

It was considered an essential knowledge about area history and local products under the policy tourism promotion in local area with the belief that tourism personnel in the tourism aspect, it is required knowledge and background, tradition and culture are reflected to unique and identity of each area. The research results is congruent to the governmental policy in tourism promotion in EEC area by Eastern Economic Corridor Office of Thailand (EECOT) had defined roles and directions of tourism of each 3 provinces that is different to each province and requirements of unique and identity promotion of each area such as Chon Buri province, Rayong province, and Chachoengsao province (Eastern Economic Corridor Office of Thailand, 2018a).

2.1 Chachoengsao province area; aims to create a tourism site to promote Thai way of life of a cultural city, the green residence with modern top grade to support the expansion of Bangkok metropolitan area and EEC, including the new area around the high speed train stations. In addition, Chachoengsao province will be developed to promote the Thai way of life. Its prominent area is the way of life, culture and local agriculture. The promotion guideline for development of provincial tourism site, the development of tourism personnel competency should work with the nature of the tourism site.

2.2 Chon Buri province area The city aims to be the business tourism, recreation, convention center, the top international trade exhibition center of Asian. It is an innovative region of tourism that is ready to make changes and also presents a lively nature, connected to industrial promotion, and face to s-curve in health and medicine with the international medical center. In order to meet the guidelines of promotion of a provincial tourism site development, there is a policy to be modern in the east since this province is modern and perfectly blended with localness. Moreover Pattaya city locates in Chon Buri Province is 1 in 5 MICE city (The type of tourism is Meetings , Incentives ,Conferences and Exhibitions) and MICE city are Chon Buri ,Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya, Phuket and Khon kaen of Thailand. Thus the development of tourism's personnel competencies should have the characteristics that are pertinent to a provincial tourism site.

2.3 Rayong province area; aims to be the educational and scientific city and as a source of human resource development, and as a city of empowerment and creation. It has the benefit of Utapao international airport to raise the Asian logistics to be a research center of technology and recreation. There is a guideline of city development as a business city since it has an industrial estate area and various business establishments. The development of tourism personnel competency should have the characteristic that is matching with provincial tourism site.

3. Knowledge of Special Technology

From the in-depth interview of 5 key informants, the majority of opinions expressed are that the essential competency of tourism personnel should have technological knowledge of tourism services in the digital age, such as field cooperation project of testbed (a platform for conducting rigorous, transparent, and replicable testing of scientific theories, computational tools, and new technologies), internet of things (IOT: the network of physical object “things” that are embedded with sensors, software, and other technologies for the purpose of connecting and exchanging data with other devices and systems over the Internet) and autonomic systems in industrial promotion areas and digital innovation (Eastern Economic Corridor Office of Thailand, 2018b).

4. Tourism Management

From the in-depth interview of 5 key informants, the majority opinion expressed was that the essential competency of tourism personnel should have tourism management knowledge owing to the governmental policy to raise tourism quality in area in Eastern region of 3 provinces of Chon Buri province, Rayong province, and Chachoengsao province to meet world tourism level, and to support tourist groups with high income and healthcare needs. There are Pattaya, Satanic, and Rayong as circle of core tourism that extend to Chachoengsao province. The area development is divided according to governmental policy with a slogan of “b-leisure destination” harmony of business and leisure” or “the aim of integration between business and leisure”. It is a region of travelling to work or running a business in different areas and is a Tourism Education Center.

5. Knowledge on Analytical Thinking and Development

From the in-depth interview of 5 key informants, the majority opinion expressed that the essential competency of tourism personnel should have knowledge on analytical thinking, and development since it is an important knowledge for tourism personnel. Thus capability of analytical thinking, and development for planning to provide services for tourists effectively

and strategic planning for tourism site development. These persons should be able analyze and develop capacity skills to provide services that are congruent with governmental policy.

Skill Competency

This study, the data collection with questionnaire from sample group of 5 groups that composed representatives of office of tourism, representatives of tourism enterprise association, representatives of hotel entrepreneur who got reward from TOT, tourist group, and representatives of local work unit, it was found the essential competency of tourism personnel in EEC area is the important skill competency as follows:

1. Skill in Tourist Communication

From the in-depth interview of 5 key informants, the majority opinion expressed that the essential competency of tourism personnel should have skill in tourist communication. From data and direction survey, the tourism promotion for social and economic development in EEC (Eastern Economic Corridor Office of Thailand, 2020). There is a setting of tourism education center in development and readiness preparation of tourism personnel with special aspect that is congruent to potential segment by using the “Sattahip model” in learning together with working.

2. Skill in Tourism Site Recommendation

From the in-depth interview of 5 key informants, the majority opinion expressed that an essential competency of tourism personnel should be to have skills in tourism site recommendations that is congruent to report of documental survey on the issue of the demand of Thai labor forces in EEC (2018-2030). It was found that when personnel lacked data that is adequate for tourism site recommendation for tourist in EEC (The academic Office, The secretariat of The House of Representative, 2018).

3. Skill in Technological Use

From the in-depth interview of 5 key informants, the majority opinion expressed that an essential competency of tourism personnel should be to have skill in technological use. The majority had the opinion that skills in technological use to facilitate for tourists in the form of data collection as a “data base” for information and technological management or “management information system”. It is congruent to the document of demand of Thai labour forces in EEC EEC (2018-2030). Moreover it is also found that there is a gap in computer

literacy of 35.7 percentage (The academic Office, The secretariat of The House of Representative, 2018).

4. Skill in Cultural Conservation and Localness

From the in-depth interview of 5 key informants, the majority opinion expressed that an essential competency of tourism personnel should be to have skills in cultural conservation and localness. It is obviously seem from the state that the tourism personnel should be as a medium of public relations and be able to express Thai identity, to be well known since each local area and community are all outstanding and should be represented in a good Thai way.

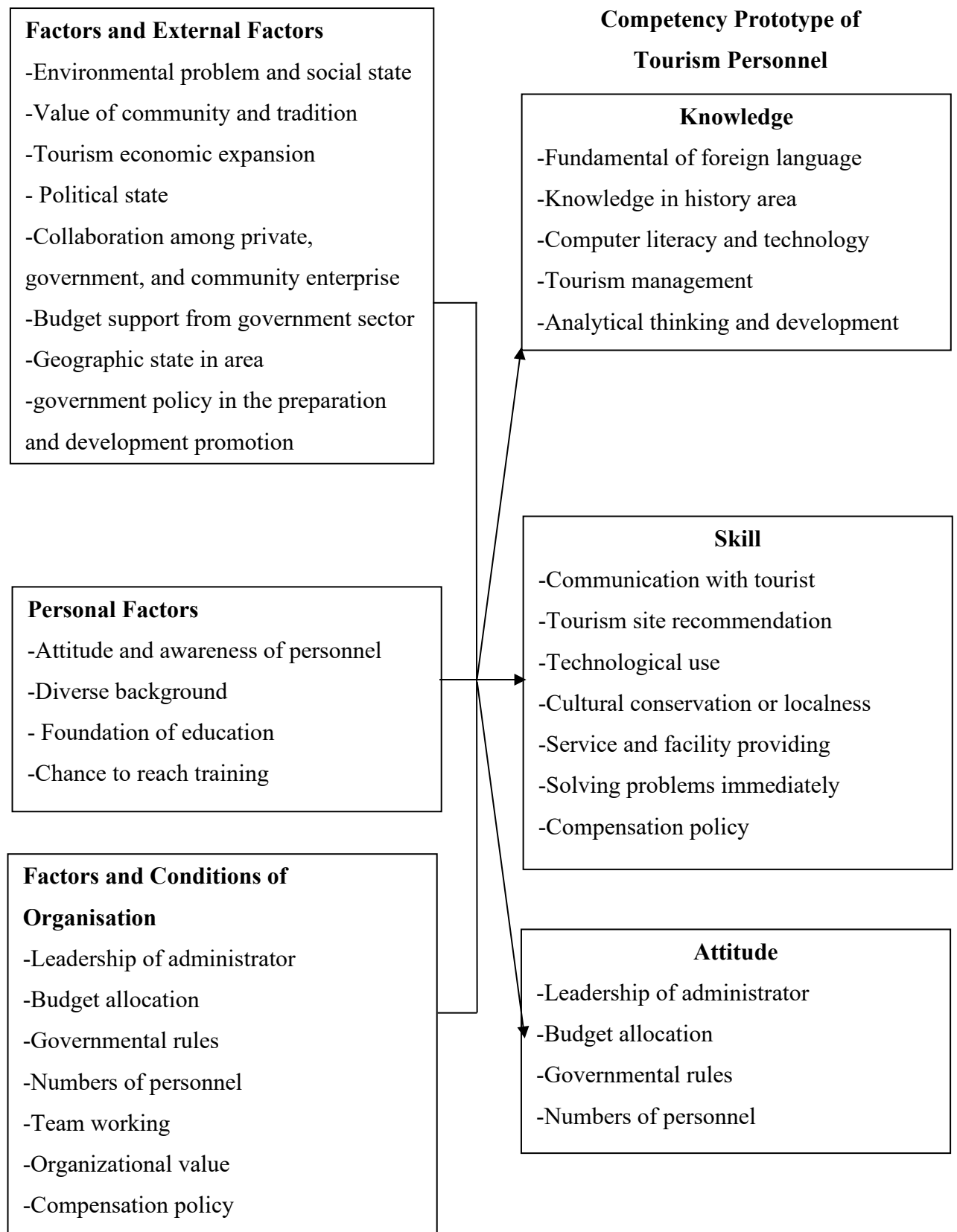
From this study, it was found that factors and conditions that affected to development of tourism personnel competency in EEC composed of 2 factors as follows:

1. Organization Factor

From research results, it was revealed that organization factors affected tourism personnel competency by sort descending. It is team working, value of organization to promote worker to have self-development, leadership of organizational administrators, skill training project for worker continuously and policy to give special compensation for staff who passed training course of development and skill respectively.

2. External Factor

From research results, it was revealed that external factors affected tourism personnel competency in EEC area by sort descending. It is environmental problem and social state, tourism economic expansion, political state, private and government sectors participated with community enterprise in skill straining to tourism personnel and supporting budget from government sector for training project establishment on skill development for tourism personnel respectively.



Picture 1. Conceptual Framework of Factors and Conditions affected to promotion for development of tourism personnel competency

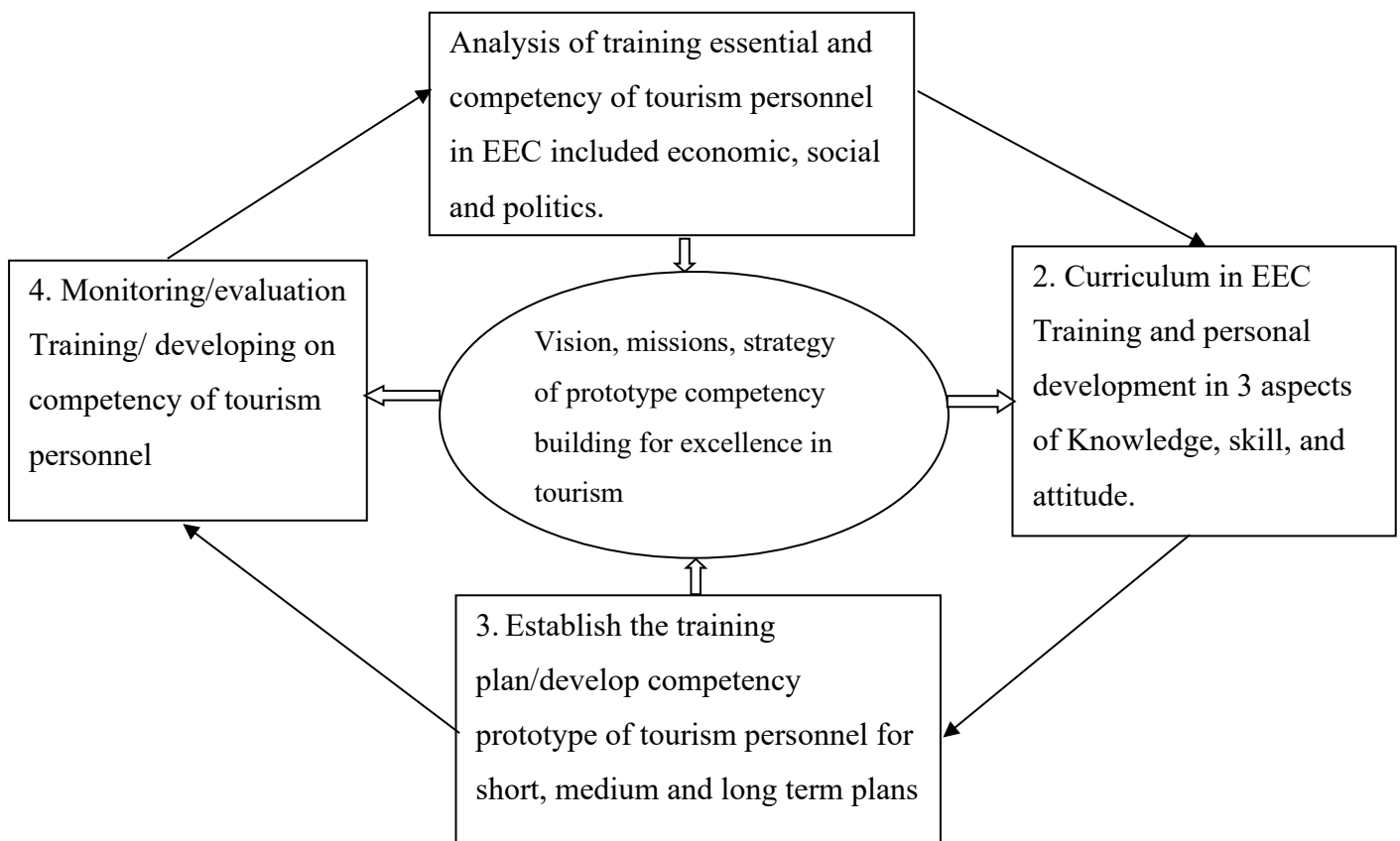
RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Promotion guideline and competency prototype of tourism personnel in EEC

The government should implement for readiness and preparation for tourism personnel in EEC by the establishment of the education institute, training center and research center including scholarship given. The guidelines for promotion of competency prototype of tourism personnel in EEC area are guidelines to promote tourism personnel competency. At the upstream period, the governmental sector should pay attention to the implementation according to the work plan that is defined in the part of urgent period. Midstream period, the governmental sector should build the alliance group. At downstream period, the governmental sector should establish the work unit to follow and evaluate the training results and competency development of tourism personnel by continuous considering on achievements.

2. Stage of strategic preparation toward development competency prototype of tourism personnel

The governmental sector should establish the strategy for tourism personnel competency in EEC area that composed of 4 stages as follows:



Picture 2. Conceptual Framework of Development of Tourism Personnel Competency of EEC



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