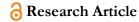
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Feedbacks of Employers on Graduates of a State University's External Campus in the Philippines

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Abstract

The study determined the feedback of employers on the work competence of graduates and crafted enhancement activities along the findings of the study. It was conducted at the University of Eastern Philippines, Laoang Campus. The study utilized a quantitative research design, particularly the descriptive design. Using purposive and quota sampling, it involved the immediate heads/supervisors of 150 graduates of the institution. To gather the needed data, a 20-item survey questionnaire was utilized. The data were subjected to statistical treatment using frequency counts and means. The study revealed that generally, the graduates were rated Very Satisfactory by the immediate heads/supervisors. The highest means of the graduates were on human relation skills, work ethics, and adequacy of knowledge in the work, while the lowest means were on leadership skills, entrepreneurship skills, and risk-taking skills. The Engineering graduates were rated Excellent, while Teacher Education, Criminology, and Industrial Technology graduates were rated Very Satisfactory. Graduates manifested Excellent ratings in human relation skills, work ethics, adequacy of knowledge in the field of work, capacity to learn new skills and procedures, ability to apply knowledge to the workplace, adaptability and flexibility, and teamwork. It is concluded that the graduates are doing well in their workplaces, although there are areas to improve in their workplace competence. The findings served as inputs for crafting curricular enhancement activities, particularly for the areas needing improvement.

Keywords: Employers, Feedbacks, Graduates, Work Competence

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1. INTRODUCTION

A degree program in a learning institution aims for each graduate to go into a job aligned with their respective courses. It is expected eventually that graduates who landed into jobs would be able to adjust and work smoothly in their job stations. Heads of offices or employers are expected to see that employees are competent in their line of work.

One critical measure of success in workplaces is an employee's ability to use competently the knowledge, skills and values that match the needs of his job, satisfy the demands of his employer, and contribute to the overall achievement of institutional goals (Abas & Imam, 2016). Employer's feedback can generate evidence on the quality of graduates, their capabilities and performance in the school (Butler, 2003; Singh, 2012) and is usually reported as the employers' level of satisfaction of the graduates. Further, it can provide information on proficiencies and qualities they considered very important and useful in the work place (Aquino, 2015).

Canizares (2015) posit that majority of the top-rated character traits essential in their work has something to do with working with others. In an employee report of the University of Mauritius, employers consider as important in the workplace the following skills: capacity for cooperation & teamwork, ability to apply knowledge to the workplace, verbal communication/presentational skills, capacity to learn new skills



and procedures, adequacy of knowledge in appropriate field, adaptability/capacity to cope with change, analytical problem-solving skills, ability to access & use relevant information, time management, capacity to work with minimum supervision, written communication/report writing skills, organizational skills, capacity to make decisions, leadership skills, and computer and numeracy skills. Lowden et al. (2011) stated that employers now prefer hiring employees who work in a team and promote leadership and personal qualities. The study of Yap and Reston (2014) found that the employers preferred high level of skills in critical thinking, independent learning, teamwork, and computer.

In a report of Acosta & Igarashi (2017), employers in some parts of South America consistently complained about difficulties finding workers with the right behavior, creativity and/or socio-emotional skills. However, they found that the Philippine counterparts reported even low satisfaction with workers' interpersonal and communication skills, or work ethics.

In the Philippines, employers are satisfied with teachers prepared at Batangas State University ARASOF (Aquino et al., 2015). The study of Elladora et al. (2022) revealed that the overall performance of teacher inductees was very satisfactory in terms of knowledge, teaching power and instructional effectiveness, executive ability and management skills, and professional responsibility, ethics and personal relationships. Tapadera et al. (2024) revealed high praises for Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology Bachelor of Elementary Education graduates, particularly in instructional competence and leadership skills. Osabel et al (2024) reported that employers were very satisfied on teacher education graduates of Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, specifically on attributes (professional and personal) and skills (communication, learning and innovation, IMT, life and career. Navarro (2020) showed that BSED graduates of Cavite State University always exceeds the required standards of employers by exemplifying commendable performance in work attitudes, information technology literacy and interpersonal skills.

In the Engineering industry, employers rated the Engineering graduates Very Good in terms of adaptability to new technology and engineering equipment; provision of support, service and assistance for the welfare of the organization; harmonious and friendly relations with superior, peers and subordinates; demonstration of significant values of the organization to achieve its vision and mission, protection and preservation of company's property, and practice of honesty, fairness and transparency in all business transactions (Dotong et al., 2017).

In terms of the criminology profession, Bautista et al. (2020) found that employers were Very Satisfied with the Criminology graduates in terms of response to the needs of the organization; performance of leadership roles with exceptional sense of duty and dependability; passion for execution and sense of urgency in all tasks; participation in decision-making and implementing the activities of the organization, promotion of positive image of the department through effective service; demonstration of significant values of the organization to achieve its vision and mission, becoming a model of leadership who adheres to the policies, rules and regulations of the organization, protecting and preserving company's property through careful and wise use of the resources, demonstrating professionalism in dealing with colleagues, and setting oneself as an example of moral and ethical behavior to all stockholders. Ayeo-eo and Doquilla (2021) concluded that employers were satisfied and happy with the performance of NEUST criminology graduates as to their attendance, attitude, discipline, integrity and loyalty. Habiatan (2021) reported that employers are highly satisfied on the commitment, knowledge to job, quality of work, communication skill, and public relations performances of the criminology graduates.

In the Industrial Technology realm, there is some to a great extent use of acquired skills and competencies to the current employment of graduates of the Batangas State University JPLPC Campus (Gequinto & Mads, 2019). Aquino et al. (2024) recognized the growing demand for BS Industrial Technology graduates in various industries, as their skills are becoming increasingly valuable and in-demand. With the growing complexity of technology, employers are seeking more highly-trained and specialized employees who can take on a leadership role.

Tudy (2017) reported that employers gave high satisfactory rating to graduates in skills like specific job-related knowledge, specific job-related skills, oral communication, written communications, comprehension, math skills, computer skills, critical thinking, problem solving, research and analysis, teamwork, organization and planning, time management, quality of work, productivity, creativity and innovation, adaptability, responsibility and character.

The study will advance curriculum enhancement as its output. The curriculum of higher education institutions is expected to be dynamic to accommodate changes relative to industry needs.

2. METHODS

2.1. Study Design

The study employed quantitative research design particularly the descriptive technique. The quantitative research design was chosen as the skills of the graduates of the campus can be easily assessed by employers through Likert scales. The levels of attainment of the various workplace skills in the study are better described using quantitative studies.

2.2. Setting and Participants

The research locale was the University of Eastern Philippines Laoang Campus, one of the two external campuses of the University of Eastern Philippines, a comprehensive state university in Northern Samar, Republic of the Philippines. Using quota sampling, it involved 150 graduates of the Campus. There were 30 graduates chosen per school year. The 30 respondents were sampled proportionally according to the number of graduates. The students were graduates of the past five school years before the pandemic: 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. Graduates before the pandemic were chosen as there is a minimal number of employed graduates after the pandemic. The 150 respondents comprised of 60 BEEd graduates, 30 BSEd graduates, 25 BS Criminology graduates, 10 BS Civil Engineering graduates, 5 BS Electrical Engineering graduates, and 20 BS Industrial Technology graduates.

2.3. Data Collection

To gather the needed data, a two-part questionnaire was utilized. The first part of the questionnaire was a 20-item Likert scale on several work competencies while the second part was composed of three open-ended questions. Two sets of the questionnaire were prepared, a hard copy and a Google form version. The Google form version were sent to the employers or immediate heads of the graduates who are outside the town while the hard copies of the questionnaires were given to the employers/immediate heads who are within the municipality where the Campus is located.

2.4. Data Analysis

The first part of the instrument contained items where the respondents rated the employees' skills Excellent, Very Satisfactory, Average, Fair, or Poor. The means of the items were computed and interpreted into: 4.20 - 5.00 (Excellent); 3.40 - 4.19 (Very Satisfactory); 2.60 - 3.39 (Average); 1.80 - 2.59 (Fair); and 1.00 - 1.79 (Poor). The numerical data were subjected to statistical treatment using frequency counts and means for the evaluation of the graduates' work competence by the employers. For the second part of the instrument where there are three open-ended questions, thematic analysis was done. The answers were classified into common ideas and grouped into themes. The findings were analyzed to derive inputs on curricular enhancement.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Work Competence of Graduates

Table 1 presents the level of work competence of UEP Laoang graduates along 20 identified work competencies. The graduates were rated by the immediate heads/supervisors. The data revealed that generally, the graduates were rated Very Satisfactory (M=4.08) by the immediate heads/supervisors. The Engineering graduates were rated Excellent (M=4.33) while Teacher Education (M=4.06), Criminology (M=3.86), and Industrial Technology (M=4.07) graduates were rated Very Satisfactory.

Table 1. Level of Work Competence of Graduates by Program

| Commenter | | | Mean | | | T., 4 |
|---|------|------|------|------|---------|-------------------|
| Competency | TE | CR | EN | IT | Average | Interpretation |
| Human relation skills | 4.10 | 4.10 | 4.57 | 4.55 | 4.33 | Excellent |
| Work ethics | 4.21 | 4.10 | 4.50 | 4.45 | 4.32 | Excellent |
| Adequacy of knowledge in the field of work | 4.24 | 4.05 | 4.43 | 4.45 | 4.29 | Excellent |
| Capacity to learn new skills and procedures | 4.28 | 4.10 | 4.36 | 4.36 | 4.28 | Excellent |
| Ability to apply knowledge to the workplace | 4.22 | 4.14 | 4.36 | 4.36 | 4.27 | Excellent |
| Adaptability and flexibility | 4.12 | 4.05 | 4.36 | 4.36 | 4.22 | Excellent |
| Teamwork | 4.21 | 4.14 | 4.29 | 4.18 | 4.21 | Excellent |
| Personal management skills | 4.19 | 4.00 | 4.21 | 4.27 | 4.17 | Very Satisfactory |
| Emotional intelligence | 4.13 | 4.19 | 4.00 | 4.18 | 4.13 | Very Satisfactory |
| Organizational skills | 4.01 | 4.00 | 4.36 | 4.09 | 4.12 | Very Satisfactory |
| Time management | 4.01 | 3.90 | 4.36 | 3.91 | 4.05 | Very Satisfactory |
| Problem solving skills | 3.94 | 3.57 | 4.64 | 3.91 | 4.02 | Very Satisfactory |
| Analytical skills | 4.00 | 3.52 | 4.64 | 3.82 | 4.00 | Very Satisfactory |
| Information technology skills | 4.00 | 3.67 | 4.57 | 3.64 | 3.97 | Very Satisfactory |
| Decision-making skills | 3.93 | 3.81 | 4.07 | 4.00 | 3.95 | Very Satisfactory |
| Written communication skills | 4.06 | 3.62 | 4.35 | 3.64 | 3.92 | Very Satisfactory |
| Verbal communication skills | 4.03 | 3.67 | 4.14 | 3.73 | 3.89 | Very Satisfactory |
| Leadership management skills | 3.84 | 3.43 | 4.28 | 3.82 | 3.84 | Very Satisfactory |
| Entrepreneurial skills | 3.84 | 3.43 | 4.00 | 4.09 | 3.84 | Very Satisfactory |
| Risk management skills | 3.93 | 3.71 | 4.07 | 3.64 | 3.84 | Very Satisfactory |
| Grand Mean | 4.06 | 3.86 | 4.33 | 4.07 | 4.08 | Very Satisfactory |

Note: TE – Teacher Education, CR – Criminology, EN – Engineering, IT – Industrial Technology

Generally, out of the 20 competencies, graduates manifested Excellent rating in seven attributes, namely: human relation skills, work ethics, adequacy of knowledge in the field of work, capacity to learn new skills and procedures, ability to apply knowledge to the workplace, adaptability and flexibility and teamwork. Among the competencies, the lowest means were on leadership (M=3.84), entrepreneurship (M=3.84), and risk management skills (M=3.84).

Further, looking at the means per college/program, Teacher Education graduates were Excellent in work ethics, adequacy of knowledge in the field of work, and capacity to learn new skills and procedures. Engineering graduates were Excellent in human relation skills, work ethics, adequacy of knowledge in the field of work, and capacity to learn new skills and procedures, ability to apply knowledge to the workplace, adaptability and flexibility, teamwork, personal management skills, organizational skills, time management, problem solving skills, analytical skills, information technology skills, and written communication skills. The Industrial Technology graduates were Excellent in human relation skills, work ethics, adequacy of knowledge in the field of work, and capacity to learn new skills and procedures, ability to apply knowledge to the workplace, adaptability and flexibility, and personal management skills. The Criminology graduates have no Excellent rating in any competency.

Generally, Teacher Education graduates had the lowest means in decision making skills, risk management skills, leadership skills, and entrepreneurship skills. Criminology graduates had the lowest means in analytical skills, problem solving skills, leadership skills, and entrepreneurship skills. Engineering graduates had the lowest means in decision making skills, risk management skills, emotional intelligence skills, and entrepreneurship skills. Finally, Industrial Technology skills were found the lowest in risk management skills, information technology skills, and written communication skills.

Meanwhile, open-ended questions given to employers reveal a similar pattern. Themes derived from the general comments of the employers include the graduates being resourceful, hardworking, work-ready, intelligent and well-informed, has desire for self-improvement and professional development, versatile, adaptable, with good manners, can work with the team, competent, competitive, effective and efficient, proactive, has good personality, has good working relationship with co-employees, and research-oriented.

3.2. Enhancement Activities

From the findings of the study and the suggestions of the respondents along improvement of the curriculum, listed in Table 2 are activities that could be embedded in the curriculum, both academic and non-academic.

Table 2. Enhancement Activities

| Areas of | Objectives | Activities | Persons | Outcome |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Concern | Objectives | | Involved | Indicators |
| Leadership management skills | To produce efficient and effective leaders and managers who retain high customer satisfaction levels and improve employee productivity in the long run, thereby enhancing organizational culture and morale. | Involve students in a series of leadership skills seminars and teambuilding activities which would enhance their problem-solving skills, and ability to provide direction, coaching and motivation for their peers. | University and Student Council officers and advisers, students | Graduates who are efficient and effective leaders and managers who are able to retain high customer satisfaction levels and improve employee productivity in the long run, thereby enhancing organizational culture and morale. |
| Entrepreneurial skills | To produce graduates with good and effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills, who are able to sell both themselves and their ideas or products, possessing focus and eagerness to learn, and at the same time, an ability to be flexible and adaptable. | Organize a workshop aimed at improving the students' interpersonal skills and business know-how, such as handling finances and setting up smart career objectives. | Guidance and Counselor, students | Graduates with effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills, who are able to sell both themselves and their ideas or products, possessing focus and eagerness to learn, and at the same time, an ability to be flexible and adaptable |
| Risk management skills | To inculcate analytical skills among students, and to help improve their problemsolving skills, thereby enhancing their ability to quantify risks in both personal and work-related situations. | Involve students in a series of risk management skills seminars and teambuilding activities with contests and games which would encourage them to take more risks for personal and organizational gain. | University Student Council officers and advisers, and students | Graduates with enhanced analytical skills and improved problemsolving skills who possess the ability to quantify risks in personal and workrelated situations. |
| Character | To instill the value of hard work, setting realistic short- and long-term career goals, and underscoring work ethics. | Organize a career guidance and job orientation lecture series for graduating students, which would help develop the character of the graduates and equip them with positive work values in preparation for real-life experience in their first job. | Guidance Counselor, and students | Graduates who value hard work, set realistic shortterm and long-term career goals, and underscore work ethics. |
| | To gain better on- thejob training experience and | Assign on-the-job training students into various partnerindustries in order to | Student Internship Coordinator | Graduates with better OJT experience and improved |

| Areas of Concern | Objectives | Activities | Persons Involved | Outcome Indicators |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| | improve interpersonal relationship with coworkers | broaden their collective experience as interns, equipped with real-life work experience, and to develop their skills as potential new hires. | | interpersonal relationship with coworkers |
| Communication Skills | To improve the students' oral and written English communication skills | An enhanced Purposive Communication curriculum in which business correspondence, covering the oral and written aspects of interoffice communication, should address the weaknesses in communication skills | English faculty, students | Graduates with improved oral and written English communication skills |
| Technical Skills | To enhance and update the basic and advanced information and computer skills of students | Subjects concerning technology should integrate basic and advanced information and computer skills enhancement in order to prepare the graduates to office work which heavily relies on computer use | Faculty who are adept in ICT, students | Graduates with enhanced and updated basic and advanced information and computer skills |

4. DISCUSSION

Generally, the findings of the study show that the graduates are doing well in their respective jobs. A comparison of the mean ratings of the graduates reveal that Engineering graduates were rated Excellent while the rest of the graduates in other programs were rated Very satisfactory. This finding shows that graduates of the UEP Laoang Campus are performing well in their respective employments.

On the average, the graduates had the highest means in human relation skills, work ethics, and adequacy of knowledge in the field of work. Individuals with excellent human relations skills understand what knowledge organizations need, such as communication skills and cognitive strategies to operate harmoniously and productively in organizations (Piquette & McMaster, 2016). The finding suggest that graduates demonstrate high motivation and observance of high-quality results. The finding further suggest that the graduates were equipped with the know-how on the background knowledge of the industry that the graduates have employed in. The strengths of the graduates emphasize their skills to relate to coworkers, which is important in teamwork and collaboration. Professionalism as a manifestation of work ethics is also a strength aside from the knowledge of the nature of their work which is a basic expectation of any employee of an organization.

The results also show that on the average, the graduates had the lowest means in leadership management skills, entrepreneurial skills, and risk management skills. Webber (2019) reported that 48% of human resource professionals believed the graduate workforce lacks leadership. Leadership skills development among graduates is essential as leadership can act as a significant predictor of graduates gaining a place in the labor market, as well as being a significant career-building factor (Uaikhanova et al., 2022). Entrepreneurial skills are essential in today's academic environment as these skills can be a key factor that can influence economic development of local communities (Bardales-Cárdenas et al., 2024). Without risk management skills, there would be difficulty in identifying risks or hazards in the workplace, in assessing their likelihood and potential impact, and in taking steps to reduce or mitigate those workplace-related risks. The weak points of the graduates point out to the lack of skills to lead others and the drive to innovate and create as manifested in low entrepreneurial skills.

Teacher Education graduates had the highest mean in work ethics. Through complying to basic rules and concepts of work ethics, the teacher posits norms and standards of behavior in education and portrays exemplary behavior to students (Turk & Vignjevic, 2016). Engineering graduates had the highest mean

along human relation skills. This confirms the findings of Dotong et al. (2017) that engineering graduates of Lyceum of the Philippines University – Batangas are very good in maintaining harmonious and friendly relations with superior, peers and subordinates through respecting their individual differences. The Industrial Technology graduates had also the highest mean in human relation skills. Gequinto & Mads (2019) identified human relations skills as highly relevant and appropriate skills of Industrial Technology graduates. The Criminology graduates had highest ratings along emotional intelligence. Turner (n.d.) states that intelligence about and control of emotions to meet the demands faced on the streets are requisites for effective and efficient law enforcement in today's environment.

Lowest means in leadership management skills were manifested in Teacher Education and Industrial Technology graduates; in entrepreneurship skills manifested in Engineering, Criminology, and Industrial Technology graduates; in emotional intelligence among Engineering graduates, and in risk management skills among Industrial Technology graduates. Most of the skills in the lowest means are skills which are very relevant in the contemporary world. Leadership management skills need emotional intelligence and risk management. The drive to be enterprising and innovating heavily rests on a solid leadership foundation.

The findings highlight the need for industry and academe partnerships to further hone the skills of the graduates of the institution who are employed in the various industries. The partnership also underscore the need for the academic institutions to integrate in the curricular programs the opportunities to develop employability skills. With these findings, there is also a need to conduct more researches in the future to corroborate if there are improvements and changes in the skill set manifested by the graduates of the institution.

5. CONCLUSION

The immediate supervisors/heads in the respective workplaces of UEP Laoang graduates are very much satisfied with the performance of the graduates. Aside from the general job-specific knowledge and how to apply this to work, the graduates have outstanding performance in skills relating to improving themselves, adjusting to their work and working with people. The graduates were generally low in, though still Very Satisfactory, leadership, entrepreneurship, and risk management skills. There is a need to improve students' skills in the areas which were rated the lowest.

With the study assessing the various skills developed by the graduates of UEP Laoang Campus, areas of strength have been revealed. These areas of strength such as human relations skills, work ethics, and knowledge of the job can be areas capitalized by employers to maximize the potentials of the employees. The weak areas on leadership, entrepreneurship and risk-taking are areas to be explored by employers as points for improvement of employees.

Future research activities of the campus should focus more on how to improve the skills which are rated least. Researches which will uncover other skills not covered in the list of skills mentioned in the study should be done. Qualitative studies which will explore the experiences of graduates as employees and the perspective of employers could be rich studies that will confirm or negate the findings of quantitative studies.

The enhancement activities crafted as output of this study could be adopted by the various departments as a guide in enhancing the curricular programs of the university. Student leadership programs which not only tackles leadership enhancement but also entrepreneurial skills and risk-taking skills should be designed and implemented by the academic units of the university.

The Office of the Assistant Director for Academic Affairs and the Office of Student Affairs should go hand-in-hand in implementing the activities suggested to enhance the workplace competence of the future graduates. A regular tracer study should be enforced by the Office of the Assistant Director for External Affairs to follow-up the UEP Laoang graduates. A lecture-series on workplace competence should be spearheaded by the Guidance and Testing Center to equip the graduating students with knowhow on the future careers they will face. A similar lecture-series should also be conducted to faculty members so as to identify teaching strategies where they can integrate activities which will enhance the workplace competence of the future graduates of the institution.

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Research Ethics. Considering research ethics, the authors affirm that this research was conducted with integrity and in adherence to ethical standards and that all procedures were conducted in accordance with applicable laws and institutional regulations. All data, findings, and conclusions presented in this article are original and accurately reported. The study received ethics approval on April 15, 2021 (Reference Number: 2021-001-d-001) from the University Ethics Review Committee as a prerequisite in the conduct of the study for Calendar Year 2021.

Data Availability Statement. All data and materials used in the study are available and can be obtained from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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