

Competencies of the K-12 Graduates and Their Work Opportunities as Assessed by Top Ten Employers in The City of San Fernando, Pampanga

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The study assessed the competencies of the first batch of K-12 graduates and their work opportunities according to top 10 employers in the City of San Fernando (CSF), Pampanga. This is a descriptive study designed to assess the employers' job vacancies and the required competencies for the jobs. The top ten employers were identified by the City Employment Office, CSF based on the frequency on hiring applicants. The respondents included 144 K-12 graduates randomly selected from graduates of one public school in the CSF for the school year 2017-2018. A checklist and a Likert scale were the instruments of the study. The study found that K-12 graduates were competent in communication, computer literacy, physical fitness, work management, customer and co-worker relations. They possessed soft skills needed in work like friendliness, trustworthiness, smartness, adaptability, and willingness to undergo training. The K-12 graduates were found to be qualified in terms of skills and competencies required by the employers. It was also found out that companies were looking for employees with soft skills rather than just hard and technical skills.

Keywords: *K-12 graduates, Job Opportunities, Top 10 Employers, Competencies*

Introduction

Republic Act Number 10533 (R.A. 10533) otherwise known as “Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013” was signed into law on July 23, 2012. The enactment mandates one (1) year of Kindergarten and twelve (12) years of basic education. According to the Department of Education, the rationale of the R.A. 10533 is to address the poor quality of basic education provided by the previous curriculum as reflected in the low achievement scores of Filipino students and the increasing Philippines’ unemployment rate (Tell it to Sunstar: The K-12 program, 2018). The Aquino administration, together with the Department of Education, believed that K-12 will provide sufficient time for mastery of concepts and skills to develop lifelong learners, and prepare graduates for teaching education, middle-level skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship (GOVPH). Thus, the curriculum develops the use of spiral progression approach – from simple knowledge going to complex as the grade level goes higher – to ensure the achievement of the aforementioned goals.

Acquiring skills was given emphasis in the enhanced curriculum in order for the K-12 graduates to be employable. The same is true with what is stated in an article entitled ‘International Experience and Graduate Employability: Stakeholder Perceptions on the Connection’ by Crossman and Clarke (2009). They defined employability as having the skills and abilities to find, remain, or obtain new employment as, and when, required. It was also said in their article that to be employable is to have skills such as transferable which include oral communication, high level learning skills, problem solving, decision making skills, and traits such as responsible, positive attitude, interpersonal skills, and ability to work both in a team and independently (Cassidy, 2004).

Bridgstock (2009) conducted a research about the employability of the graduates in order for them to be hired in the world's ever changing and developing workforce. According to Rychen and Salgaric (2005), as cited by Bridgstock (2009) in her study, 'The Graduates Attributes We've Overlooked: Enhancing Graduate Employability Through Career Management Skills', the capacities of reflectiveness and lifelong learning underpin three broad categories of competencies necessary for 'a successful life and well-functioning society'. These are the 'use of tools', 'acting autonomously', and 'interacting in heterogeneous groups'. In addition, a study conducted by Promis (2008) which aimed to find out who will be hired or who will not, who will be let go and who will be retained, who passed over and who will be promoted by determining the extent to which the job market is looking for soft skills or Emotional Intelligence (EI) competencies; identifying the relationship between the level of the positions and the soft skills required or desired; identifying those soft skills or EI competencies most often required in current job ads; and determining whether job ads are asking for those competencies.

In an article written by Amanda Fernandez in GMA News, National Industry Academic Council (NIAC) Secretary and President of Philippine Business Education Chito Salazar said in a press conference that the new curriculum would provide students with the competencies to be employed right after high school and the different business associations in the country including the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) have vowed to accept high school graduates for work in their companies if they meet competency standard. However, another article was released in 2018 by ABS-CBN News, which said that "The Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry warns that the first batch of K-12 graduates entering the work force in March of that year may not be as ready as hoped." (ABS-CBN News, 2018). The president of PCCI Human Resource Development Foundation and Director-in-Charge Alberto Fenix Jr. said on an interview, "Majority of these 600,000 (*graduates*) I don't think they really got the sufficient training" (ABS-CBN, 2018). He was talking about the 80-hour immersion course of the Grade 12 students in their On-the-Job training being not enough to acquire the needed skills. This is despite the fact that Senior High School program includes getting work experience while studying and companies can even hire them after they graduated (Official Gazette of the Philippines) even though there are a lot of opportunities waiting for the graduates in the Philippines and abroad. Unfortunately, only few meet the requirements of the establishments and companies (GOVPH). Not all applicants are competent enough in matching the skills needed by the employers.

It is important that applicants must be aware of the skills or competencies needed by the employers. Saunders and Zuzel (2010) conducted a study entitled "Evaluating Employability Skills: Employer and Students Perceptions" which aimed to determine the views on the nature and relative importance of employability skills of the main stakeholders, graduates and employers and on the preparedness of the students and graduates for employment; to compile skills needed by the employers and incorporate them to the skills of students; and utilize the data from the students self-assessed skill profile to be inputted to the curriculum and delivery of modules. Hence, this study aimed to assess the competencies and work opportunities of the K-12 graduates as perceived by themselves and assessed by the top 10 employers in the City of San Fernando, Pampanga. Furthermore, this study inquired the graduates about the competencies that they should acquire to be able to land a job. Indeed, the matching of the K-12 graduates' competencies and needed competencies by the employers must be assessed to see the effectiveness of the implementation of the R.A. 10533 – the chances that the K-12 graduates can find work after graduation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on R.A. 10533 or the K-12 Curriculum, the five pillars of education crafted by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, learning to live together, and learning to transform. Specifically, this study is anchored to learning to know, and learning to do. As goals or targets of K-12 curriculum, mastery of concepts and skills, and middle-level skills development are anchored on the Pillars of Education that fall under the learning to know and do, which support the theory used, and support the aim of the study to look for the work opportunities of K-12 graduates as perceived by the graduates themselves and the top 10 employers.

Conceptual Framework

To understand how the study was conducted, the conceptual framework was formulated. It made use of input, process, and output. Under input were K-12 Curriculum, Five Pillars of Education, K-12 graduates, and Top 10 Employers in the City of San Fernando, Pampanga; the process included interview and data gathering using the questionnaire and the checklist; and the output consisted of job perception of graduates themselves and the top 10 employers, self-assessed competencies of the K-12, competencies needed by the top 10 employers, and an analysis on competencies of the K-12 graduates and skills needed by the top 10 employers on whether they match each another.

Methodology

This study utilized descriptive method and an analysis of data to find out whether the competencies of the K-12 graduates and the competencies needed by the employers match with each other. To meet the assessment, qualitative and quantitative methods were used. The respondents who were randomly selected are the 144 Grade 12 students of Pampanga High School in the school year 2017-2018. The top 10 employers in the City of San Fernando, Pampanga were identified by the City Employment Office of the CSFP. The top 10 employers included Chowking (Maimpis), Jollibee (Sindalan and Maimpis), Asiawide Refreshments Corporation, Super Value Inc. (SM Supermarket), Mandurriao Star Inc. and Madison Shopping Plaza Inc. (SM Department Store), Pampanga's Best, Universal Robina Corporation, and Walter Mart Supermarket (San Fernando).

The research instruments used were a questionnaire, Likert scale, and a checklist. The questionnaire for the companies consisted of questions intended to know the available job in the company and needed skills for specific work, position, or designation. From the employers' responses, the researchers constructed two (2) instruments: a checklist that aims to assess the job perception of the students; and a Likert scale to measure students' competencies. The dry-run and validation of the questionnaire for the employers was conducted by administering the tool to the Human Resource Officer of Bataan 2020, Incorporated, Paper Mill while the dry-run and validation of the Likert scale and checklist for the students were conducted by administering them to the Grade 12 ABM students of Systems Plus Computer College, San Fernando Campus.

The researchers used Microsoft Excel in computing the mean score of the competencies of the K-12 graduates and percentages in getting the data for the job opportunities perceived by the Grade 12 students and their plans after graduation. To interpret the competencies of the K-12 graduates, the following guides were used: 3.5 – 4.0 is Very Capable/Always; 2.5 – 3.4 is Capable/Sometimes; 1.5 – 2.4 is Somehow Capable/often; and 1.0 – 1.4 is Not Capable/Never.

Results and Discussions

This study aimed to assess the competencies and work opportunities of the K-12 graduates as perceived by themselves and assessed by the top 10 employers in the City of San Fernando, Pampanga. Furthermore, this study inquired from the graduates about the competencies that they should acquire to be able to land a job.

The K-12 graduates perceived themselves to be working as service crew (26.32%), encoder (18.42 %), cashier (7.89%), sales clerk (7.89%), and others such as foot spa massager, customer service representative and tutor (7.89%). They also perceived that they could apply as saleslady/salesman (5.26%), and marketing crew (5.26%). Furthermore, they also perceived themselves working as bagger (2.63%), inventory assistant (2.63%), machine operator (2.63%), merchandiser (2.63%), and packer (2.63%).

Their self-assessed competencies are as follows: Communication Skill (3.30) – Capable; Computer Literacy (3.49) – Capable; Physical Fitness, Energy, Management To Work Under Pressure (3.22) – Capable; Customer Relations (3.52%) – Very Capable; Customer Relation (3.52) – Very Capable; Trustworthiness (3.50) – Very Capable; Smartness (3.42) – Capable; Adaptability (3.37) – Sometimes; And, Willingness To Undergo Training (3.37) – Always.

The top 10 employers in the City of San Fernando, Pampanga offer jobs as cashier (30%), sales clerk (30%), service crew (30%), stock clerk (30%), kitchen/staff crew (20%), bagger (10%), checker (10%), customer assistant (10%), office assistant (10%), packaging crew (10%), production crew (10%), shakedown crew (10%), spare parts checker (10%), and tire inspector (10%).

The competencies of the applicants that the top 10 employers need are Communication Skill, Computer Literacy, Physical Fitness, Energy, Management To Work Under Pressure, Customer Relations, Customer Relation, Trustworthiness, Smartness, Adaptability, And Willingness To Undergo Training.

The results show that there are jobs being offered to K-12 graduates by the top 10 employers in San Fernando, Pampanga. Most of them have job openings which confirms the article written by Amanda Fernandez in GMA News that says different business associations in the country including the PCCI have vowed to accept high school graduates for work in their companies if they meet competency standard. The K-12 graduates perceived themselves as possessing the competencies needed by the top 10 employers in the City of San Fernando, Pampanga. One of the competencies that Pampanga's Best and Walter Mart Supermarket require is the willingness to undergo training once they are employed. The K-12 graduates firmly believed that they are always willing to undergo training (3.63), thus meeting the needs of the mentioned employers. This soft skill is appropriate for jobs such as packaging or production crew and

cashier. Customer and co-worker relations or friendliness is one of the skills that Supervalve Incorporated, Jollibee Food Corporation (Sindalan), Mandurriao Star, Madison Shopping Plaza, and Chowking (Maimpis) require from their applicants.

The K-12 graduates identified themselves as very capable (3.52) to match the skills that are suited for cashier, sales clerk, bagger, stock clerk, checker, kitchen and service crew. Supervalve Inc., Mandurriao Star, and Madison Shopping Plaza need applicants who are trustworthy to be hired as cashier, sales clerk, bagger, stock clerk, and checker. The K-12 graduates assessed themselves as very capable (3.50) of being trustworthy, thus matching the need of the employers. Applicants who are computer literate are needed by Asiwide Refreshments Corporation (Royal Crown Cola) and Chowking (Maimpis) to be hired as cashier, and service crew. The K-12 graduates are capable (3.49) of being computer literate, thus matching the needed competency by the employers. Another competency needed by Supervalve, Jollibee Food Corporation (Sindalan), Mandurriao Star Inc., and Madison Shopping Plaza Inc. is smartness. The K-12 graduates identified themselves as capable (3.42) of being smart. This competency fits the jobs of cashier, sales clerk, stock clerk, bagger, kitchen crew, and checker. Adaptability is one of the major competencies that Jollibee Food Corporation and Walter Mart Supermarket require from their applicants for service crew and cashier. The K-12 graduates identified themselves as sometimes (3.37) adaptable, thus matching the needed competency.

In addition, Jollibee (Sindalan), Chowking (Maimpis), Pampanga's Best and Walter Mart Supermarket need applicants who have good communication skill. The K-12 graduates assessed themselves as capable (3.30) of having this skill. Good communication skill is suitable for jobs as cashier, service crew, kitchen staff, packaging crew, and production crew.

On the other hand, not all requirements of the employers are cognitive and soft skills. They also need applicants who are physically fit, energetic, and can manage to work under pressure. These physical and psychological competencies are required by Supervalve Incorporated, Jollibee Food Corporation, Mandurriao Star Inc. and Madison Shopping Plaza Inc., Pampanga's Best, and Walter Mart Supermarket to jobs such as bagger, cashier, stock clerk, marketing crew, checker, packaging crew, and production crew. The results show that the K-12 graduates are capable (3.22) in this competency.

These show that the competencies of the graduates match the competencies needed by the employers. This is contrary to what PCCI HR Development Foundation and Director-in-Charge Alberto Fenix Jr. said in an interview that majority of the Senior High School graduates do not really get the sufficient training (ABS-CBN News, 2018). Since, employability was defined by Crossman and Clarke (2009) as having the skills and abilities to find, remain, or obtain new employment as, and when, required, then, the K-12 graduates perceived themselves as competent to fit the jobs offered by the top 10 employers in the City of San Fernando, Pampanga. This finding shows that it is evident that the K-12 graduates can land a job. These findings also concur to the study of Saunders and Zuzel (2010) in a way that employers' and students' perceptions must be evaluated or assessed if they match or not. This research also assents to Rychen and Solgaric (2005) as cited by Bridgstock (2009) in her study that the 'use of tools', acting autonomously', and 'interacting in heterogenous groups' are competencies necessary for a successful life and well-functioning society, which is similar to how K-12 graduates perceived themselves as adaptable and friendly. This study also accedes to the study of Promis (2009) and the study of Robles (2015) in a way that they both aim to find out who will be hired or not by determining the

extent to which the job market is looking for soft skills. This study about K-12 has proven that all the top 10 employers in the City of San Fernando, Pampanga are after the soft skills rather than hard skills. Most of these competencies identified are soft skills which conclude that the employers do not just focus on hard skills. The only hard skill that the employers require is computer literacy or having a basic knowledge in using computer. The respondents differ but the aims are similar to one another.

Given these findings it is recommended that the following will be considered: The Department of Education may enhance subjects or fields in the curriculum that can help the students on the development of their skills, more specifically soft skills such as the communication related programs and values orientation programs. These may be considered in the implementation of the K-12 curriculum since majority of the employers are also after the same skills. The Department of Education may also consider strengthening career orientations for the students to fully guide them with their plans after graduation. It is also proposed to conduct parents' orientation regarding their involvement in choosing the path for their children. The city government and the Department of Education should consider establishing linkage with the companies that offer jobs to K-12 graduates to organize programs such as job fairs solely for them. In this way, the graduates would have the awareness on the companies that are open to hire them. Future researchers, specifically the Department of Education, may continue the study into wider scope – national level – and, if possible, include the global competitiveness of the K-12 graduates.

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