Original Research Article

Graduates Performance on the Lenses of Employers: A Tracer Study

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Abstract: The purpose of the study is to determine the performance of the graduates of biology and psychology undergraduate programs in a state university, in Central Luzon, Philippines, through the perspective of their employers. Descriptive- quantitative research design was employed in order to attain its objectives. In addition, convenience sampling was utilized in gathering the data of 77 graduates of the two programs, through adopted standardized questionnaire, which was analyzed through descriptive statistics. The study found out the undergraduate biology and psychology programs of a state university in Central Luzon, Philippines is relevant and responsive to the needs of the global workforce. However, the study also emphasized that there is a need to increase the employees' poor level of organizational commitment and communication skills, thus, academic institutions may formulate relevant programs and curriculum enhancement to address these concerns. Similar study may be conducted to address the causes of these poor employees' performance factors.

Keywords: Biology, Communication skills, Curriculum Graduate performance, Organizational commitment, Psychology, Tracer study, State university.

INTRODUCTION

One of the goals of a Higher Education Institution (HEI) is to produce a globally competitive professional that meets the needs of the labor market in local and global society. In order to achieve this, academic institutions align their curricula that is responsive to the revolutionizing needs of industry 4.0. In addition, Naidoo *et al.*, (2011) emphasized that harmonization of teaching and learning approach to the fast-pacing needs of the educational system in the global society should be addressed in order to achieve academic excellence that is significant to the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) world.

In order to achieve this, academic institutions formulate several mechanisms to achieve a responsive education aligned to the global trends, one of which is the recalibration of curriculum. Curriculum serves as a direction of the teaching and learning approach in the academic institution. Henceforth, in developing curricular programs, relevance of academic programs outcome should be aligned in the needs of labor market to achieve expected competencies of the students (Kartika *et al.*, 2019). In addition, according to Cuadra *et al.*, (2019), relevance of the curricular programs to the professional competence of graduates, serves as major strength in developing academic curriculum.

There are several measures in determining the effectiveness of a curriculum in an HEI, one of which is the licensure examination performance (Camuyong *et al.*, 2022). Performance rating in the licensure examination serve as a primary tool in determining of the effectiveness of an undergraduate program.

Another factor that contributes of the curriculum effectiveness is the performance of graduates in the workplace. Reusia *et al.*, (2020) discussed that the measure of the effectiveness and relevance of instruction of an academic institution is through the information provided by its graduates. Moreover, Kartika et al. (2019) explained that tracer study is essential in determining the alignment of acquired academic competencies of student to the needs of labor market. More so, it determines the effectiveness of a curricular offering in providing quality education of an academic institution, hence, it contributes to the development of academic programs. Furthermore, Llego & Bañez (2017) mentioned that, tracer studies, as a form of feedback from graduates, contribute in developing the curriculum that can improve the quality of the degree program.

Aside from the information provided by the graduates, another significant source of data is employers' feedback. Supervisors and managers who closely monitor the work performance, which comprise

of knowledge, skills and abilities of employees, provides accurate and consistent information about the employee.

Thus, the objective of the study was to determine the performance of the graduates from Bachelor of Science in Biology and Bachelor of Science in Psychology of a State University in Central Luzon, Philippines, based on the perspectives of their employers.

METHODS
Design
The study used descriptive- quantitative research design in determining the performance of graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Biology and Bachelor of Science in Psychology of a State University in Central Luzon, Philippines as perceived by the employers.

As to Ethridge (2004), descriptive research can be characterized as an attempt to determine, describe, and put in order. In addition, descriptive research casts light on current issues or problems through a process of data collection that enables them to describe the situation more completely than was possible without employing this method (Fox and Bayat, 2007).

Participants and Research Instrument
There were 77 graduates of BS Biology and BS Psychology program from 2005 to 2020 that were evaluated by their employers. Due to logistics and constraints brought by the pandemic, the researchers opted to use convenience sampling. As mentioned by Edgar and Manz (2017), convenience sampling takes samples that are "conveniently" located on a certain location or internet service. Galloway (2005), in the Encyclopedia of Social Measurement, mentioned that convenience sampling does not use patterns in acquiring respondents. Rather, it recruits by merely asking people who are readily available. Thus, it can simply ask friends, relatives. Initial list of graduates was obtained from the Registrar's office were used for the survey.

The main instrument that was used in the conduct of the study was adopted to the standardized survey questionnaire used by Leabres (2020) in determining the job performance of employees which include the following criteria; interpersonal skills, professionalism, integrity, leadership, organizing skills, enthusiasm and initiative, reliability, commitment, competence, confidence, communication skills, and, flexibility and adaptability.

Data Collection and Analysis
After securing approval from the concerned authorities, the data were gathered through online media platform, wherein participants were requested to fill out online employers' feedback form. After tallying of the results, the collected data were subjected to statistical analysis through SPSS.

Further, in determining the performance of the graduates through feedback of their employers, descriptive statistics such as weighted mean, frequency and percentage were utilized.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
Figure 1 showed that there were 22 (28.90%) graduates from BS Biology and 54 (71.10%) graduates from BS Psychology that were evaluated by their employers.
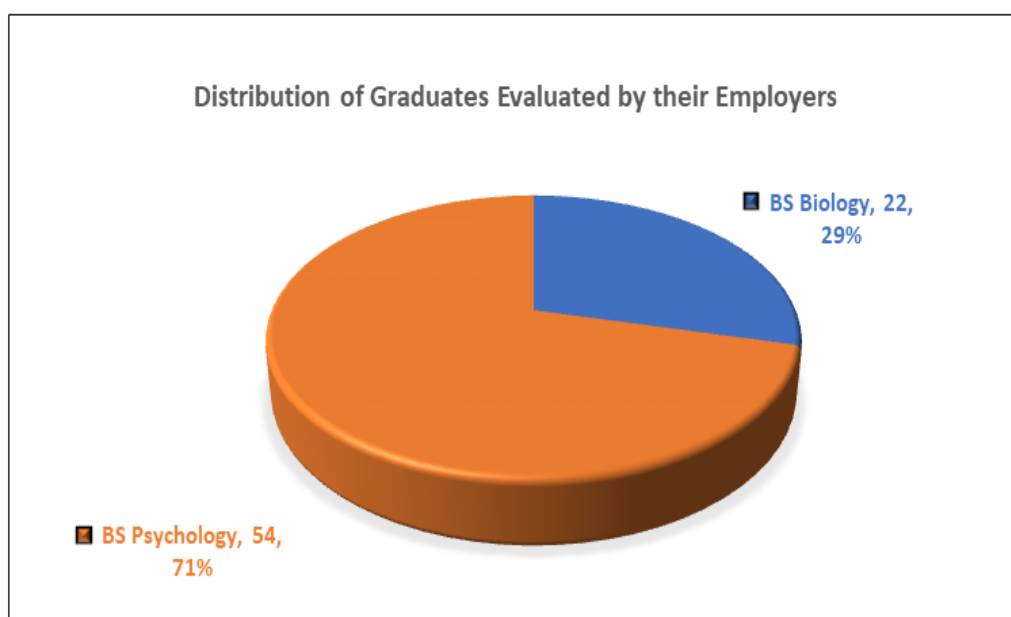

Figure 1: Distribution of graduates evaluated by their employers

Table 1: Results of the performance indicators of the Graduates based on the evaluation of their employers

Indicators	Weighted Mean	VM
Interpersonal Skills	3.76	**Always**
Professionalism	3.72	**Always**
Integrity	3.76	**Always**
Leadership	3.75	**Always**
Organizing Skills	3.76	**Always**
Enthusiasm and Initiative	3.78	**Always**
Reliability	3.77	**Always**
Commitment	3.25	**Often**
Competence	3.73	**Always**
Confidence	3.71	**Always**
Communication Skills	2.98	**Sometimes**
Flexibility and Adaptability	3.76	**Always**
Overall Weighted Mean	**3.64**	**Always**

Legend: 1.00- 1.49 (Never), 1.50- 2.49 (Sometimes), 2.50- 3.49 (Often), 3.50- 4.00 (Always)

Table 1 reflected the results of the performance indicators of the graduates' performance based on the evaluation of their employer. As perceived by the employers, all indicators have a weighted mean of above 3.50 (always) except on commitment which has weighted mean of 3.25 (often). This result might be due to the nature of job that an employee played in the organization. According to the study of Grego-Planner (2019), organizational commitment depends on the type of the organizational they were affiliated, whether publica or private. The author also emphasized that high levels of organizational commitment were observed for employees working on the public than private sector. Furthermore, Şentuna (2015) explained that there is variation in terms of organizational commitment. The study further explained that the differences are due to the level of male's organizational commitment is more focused on responsibility and being sociable.

More so, the study revealed that the graduates are poor in communication skills, both oral and written, with a weighted mean of 2.98 (sometimes). Ab Rahman *et al*., (2019) emphasize that employers nowadays look for graduates who are well balanced in both their academic achievement and possess 'soft skills' such as communication, problem solving, interpersonal and the ability to be flexible. In a report by the Malaysian government on fresh graduates discovered that the majority who could not secure employment were due to them being inexperienced, having poor English and communication skills (Malaysiakini, 2005).

Past research also reveal that most employers seek certain skills, look for certain attitudes that they characterize as ones that would fit their company and industry profiles. This could also mean that they have certain criteria that illustrate them as being effective team members. The very reason of this is one that obtaining a certain type of graduates will reduce on the number and types of trainings later on they have to organize which could be translated into spending less money and time on training their personnel. Research on students'

employability anonymously agreed that fresh graduates' communication skills will have to be adequate for them to function and perform their duties and tasks well at workplaces. This perception is due to the fact that certain soft skills are observed to be needed at workplace. Such skills are interactions, negotiations, interpersonal skills and both written and oral communication ways of communicating with colleagues and clients are regarded as vital since it reflects much of the image and reputation of the organizations and industries where these graduates work.

The study conducted by Alih *et al*., (2018) reveals that communication skills especially the English language speaking skill is one of the criteria used to select fresh graduates for employment. This is supported by the findings in Zaharim *et al*., (2009) investigating the employers' expectations towards engineering graduates who found that the communication ability is one of the skills needed to get hired. According to Marlina Ali and Shaharom (2006), poor communication skills of the fresh graduates may become threats to their employability.

Moreover, the overall weighted mean of the graduate performance indicator based on the evaluation of employers was 3.64 (always), thus the program is effective and responsive to the needs of the labor market.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the results of the study, it implied that the program curriculum of the Bachelor of Science in Biology and Bachelor of Science in Psychology is effective and responsive to the needs of the global workforce. Moreover, it is suggested that the department may institute mechanism on how to raise the level of commitment of its students and graduates. In addition, the program may incorporate additional subjects and activities that may contribute on the development of communication skills among its students. Lastly, similar study may be conducted that will address the factors that may contribute on their poor organizational commitment and communication skills.

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