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FROM ACADEME TO INDUSTRY: WHICH ACADEMIC SKILLS MATTER?

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Abstract

The paper explores the baffling question on which academic skills really matter on the job. And which don't matter? The answer is derived from a survey of 86 students who underwent Language Practicum (LP) and 30 supervisors. LP is the On-the-Job Training (OJT) component of the Bachelor of Arts in English of the College of Arts and Letters, Bicol University. Because more demanding requirements and higher standards are required for the meaning of evaluation theory as a framework, the term model/approaches is preferred. This refers to "an evaluation theorist's idealized conceptualizations for conducting program evaluation" (Stufflebeam and Shinkfield, 2013). As revealed in the findings, the academic skills found by the Language Practicum trainees to be most applicable to job performance are interpersonal skills and business letter writing. At the tail end are academic skills developed mostly from literature courses, Physical Education, Foreign language and Technological Environment. Organizational communication and interpersonal skills were rated by the sponsoring agencies to be the most useful academic skills needed during the training, and therefore in the trainees' future jobs. Literature-related skills and physical education skills are least useful. To conclude: there are academic skills that are most and least useful to actual job performance. It is recommended that these be considered in the crafting of future curriculum to ensure that graduates are job-read.

Keywords

Academe, Industry, Academic Skills, On-the-Job Training (OJT)

1. Introduction

Language Practicum, now referred to as Student Internship Program (SIP), is a development emerging from the 2009 Revised Bachelor of Arts in English (AB English) curriculum of Bicol University College of Arts and Letters. It is meant to provide students the exposure and readiness to the workplace deemed necessary to turn out more competitive graduates. Because graduates are immersed in the actual workplace, and are in fact under the apprenticeship of a supervisor, they could very well provide the answer to the all too pervading question: What academic skills matter to industry? The study provided a two-pronged information -- from the trainees and the trainers— which is vital to both academe and industry. Consequently, the research aims to bridge the gap between competencies and jobs available. The continuity in information exchange, with schools updating the students about the trends in employment and with the Industry providing such information, hopefully, will resolve the pervasive mismatch between academe and industry, on a micro level at the least.

For the framework, the researcher exercised restraint in using the term evaluation theory, which refers to the “more advanced” notion of evaluation. Thus, the study is not an “evaluation” of the Language Practicum in the real sense. Evaluation Theory is here reserved for “creatively developed yet more rigorously tested conceptualization of program evaluation” (Stufflebeam and Shin field, 2013). Because more demanding requirements and higher standards are required for the meaning of theory, the term model/approaches is preferred. This refers to “an evaluation theorist’s idealized conceptualizations for conducting program evaluation” (Stufflebeam and Shin field, 2013).

Typical approaches are question-oriented and method-oriented. Whether the methodology or questions addressed in these approaches are appropriate for assessing the Language Practicum’s merit and worth are secondary consideration. The questions-oriented begins with a question and the methods-oriented may start with an overriding commitment to employ both qualitative and quantitative methods. Both approaches stress that it is usually better to answer a few pointed questions well than to attempt a broad assessment of a program’s merit and worth (Stufflebeam and Shinkfield, 2013).

The elements for quasi-evaluation, true to the expert’s conceptualization, “may not meet the requirements of a sound evaluation” (Stufflebeam and Shin field, 2013) but they can

investigate questions that will provide evidence on the program evaluated and the approaches are committed to assessing and helping improve aspects of the Language Practicum.

2. Materials and Methods

The study is a descriptive research. Data on academic skills most applicable to Language Practicum were derived from reanalyzing a portion of the questionnaires used by Hermosa et al upon permission from the researchers. Respondents included a total enumeration of 86 fourth year students from two classes of AB English 2013 and 30 sponsoring employers.

For validation purposes, the results of the research were presented to a small group of fifteen (15), mostly sponsoring employers, and which also included Language Practicum trainees from 2013-2015, and a representative from the academe, particularly the department chair of the English Department. Sponsoring employers are from the following industry: school/educational institutions, government agencies, media centers and private companies.

3. Results and Discussions

Academic skills is used generically in this research to mean the cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitudes) and psychomotor (skills) competencies purportedly developed through the general, major, elective and mandated courses in the AB English curriculum. The academic skills here identified are culled from the course syllabi of the 2009 Revised AB English Curriculum as already used in Hermosa et al's (2014). The same instrument was subjected to review by the undergraduate students' thesis committee and adviser.

As revealed in the findings, the academic skills found by the Language Practicum trainees to be most applicable to job performance are: interpersonal (4.42); business letter writing (4.26); workplace readiness (4.16) oral presentation(4.16); social responsibility (4.11), public speaking (4.11); composition writing (4.11); oral expression (4.05); listening (4.05) and Information Technology (4.05). These are the skills topping the list as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Academic Skills Most Applicable to Job Performance (Trainees' Viewpoint)*

Academic Skill	Rating	Rank
Interpersonal Skills	4.42	1
Business Letter Writing	4.26	2
Workplace –readiness	4.16	3.5
Oral Presentation	4.16	3.5
Social Responsibility	4.11	6.33

Public Speaking	4.11	6.33
Composition Writing	4.11	6.33
Oral Expression	4.05	10
Listening	4.05	10
Information Technology	4.05	10
Organizational Communication	4.00	11.5
Cooperative Planning & Teamwork	4.00	11.5

The result for the most applicable skills is not as surprising. After all, the respondents of this study were the beneficiaries of the revised curriculum which, at the time of revision in 2008, incorporated courses which were the identified needs of the times. The revised curriculum strengthened the development of interpersonal as well as organizational communication skills in the course Interpersonal and Organizational Communication. It also ensured the work readiness of the students through the course Language Practicum, which provides the students the basic knowledge and preparation before actual deployment. Business writing which is adequately treated in Business Communication may indeed be attributed to the addition of this course. Oral presentation, public speaking and listening being on top 10 may also be credited to the enhancement in course description of Speech Communication. Social responsibility, on the other hand, is embedded in most of the courses in the program.

At the tail end as shown in Table 2 are six academic skills developed mostly from literature courses namely: writing of literary criticisms, literary interpretation and analysis, literary evaluation, defining of literary terminologies, literary performance, and comparing and contrasting of literary masterpieces; two academic skills from Physical Education, namely: playing sports and folk and ballroom dancing; one from an elective subject, which is Foreign language and one from Technological Environment which is scientific literary skill. This is a valuable insight that must be considered in the crafting of a new curriculum.

Table 2: *Academic Skills Least Applicable to Job Performance (Trainees' Viewpoint)*

Academic Skill	Rating	Rank
Presentation of Science Advocacies and Business Report Writing	2.95	31
Writing of Literary Criticism	2.74	32
Literary Interpretation & Analysis	2.63	33.5
Literary Evaluation	2.63	33.5
Defining of Literary Terminologies	2.47	35
Literary Performance	2.42	36.5

Foreign Language	2.42	36.5
Comparing & Contrasting of Literary Masterpieces	2.21	38
Scientific Literacy	2.05	39
Playing Sports	1.84	40
Folk & Ballroom Dancing	1.63	41

On the part of the sponsoring organizations, most useful skills are: organizational communication (4.95); organizational communication (4.90); critical, analytical and reflective thinking (4.87); listening (4.85); and cooperative planning and teamwork (4.72). Table 3 presents this data.

Organizational communication and interpersonal skills were rated by the sponsoring agencies to be the most useful academic skills needed during the training, and therefore in the trainees' future jobs. Other top skills are communication or communication-related, and therefore leads to the conclusion that most companies/agencies need employees who are good communicators, both in written and oral forms.

Table 3: *Academic Skills Most Applicable to Job Performance (Supervisors' Viewpoint)*

Academic Skills	Rating	Rank
Organizational Communication	4.95	1
Interpersonal Skills	4.90	2
Critical, Analytical & Reflective Thinking	4.87	3
Listening	4.85	4
Cooperative Planning & Teamwork	4.72	5
Social Responsibility	4.60	6
Leadership	4.49	7
Reading Comprehension	4.35	8
Workplace –readiness	4.31	9
Oral Presentation	4.28	10
Data Gathering	4.27	11
Oral Expression	4.26	12
Grammatical	4.23	13
Statistics/Mathematical	4.18	14
Business Letter Writing	4.17	15
Non-Verbal Communication	4.03	16
Information Technology	4.00	17

Literature-related skills and physical education are skills found to be least useful as seen in Table 4. This runs parallel with the move of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to realign the AB English curriculum so that it deals more on Language and less (or even no longer)

on Literature. The skills of playing sports and dancing have understandably been given low ratings because they have little, if any, relation to the job.

Table 4: *Academic Skills Least Applicable to Job Performance (Supervisors' Point of View)*

Academic Skill	Rating	Rank
Literary Evaluation	1.90	34
Playing Sports	1.82	35
Comparing & Contrasting of Literary Masterpieces	1.68	36
Literary Interpretation & Analysis	1.64	37
Literary Performance	1.54	38
Writing of Literary Criticism	1.51	39
Defining of Literary Terminologies	1.42	40
Folk & Ballroom Dancing	1.32	41

While literature courses are instrumental in developing critical, analytical and reflective thinking, fact cannot be discounted that other skills developed from literary studies are not readily applicable to the workplace. The focus-group discussion provided insights on the issue. DOT representative maintained: “I think Literature subjects develop our critical thinking skills. We may not see its importance right away but it does help students become more proficient in communication such as writing.” (FGD, May 12, 2015) Former LP trainee also stressed a similar point by emphasizing that: “my writing skills were developed because of the literature subjects I have gone through and I was and still am able to apply it in my day-to-day task as an administrative aide for the mayor as I am tasked to also write some of her speeches, presentations and reports. I am able to apply literature values and writing skills.” (FGD, May 12, 2015). On the other hand, a recent AB English graduate offered a different viewpoint: “Literature is important for it develops our comprehension and thinking skills but the students find it hard to apply their literature skills into their daily communication and tasks.” (FGD, May 12, 2015) DOT representative agreed, and thus pointed out: “AB English curriculum hones you and leads you to the academe. Maybe the curriculum may be adjusted in a way that we can incorporate more technical subjects which develops skills that are required by the work industry.” (FGD, May 12, 2015). To this DSWD representative added: “Maybe lessen literature subjects, make it elective subjects only.” (FGD, May 12, 2015). Following this line of thought, the panel seemed to arrive at an agreement summed up in a comment, thus: “lessen and remove other literature subjects that seem redundant all throughout the course of the program. Though

we appreciate those literature subjects, I think some are no longer necessary to prepare us for the corporate world.” (FGD, May 12, 2015).

This research sees the value of inculcating higher order thinking skills which can only be attained by rigorous reading or even viewing of academic materials, regardless of content classification. The more critical aspect is the attainment of the set learning outcomes which necessarily must be constructively aligned to instructional strategies and assessment. Content becomes secondary to the outcome which is now the take-off point of all instruction. Teachers become secondary to learners who now occupy the central role in the process.

As for physical education courses, relegating it to basic education might just be a solution.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

There are academic skills that are most and least useful to actual job performance. These are the skills that matter and do not matter to the industry when graduates from the academe flock the workplace. Academic skills most applicable to job performance of language practicum trainees are communication and communication-related skills. Competencies related to the business world, particularly on corporate/organizational communication should be made the core competencies of AB English curriculum. Students must not only be thought general communication theory and practice, but more so be geared to specific communication purposes, that of sharing information within a business. It is recommended further that these be considered in the crafting of future curriculum to ensure that graduates are job-ready.

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