



Employability and Competence Skills of Graduating Students in a Private Higher Educational Institution in Taguig City, Metro Manila, Philippines

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Abstract

Policy makers in the Philippines are focusing on the gaps between the knowledge and skills provided by higher educational institutions and the job opportunities available in the labor market. Graduates are often faced with challenges in looking for jobs right after graduation, thus, schools play a crucial role in ensuring that students are equipped with knowledge and competency skills.

This study examines the level of employability and competence skills of the 309 graduating students taking up different degree programs of The Fisher Valley College located in Taguig City, Metro Manila. About 17.8% of the respondents are currently working and 21.7% wanted to work in the service sector. More than half of the total respondents wanted to work in the government. Most of the respondents will look for a job immediately after graduation. Communication skills are the most important of skills in order for them to get hired in their first job applications. The most important factor identified when selecting an organization or company for work is when it provides ample opportunities for them for career advancement. Among work-related values, respondents considered love for God and perseverance and hard work as the most important.

Five components of employability skills were identified: (1) problem-solving and analytic; (2) learning; (3) personal organization and time management; (4) creativity, innovation, and change; and (5) personal strengths. Overall, students assessed that these skills are very important in employment. However, they reported lower competency levels on these skills particularly on solving problems, identifying essential components of the problem, sorting out the relevant data to solve the problem, and contributing to group problem solving.

It is very important for all sectors, i.e., schools, government, and industry, to prepare the students acquire the necessary skills and provide them with opportunities as they enter the labor market.

Keywords: Competency Skills, Employability, College Students, Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

Entering the labor market is one of the major life-defining events in a graduate's professional life after graduation. However, there still exists a gap between the level of employability skills of graduates and their competency skills acquired during their stay in college and often, work requirements do not meet with these skills (Ranasinghe, 1992; Lindsay, 2002).

Higher educational institutions should make sure that they know the status of their graduates. Tracer studies are in fact encouraged to determine the employment status of the graduates. One way of measuring the effectiveness of the service delivery of universities and colleges is by looking at the employability of their graduates (Orence & Laguador, 2013; Loquias, 2015).

Policy makers in the Philippines are focusing on the gaps between the knowledge and skills provided by higher educational institutions and the job opportunities available in the labor market. Graduates are often faced with challenges in looking for jobs right after graduation, thus, schools play a crucial role in ensuring that students are equipped with knowledge and competency skills.

Thus, this study examines the levels of employability and competence skills of graduating students in The Fisher Valley College, a private higher educational institution located in Taguig

City, Metro Manila. The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the profile of the graduating students in terms of selected socio-demographic characteristics?
2. What are the work-related values which are considered important in gaining employment?
3. What are the levels of importance and competence of employability skills of graduating students in terms of problem-solving and analytic, learning, personal organization and time management, creativity, innovation, and change, and personal strengths?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employability is notoriously complex to define, but for the purposes of this review we have looked at research that uses the term 'employability' and which intersects with one of the key concepts which are contained with the Higher Education Academy's (HEA's) Framework for embedding employability. The framework was used both to provide keywords for the literature review, and to help in structuring our report. Higher education providers are under considerable pressure from policymakers, students and employers to ensure that graduates emerge from higher education ready for the



labour market. The imminent implementation of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) looks set to increase this pressure (HEA, 2016).

It is also possible to argue that a focus on employability is a moral duty for higher education providers. Students invest their time and money in accessing higher education with the expectation that it will offer them access to greater life chances than they would have obtained if they had not attended HE. For the most part, this expectation is fulfilled with graduates generally doing better in the labor market than non-graduates. However, it is not simply holding a degree that results in these outcomes (although there is an important signaling effect), rather it is critical that higher education develops students in ways that support them to be successful in the future.

Academic interest in employability appears to be growing. Academics are wrestling with the nature of employability, its political implications, the ways in which it is delivered and the relative efficacy of each of them. Academics approach these questions from a range of political, theoretical, methodological and professional perspectives.

METHODOLOGY/MATERIALS

Research Design and Sample Size

This study uses a descriptive, quantitative research design. It is primarily descriptive because it describes the characteristics of the respondents.

A total of 320 graduating students for second semester, academic year 2018-2019 were given survey questionnaires but only 309 questionnaires were completely answered. Eleven questionnaires were considered spoiled due to many items left unanswered, thus, the response rate is 95.24%.

There were 109 graduating students from the College of Business Administration and Accountancy who are taking up Bachelor of Science in Accountancy and Bachelor of Science in Business Administration major in Management. Eighty three (83) graduating students are from the College of Hospitality Management taking up Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Management. From the College of Computer Studies, 75 graduating students participated in the study who are taking up Bachelor of Science in Information Technology and Bachelor of Science in Computer Science. There were 42 respondents who are taking up Bachelor of Elementary Education and Bachelor of Secondary Education under the College of Education.

Instrumentation and Data Analysis

Survey questionnaire is the main instrument used in this study. Questionnaire items included in the instrument were selected socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, employment-related data, competencies acquired at school, work-related values, and levels of importance and competence of employability skills of the respondents.

Questions are designed on a 5-point Likert scale rating anchored on '1' with range of means 1.00-1.79 for not important/not competent, '2' with range of means 1.80-2.59 for less important/less competent, '3' with range of means 2.60-3.39 for moderately important/moderately competent, '4' with means 3.40-4.19 for important/competent, and '5' with means 4.20-5.00 for very important/very competent.

Frequencies, percentage distributions, weighted means, verbal interpretations, and ranks were employed to analyze the results of the study.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age Groups		
18-19	114	36.9
20-21	114	36.9
22 and above	81	26.2
Sex		
Male	162	52.4
Female	147	47.6
Civil Status		
Single	292	94.5
Married	17	5.5
Religion		
Roman Catholic	259	80.9
Non-Roman Catholic	59	19.1
College		
CBAA	109	35.3
CCS	75	24.3
COE	42	13.6
COHM	83	26.9
Monthly Family Income		
P10,000 and below	141	45.6
P10,001-P20,000	53	17.2
P20,001-P30,000	63	20.4
P30,001-P40,000	4	1.3
P40,001-P50,000	26	8.4
P50,001-P60,000	8	2.6
P60,001-P70,000	10	3.2
Over P70,000	4	1.3
Employment Status		
Currently Working	54	19.4
Not Working	249	80.6
Total	309	100.0

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage distributions of respondents by selected socio-demographic characteristics. Results show that 18 to 21 years old respondents comprise 73.8% of the total respondents while 26.2% of the students are 22 years old and above. There are more males than females (52.4% vs. 47.6%). An overwhelming majority of the respondents are single (94.5%) while 5.5% of the respondents are married. In this survey, "single" refers to those who have never married and "married" denotes those who had a partner (including common-law marriage). Of the 309 respondents, 250 (80.9%) students are Roman Catholics while only 59 (19.1%) are in other religions.

One hundred nine (109) students are from the College of Business Administration and Accountancy, 83 students are from the College of Hospitality Management, 75 students are taking up programs under the College of Computer Studies while the remaining 42 students are taking up programs under the College of Education. There are 141 respondents or 45.6% of the total number of respondents who have a monthly family income of P10,000.00 or less. About 17.2% of the respondents have monthly income between P10,001 to P20,000.00 while 20.4% has income between P20,001 to P30,000. The remaining percentage has income above P30,000.00. As to employment status, 249 respondents or 80.6% are not working while 17.8% of the total respondents are currently working.

Table 2. What occupation category do you want to work after graduation?

What occupation category do you want to work after graduation?	Freq	Percent age
Services	67	21.7
Technical	30	9.7
Operations	6	1.9
Business Process Outsourcing	13	4.2



Banking and Finance	43	13.9
Human Resources	35	11.3
Academe/Teaching	51	16.5
Telecommunications	2	0.6
Trade/Industry	5	1.6
Others	57	18.4
Total	309	100.0

Table 2 indicates the respondents' choice of occupation category after graduation. The service sector is the top choice of the respondents (21.7%), followed by academe or teaching (16.5%), banking and finance (13.9%), and human resources (11.3%). Others wanted to work in the technical, business process outsourcing, operations, and trade or industry. The remaining 18.4% of the respondents choose to work in other fields.

From the table above, many students wanted to work in occupations which are outlined within the business administration and accountancy programs. This can be attributed to the fact that there is a high demand in the local and global workplace and diverse business environments that produces intangible goods, more precisely services for business graduates. Countries with economies focused on the service sector are considered more advanced than other markets. This perception is paralleled by Uhlig, et al (2017) when they affirmed that employees with business administration and accountancy degrees have higher earnings, job security and job satisfaction.

Table 3. What type of company/organization do you want to work?

What type of company/organization do you want to work?	Frequency	Percentage
Private	124	40.1
Government	185	59.9
Total	309	100.0

The person's response to employability concern is determined by the type of organization he is engaged in, hence, variable was examined by the researchers and data relating to the type of organization is depicted in Table 3. Surprisingly, majority of the respondents (59.9%) wanted to work in the government sector as contrast to 40.1% who wanted to get an employment in private companies. Many graduating students are enthusiastic to take their career paths in the government due to the benefits and job security. These factors make government positions beneficial.

Table 4. Is there any member of your family who attended in this school?

Is there any member of your family who attended in this school?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	139	45.0
No	170	55.0
Total	309	100.0

Students were asked whether or not there are family members who attended in the same institution. While more than half (55.0%) of the respondents stated in the negative, the remaining 45% who said that there are family members who also attended in the same institution is considered a high percentage.

Table 5. What is your plan after graduation?

What is your plan after graduation?	Frequency	Percentage
Look for a job immediately	249	80.6
Currently working, continue with my present employment	16	5.2
Start my own business	5	1.6
Join family business	7	2.3
Pursue further studies	10	3.2
Migrate	11	3.6
Rest	1	0.3

Do not have any idea yet	10	3.2
Total	309	100.0

Respondents were also asked about their plans after graduation as shown in Table 5. Around 249 or 80.6% of the respondents were decided to look for a job immediately while 5.2% of the graduating students will continue working in their present employment. Eleven (11) students stated that they will migrate or go abroad while 10 students will pursue further studies, i., will be taking master's degrees. Seven (7) students will join family businesses and five (5) students will start their own businesses. There are 10 students who do not have any idea yet what to do while one student stated that he will not do anything but rest.

The result confirms that majority of respondents were willing to look for a job immediately or after graduation in order to utilize their level of education. Both male and female respondents regardless of course programs convinced that college education is an important investment that helps people build their skills and prepare for high-skilled jobs. Historically, those who have made this investment have received a substantial economic benefit that lasts over their lifetime (Abel et al., 2014).

However, there have been reports of newly minted college graduates who are unsuccessful at finding jobs suited to their level of education and those who do find work are often confined to low-wage positions (Vedder et al., 2013). Moreover, some factors may hinder in finding a job is due to a mismatch between the aspirations of graduates and employment opportunities available and the influence of career choice decisions for an individual's career (Nyamwange, 2016).

Table 6. How much is your expected gross monthly salary as new graduate?

What is your plan after graduation?	Frequency	Percentage
P10,000 and below	249	80.6
P10,001-P12,000	16	5.2
P12,001-P15,000		
P15,001-P17,000	5	1.6
P17,001-P20,000	7	2.3
P20,001-P22,000	10	3.2
P22,000-P25,000	11	3.6
P25,001-P27,000	1	0.3
Over P27,000	10	3.2
Total	309	100.0

Table 6 shows the expected gross monthly salary of respondents as new graduates. it is clear that the most number of respondents belongs to the salary range of 10,000 and below that accounts to 80.6%, 16 or 5.2% from 10,001-12,000, 11 or 3.6% from 20,001-22,000, 10 or 3.2% from 17,001-20,000 and 25,001-27,000, respectively. Seven respondents or 2.3% from 15,001-17,000 salary range, 5 or 1.6% from 12,001-15,000, 1 or 0.3% from 22,000-25,000 and the monthly salary of over 27,000 is the lowest point or insignificant.

The analysis validates findings in previous research that newly graduates would accept jobs with low salaries since they do not have professional experiences yet and they can change jobs within a year (Barea and Vasudeva, 2015). Salary is not a constraint for the right people. Recent graduates expressed that they would desire to work at a firm with a satisfied social atmosphere and accept a lower salary, rather than receive high salaries with less entertainment.

Table 7. Which of the following competencies is the most important to you in order to be hired in a company?

Which of the following competencies is the most important to you in order to be hired in a company?	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Communication Skills	171	55.3	1
Critical Thinking Skills	27	8.7	3
Entrepreneurial Skills	60	19.4	2



Human Relations Skills	17	5.5	6
Information Technology Skills	16	5.2	5
Problem-solving Skills	18	5.8	4
Total	309	100.0	

Table 8. Which of the following factors is the most important to you when selecting an organization or company for work?

Which of the following factors is the most important to you when selecting an organization or company for work?	Freq	Perce
	uency	ntage
Provides ample opportunities for career advancement	189	61.2
Has opening for my preferred field of interest	48	15.5
Presence of friends or relatives in the company	8	2.6
Near my residence	59	19.1
Others	5	1.6
Total	309	100.0

Table 8 shows the list of factors which are considered the most important for the respondents when selecting an organization or company for work. Out of the 309 respondents, 189 (61.2%) indicated that they will choose a company that provides ample opportunities for career advancement while about 19.1% will consider a company if it is near their places of residence. About 15.5% of the respondents will choose an organization that provides job opening for their preferred field of interest while 2.6% or eight respondents indicated that the presence of friends or relatives in the company is the most important factor. Meanwhile, five (5) respondents mentioned other reasons.

It is interesting to note that when growth opportunities are abundant and environment is conducive, individuals work with considerably more vigor. This is possible to have an influence on the responses of the respondents. Research has shown unequivocally that greater career development leads to increased productivity and commitment. Li et al. (2016) examined the impact of career development on employee commitment among part-time faculty in Hong Kong University. They found out that career development have a significantly positive influence on employee commitment. Kraimer et al. (2011) asserted that perceived growth opportunities offered have been linked to higher job performance and lower turnover rate.

In recent decades, career development has seen a shift in the way it is approached. Traditionally, it was up to an organization to ensure that its employees had the skills to meet the company’s long-term goals. This shift has changed the way that organizations handle career development. Employer invests in their employees via career development in order to improve organizations’ competitive ultimately. They undertook that career development should be nuanced and tailored to individual needs and stages of career. Lee and Bruvold (2003) claimed that equipping employees with competencies, new knowledge and skills means investment in career development that can enable them to accept new challenges outside or within the organization.

Table 9. Means, Standard Deviations, Verbal Interpretations, and Ranks of Work-related Values

Work-related Values	Means	Std. Dev.	Verbal Interpretations	Ranks
Courage	4.485	.796	MI	5
Creativity and innovativeness	4.418	.816	MI	9
Efficiency	4.246	.956	MI	15
Fairness and Justice	4.401	.894	MI	10
Honesty and love for truth	4.492	.763	MI	4.5
Leadership	4.492	.917	MI	4.5
Love for Co-workers and others	4.440	.777	MI	7
Love for God	4.563	.926	VI	1
Nationalism	4.340	.969	MI	13
Obedience to superior	4.311	1.054	MI	14
Perseverance and hard	4.528	.877	VI	2

work				
Professional Integrity	4.495	.907	MI	3
Punctuality	4.437	.908	MI	8
Supportiveness	4.359	.949	MI	11
Tolerance	4.346	.977	MI	12
Unity	4.453	1.058	MI	6
Composite Mean Score	4.425		MI	

Table 9 exhibits work related values which are very much considered in finding employment among graduating students. Love for God and perseverance and hard work are very important with weighted means of 4.563 and 4.528, respectively. The rest of the work-related values are considered moderately important. Interestingly, obedience to superior and efficiency got the lowest mean scores of 4.311 and 4.246, respectively.

Refozar, Vasquez and Luistro (2017) found that hard work ranked second among work-related values which contribute to meeting the demands of employment among business and computer management graduates in a Philippine university. The consistency of the results is not surprising given the fact that Filipinos are hardworking individuals. They wanted to help their families who have supported them in their studies.

Based on the present study, love for God continues as the dominant work-related values or very important to the job placement of the graduates. In this today’s complex, fast-faced, demanding and volatile business environment this is most appealing. Reave (2005) detailed that spiritual values (including Love for God) animates transcendent quality of work. When individuals possess such values are more likely to increased productivity, lowered rates of turnover, greater sustainability, and able to promote positive work relationships. It is interesting to note that an individual regardless of caste or occupation embraces their sense of spirituality able to handle the conflicts, paradoxes and ambiguities (Silver, 2013).

Therefore, aligning an employee’s values specifically love of God coupled with graduate’s perseverance and hard work will surely foster loyalty and a bond between employer and employee (Buenviaje, et al., 2015).

Table 10. Levels of Importance and Competence of Employability Skills of the Graduating Students

Problem-solving and Analytic	Level of Importance				Level of Competence			
	\tilde{x}	SD	V I	R	\tilde{x}	SD	V I	R
1. Solving problems	4.372	.923	V I	1	4.220	.832	V C	5
2. Identifying problems	4.311	.901	V I	3.5	4.356	.881	V C	2
3. Prioritizing problems	4.307	.915	V I	4	4.367	.902	V C	1
4. Identifying essential components of the problem	4.311	.943	V I	3.5	4.223	.999	V C	4.5
5. Sorting out the relevant data to solve the problem	4.288	.821	V I	5	4.223	.949	V C	4.5
6. Contributing to group problem solving	4.366	.879	V I	2	4.288	.921	V C	3
Composite Mean Score	4.326		VI		4.280		V C	

Learning	Level of Importance				Level of Competence			
	\tilde{x}	SD	V I	R	\tilde{x}	SD	V I	R
1. Keeping up-to-date on developments in the field	4.502	.771	V I	3	4.372	.879	V C	3
2. Gaining new	4.557	.744	V I	1	4.482	.820	V I	2



knowledge in areas outside the immediate job			I				C	
3. Gaining new knowledge from everyday experiences	4.521	.816	V I	2	4.521	.828	V C	1
<i>Composite Mean Score</i>	4.526		VI		4.459		V C	

Personal Organization and Time Management	Level of Importance				Level of Competence			
	\tilde{x}	SD	V I	R	\tilde{x}	SD	V I	R
1. Allocating time efficiently	4.447	.883	V I	2	4.372	.901	V C	2
2. Setting priorities	4.499	.812	V I	1	4.346	.922	V C	3
3. Managing / overseeing several tasks at once	4.275	.956	V I	4	4.220	.992	V C	4
4. Meeting deadlines	4.324	.970	V I	3	4.395	.893	V C	1
<i>Composite Mean Score</i>	4.386		VI		4.333		V C	

Creativity, Innovation and Change	Level of Importance				Level of Competence			
	\tilde{x}	SD	V I	R	\tilde{x}	SD	VI	R
1. Adapting to situations of change	4.366	.950	V I	2	4.346	.901	V C	4
2. Keeping up-to-date with external realities related to your company's success	4.375	.909	V I	1	4.401	.834	V C	2
3. Re-conceptualizing your role in response to changing corporate realities	4.324	.900	V I	4	4.392	.844	V C	3
4. Initiating change to enhance productivity	4.363	.911	V I	3	4.414	.885	V C	1
5. Providing novel solutions to problems	4.262	.999	V I	5	4.249	1.006	V C	5
<i>Composite Mean Score</i>	4.338		V I		4.361		V C	

Personal Strengths	Level of Importance				Level of Competence			
	\tilde{x}	SD	V I	R	\tilde{x}	SD	VI	R
1. Functioning well in stressful situations	4.453	.898	V I	2	4.314	.988	V C	5
2. Functioning at an optimal level of performance	4.353	1.007	V I	6	4.275	.993	V C	6
3. Responding positively to constructive criticism	4.379	.982	V I	5	4.356	.910	V C	4
4. Maintaining a positive attitude	4.469	.913	V I	1	4.385	.962	V C	2
5. Maintaining a high energy level	4.440	.943	V I	3	4.369	1.054	V C	3
6. Ability to work independently	4.427	.939	V I	4	4.398	.919	V C	1
<i>Composite Mean Score</i>	4.425		VI		4.350		V C	

Table 10 shows the levels of importance and competence of employability skills of graduating students. Learning skills are considered very important and at the same time, respondents reported very competent in these areas. It is very important for them to gain new knowledge in areas outside of their immediate job and from everyday experiences and keeping up-to-date on the developments in the field.

Among the five skills, problem-solving and analytical skills ranked fifth in terms of importance and competence as perceived by the respondents. While verbal interpretations suggest that these are very important and respondents claimed that they are very competent in identifying and solving problems, this is worthy of taking into scrutiny.

One striking result in this study is that the levels of competence of all employability skills are lower than the levels of importance except for creativity, innovation, and change. This means that while students believe that these skills are very important, they reported lower levels of competence. This can be attributed to the fact that they still lack the necessary experiences which are very important in getting employed.

Overall, graduating students consider all employability skills as very important with a composite mean score of 4.40. They also believe that they are very competent in these areas with a composite mean score of 4.356.

CONCLUSION

One in every five students is currently working while studying. The concept of work-study balance has been an ongoing struggles for many young Filipinos who do not want to stop their college studies. Universities, private companies, and government agencies, therefore, have to implement programs that would help these working students cope up this daunting task before them. Most of the graduating students wanted to work in the government. This is quite interesting because in the past decades, Filipinos did not want to join government because of low salaries. The trend was reversed in the past few years due to increases of salaries among government employees which encourages many young professionals to join the government. These future professionals also want to engage in the service sector. Services sector posted the highest share of GDP in the fourth quarter of 2018 which is 56.2% (DTI, 2018).

Communication skills are considered the most important of all skills, thus, schools should strengthened the English curriculum, particularly oral and writing skills, so that students would be ready to face job interviews. In addition, since Filipinos are considered religious, schools have to reinforce teaching religious and moral values which are important in the workplaces. Work values should be integrated in all aspects of classroom teaching and trainings and seminars.

While students reported a relatively high importance and competence in all employability skills, it is noteworthy that they reported lowest competency levels in terms of problem-solving and analytical skills. These sets of skills are important in examining situations to identify the strengths and weaknesses so that they would be able to make recommendations how to solve problems in their respective companies where they will be employed.

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