SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES OF BUSINESS

EDUCATION TEACHER IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Unemployment and dissatisfaction among employers are issues that need to be tackled order to align courses and academic programmes in public higher learning institutions (PHLIs). Curriculum, academics, publications, researches, facilities, administrations and students' input are some of the factors at PHLIs that influence students' learning. Students will understand the importance of evaluating their knowledge, skills and attributes better when they have been in the working environment. Effective educators must possess professional skills and attributes that will be examples to students, colleagues and members of their community. Business graduates in education are expected to understand and able to disseminate the theories and practices in the business world. Therefore, this research aims to: assess the importance of skills and attributes deem important in the field of business education as ranked by the teachers themselves: assess the development the skills and attributes among the teachers; and look at differences in the development level of the skills and attributes base on demographic factors. Statistical tests such as mean scores and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed to answer the research questions involved.

Keywords: Business Education teachers, professional skills, attributes, demographics

Introduction

Teachers play important roles in preparing the future generations (Ahmad Kamal Johari 2006). Their roles are not only to disseminate knowledge but also to ensure students development in a holistic manner (Ismail Zain 2003). These are extremely tough challenges, especially in the present environment, that demand bigger

involvement on their part due to the working culture of most parents. Curriculum, academics, publications, researches. facilities, administrations and students' input are some of the factors at PHLIs that influence learning. Graduates will understand the importance of and capable of evaluating their knowledge, skills and attributes better when they are in a working environment. Effective educators must possess adequate knowledge, professional skills and attributes that will be examples to students, colleagues and members of their community. Business graduates in education are expected to understand and be able to disseminate the theories and practices in the business world. Thus, the research decided that a research to assess teachers' feelings about the importance of some selected skills and attributes and their own development in the areas, especially in the field of business education is necessary.

Objectives

This paper aims to highlight findings about:-

1. The importance of oral communication, written communication, management, interpersonal, computer, analytical, team work, supervision, coordination and research skills and attributes such as high spirit, motivation, intelligence, initiative, creative, self starter, flexible, innovative, hands-on and result orientation in the field of business education as ranked by the teachers themselves;

2. The development of the skills and attributes among the teachers; and

3. The differences in the development level of the skills and attributes based on gender location of schools (urban or rural) and institution where the education qualification was obtained (PHLIs or other such as the teaching colleges).

Review of Literature

Educational institutions serve to influence students' attitude towards work and their function in work through formal and informal education and the social relationship in the institution. It provides career education and teaches about work: in other words, i prepares graduates to play their roles in the community. This is accomplished through courses or industry-related curriculum and the like. In short, the objectives of higher education are: to provide general education (Atkins 1995); to enable graduates to build apply and disseminate knowledge (Atkins 1995); to prepare graduates for a profession or specific work (Atkins 1995): and to generally prepare graduates for the working world (Atkins 1995; Fallows & Steven 2000; Norlia Mat Norwani 2009a). This shows that higher education focuses on not only teaching methods, evaluation and staff training but also on issues related to learning outcomes and critical skills needed to ensure that graduates can perform effectively in their jobs.

In Malaysia, tertiary education aims to prepare graduates in terms of knowledge in the selected discipline together with development in ability and desire to function independently and innovatively in order to face challenges of the ever changing environment (Fallows & Steven 2000: Norlia Mat Norwani 2006) . Education focuses on providing knowledge and ensuring development of professional skills, attitudes and values among the graduates (Norlia Mat Norwani 2009b). Therefore, nowadays teachers need skills to develop various abilities among students. The skills are related not only to new fields of specialization, and they need to integrate various fields of knowledge. Teachers need training in multiple disciplines, skills in information technology and communication. They need to be familiar with new teaching and learning strategies, employ creative teaching aids and possess management background and social skills (Athiyaman 2001: Drew 1998; Suraini Mohd Rhouse &

Azila Abd. Razak 2003). Multi-skills approach in teaching has the potential to increase studonts' skills and contribute towards flexible learning skills (Ismail Md. Salleh 2005). Effective educators must possess professional attributes which are reflected in their practices and behaviour in the classrooms, community and professional development (Ismail Zain 2003, Robiah Sidin 2002).

Methodology and Samples

The theoretical foundation for constructing the research framework was based on the Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model (Astin 1993a, 1993b, 2001). The model focused on student development theory which looked at the impact of learning institutions on students' output. The survey method was used to collect data for this study. A questionnaire was prepared It contained questions pertaining to demographic information, item that measured the importance of the selected skills and attributes and items that measured the extent of development in the kills and attributes involved (Athiyaman 2001).Items on the importance and development of the skills and attributes were measured using the Likert scale (Gay & Airasian 2005). Using the Nunnaly (1978) formula, the responses were interpreted as low, moderate or high level. A total of 300 questionnaires were given to 150 business education students studying at Sultan Idris University of Education (UPSI). The students were assigned to go to secondary schools in their home towns during the semester break of the first semester in the 2005/2006 academic session. This procedure allowed random sampling of the population.

The samples were teachers who were teaching or had experienced teaching any of the business discipline subjects in secondary schools. 243 questionnaires were returned for further analysis. The table below shows distribution of the samples based on gender, urban/rural schools and institutions where teaching qualification was obtained (PHLI/teaching colleges). Statistical tests such as mean scores and analysis variance (ANOVA) were conducted to answer the research questions involved.

TABLE 1: Distribution of Sample

CATEGORY		FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Gender	Male	82	33.74%
	Female	161	66.26%
School Location	Urban	98	40.33%
	Rural	145	59.67%

| Teaching Qualification | PHLI | 117 | 48.15% |
| | College | 126 | 51.85% |

Discussion of Findings

The Importance of Skills and Attributes

Table 2 shows the level of importance on the selected skills and attributes based on the responses from the teachers involved in the survey. All skills were ranked at a high level. Skills that are required to communicate information either verbally or in writing were among the top most in the list. This reflected the necessity to have a good command of the language to enable teachers to disseminate knowledge and conduct successful discussion in the academic setting. Without a strong ability to converse both orally and in writing, teachers will have difficulty to impart knowledge in their field, conduct active and meaningful teaching and learning activities, encourage active participation of students or convey messages to any body in their working environment. This not only will hinder learning and development among students, but also will become a deterrent factor in the professional development of the teachers. Such teachers will not be trusted with important tasks that can help to increase their capability. In the long run they will feel frustrated and not motivated to perform well. This will contribute to various unprofessional teaching and learning practices such as teachers do not prepare their lessons, students are asked to read the text book in class, exercises given are not cheeked by teachers, students end up doing chores for the teachers involved and many other practices that do not reflect the professionalism of the teachers. These partly contribute to the lack of respect of the public towards the profession. In the social setting, teachers who indulge in negative practices usually do not show commendable attitudes or much commitment in the community. This is in contrast with the practices of the older generation teachers who had been the pride of their community. Teachers used to be well respected and they played very important roles not only in schools they serve, but also in the society. Management and interpersonal skills were ranked third and fourth but still reflected the great need of such skills for a successful teacher. These skills were followed by the more technical skills that were required to enhance the effectiveness of the teacher. Computer skill, analytical skill, team work, supervision skill, coordination skill and research skill were the supporting skills that enhanced the professionalism of the teachers. These skills allowed them to be more flexible and function effectively as

TABLE 2: The Importance of Skills and Attributes

SKILLS/ATTRIBUTES	N	MEAN	STD DEV	INTERPRETATION	RANK

SKILLS:-

Oral communication	243	6.48	.735	High	1
Written communication	243	6.14	.921	High	2
Management	243	6.08	.896	High	3
Interpersonal	243	6.06	.843	High	4
Computer	243	5.91	.960	High	5
Analytical	243	5.82	.921	High	6
Team work	243	5.68	1.061	High	7
Supervision	243	5.51	1.165	High	8
Coordination	243	5.37	1.100	High	9
Research	243	5.29	1.192	High	10

ATTRIBUTES:-

High spirit	243	6.24	.835	High	1
Motivation	243	6.18	.848	High	2
Intelligence	243	6.17	.882	High	3
Initiative	243	6.11	.831	High	4
Creative	243	6.07	.944	High	5
Self starter	243	6.00	.923	High	6
Flexible	243	5.89	.907	High	7
Innovative	243	5.88	.942	High	8
Hands-on	243	5.86	.921	High	9
Result orientation	243	5.81	.907	High	10

teachers and as members of the work force. In addition, they were capable of handling multi-tasks requirement that usually came with the profession. They would try to improve their ability and initiate actions that could channel them towards professionalism.

The attributes measured were ranked at a high level of importance by the teachers. Attributes that were closely related to the personal drive and strength of the respondents were ranked at the top. These were attributes such as high spirit, motivation, intelligence, initiative, creative and self starter. The other four attributes which were flexible, innovative, hands on and result orientation were at the bottom of the list but were as important as the top ones based on the mean scores computed. Teachers need to have a very high spirit and motivation especially in the classrooms If the person in front of the class looks as if he is ready to give up the students will not be interested to participate on even listen to what the teacher has to say. Teachers kill student's motivation to learn once they show low spirits and lack motivation in what they do. On top of that, they have to be well versed in their teaching discipline to ensure confidence in delivering the subject matter. Then, came the initiative, creativity and hands-on focus in whatever teachers plans to do. They will not wait for instructions or for other people to take the first step in doing something. These are the self-starters who will also be flexible, innovative and practical in any actions they undertake.

The Development of Skills and Attributes

Table 3 highlights the development level of skills and attributes concerned as reflected in the respondents' responses. All skills were reported to develop at a high level. Team work, written communication management, oral communication and interpersonal skills topped the list. This fact is corroborated by the amount of interaction and communication required of the higher education student. In addition oral presentation are common practices in the higher education system to enhance students' confidence, cognitive and presentation ability. The skills are further enhanced when students are engaged in various academic and social activities. Analytical, computer, research, supervision and coordination skills are undeniably very important but are ranked lower compare to the earlier skills. The nature of activities and course work that students went through in the higher education system contributed well in developing such skills among the students. A planned curriculum followed by commitment of academic staff will help to improve the development of skills among students studying at higher learning institutions The academics must conduct evaluations to assess not only the acquisition of knowledge also development of skills and attributes deemed critical for the success of the students their career.

The development of attributes among graduates followed somewhat the same pattern the importance placed on the attributes surveyed. The internal drive such as spirit intelligence, initiative, motivation and self starter developed at higher levels compared to other attributes involved. Graduates seemed to maintain a high level of ambition and spirit on the top of the intelligence required of them. These skills allowed them to be flexible, creative, focus on result, practical and innovative. Overall, the attributes assessed showed very small variations in development. This implies that the attributes

developed and about the same amount among the teachers. Therefore, strategies undertaken

TABLE 3: The Development of Skills and Attributes

SKILLS/ATTRIBUTES	N	MEAN	STD DEV	INTERPRETATION	RANK
SKILLS:-					
Team work	243	5.72	.960	High	1
Written communication	243	5.67	.948	High	2
Management	243	5.65	.943	High	3
Oral communication	243	5.65	.986	High	4
Interpersonal	243	5.61	1.044	High	5
Analytical	243	5.52	.920	High	6
Computer	243	5.52	1.165	High	7
Research	243	5.37	1.089	High	8
Supervision	243	5.28	1.100	High	9
Coordination	243	5.18	1.109	High	10
ATTRIBUTES:-					
High spirit	243	5.76	.949	High	1
Intelligence	243	5.69	.909	High	2
Initiative	243	5.59	.989	High	3
Motivation	243	5.58	1.002	High	4
Self starter	243	5.56	1.008	High	5
Flexible	243	5.55	.996	High	6
Creative	243	5.52	.1.014	High	7
Result orientation	243	5.51	.906	High	8
Hands-on	243	5.50	.964	High	9
Innovative	243	5.48	.993	High	10

to increase the development of attributes among students can address the attributes equally. Priorities on certain attributes are not necessary but the focus should be to increase the development of all attribute as a whole.

Differences in Levels of Skills Based on Demographic Factors

Means of the skills and attributes involved were compared based on gender, location of schools (urban or rural) and institutions where educational qualification were obtained (PHLIs or other such as the teaching colleges). Based on gender, oral communication and analytical skills showed significant differences with the female reporting higher level of skills development. The female teachers also showed significant higher level of attributes such as initiative, intelligence and hands on ability. Based on location of schools, only management skill showed significant difference. Respondent who were in the rural schools generally showed higher development compared to their counterpart. A comparison based on institutions where education qualifications were obtained shewed significant differences in research skill and flexible attribute. Both factors were reported higher by respondents who obtained their professional qualification in education from PHLIs.

The female students generally were more involved and committed in pursuing excellence. Due to this they showed a higher level or development in a few skills and attributes. The higher learning institution can help the male students to perform equally well by providing healthy challenges that encourage their positive involvement in various academic and social activities.various academic and social activities. Motivation and guidance can help to encourage the students to follow the right paths towards development. Teachers in the rural areas showed higher management skills probably due to the challenges they had to encounter in these areas. The schools in rural areas often lack proper facilities and infrastructures. The background of parents in these areas also required the teachers to be more empathetic and resourceful. The government should continuously monitor the needs of the rural-area schools to ensure equality in education among the citizens. Based on institutions where education qualifications were obtained (either from PHLI or teaching college), it was obvious that PHLIs put a lot of emphasis on research. The curriculum a PHLIs had allowed students to be more flexible. This is particularly important as the curriculum and teaching strategies evolve according to the need of the country and fulfill global expectations. Teachers need to be practical and able to adapt their teaching and learning techniques according to the ability of the students.

TABLE 4: Differences Means of Skills

SKILLS/ATTRIBUTES	GENDER	URBAN/RURAL	PHLI/OTHER

SKILLS:-

Written communication

Oral communication   * (Female)

Interpersonal

Management   * (Rural)

Team work

Analytical   * (Female)

Computer

Coordinate

Supervision

Research   * (PHLI)

ATTRIBUTES:-

High spirit

Motivation

Initiative   * (Female)

Intelligence   * (Female)

Hands-on   * (Female)

Self starter

Flexible   * (PHLI)

Creative

Innovative

Result orientation

The future generations need to be equipped with skills, knowledge and values that can fulfill the need of the work force in the knowledge-based economies. This requires improvement in various educational aspects. Some suggestions toward improvement include:-

i)   Strengthening the teaching profession. Teachers must be provided with the best, continuous training because teachers will be the ones who will shape the future generations. Schools and other institutions must plan timely human resource

development programmes to maintain and enhance motivation and professionalism of their staff. Teachers must be given opportunities to further their studies at higher levels and ample support should be provided to encourage them to continuously improve their capabilities. Teachers who decided to continue their studies should be penalized in terms of remuneration seniority. In cases whereby temporary teachers are recruited, screening via mock teachings are necessary to ensure that the persons selected posses the minimum skills and attributes necessary to perform their duties in schools.

ii) Strengthening the command and use of the English language. There is an urgent need to master the English language in today's global economic environment. Language becomes *lingua franca* in business, technology and social context. Higher education should provide opportunities for students to practice the language as much as possible so that they can converse comfortably using the language in various contexts. A good command of English Language will foster the acquisition of knowledge due to the vast number of resources written in the language.

iii) Encouraging life long learning. This can be done either formally or informally. This practice will enhance human resource development and allow utilization of resources to the full extent. Students at higher education and academic staff at all levels must be encouraged to continuously increase their knowledge and skills by involving in academic discussion sessions among them on a timely basis. This can be a platform for them to share knowledge and discuss issues related to their fields of interest.

iv) Increasing opportunities in higher education. Public and private higher education institutions should increase enrollment of students particularly in areas such as information technology, science and technology to ensure that the ratio of 60:40 targeted by the government can be reached by 2010. This is in line with the needs in the global environment. The demand for high skills work force is increasing due to the shift to knowledge-based economies. Well-trained,skillful and knowledgeable staff are required to ensure economic growth and allow the country to compete globally. To be a center of excellence in this region, Malaysia needs an education system that emphasizes the preparation of well-trained academics and provides a condusive learning environment.

v) Fostering creative ant critical thinking. Activities at higher education should develop creativity and critical thinking among students. The ability to think critically and analytically will allow individuals to analyze situations objectively before coming to a solution. This ability is an important attribute that will bring about the best in a person's professional endeavour.

Conclusion

The development of skills and positive attributes among students at higher learning institutions are perpetual concerns among academics. In the past, the simple nature of

the educational environment did not impose a lot of problems to teachers. However, as we move towards becoming an industrialized country with a focus on knowledge-economy, information technology and globalization, the educational setting becomes more complex. Teachers have to better prepare themselves in terms of skills and attributes to enable them to face bigger challenges in schools these days.

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