

ABAC GSB FRESHMEN'S PERCEPTIONS ON EXPECTED PERFORMANCE DIMENSIONS AND LEARNING PREFERENCES: IMPLICATIONS TO CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND INSTITUTION DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This research aims to build comprehensive student profiles to identify perceptions and expectations of the students enrolled in the Master programs of the Graduate School of Business (GSB) at Assumption University of Thailand. The main purpose is to establish curriculum and instructional links between what is offered and what students perceived as relevant learning experiences in the program and contribute towards increased student satisfaction in their master degree education. Self-administered questionnaires were collected from 379 incoming freshmen MBA students from February to August, 2015. The findings of the study revealed that among the performance dimensions expected by the industry from MBA graduates, the dimensions on English proficiency, ethical behavior, and effective use of IT obtained the highest means. Interestingly, timely achievement and responsibility as well as entrepreneurial spirit scored lowest while based on their profiles, the majority of the freshmen are self-employed. Likewise, the overall students' preferences on the learning processes, modalities, and learning styles indicated no marked differences of preferences of one or two of these modalities and activities. This indicates that choices are generalized and would imply the need for a variety of teaching strategies to respond to the variety of learning processes and modalities that would require appropriate learning activities. To conclude on the interface of the three areas of the study namely: the demographic profiles, the expected performance dimensions, and preferred learning processes to areas of development in graduate education - curriculum, instruction, and institution development, certain initiatives for development were recommended such as: the inclusion of a module or course on the entrepreneurship as a basic foundational course for all students enrolled at GSB to support the third dimension of the Unique Identities of an ABAC graduate which is entrepreneurial spirit and leadership; the adoption and utilization of a brain-based holistic and integrative model of the experiential learning cycle by all lecturers to provide for the use of a variety of teaching modalities and learning activities in all courses. Further it is concluded that Quality Education at any level must come from the interface of quality curriculum, quality instruction, and quality organization. These three areas are intimately interactive and interrelated to achieve the desired outcomes of higher education and realize the vision of AU in "educating intelligences and active minds to change the world."

Keywords: Curriculum development, Expected performance dimension, Institution development, Instruction development, Learning preferences, Learning styles, Students' perceptions

“This article is a collaborative/collective composition of four professional colleagues of ABAC Graduate School Business based on the institutional research conducted by the ODI team on the subject indicated by the article title during the academic year 2015-2016.”

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INTRODUCTION

What makes a curriculum program relevant, responsive, meaningful, and appropriate to the learning needs of the students taking it? What makes it reflective of the purpose-vision-mission of the institution? These questions are challenges to university administrators in making the curriculum and instruction responsive to learners' as well as societal needs as they are stakeholders of educational programs at all levels of the educational system. Besides fulfilling curricular requirements from mandated frameworks on course content scope and sequence in higher education, it is just as imperative to obtain information from stakeholders on what is needed to enrich, enhance, expand, and ensure effective teaching-learning processes relevant and significant. This study intends to explore and describe the perceptions and perspectives of freshmen students enrolled at GSB and discover links to areas of relevance to curriculum and instruction in graduate education.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The overall purpose of this research is to establish curriculum and instructional links between what is offered and what students perceived as relevant learning experiences in the program and contribute towards increased student satisfaction in their master degree education. The specific objectives of the study are: 1) to build a comprehensive student profiles to identify perceptions and expectations of the students enrolled at Graduate School of Business (GSB) at Assumption University of Thailand, and 2) to

ultimately improve teaching and learning experiences of students and faculty members. As a result, findings from this study maybe reflected on class instruction and curriculum development at GSB.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relevant topics reviewed from the literature to compose this discourse include: demographic information, expected performance dimensions, theories of curriculum development, theories and models of learning styles, preferred teaching and learning methods, experiential learning cycle, whole brain literacy, and institution development.

Demographic Information

Given the highly competitive nature of many transnational higher education markets (Wilkins, 2010; Knight, 2011), institutions that consistently achieve student satisfaction can expect to gain competitive advantages. Wilkins (2013) states that higher education institutions that achieve student satisfaction can benefit in a number of ways. Satisfied students are less likely to drop out (DeShields, Kara & Kaynak, 2005; Schreiner, 2009); improve their competencies; engage in positive word-of-mouth and collaborate with the institution after they graduate (Alves & Raposo, 2009). Thus, it is important for a higher education institution to identify who their students are, their demographic profiles, what perceptions they have on performance (competencies) and learning preferences for the academic programs that would lead to higher satisfaction at the university.

Expected Performance Dimensions

As business organizations push the boundaries of efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, innovation, sustainability, and reaching out for their customers, achieving performance excellence requires the adoption of an open system business model (Gomes, 2011). As a result, higher business education is being called upon to meet new challenges that stemmed from the realities of the innovative open system business model (Frolich & Stensaker, 2010, as cited in Gomes, 2011). But there are still gaps observed between traditional educational preparation and recent organizational performance expectations that have been subjects of concern among scholars and practitioners (Agut & Grau, 2002; Agut, Grau, & Peiro, 2003; Digman, 1990; Gomes, 2011; Kimball, 1998; King, Flower, & Zeithaml, 2001). Therefore, educational programs should be aligned with the job market in order to improve employability of graduates (Winkel, 2010).

Gomes (2011) identified desired performance characteristic of entering managers from the point of view of Portuguese business executives. The questionnaire in the study was composed of 37 items reflecting the performance-related competencies, attitudes, and behaviors relevant to the expected performance of entry-level managers which resulted in five extracted factors:

First, adaptability and leadership factor included a set of characteristics associated with the adaptability of the entry-level managers to the organizational culture and the way they can influence it. Second, organizational learning factor underscored the importance of the organizational learning

process, in relation to the overall organizational performance. Third, effective utilization of information technology (IT) factor captured the importance of utilizing new information and communication know-how within the boundaries of established organizational rules and procedures. Fourth, timely achievement and responsibility factor emphasized the interaction between actions and responsibility. This factor included a set of characteristics directly related to the decision making process of managers. Fifth, entrepreneurship and accountability factors emphasized the importance of entrepreneurship and innovation within existing organizations.

Theories of Curriculum Development

There are two foundational works on curriculum development by Ralph Tyler (1949) and Jerome Bruner (1960). These works were not only among the first books on curriculum but also remain as classics and continue to provide the foundation for current thinking in curriculum development (Howard, 2007). In this section, theories of Tyler and Bruner and other important works on curriculum development are discussed.

Ralph Tyler (1949) called for the application of four corresponding principles in the curriculum development: *defining goals, establishing corresponding learning experiences, organizing learning experiences to have a cumulative effect, and evaluating outcomes*. Tyler's principles were the accepted approach to curriculum development for a long time, and they guide the essential questions of curriculum development today, though they are now applied to newer ideas and considerations that extend or reinterpret his principles (Howard, 2007).

However, Tyler's approach, often called the *product approach*, has been criticized due to its perceived mechanistic orientation to curriculum¹. In his *product approach*, behavioral objectives were the underpinning of its design and the success or failure of the curriculum was based on pre-defined changes in student behavior. In response to the *product approach* advocated by Tyler, came what is known as the *process approach*. This approach is most associated with the work of Stenhouse (1974), who advocated principles for selecting content, developing teaching strategies, sequencing learning experiences, and assessing student strengths and weaknesses with an emphasis on empiricism.

From another perspective Bruner's book, *The Process of Education* (Bruner, 1960), one chapter on the importance of structure speaks most directly to the development of curriculum. The theme of structure emphasizes the importance of presenting basic structures of the disciplines as the central points of curricula and the relationships among them. Bruner advocated that fundamental ideas, once identified, should be constantly revisited and reexamined so that understanding deepens over time (Howard, 2007). This notion of revisiting and reexamining fundamental ideas over time is what has become known as a "spiral curriculum" which has been widely supported by many researchers.

In his article, *Examples of Recent Thinking in Higher Education*, Knight (2001) provides a convincing argument for the superiority of a process approach to curriculum development in higher education by outlining the problems with an "outcomes-led rational approach" to curriculum planning.

Knight's major point, however, is not to advocate one approach over another, but to stress the necessity of coherence in a curriculum (Howard, 2007). He returns to Jerome Bruner's concept of the spiral curriculum, saying "Bruner depicted good curriculum as a spiral of repeated engagements to improve and deepen skills, concepts, attitudes and values, and extend their reach. The spiral curriculum has coherence, progression and, I claim, value" (p. 371). Contending those views, it is possible to provide coherence and progression in a process curriculum as well as in a product curriculum.

Problem-Based Theory of Curriculum Development

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model was developed in medical education in the early 1970's and has been adapted to diverse disciplines including business, education, engineering, social work, and high schools (Savery & Duffy, 2001). PBL is an instructional (and curricular) learner-centered approach that empowers learners to conduct research, integrate theory and practice, and apply knowledge and skills to develop a viable solution to a defined problem (Savery, 2006). PBL is characterized by a student-centered approach, teachers as "facilitators rather than disseminators," and open-ended problems as claimed by Wilkerson and Gijsselaers (1996). In addition to emphasizing learning by "doing," PBL requires students to be meta cognitively aware (Wilkerson & Gijsselaers, 1996). Students must learn to be conscious of what information they already know about the problem, what information they need to know to solve the problem, and

what strategies to use to solve the problem (Savery, 2006).

Understanding by Design

Understanding by Design (UBD) was initiated by Wiggins and McTighe (1998) which offered a way to design/redesign any curriculum to make student understanding more likely. The UBD framework offers a planning process and structure to guide curriculum assessment, and instruction. Its two key ideas are: 1) focus on teaching and assessing for understanding and learning transfer, and 2) design curriculum “backward” from those ends. (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). UBD differs from traditional approaches to designing curriculum because instead of planning activities or tasks first, it begins with how and what will be assessed. According to Wiggins and McTighe (1998), the effectiveness of curriculum, assessment, and instructional designs is ultimately determined by students’ achievement of desired learning. UBD uses curriculum as a means to an end and it focuses on a particular topic, uses a particular resource, and chooses specific instructional methods to cause learning to meet a given standard.

Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Curriculum

STEM is a curriculum based on the idea of educating students in the disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in an interdisciplinary approach. STEM integrates them into a cohesive learning paradigm based on real-world application. Using the workshop mode of instruction is the preferred strategy towards empowering

the students’ learning abilities. Modeled on STEM education, the lecturer and students discuss, negotiate, and design the curriculum focus using engineering process design as the main impetus in the learning agenda which may include business theories, business process engineering the learning agenda and encapsulating the principles of management, statistics, psychology, information technology, all to the effect of business decision making process.

Given that the students in the Graduate School of Business bring with them into the classroom environment, differing work situations and with diverse business backgrounds, the curriculum with its focus on learning by doing, and involving business concepts and process designs will empower students into not merely internalizing their theories but also gaining through workshop sharing the best of new ideas to take their business expertise forward. A highlight in this methodology is that students can then, through project work and data storage systems, evolve software solutions which could also be applied towards newer solutions within institutional searches for improved and better services components.

Theories and Models of Learning Styles

According to Keefe (1987), the exploration of learning styles was started by educational psychologists since 1960s. Thus, a diversity of theoretical approaches and models has emerged over the past several decades. Most of the research attention focused on the concept of field dependence, a holistic approach to learning, versus field independence, an analytical approach to information processing (Halverson, 1979;

Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974; Witkin, 1977, as cited in Rossi-Le, 1989). In this section, major theories and models of learning styles and modality are discussed as follows.

Learning Styles

Emerging from the diversity of cognitive learning models is a shared perspective that learning styles represent distinctive and fairly consistent modes of responding to and processing information (Gregorc, 1979; Keefe, 1987; Witkin, 1975, as cited in Rossi-Le, 1989). In general, cognitive learning style is an individual's preferred mode for perceiving, organizing, and retaining information. Some researchers have used self-reporting surveys and inventories to determine the learner's preferred styles (Dunn & Dunn, 1978; Farr, 1971; Keefe, 1987; Reid, 1987; Reinert, 1976). For example, Reid (1995) has stated that learning styles are internally based on characteristics of individuals for intake of understanding of new information in her Perceptual Learning Style Preference model. She further argues that all learners have individual attributes related to the learning processes. Reid categorizes learning styles into five types: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, group, and individual (Obralia & Akbarov, 2012). Even though Reid's model is widely used in foreign language acquisition study, this current research utilizes her model to identify learning styles due to the fact that the model indicates specific teaching and learning activities which can be directly applied to the classroom instruction.

Preferred Teaching and Learning Methods

As discussed earlier, one of the key aims of higher education is to help graduates

equipped with critical competencies expected in the industry. Correct interpretation of outcomes will guide both learners and teachers on the choice of relevant learning and teaching methods to achieve the intended learning (McKimm, 2003). Teaching and learning methods come in many forms: lecture, group discussion, demonstration, and case study are among just a few types of teaching and learning methods. It is well known that each of teaching and learning method has its strength and weakness. Therefore, it is essential to use a combination of strategies to best serve the intended learning objective.

If we are to reflect on the nuances from the review of literature on the learning styles that imply instructional strategies, on curriculum development that delve into structure and spiral progression of an increasing complexity of subject matter, we can draw three perspectives that would influence curriculum and instruction development at any level of the educational system, namely 1) the "process view" of learning, i.e. the learning processes as the "content of learning" as in "learning to learn to learn;" 2) the "content view of knowledge," i.e. learning subject matter mastery as a body of knowledge of the discipline; and 3) the "context view" of learning where the situation and circumstances of the learning milieu as would be implied in the cultural setting of the learners and the environment. The context view of learning therefore would be for Assumption University Graduate School of Business or any educational institution to consider the ASEAN Economic Community integration as a point of reference for standards setting and referrals in curriculum and instruction. The strength of this study pointed out what HEI's must focus on in terms

of preparing students armed with the whole theories for outcome based performance, and the major direction for proficiency in English and development of values or ethics.

Taking and connecting the “process,” “content,” and “context” views of learning, one can say that it is neither one approach is better than the other, nor an emphasis of one perspective over and above another that matters in curriculum development as well as instruction development. What is more important is for teachers to see and sense through all the dimensions and dynamics of the learning processes of learners in an environment and enable the learners to engage in a variety of learning activities and modalities to gain access to process learning, and content learning in the context where it is relevant to the learners themselves.

Experiential Learning Cycle

Kolb (1984) defined learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience.” (p.41) Experiential learning is a process of constructing knowledge that involves a creative tension among the four learning modes that is responsive to contextual demands. This process is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner “touches all the bases”- experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting.

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) has been widely used in learning, research and practice for more than three decades (Armstrong & Fukami, 2008). “Building on the foundational works of Kurt Lewin, John Dewey, and others, ELT offers a dynamic

theory based on a learning cycle driven by the resolution of the dual dialectics of action/reflection and experience/abstraction. These two dimensions define a holistic learning space wherein learning transactions take place between individuals and the environment (p.3)” in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned.

Whole Brain Literacy

With the advent of the knowledge economy of the third wave (Toffler, 1980) and the emergence of purpose economy (Hurst, 2014) attention needs to be sharply focused not just on the update on content knowledge in all of the courses in a program, nor on learning style preferences, but more importantly on the “information processing skills set” as key learning processes to making teaching/learning experiences relevant, effective and in sync with the changing times and content of the learning environment.

How does one facilitate learning effectively in fast changing times? For two decades Tayko extrapolated from the four-brain model of Lynch (1988, 1993, 1996, 2003), developed and applied a “frame and flow” called “whole brain literacy” (WBL) (Tayko & Letz, 1994; Tayko & Intia 2004; Tayko & Talmo, 2010; Tayko & Agloro, 2012) in curriculum, instruction, and organization development engagement, Tayko (2014, 2015) approached it as holistic or integral way to engage learners in “transformative learning and change.” The WBL way utilizes the generic, latent functional processes of the brain from four quadrants and take the information generated from the quadrants and connect them around a core

purpose – a core functional process which she added on to the four brain processes and called “I Live on Purpose.” To Tayko and her colleagues, the brain-based modality interwoven with the “purpose and process view of learning” is creating more effective, efficient, elegant, ethical, and excellent engagement in teaching-learning sessions. Tayko utilizes this “frame and flow” of WBL to connect, encompass, integrate, and make alignment of various models such as the experiential learning cycle of Kolb (2006), the Blooms taxonomy of learning domains (cognitive, affective, psychomotor), Gardner’s multiple intelligences and many other models. (Tayko & Talmo, 2010). The whole brain literacy when matched with the Kolb’s experiential learning cycle (2006), the nature of the stages of the experiential learning cycle is complemented by the corresponding and appropriate thinking processes identified as follows and illustrated in Figure 1

1. Stage 1 as Concrete hands-on experiences, matches with “I Pursue & I Preserve” processes to have a “direct experience,”
2. Stage 2 as Reflective observation matches with the “I Preserve and I Explore” processes to review and reflect on the experience,
3. Stage 3 as Abstract conceptualization matches with the “I Explore and I Control” processes to arrive at a concept or conclusion, and
4. Stage 4 as Active experimentation matches with the “I Control and I Pursue” processes to apply the concepts in new learning situations.

All these four stages revolve around the “Core Purpose” of the learning cycle which is to “cause learning to happen” thus one experiences what is called “transformative learning and change” through the WBL way. (See Figure 1)

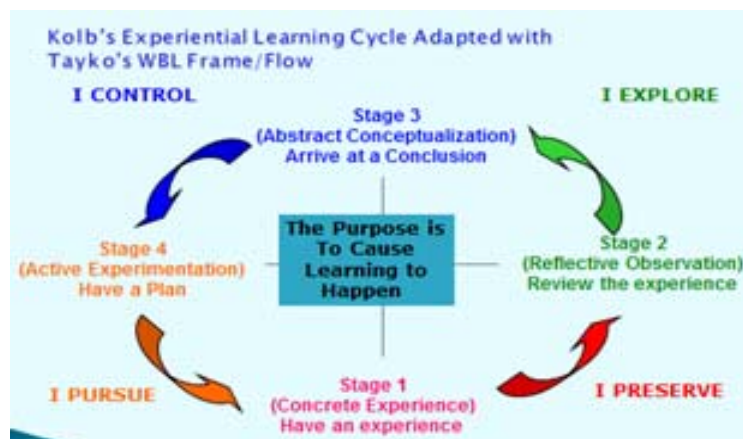


Figure 1: Matching WBL Frame / Flow with the Stages of Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle. (Tayko & Talmo (2010))

In the light of the advancement of information technology as the third wave of Toffler (1980) defining knowledge economy, the emergence of the “purpose economy” by Hurst (2014), the advocacy of Pink’s conceptual age identifying the “right-brainers to rule the world” (Pink, 2006), Friedman’s response to his own question what is the “right stuff for education in a world that is flat” (Friedman, 2006), and Zelenka’s naming of the fourth wave of development as the “web wave” shift from knowledge worker to “networker” (Zelenka, 2007), the greatest challenge for educators and human development practitioners is not on which teaching-learning strategies/approaches are effective to enable learners to learn based on their learning styles and preferences, but more importantly on how to enable the LEARNER as a WHOLE HUMAN PERSON to be challenged to “think, learn, create, care, connect” whole in all that they do in fast changing, complex, conflicting, and confluent times (Tayko, 2015). “Process learning” by tapping four quadrants of the human brain anchored on a core purpose ensures a holistic thinking or conceptualization of the world outside from inside, or within as constructed by the learner. This is the key to empowering the learner in a fast shifting knowledge where constant construction and de-construction of knowledge is necessary. Enabling learners to use “whole brain thinking” to experience “whole brain learning” and consequently do “whole brain leadership” is the direction Tayko and Agloro advocate for learners to be “on the ball – leveraging the future learners want using whole brain literacy.” (Tayko & Agloro, 2012)

Institution Development

An institution in contrast to an organization is defined by Uphoff (1986) as “complexes of norms and behaviors that persist over time by serving collectively valued.” It has long term duration in perspective with interdependent control of its parties, diffused delineation and difficult changeability. Using this definition of Uphoff, a distinction is important to make between concrete and abstract institutions. Concrete institutions include governments, schools, law courts, and the like. Abstract institutions are laws, market systems, unwritten social norms, marriage, money, and others. In this discourse the concrete institution like a higher educational institution, i. e. a graduate school of business is the focus for institution development.

Institution development is a process of improving institution’s direction combining managerial, technical, organizational, and behavioral techniques as a matter of policy direction. A more functional definition of institutional development refers to the creation or reinforcement of a network of organizations to effectively generate, allocate, and use human, material, and financial resources to attain specific objectives. The goal of this initiative is to engage in the private higher education institution to develop high-quality academic programs.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework identifies the interface among the demographic profiles, the expected performance dimensions, and preferred learning processes of the respondents and the possible implications to

institution development programs, curriculum development, and instructional development as shown in Figure 2 below.

The demographic profiles of the respondents – freshmen students enrolled at GSB provided important details to the characteristics of the institution's target market.

The expected performance dimensions are based on the industry's expectations of an MBA graduate. The expected performance dimensions used in this study are based on the desired performance characteristic of entering managers from the Gomes's study (2011). These are as follows:

First, adaptability and leadership factors included a set of characteristics associated with the adaptability of the entry-level managers to the organizational culture and the way they can influence it. Second, organizational learning factor underscored the importance of the organizational learning process in relation to the overall organizational performance. Third, effective utilization of IT factor captured the importance of utilizing new information and communication know-how within the boundaries of established organizational rules and procedures. Fourth,

timely achievement and responsibility factors emphasized the interaction between actions and responsibility. The factors included a set of characteristics directly related to the decision making process of managers. Fifth, entrepreneurship and accountability factors emphasized the importance of entrepreneurship and innovation within existing organizations. In addition, ethical behavior and English proficiency are included as they are two of the three unique identities set out by Assumption University besides entrepreneurial spirit.

Preferred learning processes in the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ), and preferred teaching and learning activities developed by Reid (1995) were adopted in this research. These learning activities include: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, group and individual learning style preferences. In addition, nine learning activities were used: demonstrations /models/practical sessions, books/handouts/readings, lectures/informative presentations, group discussion, guest speakers, case studies of actual companies, field trips, role playing, and experiential learning activities.



Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

Instrumentation

The data for this research were gathered using a survey questionnaire. The items in the questionnaire were generated using the following procedures:

In this research, three different measures were merged as one complete survey questionnaire: expected performance dimensions (competencies), the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ), and preferred teaching and learning activities. Several demographic information items were included as well.

First, there were five expected performance dimensions (competencies) extracted from 37 original items: adaptability and leadership, organizational learning, effective utilization of IT, timely achievement and responsibility, and entrepreneurship and accountability (from the Gomes study). In this current study, 18 items were selected in the questionnaire. In addition, two more factors, *ethical behavior and English proficiency*, are included as they are two of the three unique identities set out by Assumption University besides entrepreneurial spirit.

Second, the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire was adapted by the research team. The original questionnaire has 25 items and each five items are related to visual, auditory, kinesthetic, group, and individual learning style preferences. This current research utilizes her model to identify learning styles due to the fact that the model indicates specific teaching and learning activities which can be directly applied to the classroom instruction.

Third, regarding preferred teaching and learning methods, there were nine activities for students to choose from: demonstrations /models/practical sessions, books/handouts/readings, lectures/informative presentations, group discussion, guest speakers, case studies of actual companies, field trips, role playing, and experiential learning activities.

As a result, the complete survey questionnaire is composed of 40 items reflecting performance-related competencies, learning styles, and preferred teaching and learning methods. For items in both performance-related competencies and learning styles, Likert-type scale was used ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). As for preferred teaching and learning activities, respondents were asked to rank 1 as the Most Preferred to 5 as the Least Preferred, among nine teaching and learning activities/methods.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The items in the questionnaire went through a validity review by three experts. The instrument was pretested for reliability by administering to a group of 30 MBA students. The overall value of the Cronbach Alpha Reliability for the instrument was found to be .926.

Respondents and Procedure

The population for this study was freshmen MBA students. A complete enumeration of the population was used since the questionnaire were distributed during the freshmen seminars held in 2015. The first survey questionnaires were distributed to 91 students who attended the Freshmen Seminar

in February 21-22, 2015. The second set of survey questionnaires were distributed to 117 students in June 13-14, 2015 and the third set of survey questionnaires were distributed to 171 students in August 29, 2015. Before the survey questionnaires were distributed, one of the research team members explained the purpose of the survey and how the data were going to be used.

Data Analysis

The data in this current study were also analyzed using descriptive statistics in order to depict the data in concise ways.

RESULTS

A. Demographic File of Students

Of the 379 freshmen from three batches of MBA students, 64.45% were females and 35.55% were males. More than half or 57.56% were in the 21-25 years old bracket, 33.63% were between 26-30 years old, and 8.81% were in the 31-40 years old range. (See Figure 3)

More than half or 53.43% are of Thai nationals and 46.57% are International students. (See Figure 4: Nationality)

For the years of work experience 20.13% worked for less than a year, 49 % have worked between 1-3 years, 13.93%, from three to five years, and 17.23 more than 5 years. (See Figure 5: Years of Work Experiences Profile)

Almost half of the respondents or 48.5 % came from the Services industry, (28.3%) were involved in the Trading industry, 15.63% from Manufacturing, 4.2 % from the Extraction industry, and 3.36% came from academic institutes. (See Figure 6: Types of Industry of Respondents)

It is interesting to note that 70.1% are self-employed and 29.9% are employed. Of the employed, 61% were in staff positions, 15.6% in supervisory positions, and 20% in managerial positions. (See Figure 7: Nature of Employment and Figure 8: Current Positions)



Figure 3: Gender



Figure 4: Nationality



Figure 5: Years of Work Experiences Profile

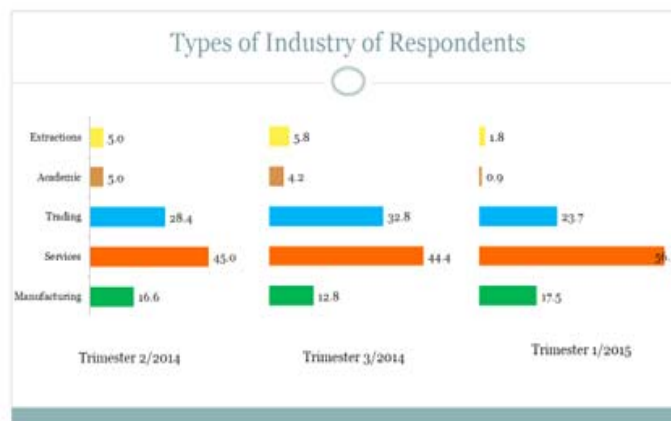


Figure 6: Types of Industry of Respondents



Figure 7: Nature of Employment



Figure 8: Current Positions

The profile of the 379 MBA freshmen students at Assumption University show that they are mostly young people below 25 years old, majority of whom are females of Thai nationality, almost half of them with 3 years or less work experience, mostly in the services industry, and two thirds of the group are self-employed. This kind of profile provides important insights into the industry's expected performance dimensions, preferred learning styles, and learning activities of this group of respondents.

B. Expected Performance Dimensions

Aforementioned earlier, three data sets were collected during GSB induction and freshmen seminar in February, June, and August, 2015. There are seven performance dimensions expected by the industry from MBA graduates which are adaptability and leadership, organizational learning, timely achievement and responsibility, effective use of IT, entrepreneurial spirit, ethical behavior, and English proficiency. Results of students' self-assessment on industry's expected performance dimension are shown in Figure 9.



Figure 9: Students' Self-Assessment Regarding Industry's Expected Performance

The overall means of seven dimensions are slightly over 4 which indicate the majority of respondents responded 'Agree' in a five point Likert scale. Three highest means among these dimensions were English proficiency, ethical behavior, and effective use of IT at the value of 4.31, 4.23, and 4.19 respectively. The next higher means were organizational learning at 4.15 and adaptability and leadership at 4.1. Both timely achievement and responsibility and entrepreneurial spirit dimensions scored at 4.03. Interestingly, entrepreneurial spirit scored at the lowest while based on their profiles, the majority of the freshmen are self-employed. These data show significant policy implication of curriculum development at the institutional level in order to improve perceived performance competencies of our MBA graduates.

C. Learning Process Preferences or Modalities

Five modalities of learning styles (or processes) were used for respondents to choose from as their preferred best learning modality as shown in Figure 10. These are: 1) Visual learning, 2) Auditory learning, 3) Kinesthetic learning, 4) Group learning, and 5) Individual learning. The mean averages of the five modalities of learning processes were obtained for all three groups of freshmen respondents. Of the three styles (processes) of learning, kinesthetic or learning by doing obtained the highest mean average of 4.04, followed by auditory or hearing at 3.90, and visual or seeing by 3.69. There is no significant difference in the means among these three modalities or the differences are not substantial which indicate all these three modalities need to be given due attention as avenues for

meaningful learning effectiveness. Between “group learning” and “individual learning,” all three groups obtained higher mean average for “group learning” (3.94) while individual learning obtained a low mean average of 3.22. This clearly suggests that the group learning is much more preferred for effective learning than individual learning.

In terms of students’ preference on learning activities such as demonstrations, group discussion, case studies, lecturers, experiential learning, handouts, books, guest speakers, field trips, and role playing, as shown in Figure 11, the three groups of freshmen respondents share similar mean averages.

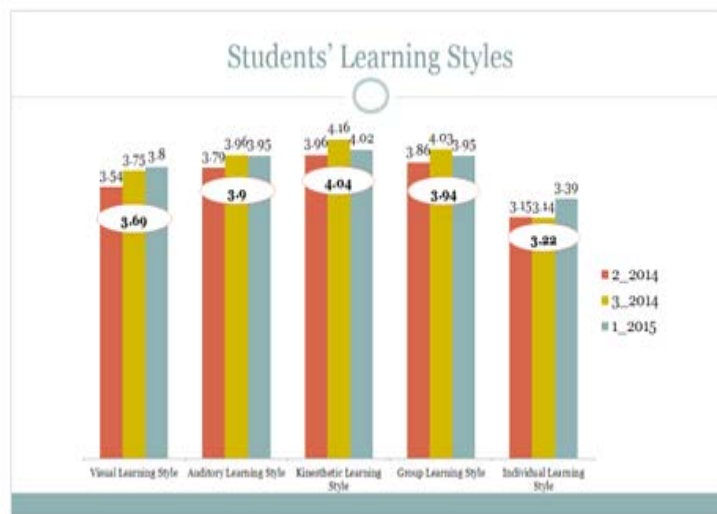


Figure 10: Students’ Learning Styles

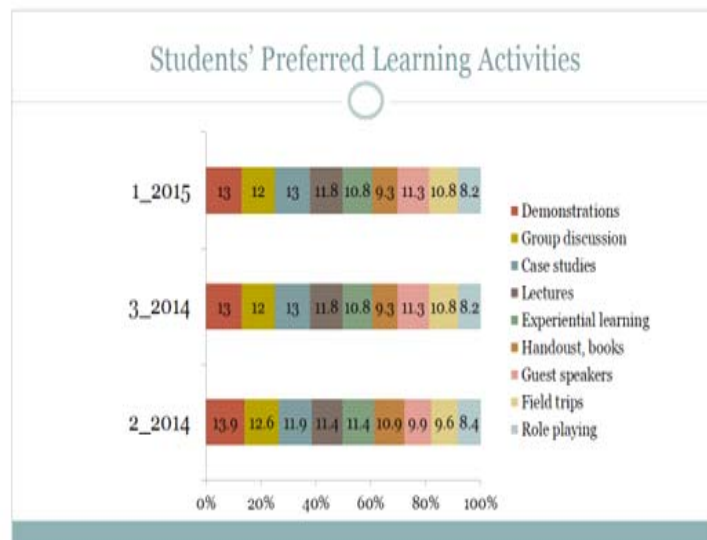


Figure 11: Students’ Preferred Learning Activities

The most preferred learning activity is demonstrations. These results suggest that all these learning activities are preferred as a composite set of activities that would be utilized in any instructional process. It suggests that these activities should be used when feasible and appropriate for learning effectiveness.

DISCUSSION

Expected Performance Dimensions

The industry's overall means for the expected performance of the 3 batches ranged from 4.03 to 4.31. This indicates that students responded between 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' on perceived performance dimension desired by the industry. It is interesting to note that of the industry's expected performance, the dimensions on English Proficiency and Ethical Behavior obtained the highest means of 4.31 and 4.23 respectively. These correspond to two of the three Unique Identities of an Assumption University graduate. However, the third Unique Identity, Entrepreneurial Spirit, obtained the lowest mean among the three batches of MBA freshmen.

One important implication to note here is that entrepreneurial spirit dimension scored at the lowest (4.03) while 70% of the freshmen are self-employed. These figures indicate significant curriculum development policy at the institutional level in order to improve perceived performance competencies of our MBA graduates. One suggested curriculum policy is to require all MBA students to take entrepreneurial courses. Entrepreneurial courses are not compulsory subjects in the current curriculum at GSB and

only a few MBA students have taken these courses.

Aside from putting emphasis on entrepreneurial courses, another recommendation for curriculum development is to continue to reinforce the English Proficiency and Ethical Behavior in the different courses offered in the MBA to further enhance the Unique Identity of an Assumption University graduate.

One other dimension which obtained one of the lowest means is achievement and responsibility. This dimension is actually a subset of the Entrepreneurial dimension under Personal Entrepreneurial competencies which include an achievement cluster and a power cluster (Hisrich, et al. 2013). If Assumption University MBA graduates are to demonstrate the Unique Identities of English Proficiency, Ethical Behavior and Entrepreneurial Spirit, the dimension of Achievement Orientation and Responsibility must be inculcated in the courses in the MBA curriculum.

Learning Process Preferences or Modalities and Students' Preferred Learning Activities

From the overall profiles of students' preferences on the learning processes, modalities, and learning styles, one can see no marked differences of preferences of these modalities and activities by any of the respondent groups. This trend clearly indicates that choices are generalized and would imply the need for a variety of teaching strategies to respond to the variety of learning processes and modalities that would require appropriate learning activities.

This further strongly implies that the design of curriculum materials on any content or subject matter and the matching of

instructional strategies to cause learning to happen would require a comprehensive, coherent, integrative, and holistic approach. Analyzing and matching those learning processes, modalities, and activities from a broader perspective, would call for the use of a holistic and experiential learning model that would encompass all of the preferences. Therefore advocacy of the brain-based model called whole brain learning that matches well within the Kolbian experiential learning cycle, would be most appropriate to use as integrative framework for curriculum and instruction design and development.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To connect and conclude on the interface of the three areas of the study namely: the demographic profiles, the expected performance dimensions, and preferred learning processes to areas of development in graduate education - curriculum, instruction, and institution development, the above implications point to the following initiatives for development:

1) The inclusion of a module or course on the Entrepreneurial Spirit as a basic foundational course for all students enrolled at GSB to support the third dimension of the Unique Identities of an ABAC graduate which is Entrepreneurial Spirit and Leadership. This would definitely encourage, inspire, and support the 70.1% respondents of this study who are self-employed. This then would increase the students' perception of the Entrepreneurial Spirit which obtained the lowest score of the competencies being assessed.

2) The adoption and utilization of a brain-based holistic and integrative model of the experiential learning cycle by all lecturers to provide for the use of a variety of teaching modalities and learning activities in all courses. This then would support the GSB policy as well as that of OHEC to adopt 75% workshop of activities in instruction, complemented only by 25% lecture presentation.

3) All initiatives on curriculum and instruction development to "cause learning to happen" and consequently generate the desired learning outcomes as competencies that exemplify the envisioned Unique Identities of an ABAC graduate, can only be effective, university-wide, when institution development initiatives are instituted in terms of policy formulation and implementation of curriculum and instruction development, supported by faculty development initiatives through faculty orientation, seminar-workshop, knowledge sharing, and research in these identified areas.

4) The emphasis on "problem based learning" can be offered to propel the "learning by doing" philosophy which offers the students the opportunity to look at problems, analyze them, and work out solutions through the applications of theories, explications of the facets of the problems, and exploring solutions to address the problems. There is also the need to a great extent, to take the "room" out of the class, by expanding the boundaries of student learning by linking them to communities of businesses, technology,

or emerging economic scenarios which help the students relate to the real life situations and then, think of solutions before actually advising the applications of possible solutions to real problems outside of the classroom limits. Here, Vyogsty's theory of the zones of proximal learning encapsulates the reflective mode where theories are shared and reflected on in classroom based instructions and then, tested and re-learned or re-discovered through actual testing. The use of ICT can also strengthen or extend the learning curves, given that much learning today is done through ICT connectivity.

Quality education at any level must come from the interface of quality curriculum, quality instruction, and quality organization. These three areas are intimately interactive and interrelated to achieve the desired outcomes of higher education and realize the vision of AU in "educating intelligences active minds to change the world."

Endnotes

¹Though he gave much greater emphasis to the active role of the students in the learning process and to the implications student involvement has for curriculum development in *Two New Emphases in Curriculum Development* (1976)

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