

Evaluating Students' Soft Skills Proficiency and Knowledge during the Industrial Training Programme in Lagos State University: The information professionals Perspectives

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ABSTRACT: *The importance of developing soft skills proficiency among students should be the priority of all the tertiary institutions in order to ensure their graduates are marketable. Therefore, it is essential for tertiary Institutions to distinguish the knowledge and soft skill levels of their students so that strategies and intervention could be implemented to rectify their capabilities. The main purpose of this study is to evaluate the knowledge and softskills proficiency from the librarian's viewpoints on the Tai Solarin University, Ijebu Ode, Ogun State students participating in the industrial training programme. A total of 120 students from different industrial backgrounds had participated in this study. A questionnaire consisting of five dimensions of soft skills which are basic knowledge, communication skills, practical skills, leadership, and attitude was utilized to collect data. The results of this study indicate that the information professionals were satisfied with the knowledge and soft skills proficiency portrayed by TASUED students in preparing themselves for the real work environment. The information professionals from the service were satisfied with students' performance in all dimensions of soft skills measured. However, information professionals from the technical service division perceived as moderate satisfaction for all dimensions of soft skills. Additionally, the information professionals of the technical service division assessed by giving the lowest satisfaction score for "hands-on" skills, but generally they satisfied with the students' communication skills. The information gathered can provide important insights from the perspective of faculties which is valuable in improving the overall hard and soft skills proficiency for future information professionals.*

KEYWORDS: industrial training, student's performance, information professionals, soft skills

INTRODUCTION

Numerous academics have addressed the value of industry training or internship programs, including Beck and Kosnick (2002), Griffith and Wilson (2003), Barney and Pleban (2006), and Lloyd and Briston (2006). The majority of these studies critically examined the shift in mindset that trainees ought to have by the time they finish their training. Even if students have improved attitudes, abilities, and maturity, their unconscious moods might fluctuate over time, affecting things like anxiety, work satisfaction, perception, and efficiency (Teng, 2008). These results highlight the need for more study, particularly in creating a theoretical framework for industrial training in connection to smart partnerships. A well-thought-out program of industrial training will equip students to become skilled workers who may boost the nation's economy. Numerous academics have addressed the value of industry training or internship programs, including Beck and Kosnick (2002), Griffith and Wilson (2003), Barney and Pleban (2006), and Lloyd and Briston (2006). The majority of these studies critically examined the shift in mindset that trainees ought to have by the time they finish their training. Even if students have improved attitudes, abilities, and maturity, their unconscious moods might fluctuate over time, affecting things like anxiety, work satisfaction, perception, and efficiency (Teng, 2008). These results highlight the need for more study, particularly in creating a theoretical framework for industrial training in connection to smart partnerships. A well-thought-out program of industrial training will equip students to become skilled workers who may boost the nation's economy.

Prior research has concentrated on how students view their experiences and the lessons they have gained (Mihail, 2006; Warinda, 2013). Mihail (2006) discovered that the short duration, low student compensation, and excessive work hours are associated with the structural weaknesses of internship programs. Programs for internships vary from course to course. Conversely, unstructured internship programs that have students perform the same tedious task every day deprive them of the tough work that would allow them to grow professionally and support their teachers (Rothman, 2007). Although an intern might not be able to work on more advanced projects, receiving the same tasks over and over could negatively affect their experiences (Crumbley & Summers, 1998). Therefore, it is imperative that academic institutions look at how their graduates are received in the workforce. In many nations, higher education officials continue to prioritize addressing the issue of graduates' employment. Given the present state of uncertainty surrounding the labor market, these issues are receiving more attention. The significance of "employability skills" is still emphasized by policymakers as a means of ensuring that graduates are adequately prepared to handle the demands of an increasingly flexible labor market. To make sense of graduate employability as a policy issue, this paper goes over some of the major empirical and conceptual topics in the field during the last ten years. The persistent rise in the rate of young unemployment appears to be caused by the existing educational system's inability to produce graduates with transferable and necessary skills. As of 2014, Phillips Consulting This article will emphasize a research that examines the performance of Tai Solarin University, Ijebu Ode, Ogun State students in the industrial training programs in light of the importance of understanding the quality of

undergraduates. The study's primary goal is to gauge the students' proficiency in fundamental knowledge and soft skills, which are highly valued by information professionals. The investigation's conclusions will assist the institution detect gaps in the programs it offers, allowing for the planning of the required steps to address the issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Roles of Internship Programme

According to University of Wisconsin-Stout (2008), internships are designed to provide students with "real life" or "on-the-job" experiences and are conducted under the supervision (direct or indirect) of an instructor. In addition, via interactions with the teacher and an on-site supervisor who will oversee them at the work site, students will have the opportunity to assess and refine their abilities. For many years, experiential education has been regarded as a legitimate approach that broadens the scope of teaching and learning outside of the traditional classroom. Information workers recognize the importance of academically driven internships because they believe that these kinds of internships would give them more human resources in this growing industry. Smaller participating businesses now use internships widely as a reliable way to find bright, overachievers who they may hire into their workforce (Mihail et al., 2006). Research from the past has shown that employers use internships to identify possible candidates for future hiring (Gault, 2000; Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Hurst & Good, 2010). Beard (1998) and McDonald, Birch, Hitchman, Fox, and Lido (2010) found that hiring choices are more frequently influenced by an employee's prior work experience. However, it seems that employers' and students' desires are at odds. While students expect to receive training during their placement, companies want students to be well-prepared with the knowledge and practical skills they have learned in college before starting their internship. (Gault et al., 2010). Internships are seen as a vital component of postsecondary education, offering advantages to students, faculty, and the university in equal proportion (Coco, 2000).

Beard (2007) makes the following theory regarding the issue of expanding the current internship programs: comprehensive programmed assessment tools that are used to evaluate the internship experience, students' learning, and satisfaction with the programmes can offer crucial insights from the viewpoints of the external internship supervisor and the student intern. As for today, a plethora of internship evaluation techniques used by the supervisor were founded on Kolb's theory of learning, which supports the use of experiential learning through four main components: Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC), and Active Experimentation (AE) (Kolb, 1984; Sweitzer & King, 2009).

Hard Skills versus Soft Skills

It is unquestionably necessary to have both hard and soft talents in order to thrive in a given professional position. Hard skills are, by definition, the technically attainable abilities required to carry out a certain activity. It involves having subject matter knowledge in particular professional abilities like arithmetic, programming, and engineering and involves being able to employ more of the left-logical side of the brain

when doing tasks. Hard talents may therefore be created via instruction and practice in that particular profession, without question. A mathematician demonstrating challenging skills can be counting an object's mass using a specific formula. Soft skills, on the other hand, are more employability-focused and involve a greater use of the right side of the brain. In schools, these talents are not taught very adequately. It may thus be learned on your own and via trial and error. Effective communication, problem-solving, creative thinking, and leadership are all considered soft talents. It is indisputable that soft and hard talents are equally crucial factors, particularly when it comes to employability. For example, a management of a firm would undoubtedly assess your suitability for a certain work by comparing your hard skills to those of the position (Han, 2011).

However, as soft skills are equally important, meeting the requirements for hard talents alone may not be the only thing to worry about. For instance, in order to impress the interviewer and get the job, we might have to go through a series of interviews where we have to demonstrate a variety of soft skills including effective communication, persuasion, and leadership ability. Thus, the significance of both hard and soft skills has been stressed in order to ensure the excellent level of the programs given by the tertiary institutions, particularly at Lagos State University, Ojo. The following are the recommended domains for program learning outcomes:

- i. Information abilities
- ii. Useful abilities
- iii. Social duties and abilities
- iv. Humanities, professionalism, and ethics
- v. Teamwork, leadership, and communication abilities
- vi. Use of scientific techniques, critical analysis, and problem-solving abilities
- vii. Information management and lifelong learning
- viii. Entrepreneurship and managerial abilities

Student Performance in Job Market

Student Quality

The quality of students entering the workforce can be broadly examined in two contexts: (i) after graduation, when they are directly linked to the workforce, or (ii) while they are still enrolled in school but working for industrial training as part of their coursework. The former could provide more information on the goals, perspectives, and abilities of pupils. However, it is costly and challenging to follow them in the labor market. In actuality, it's possible that a study's faculty participation count might be inadequate.

Although faculty engagement in the latter is more than in the former, it could be slightly skewed to represent student success and potential as workers. For instance, when students feel like outsiders and aren't assigned reliable assignments like regular staff members, they get quickly demotivated and lose interest in their studies. As a result, individuals might not be able to demonstrate their genuine abilities at work, as Teng (2008) suggests.

Students must participate in their industrial training program at Tai Solarin University in Ijebu Ode, Ogun State, during their final semester after completing all required coursework. During the four to six months of industrial training, students in these programs will acquire new information by their active engagement in the workplace and will be equipped with the soft skills required by industry. Offering industrial training programs during the last semester serves the primary purpose of enabling students to get work offers prior to the training's conclusion, so mitigating the issue of graduate unemployment (Praktikum, 2005).

Since industrial training is now required for the majority of TASUED undergraduate programs, it is important to assess students' performance to make sure the programs are really improving their ability to think critically, communicate effectively, maintain a positive attitude, and possess other qualities that make a good employee. Put differently, it alludes to the soft skills that pupils possess that enable them to collaborate and get along with others. To put it briefly, these are the dispositions and manners required to get along with others and create wholesome relationships. Hard skills, or a person's knowledge and vocational abilities, are viewed as a supplement to soft skills in the workplace (www.investopedia.com/terms/s/soft-skills.asp).

Presently, industry supervisors and assigned university professors analyze and grade every activity that students do during the training time at the majority of tertiary institutions. As an alternative to getting faculty input on students' performance, which includes soft skills, a survey was then conducted.

Skills Acquisition

Students should demonstrate the knowledge and abilities that will help them more easily handle the demands of today's industry. Eventually, they will have the chance to hone their employability and personal skills through their "real life" job experience. Technical and general skills are included in employability skills, as they are essential in the workplace. Technical skills are knowledge pertaining to certain subjects that we often acquire via formal classroom instruction. For instance, the skills and knowledge are required to do activities pertaining to computers, science, engineering, mathematics, and other fields. On the other hand, non-technical, general abilities are strongly linked to employability. In order to match the expectations of information professionals, our graduates still need to make significant progress in soft skills, which are related to generic talents and may be used across a range of topic domains, jobs, and life scenarios (Fairuzza, Nazuir, & Wahid, 2011). Furthermore, as per their research, every skill set mentioned in the soft skills training of the Intel Elite Programme, including communication, teamwork, creative and critical thinking, programming, project management, and decision-making and problem-solving abilities, is crucial in the workplace. According to the study's findings, graduates' unemployment problem is most likely caused by a lack of certain soft skills.

Furthermore, Bailey, Hughes, and Barr's (2000) study on faculty engagement in industrial training programs shows that interns' skill sets are on par with those of entry-level employees. These parallels emerge from the fact that the study focused on a number of skill areas, such as technical, communication,

writing, math, and science skills, as well as attendance, dependability, attitude, and productivity. As a result, it is imperative that tertiary institutions evaluate the knowledge and soft skills that their students have acquired through industrial training programs. After completing their training, students should be ready to use their abilities and competences in a genuine work context (Peacock & Ladkin, 2002).

These additional values can serve as a benchmark for determining if the goals of the industrial training programs are effectively met. What are the required competences and skills that students from the programs should be able to achieve is the problem. Using 22 skill domains from Murray and Robinson (2001), Mihail (2006) looked at the main advantages that students received from their industrial training in Greek universities. These skill sets were taken from the three primary skill categories—academic, enterprise, and personal development. The first group brings together learning-related abilities including computer literacy, oral and written communication, and specialized knowledge.

The capacity to prioritize, work in a group, and manage time is the subject of the second category. Lastly, the last category includes personal qualities like creativity, self-assurance, and problem-solving skills. According to his research, students have the opportunity to improve their specialized knowledge and become highly proficient in the use of information technology. In addition, the industrial training helps the students learn how to manage their time and prioritize their tasks, as well as how to operate in a team and have open communication. Thus, it can be determined from the examination of linked literature that students' effectiveness in the workplace may be measured by at least five interrelated qualities: fundamental knowledge, communication skills, practical skills, leadership, and attitude. Thus, in this study, those identified skills were included for the assessment of the TASUED students' knowledge and soft skills performed in the industrial training programmed.

METHOD

Population of the Study

This study obtained feedbacks from faculties on performance of TASUED students from their experience with the industrial training programs. A group of students from various academic programs who went for industrial training in January 2023/2024) was chosen as a population and the distribution of students' academic programs is tabulated in Table 1.

| Academic Programs | Number of students |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Computer Science | 25 |
| Physics (Ed) | 20 |
| Biology (Ed.) | 15 |

| | | | |
|-------|-------------------------------------|----|----|
| Table | Chemistry (Ed.) | 11 | 1. |
| | Mathematics | 10 | |
| | Human Kinetics and Health Education | 10 | |
| | Educational Management | 15 | |
| | Library and information science | 31 | |

Number of students involved in the industrial training program January 2023/2024 session based on academic area of study

Respondent Identification

There were 8 faculties involved in placing TASUED students for industrial training programs for January 2023/2024 session. They accepted a student or more at one time, and the training may take two and the half months, four months or six months depending on the programs of study. Some of these faculties have been participating in the industrial training programs for many years and others may be first timers. However, such status will not be a major barrier in their assessment of students' performance. All faculties participating in the industrial training programs must provide their backgrounds for record purposes and this information is stored in the Practicum System, and is used in this study.

Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire development process is divided into four phases as the following: (i) analysis of the related literature, (ii) focus group, (iii) item development, and (iv) face or content validation. List of skills as highlighted by Mihail (2006), Bailey et al. (2000) and Breugh (2008) is used as a basis to identify skills that should be attained by the students from this study. Later, these skills are grouped into four dimensions of the soft skills and one dimension regarding the basic knowledge through discussion by experts from the University Industrial Training Programs in a focus group session. Results obtained by this group lead to the designing of the questionnaire and finally, the questionnaire is tested through face and content validation process before it is finalized.

Identifying Knowledge and Soft Skills

The questionnaire focuses on four dimensions of soft skills which are (i) communication skills, (ii) practical skills, (iii) leadership (iv) attitude, and one-dimension pertaining to basic knowledge. Measurable components were then identified for each dimension and listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Dimension of knowledge and soft skills' measurable components

| Dimension | Measured Component |
|----------------------|--|
| Basic knowledge | Knowledge on the field of study, responsibility, attached industry and current issues. |
| Communication skills | Level of capabilities to deliver thought, opinion, and perform negotiation with patrons, |
| Practical skills | Components in this dimension include students' ability to use computers and technology and solve the assigned problems. |
| Leadership | This dimension consists of components such as the ability to make decisions pertaining to the task planning, to lead other colleagues, willingness to accept responsibilities. |
| Attitude | Components in this dimension include level of commitment on the career, time management, willingness in giving assistance when needed and tasks prioritization. |

The goal of the basic knowledge assessment is to gauge students' understanding of how to find out about the associated faculty, the assigned work or projects, how to apply what they have learned in class, and some contemporary challenges related to these topics. The communication skills assessment measures the students' ability to express themselves both orally and in writing when completing assignments.

The provision of a genuine work environment for students to acquire information or theories is a primary goal of industrial training programs. Thus, this study looks at how students might use what they learn in the classroom to solve real-world problems utilizing ICT, other technology, and other potential solutions. The elements that make up practical skills will dictate how well-equipped a person is to handle popular technology in management contexts. The measures that are often used in medical and engineering industrial training programs that require students to employ specialized technologies or systems are not included in this dimension.

The goal of leadership is to gauge how well kids make decisions. This dimension's components look at the students' capacity for responsibility toward a task, teamwork and leadership, and planning and executing the right course of action for a particular assignment. Lastly, the attitude dimension looks into the discipline and manners of the pupils during the instruction. This dimension looks for traits in students such as their drive to grow personally, dedication to their work, courage to take on new challenges, self-discipline in managing their time, and readiness to support others in achieving similar goals.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire consists of five parts which are; (I) profile of the participating industry, (II)

measurement of the five soft skills of students' performance, (III) measurement of the performance of the University in managing the industrial training programs, (IV) industry opinion towards the industrial training programs and (V) information professionals' suggestion for enhancing the industrial training programs as they prefer to. The focus of this paper will be on parts I, II and V respectively. All the identified components as listed in Table 2 are measured using the Likert scale ranges from 1 to 5 in part II of the questionnaire. The lowest value indicates less satisfactory performance and the level of satisfactory increases as the value approaching 5.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed through mail to the officer in each faculty who was responsible to supervise the attached trainees. Due to poor respond at the beginning of the data collection process, the questionnaire was again distributed to faculties by visiting them. Besides, phone calls were also made to remind the respective officers to respond.

The completed questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis to explain about the background of the sample and their response. A content analysis was also performed to determine some potential suggestions to be considered for further improvement of this program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analyses conducted on the returned questionnaires discover that students were good in hands-on skills, leaderships and disciplines. However, students seem to face some difficulties in understanding the new environment surrounding them as well as communicating in English language confidently. This may be due to a crammed time schedule during academic semesters that cause to isolate themselves from the community, especially when it is related to global issues that are beyond their subject of studies. Therefore, they need some ample times to understand new issues and respond to the issues.

In addition, Figure 1 summarizes faculties' perceptions on the investigated dimension of students' knowledge and soft skills performances. This chart identifies the critical signal of the weaknesses on the performance based on type of faculties. A short brief about the spider-web chart is as follows: a perfect performance will score 5 points, hence if all the five skills are excellent, then each skill scores 5 points. Labelling the points in the spider-web chart and joining the points lead to a perfect pentagon. The results in Figure 1 indicate the differences of skills sought by types of faculties. Interestingly, among these types of faculties, rated the lowest satisfaction score for hands-on skills, but they satisfied with the students' communication skills. These findings can be implied that the nature of the jobs in the factory and commerce may not be too involved with the public in most of their activities hence less communication would occur. However, students are demand to have a good basic knowledge on some technical aspects and hands-on skill especially when it is related to the tasks and responsibilities in relation to the respective jobs to be accomplished.

Table 3. Table of performance for five measured soft skills (in percentage)

| Skills | Level of performance | | | |
|---|----------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|
| | Unsatisfactory | Moderate | Satisfactory | Excellent |
| i. Basic knowledge | | | | |
| program of study | 0.7 | 28.4 | 49.7 | 21.2 |
| occupations | 1.1 | 31.7 | 45.3 | 21.8 |
| faculty | 3.9 | 44.6 | 35.4 | 16.1 |
| general/ comtemporary issues3.2 | 39.1 | 42.5 | 15.2 | |
| ii. Communication in ... | | | | |
| writing: English | 6.9 | 44.0 | 38.7 | 10.4 |
| oral: English | 6.0 | 46.0 | 37.6 | 10.4 |
| iii. Hands-on skills and Proficiency in | | | | |
| computer and software literacy 0.2 | 14.4 | 47.7 | 37.6 | |
| doing job | 1.1 | 19.9 | 45.3 | 33.3 |
| solving the given problem | 2.8 | 31.0 | 45.9 | 20.4 |
| iv. Leadership | | | | |
| decision making | 2.8 | 41.6 | 43.0 | 12.7 |
| leading peers | 3.5 | 45.7 | 36.6 | 14.2 |
| teamwork | 0.5 | 16.3 | 46.9 | 36.3 |
| integrity | 0.2 | 13.6 | 45.5 | 40.7 |
| responsibility | 0.2 | 13.8 | 42.1 | 43.9 |
| quality job | 0.9 | 27.4 | 46.8 | 24.9 |
| v. Attitude and Discipline focus during the training | | | | |
| | 0.8 | 2.2 | 42.9 | 34.1 |
| time management | 0.8 | 15.1 | 40.5 | 43.7 |
| lending help | 0.0 | 19.0 | 40.5 | 40.5 |

In comparison to Table 3, Figure 1 shows the variation of faculties' perception on the skills measured. Faculties from the services area satisfy with students' performance in all skills and the scores are similar. These perceptions are shared with other faculties except for factory and commerce as they rated moderate satisfaction for all skills. However, the results obtained in this study should not be interpreted that students with management background of studies do not fit into such industries. There are some departments in the place of work that they are possibly can be accepted such as financial department and human resource department. Students may need some time to get familiarize with the technical aspects of which are the major concern of these industries.

This study also discovers that there is no difference in work performances between TASUED students

and other students from various faculties. There are about 78.0% participating faculties in this study placed students from other universities for industrial training purposes. Therefore, it is a need to identify some differences in the level of skills among the students. In general, TASUED students are rated as good in soft skills by the participating faculties. Such performance is also rated to the other graduates. This result can be understood that students are having similar performance despite on the differences of teaching and learning approaches by the universities. Thus, it can be concluded that the issue of lack of basic knowledge and incompetence in communication occurs among the students. A more strategic plan that includes a smart collaboration between universities and industry must be carried out to minimize such weaknesses. In addition, the participating faculties also suggest some skills that can be embedded into a management student. These skills are basic accounting and financial skills, critical thinking and faculty management. Such skills are considered appropriate because all employees, regardless of their positions in the faculty, must understand how the faculty is managed. These skills are not only applicable to the services orientation faculties, but are also suitable to various faculties' backgrounds.

In summary, TASUED students' performances are satisfactorily in their overall practical skills, leadership qualities, and discipline although they do not have work experience. Most types of faculties indicate similar perception of TASUED's students except for the management faculty. However, students' basic knowledge and confidence to converse in the English language must be strengthened. Most students are rated well for knowledge pertaining to their program of study, but they are not equipped themselves with new information beyond their pursued study area. Meanwhile, the issue of lack of confidence to communicate in English language still remains, and it needs some structured activities or programs to overcome the problem.

CONCLUSIONS

The university and its faculties can gain valuable insights from the study's input on industrial training programs, which they can then share with the coordinators and administrators of the programs. The opinions of the librarians have to be taken into consideration as significant elements of a thorough assessment of the students' performance. As a result, the feedback that is obtained can be useful in enhancing both the general academic curriculum and the industry training or internship programs for aspiring managers and professionals. This study focuses on five areas of student performance: fundamental knowledge, communication skills, practical skills, leadership abilities, and attitude and discipline. Selected soft skills and knowledge that best represent students with management backgrounds are included in each area. But when it comes to technical internship programs like those in engineering, medicine, and pure science, one should take into account some added value capabilities.

Additionally, a future research might be designed to determine whether graduates from outside and ly, particularly those with a background in management studies, vary in any way in terms of soft skills. The identification of factors that lead to these inequalities will be helpful in developing better curricula for

higher education institutions, which will aid in their efforts to build human capital that is more aware and skilled.

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