

Desirable Qualifications of Home Economics Graduates as Required by Private Enterprises

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ABSTRACT

As home economists seek to expand their roles in employment, it becomes increasingly important to be able to describe their perspectives in relation to labor market. The purpose of this study was to investigate desirable qualifications of home economics graduates required by private enterprises.

Multi-stage sampling technique was employed to obtain 223 subjects from business firms, hospitals, hotels, and private schools in Bangkok. Data were collected through a questionnaire, developed and pretested to explore the opinion of the sample. Quantitative as well as qualitative analyses were conducted to obtain significant results.

The results showed the desirable qualifications of home economics graduates required by private enterprises as follows: 1) academic competency: work-related competency, professional creativity, and practical application; 2) special skills: communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills; and 3) personality and human relations: responsibility, discipline, enthusiasm, and honesty.

Statistical analysis of the data indicated a significant difference of academic competency required by private enterprises. In addition, an open-ended question revealed the importance to place the major concern on the revision and development of home economics curriculum to meet labor market needs. Courses suggested to be provided in the baccalaureate program included business administration/management, communication and language skill, personality development, human relations, leadership, psychology, and computer skill.

Key words: home economics graduates, desirable qualification, private enterprises

INTRODUCTION

In the world of knowledge-based society, intellectual capital is considered important. Graduates of new generation must have more knowledge and ability to apply their knowledge in the world of reality. Education institutions are expected to assume heavy and serious responsibility. They are needed not only to produce graduates with ability to consume

appropriate knowledge and technology; but also to produce knowledgeable people - - people who can generate knowledge when needed (Nakorntab, 2002).

Home economics, an applied field of study, combines knowledge from a variety of areas/disciplines to help individuals and society. Graduates with degrees in home economics may work in many positions in public and private settings. A report of Thailand Development Research Institute showed

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that home economics is affected by current situation/problems of labor market (Thailand Development Research Institute: TDRI, 1998). The expected positions available for home economists in labor force market in 10 years (1997-2006) is decreasing from 1,380 to 983 (Table 1). The number of home economics graduates in the labor market showed that about two thirds of the graduates (863 out of 1,186) were employed, the rest were unemployed (Ministry of University Affairs, 2003) (Table 2). One of the obstacles of being employed is that being lack of desirable qualifications (Office of Rajabhat Council, 2002).

This is a critical situation and it is an alarm for the profession, especially for many home economics programs that still attempt to keep traditional way of instruction and curriculum without concerning the labor market. A baccalaureate degree is not an automatic ticket to employment. Home economics programs need to be developed in response to employer requests as well. The professionals need to consider if the graduates

acquire knowledge and skills that are needed.

Hence, curriculum is an ongoing challenge in home economics in higher education. What should be done to revitalize home economics curriculum? This is an ongoing professional question. Curriculum planners have to seek the concepts, skills, and resources necessary for the curriculum development. *What should be included in the program to meet society needs as well as labor market? How should home economists prepare for the future? Should their preparation focus on life as it is today? Who defines what home economists of the future should be? The community? The employer? The university? What should there be for future employment?*

There are no answers to these questions.

Brown (1998) states that home economics program should be multi-disciplinary program. It should be constructed to prepare learners to serve the world of work effectively. Besides, Comb's (1994) study on trends of curriculum in 2010 points that future curriculum should response to the labor market. As home economists seek to expand their

Table 1 Graduates expected by labor market during 1997-2006.

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Higher education										
Home Economics	1,380	1,371	1,345	1,294	1,239	1,183	1,122	1,076	1,029	983

Source: Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) (1998)

Table 2 Employment of home economics graduates.

Institution	N	Employment		Reasons for being unemployed			
		Employed	Unemployed	No job available	Wait list	Pursuing education	Other
Ministry of University Affairs (264)		206	58	14	12	15	17
- Kasetsart University	38	26	12	1	2	2	7
- Srinakharinwirot University	27	20	7	-	2	4	1
-Chaing Mai University	64	49	15	4	5	1	5
- Sukhothai Thammathirat	135	111	24	9	3	8	4
Rajamagala Institute of							
Technology (609)		454	155	47	70	12	26
Rajabhat Institute (313)		203	110	50	15	45	-
Total	1,186	863	323	111	97	72	43

Source: MUA, 2003; RIT, 2002; RP, 2002

roles in employment, it becomes increasingly important to be able to describe their perspectives in relation to labor market. We need to recognize the voice of employers of what the curriculum ought to be and can be. Thus employers are needed to be invited to participate in curriculum development. Surely an examination of private enterprises ought to be part of major curriculum development or revision. Their involvement can alert and enable curriculum developers to see through the eyes of the public.

Recognition of the advantages to have broad involvement of people in the preparation of future graduates, the investigators invited private enterprises to provide needed information to the profession. This study was designed to explore necessary information and recommendations from those who would employ graduates of the field. “*What are the desirable qualification of home economics graduates required by private enterprises?*” The valuable results of this study are expected to assist curriculum planners/developers for continuously revitalizing our field.

OBJECTIVES

This study is an attempt to bring together opinions of and recommendations from private enterprises. The objectives were as follows:

1. Explore desirable qualifications of home economics graduates as required by private enterprises.
2. Compare private enterprises' opinions on desirable qualifications.

Consequently, this study put an effort to provide necessary information for curriculum planners. Most importantly, concepts/content/skills of what

home economics curriculum ought to be emphasized.

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative and Qualitative approach was conducted to collect data from executives of private enterprises. A questionnaire was developed and pretested for the reliability of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the instrument was .91. The instrument, 3-point rating scale, contained 3 aspects of desirable qualifications: academic competency, special skills, and personality and human relations.

F-test and post hoc Scheffe' test were used to analyze the differences among executives' opinion on desirable qualifications. In addition, content analysis was conducted to obtain significant recommendations of the respondents.

Population and Sample

Population

Curriculum requires that choices of many kinds be made from varying perspectives. Therefore, private enterprises, who employed home economists in Bangkok, were invited to enter into the curriculum planning procedure by examining their information. The private enterprises included those in business firms, hospitals, hotels and private schools. Lists of sampling frame were obtained from Ministry of Industry, Ministry of Education, the Association of Thai Hotels, and Yellow Pages.

Sample

In order to get precise sample that represented the population, multi-stage random sampling was

Table 3 Population and sample.

Private enterprises	Population	Invited Sample	Responding sample
Business firms	280	90	53
Service business	270	80	78
Private schools	300	95	92
Total	850	265	223

(Return rate = 84.2%)

used. Ninety business firms, 80 hospitals and hotels and 95 private schools were randomly selected. Total number of invited sample was 265. Of these, 223 participated by completing a mailed-questionnaire. The return rate was 84.2 percent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on responses to the questions exploring the desirable qualifications of home economics graduates required by private enterprises, 2 main results are to be presented in this part. They are general information of the respondents, and desirable qualifications of home economics graduates.

General Information of the Respondents

Two hundred and twenty three executives responded to a mailed survey instrument. Two thirds of the respondents were female (67.3%) and one third were male (32.7%). Regarding their positions, 44.4 percent of them were human resource managers,

30 percent were school principals/directors, the rest were supervisors and business owners (14.8% and 10.8%, respectively).

Frequency analysis showed that two fifths of the respondents were executives of private schools (41.3%). Twenty nine percent were hotels, 23.8 percent were business firms, and only 5.8 percent were hospitals.

Desirable qualifications of the graduates

Three aspects of qualifications were explored and responded. The data provided empirical evidence that the highest level of requirement was personality and human relations ($\bar{X} = 2.85 =$ highly required). The other two, special skills and academic competency were at a moderate level of requirement ($\bar{X} = 2.26$ and 2.25, respectively).

Academic Competency

Overall requirement in the academic competency was at a moderate level ($\bar{X} = 2.25$).

Table 4 General information of the respondents.

(n = 223)

General information	Type of business of private enterprises						Total	
	Business firms		Education		Service			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender								
Female	33	(14.8)	79	(35.4)	38	(17.1)	150	(67.3)
Male	20	(9.0)	13	(5.8)	40	(17.9)	73	(32.7)
Position								
Owner	10	(4.5)	13	(5.8)	1	(0.4)	24	(10.8)
Director	1	(0.4)	66	(29.6)	-	-	67	(30.0)
Human Resources Manager	32	(14.3)	4	(1.8)	63	(28.3)	99	(44.4)
Supervisor	10	(4.5)	9	(4.0)	14	(6.3)	33	(14.8)
Type of Private Enterprises								
Hospital	-	-	-	-	13	(5.8)	13	(5.8)
Hotel	-	-	-	-	65	(29.1)	65	(29.1)
School	-	-	92	(41.3)	-	-	92	(41.3)
Business firms	53	(23.7)	-	-	-	-	53	(23.7)
Total	53	(23.7)	92	(41.3)	78	(35.0)	223	(100)

Those in education business stated the highest level ($\bar{X} = 2.38$) as compared to the other two types of business: business firms and service business ($\bar{X} = 2.23$ and 2.10, respectively).

As appear in Table 5, the top five items of qualification were at a high level, as follows: work-related competency, professional creativity, practical application, developing work to be up-to-date, and having vision. Whereas, those basic knowledge in

science were rated at a low level. Interestingly, the private enterprises placed more interest and concern in working ability and knowledge application - - **theory into practice**. This reflects that in order to be able to apply appropriate knowledge, the graduates must have accurate knowledge/content.

F-test indicated significant difference, at the .001 level, in the comparison of executives' opinion on desirable qualification regarding academic

Table 5 Desirable qualifications: academic competency.

(n=223)

Qualifications	Type of Private Enterprises							
	Business firms		Education		Service		Total	
	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD
1. Work-related competency	2.87	.34	2.84	.52	2.91	.29	2.87	.41
2. Professional creativity	2.79	.45	2.84	.52	2.87	.34	2.84	.45
3. Practical application	2.91	.29	2.87	.50	2.74	.52	2.83	.47
4. Developing work	2.77	.47	2.86	.43	2.79	.41	2.82	.43
5. Having Vision	2.64	.56	2.90	.39	2.79	.41	2.80	.45
6. Making use of what exist	2.74	.44	2.84	.45	2.77	.42	2.79	.44
7. Learning effort	2.66	.73	2.85	.44	2.69	.56	2.75	.57
8. Knowledge transfer	2.55	.67	2.85	.51	2.58	.57	2.68	.59
9. Simplifying work system	2.72	.45	2.76	.58	2.56	.59	2.68	.56
10. Sufficient basic knowledge	2.62	.59	2.62	.75	2.62	.58	2.62	.66
11. Content accuracy	2.57	.57	2.73	.63	2.45	.73	2.59	.66
12. Professional knowledge	2.75	.55	2.39	.90	2.67	.71	2.57	.78
13. Higher-order thinking skill	2.51	.66	2.67	.61	1.99	.90	2.39	.80
14. Applying appropriate research results	2.34	.73	2.61	.59	2.17	.74	2.39	.70
15. Gaining field experiences	2.25	.67	2.40	.72	2.40	.70	2.36	.71
16. Technology literacy	2.36	.71	2.05	.76	2.24	.70	2.19	.74
17. Basic knowledge in applied art	2.04	.98	2.46	.70	1.85	.92	2.14	.90
18. Paraprofessional	2.08	.73	2.03	.67	2.05	.70	2.05	.69
19. Basic knowledge in mathematics	2.17	.75	2.13	.92	1.47	.96	1.91	.95
20. Participation in academic activity	1.64	.73	2.17	.77	1.73	.78	1.89	.80
21. Research ability	1.85	.90	2.22	.73	1.29	.99	1.81	.96
22. Technical writing skill	1.40	.90	2.11	.83	1.29	.89	1.65	.95
23. Awardees of the field	1.21	.84	1.59	.82	1.64	.72	1.52	.81
24. Basic knowledge in biology	1.23	1.01	1.54	.99	.94	1.02	1.26	1.04
25. Basic knowledge in chemistry	1.43	1.18	1.45	1.05	.72	.92	1.19	1.07
26. Basic knowledge in physiology	1.04	.94	1.27	1.0	.62	.79	.99	.96
Total	2.23	.35	2.38	.37	2.10	.32	2.25	.37

competency (Table 6). Post hoc Scheffe² was conducted and revealed that private schools rated at a higher level than service business, statistically significant at the .001 level (Table 7).

Special skills

Overall requirement in special skills was at a moderate level ($\bar{X} = 2.26$). Those in business firms indicated the highest level ($\bar{X} = 2.35$) as compared to the other two types of business: service business and education ($\bar{X} = 2.27$ and 2.19, respectively).

The data analysis in Table 8 showed that the top five items of the desirable qualification were at a high level, as follows: language usage, communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skill, application of psychology at work, and computer literacy. Considering that communication skills in Chinese and Japanese were rated at a low level (Table 8).

The result of the comparison of executives³ opinion on desirable qualification concerning special skills, using F-test, showed no significant differences (Table 9).

Personality and human relations

Overall requirement in personality and human relations was at a high level ($\bar{X} = 2.85$). Those in education rated the highest level ($\bar{X} = 2.88$) as

compared to the other two types of business: business firms and service business ($\bar{X} = 2.84$ and 2.82, respectively).

Interestingly, the data showed that 23 out of 24 items of the desirable qualification were rated at a high level. The top five items were responsibility, discipline, enthusiasm, honesty, and hard working. While professional concerned was the only item that the executives indicated as moderate requirement (Table 10).

No significant differences were found on the comparison of the requirement indicated by private enterprises (Table 11).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Statistical analysis of the data indicated a significant difference of academic competency required by private enterprises. In addition, an open-ended question revealed the importance to place the major concern on the revision and development of home economics curriculum to meet labor market needs.

Recommendations from the private enterprises

Courses suggested to be provided in the baccalaureate program included business administration/management, communication and language skill, personality development, human

Table 6 Comparison of the requirement indicated by private enterprises: academic competency.

Source of variance	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	3.258	2	1.629	12.851*	.000
Within groups	27.889	220	.127		
Total	31.148	222			

*p < .001

Table 7 Post hoc comparison of the requirement indicated by private enterprises: academic competency.

Comparison	Mean difference	Std. Error	p
Business firms-Education	.1512	.061	.050
Education-Service business	.2768*	.054	.000
Service business-Business firms	.1257	.063	.143

*p < .001

relations, leadership, psychology, and computer skill. In addition, specialty in home economics was also studied. Four major fields were textile and clothing, food and nutrition, family and child development, and applied art.

Four recommended courses in textile and clothing were *clothing construction*, *textile dyeing*, *clothing design and selection*, and *commercial clothing construction*.

Four recommended courses in food and

Table 8 Desirable qualifications: special skills.

(n = 223)

Qualifications	Type of Private Enterprises						Total	
	Business firms		Education		Service		\bar{X}	SD
	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD		
1. Language usage	2.87	.34	2.91	.28	2.81	.53	2.87	.40
2. Communication skills	2.87	.34	2.80	.49	2.68	.59	2.78	.50
3. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills	2.77	.46	2.78	.51	2.73	.55	2.76	.51
4. Application of psychology at work	2.64	.59	2.82	.49	2.62	.60	2.70	.56
5. Application of computer literacy	2.72	.49	2.58	.63	2.42	.61	2.56	.60
6. Persuasiveness	2.60	.63	2.58	.57	2.49	.67	2.55	.63
7. Word processing ability	2.62	.65	2.43	.66	2.35	.78	2.45	.71
8. Application of technology at work	2.55	.72	2.40	.68	2.36	.66	2.42	.69
9. Communication in English	2.42	.74	2.22	.72	2.63	.48	2.41	.68
10. At least 1 foreign language required	2.36	.83	2.17	.79	2.68	.57	2.39	.76
11. Internet utilization	2.42	.84	2.38	.76	2.31	.69	2.36	.76
12. Typing skill	2.45	.79	2.18	.83	2.24	.80	2.27	.82
13. Communication skill with E-mail	2.49	.82	2.11	.81	2.28	.77	2.26	.81
14. Business administration/management	2.28	.81	1.84	.82	2.19	.75	2.07	.82
15. Processing/analysis skill in Microsoft Excel, Access	2.36	.85	2.04	.87	1.88	.78	2.06	.86
16. Use of presentation program	2.11	.97	2.12	.86	1.87	.81	2.03	.88
17. Marketing knowledge	2.25	.75	1.73	.87	2.21	.77	2.02	.85
18. Designing program such as Page Maker, Adobe Photoshop	1.81	.96	1.80	.92	1.35	.83	1.65	.93
19. Communication in Chinese	1.32	.89	1.07	.88	1.60	.94	1.31	.68
20. Communication in Japanese	1.11	.82	.86	.82	1.77	.89	1.24	.94
Total	2.35	.48	2.19	.45	2.27	.43	2.26	.46

Table 9 Comparison of the requirement indicated by private enterprises: special skills.

Source of variance	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	.885	2	.442	2.130	.121
Within groups	45.694	220	.208		
Total	46.579	222			

nutrition were *food quality control, therapeutic diet, food preservation, and food decoration and arrangement.*

Three recommended courses in family and child development were *play and child development,*

story for children, and childcare.

Four recommended courses in applied art were *principles of art in home economics, home decoration, flower arrangement, and crafts from recycle materials.*

Table 10 Desirable qualifications: personality and human relations.

(n=223)

Qualification	Type of Private Enterprises						Total	
	Business firm		Education		Service		\bar{X}	SD
	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD		
1. Responsibility	2.94	.23	2.97	.31	2.96	.19	2.96	.26
2. Discipline	2.94	.23	2.96	.32	2.99	.11	2.96	.25
3. Enthusiasm	2.98	.13	2.91	.46	2.99	.11	2.96	.31
4. Honesty	2.94	.23	2.96	.32	2.96	.19	2.96	.26
5. Hard working	2.98	.13	2.95	.22	2.92	.26	2.95	.23
6. Job concerned	2.98	.13	2.96	.32	2.92	.26	2.95	.27
7. Ethic and moral concerned	2.91	.29	2.98	.14	2.88	.32	2.93	.26
8. Cooperative skill	2.98	.13	2.93	.24	2.88	.32	2.93	.26
9. Effort	2.94	.23	2.92	.37	2.88	.32	2.91	.32
10. Politeness	2.85	.36	2.96	.20	2.90	.30	2.91	.29
11. Calmness	2.91	.29	2.91	.28	2.85	.36	2.89	.32
12. Courtesy	2.89	.32	2.97	.17	2.81	.42	2.89	.32
13. Concern for others	2.89	.32	2.96	.20	2.82	.38	2.89	.31
14. Paying full attention	2.92	.26	2.89	.40	2.85	.36	2.88	.36
15. Neatness	2.92	.26	2.87	.49	2.82	.38	2.87	.41
16. Work commitment	2.83	.37	2.90	.29	2.85	.36	2.87	.34
17. Respect to seniority	2.81	.44	2.92	.26	2.81	.42	2.86	.38
18. Listen to others	2.85	.36	2.89	.31	2.79	.40	2.85	.36
19. Devoting to society	2.72	.45	2.83	.46	2.76	.43	2.78	.45
20. Self confidence	2.75	.43	2.82	.51	2.68	.49	2.75	.50
21. Perceptiveness	2.77	.42	2.77	.49	2.67	.47	2.74	.47
22. Consciousness	2.58	.57	2.77	.59	2.65	.50	2.69	.56
23. Resource and environment awareness	2.55	.60	2.73	.61	2.64	.60	2.65	.60
24. Professional concerned	2.47	.74	2.47	.81	2.46	.69	2.47	.76
Total	2.84	.18	2.88	.22	2.82	.23	2.85	.22

Table 11 Comparison of the requirement indicated by private enterprises: personality and human relations.

Source of variance	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	.155	2	.078	1.634	.197
Within groups	10.438	220	.047		
Total	10.593	222			

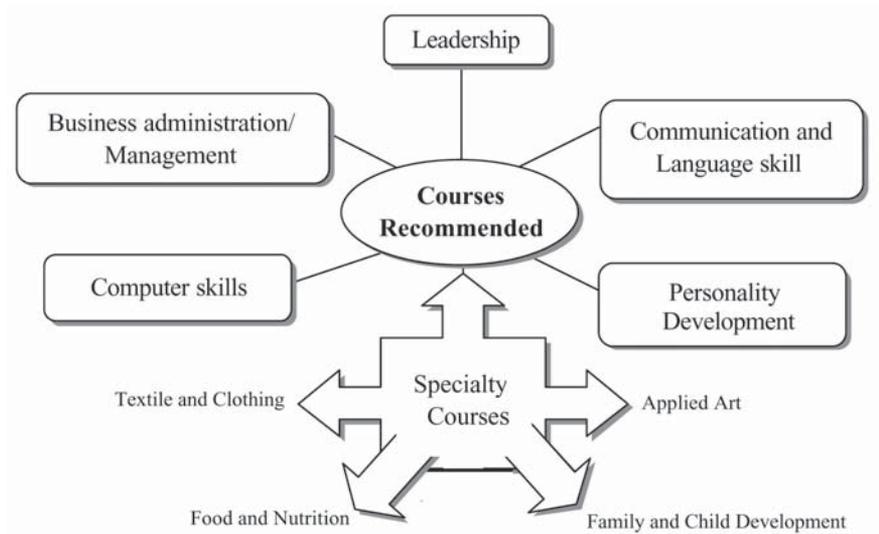


Figure 1 Courses recommended by the respondents

RECOMMENDATION

This study introduces information concerning courses suggested to be included in the curriculum. The contributions of executives of private enterprises will be a useful update as well as a valuable source for home economics curriculum planners, since few studies currently exist that focus exclusively on home economics curriculum concerns.

According to this study, the one area in which a significant amount of change is expected is in the use of technology. Concerns have been expressed on the appropriate use of computer or computer skills.

In order to prepare home economics graduates to meet such requirement expressed by private enterprises, the investigators find that it is important to place serious emphasis on the revision and development of home economics curriculum. Such courses recommended by the respondents should be taken into consideration of the curriculum developers/planners.

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