

Introduction

In the past few years, numerous applied English departments and English learning courses at vocational colleges and universities were established in Taiwan, and English professionals are trained in order to meet the demands of the job market. At the present time, it is important to maintain or increase the employment and enrollment rates for colleges and universities (Antoinette, Randall, & Carl, 2008). Therefore, connecting employers' demands and graduates' employability has increasingly been the objective of many studies in recent years. This research aimed to explore the differences between the perceptions from the employers and the faculty members of the Department of Applied Foreign Languages (AFL) at a university in Taiwan. Based on the employers' perceptions, it is helpful for AFL Departments to design its specialized instructional curriculum and for college graduates to be well-prepared into the job market. In addition, the comparisons between the perceptions of employers and the faculty members reflect the employers' concern toward the curriculum design.

Motivation and Background

Nowadays, the world is fast-paced, ever changing, and uncertain. Universities around the world have claimed different sets of the so-called graduate attributes for several decades (Barrie, 2004). Identification and review of graduate attributes have increasingly played a significant role in the strategies of universities around the world (Nair & Mertova, 2009). Accordingly, college/university graduates require more specialized skills and related knowledge to become successful staff. The perceptions and evaluation which employers assess the employees play a crucial role both for graduates to prepare well to enter job market and for colleges/universities to design proper curriculum (Hsieh, 2009). Many foreign studies have surveyed the employers' perceptions toward the graduates' general skills, professional skills, performance, interpersonal skills, adaptability, and the success of the colleges/universities in preparing the graduates for the

workforce (Clarke & Gibson, 1998; Dillon & Kruck, 2008; Looney & Klenowski, 2008; Maryland Higher Education Commission, 2007; Nicholson & DeMoss, 2009). The focus of curriculum design of colleges/ universities has shifted over the past few decades from an emphasis on academic education to paying attention to skills which are applied in the workplaces. However, general skills, professional skills, employability, and common knowledge in undergraduate curriculum have not been generally explored and they are not the focus of present studies in Taiwan. Very few empirical studies have been done in this field. Since this area has previously received little attention among colleges/universities in Taiwan, growing attention is being paid to the development of college/university for designing curriculum that would meet both students' employable preparation and employers' needs in the workplaces.

Statement of the Problems

Shivpuri and Kim (2004) pointed out that college graduates are now more than ever required to have a full complement of related knowledge (e.g., of cultures and of technology) and skills (e.g., interpersonal skills and adaptability) to become successful workers and citizens. However, they doubted that graduates use just a small percentage of what they learn in college on the job. Business executives think that a significant proportion of recent college graduates do not have the requisite skills and knowledge (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc, 2008). Ho (2008) indicated that what schools generally teach is not what the job market requires; that graduates lack the competence to adequately respond to the needs of society and employers. In Taiwan, higher education seems to face the same challenges in properly identifying the job market requirement and equivalent the curriculum content.

The perceptions of employer satisfaction which graduates perform in the workplaces were the foremost goal to be explored and analyzed. Generally, most studies focused on developing employer surveys that specifically address graduates' performance in their workplaces (Boise State University ID, 2002;

Palomar College CA, 2002; Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, 2000). Since the goal of the universities and colleges is to educate and develop students well-prepared to enter the workplaces, the assessment from the faculty members who design the curriculum is equally important. The issues of the perceptions from the employers and the faculty at colleges/universities need to be further investigated and analyzed in order to explore whether there are any differences between the employers' demands and graduates' employability, and assist the faculty members in improving curriculum design.

Purposes of the Study

This study was designed to address three purposes: (a) to investigate whether there are any differences between the perceptions from the employers and the faculty at the AFL Department toward the importance of general skills, professional skills, employability, and common knowledge; (b) to explore whether the graduates' skills learned from the AFL Department meet employers' demands; and (c) to explore the employability that the graduates possess and whether they apply their general skills, professional skills (English competency of four skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing), employability, and common knowledge in the workplaces.

Research Questions

In light of the preceding research purposes, the research questions of this study were addressed as follows:

1. Are there any significant differences between the employers' perceptions on the importance of the skills and satisfaction of graduates' performance?
2. How do the employers rate the importance of general skills, professional skills, employability, and common knowledge as well as satisfaction toward the graduates' performance?
3. Are there any significant differences between employers' perceptions and faculty members' perceptions toward the importance of the skills?
4. How do the faculty members rate the importance of general skills, professional skills, employability, and common knowledge toward the students?

Literature Review

A number of studies have shown that higher education is facing the challenges which the college students' employability can not meet the employers' requirement and the curriculum does not meet the needs of industry (Cassidy, 2006; Kagaari, 2007; Rae, 2007). In Taiwan, English departments and learning programs are established to meet the demands for English professionals, failure in reaching consensus in terms of those issues then leads to the need for formulation professional competence indicators for students in the Applied Foreign Language Department (Huang, 2003). In light of Taiwan as Asia-Pacific Regional Operation Center, professional foreign talents are in need of the career market. Since the participants are the employers who hire graduates from AFL Department of Chaoyang University of Technology (CYUT) in the study, the missions of the AFL Department of CYUT are (a) the AFL Department offers comprehensive training in this area, including basic interpretation, written translation, and an intensive course sequence related international commerce and law; (b) the AFL Department provides intensive training in the language and writing skills necessary and a variety of technical specializations cooperating Engineering field of the university; and (c) the AFL Department gives the language teaching courses and also offers kindergarten and middle-school teacher training and certification through its Education Curriculum Center.

Farooqui (2007) stressed that the globalization of English and a growing demand for competent English language users in the job markets has placed a greater emphasis on English language teaching. Several studies have suggested the difficulties of curriculum aligned to academic content standards and job market (Nair & Mertova, 2009; Shivpuri & Kim, 2004). Ministry of Education in Taiwan continues to exert enormous pressures on curriculum and assessment development. As more and more students are able to enter colleges and universities, finding a suitable job after graduation has become a big concern. The content of the curriculum has a great bearing on career choice and graduate's abilities in meeting

future employment challenges (Kagaari, 2007). It would seem logical that graduates' contributions could be greater if the courses they have studied are relevant to the needs of their business (Clarke & Gibson, 1998). Payne and Shields (2001) mentioned that when public or private institutions and universities are demanding student outcome assessment, employer evaluations are extremely important for all institutions of higher education. Assessment of graduates' attributes is not just to put emphasis on academic field and instead placing greater emphasis on general skills, professional skills, employability, interpersonal skills, social responsibility, adaptability and life skills, and common knowledge to meet the job market requirement (Shivpuri & Kim, 2004). Cox and King (2006) indicated that employers expected students to possess transferable skills including communication, analysis, design, evaluation, ethics, project and process management skills as well as an understanding of professional development. Thus, each college/university needs to design its own programs according to its particular characteristics.

Methodology

The quantitative research method was implemented in this study. This research has been undertaken from December, 2009 to May, 2010 (approximately six months). The data were collected from employers and faculty members through two surveys.

Participants

One group of the participants were the employers who hired the graduates obtained a bachelor degree from the AFL Department at CYUT from 2003 to 2007 academic year. The graduates' data with names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses were provided by the AFL Department of CYUT. A total of 682 graduates were recruited and contacted via mails, e-mails, and phones. Participants in this survey consisted only of employers of the remaining graduates who were

employed in the workplaces. The employers who participated in this study needed to perceive the graduates' working abilities and performance in their workplace. Completed surveys were received until May, 2010. In total, 74 employers responded to this survey and completed valid questionnaires for a response rate of 10.9%. In identifying the employers' career professions, education were 40.5%, 10.8% international trade, 10.8% profession science, 8.1% media and publishing, and followed by 6.5% service, wholesale and retailer, and traditional manufacturing.

The other group of the participants were part-time lecturers, full-time lecturers, professors, and the chairperson of the AFL Department at CYUT. A total of 42 faculty members were recruited, and 22 valid responses were obtained for a response rate of 52.4% (9 were males and 13 were females). Most of the participants were experienced instructors of the AFL Department.

Instruments

Two survey questionnaires were applied in this study. One of them was Employer Satisfaction Survey, and the survey was conducted to ascertain employer opinions about the recent AFL graduates. The other was Curriculum Importance Survey for the Faculty, and the survey was utilized to ascertain faculty members' conceptions of skills and knowledge. Both surveys were constructed on the basis of a quantitative method design.

Employer Satisfaction Survey

The Employer Satisfaction Survey consisted of 88 items and was divided into ten categories as below.

1. Assessing the importance on selecting an employee.
2. Assessing the importance on foreign languages and general skills of AFL graduates.
3. Assessing the satisfaction on foreign languages and general skills of AFL graduates.

4. Assessing the importance on professional knowledge and judgment of AFL graduates.
5. Assessing the satisfaction on professional knowledge and judgment of AFL graduates.
6. Assessing the importance on quality of work of AFL graduates.
7. Assessing the satisfaction on quality of work of AFL graduates.
8. Assessing the importance on particular skills of AFL graduates.
9. Assessing the satisfaction on particular skills of AFL graduates.
10. Assessing the satisfaction on overall performance in workplace of AFL graduates.

Employer Satisfaction Survey employed the 5-point Likert scale. The questions are labeled: 1= strongly not important or satisfied to 5= significant important or satisfied. Employers were asked to rate the satisfaction level of AFL graduates' abilities and performance in the workplaces as well as the importance level of skills. An open-ended question which asked employers for suggestions and expectations with six demographic information questions was also included at the end of the survey.

Employer Satisfaction Survey was designed and mandated by CYUT. The quantitative Likert scale instrument was developed in Chinese in order to make participants understand the whole items well.

Curriculum Importance Survey for the Faculty

Curriculum Importance Survey for the Faculty consisted of 44 items and was divided into five categories as below.

1. Assessing the importance on selecting an employee.
2. Assessing the importance on foreign languages and general skills of AFL students.
3. Assessing the importance on professional knowledge and judgment of AFL students.
4. Assessing the importance on quality of work of AFL students.
5. Assessing the importance on particular skills of AFL students.

Curriculum Importance Survey for the Faculty employed the 5-point Likert scale. The questions are labeled: 1= not important to 5= significant important. An

open-ended question which asked faculty members for suggestions and expectations was at the end of the questionnaire. The content of Curriculum Importance Survey for the Faculty was extracted from the dimensions of importance in the Employer Satisfaction Survey since the importance was more suitably evaluated than satisfaction by lecturers.

Considering the instrument of this study, the Employer Satisfaction Survey is adequate for this study because of the positive evaluations submitted by the expert panel. Cronbach's Alpha analysis was used to examine the reliability of the survey. Employer

Satisfaction Survey was examined for the reliability as soon as 30 responses were collected. The results presents that the range of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was from .60 to .96. Curriculum Importance Survey for the Faculty was extracted from the importance categories of Employer Satisfaction survey. Accordingly, both of Employer Satisfaction Survey and Curriculum Importance Survey for the Faculty are acceptable for this study.

The quantitative analysis of the two surveys was conducted by using SPSS 17.0 through the following statistical methods: (a) descriptive statistics, (b) paired samples t-tests, and (c) independent samples t-tests. The data were analyzed to describe the discrepancies between the perceptions of employers and the faculty members toward AFL graduates' attributes of employability.

Results and Discussion

Results of Employer Satisfaction Survey

To answer the research questions 1 and 2. T-tests were computed to assess whether any significant differences existed between importance and satisfaction from employers' perceptions. In addition, mean scores, standard deviations, and rank were used to answer employers' perceptions toward graduates' attributes.

Table 1 shows that dealing well with sudden or unexpected changes was the most important ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.61$), but possessing master degree emerged as

not very important ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.02$). It seems that employers expect employees possess more practical experience and life skills than obtain higher educational degree. The finding is consistent with Shivpuri and Kim's (2004) study that employers rated adaptability and life skills was important compared to other skills. The rank showed adaptability, experience, and professional skills are demanded by employers.

Table 1

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Rank of Importance on Selecting an Employee (Rated by Employers)

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>
1. Possessing previous working experience	4.07	.80	3
2. Possessing professional skills or relevant training	4.09	.76	2
3. Possessing professional certificate	3.80	.97	7
4. Possessing relevant skills and knowledge in core study areas	3.82	.78	5
5. Possessing bachelor degree	3.81	.99	6
6. Possessing master degree	3.00	1.02	8
7. Possessing second language skills	3.95	.92	4
8. Dealing well with sudden or unexpected changes	4.36	.61	1

According to the paired samples t-test, Table 2 shows a statistically significant difference between importance and satisfaction on a variety of foreign languages and general skills of AFL graduates rated by employers ($t = 3.03$, $p = .003$, $p < .05$). Employers rated the importance higher than satisfaction on foreign languages and general skills. It should be noticed that graduates' performance did not completely meet employers' expectation although most satisfaction questions were rated higher than 3.5.

Table 2

T-test Results of Employers' Perceptions Toward Importance and Satisfaction on Foreign Languages and General Skills

	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	sig. (2-tailed)
Importance	3.97	74	.43	3.03	73	.003*
Satisfaction	3.78	74	.57			

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 3 shows that listening to others intelligently was the most important ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.56$), but quantitative reasoning was not very important ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.87$). The results present that employers were satisfied with working effectively with team members ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.65$), but they were unsatisfied with quantitative reasoning ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.83$). It appears that employers agreed AFL graduates have high cooperative abilities to work with colleagues. Also, it is widely believed that AFL graduates are successful in training of general skills. Thus, general skills must be maintained and upgraded in order to adapt future advances. Skills refer to abilities in English writing, speaking, and reading were rated higher importance than satisfaction by employers.

Table 3

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Rank of Importance and Satisfaction on Foreign Languages and General Skills of AFL Graduates (Rated by Employers)

Items	Importance			Satisfaction		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>
1. Writing communication in English	4.12	.94	9	4.05	.66	5
2. Oral communication in English	4.26	.83	6	4.05	.69	5
3. Reading ability in English	4.15	.87	7	4.12	.64	3
4. Other second language skills	3.47	.93	13	3.53	.81	11
5. Basic computer skills	4.26	.83	4	4.11	.61	4
6. Advanced computer skills	3.84	.80	10	3.84	.71	9
7. Critical thinking skills	4.12	.73	8	3.82	.71	10
8. Processing and managing information	4.26	.71	5	3.93	.61	8
9. Familiarity with required facility	3.35	.85	14	3.51	.78	13
10. Ability to negotiate	3.78	.97	11	3.51	.78	12
11. Quantitative reasoning	3.19	.87	15	3.36	.83	15
12. Possessing leadership qualities	3.66	.95	12	3.47	.80	14
13. Working effectively with team members	4.49	.63	2	4.21	.65	1

14. Listening to others intelligently	4.50	.56	1	4.14	.75	2
15. Ability to serve consumers	4.28	.77	3	3.99	.75	7

Table 4 presents a significant difference existed between importance and satisfaction toward professional knowledge and judgment rated by employers ($t = 3.68, p = .000, p < .05$).

Table 4

T-test Results of Employers' Perceptions Toward Importance and Satisfaction on Professional Knowledge and Judgment

Note. * $p < .05$.

	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	sig. (2-tailed)
Importance	4.05	74	.40	3.68	73	.000*
Satisfaction	3.80	74	.57			

Table 5 reveals that understanding job-related information was the most important ($M = 4.35, SD = 0.56$), but “understanding on society, humanity, and culture” was not very important ($M = 3.69, SD = 0.83$). The results yield that employers were satisfied with possessing knowledge of specific technical job skills ($M = 3.99, SD = 0.64$), but they were unsatisfied with understanding on society, humanity, and culture ($M = 3.54, SD = 0.67$). The findings show that possessing knowledge of specific technical job skills and understanding job-related information were both important and satisfied. It appears that AFL graduates have a high level of competency in various job-related skills. Moreover, ability to use computer software was perceived to be more important, it could be considered crucial knowledge and be given more attention. Since it is a technology world now, students need to be trained computer software skills in class.

Table 5

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Rank of Importance and Satisfaction on Professional Knowledge and Judgment of AFL Graduates (Rated by Employers)

Items	<u>Importance</u>			<u>Satisfaction</u>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>

1. Possessing knowledge of specific technical job skills	4.26	.60	2	3.99	.64	1
2. Understanding job-related information	4.35	.56	1	3.97	.65	2
3. Possessing specific job-related skills	4.01	.69	4	3.92	.68	4
4. Ability to use computer software	4.09	.62	3	3.94	.58	3
5. Understanding basic information related to job	3.99	.73	5	3.66	.68	5
6. Understanding on society, humanity, and culture	3.69	.83	6	3.54	.67	6

Table 6 shows a significant difference was found between importance and satisfaction toward quality of work of AFL graduates rated by employers ($t = 5.49$, $p = .000$, $p < .05$). Table 6

T-test Results of Employers' Perceptions Toward Importance and Satisfaction on Quality of Work

	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	sig. (2-tailed)
Importance	4.52	74	.49	5.49	73	.000*
Satisfaction	4.12	74	.56			

Note. * $p < .05$.

As shown in Table 7, the results present that taking the responsibility on the result of tasks was the most important ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 0.50$), but the last one of importance was “understanding others’ feelings and motivations, or handling incidents” ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.60$). Furthermore, the average mean score of importance on quality of work was above 4.50. Also, the results show that employers rated the most satisfied were self-discipline ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.71$) and understanding and implementing works ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.67$), but the least satisfied was solving predictable problems with creative solutions ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.67$); moreover, the average mean score of satisfaction on AFL graduates’ quality of work was above 4.00. The category of quality of work received the largest proportion of very important and satisfied than the other categories of the survey. It appears that employers agreed that AFL graduates put their career as first priority

and enjoy at their work.

Table 7

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Rank of Importance and Satisfaction on Quality of Work of AFL Graduates (Rated by Employers)

Item	<u>Importance</u>			<u>Satisfaction</u>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>
1. Reacting to sudden incidents	4.52	.53	7	4.00	.66	9
2. Solving predictable problems with creative solutions	4.48	.53	8	3.93	.67	10
3. Understanding others' feelings and motivations, or handling incidents	4.42	.60	10	4.01	.67	8
4. Implementing working goals dependability	4.61	.55	4	4.16	.69	6
5. Implementing tasks with a good work ethic and make decisions	4.46	.56	9	4.08	.61	7
6. Self-discipline	4.53	.56	6	4.23	.71	1
7. Positive attitude toward work	4.66	.50	2	4.20	.70	3
8. Possessing a high level of learning	4.64	.54	3	4.19	.72	5
9. Understanding and implementing works	4.59	.52	5	4.23	.67	1
10. Taking the responsibility on the result of tasks	4.69	.50	1	4.20	.66	4

As shown in Table 8, no significant difference was found between importance and satisfaction toward particular skills ($t = 1.82$, $p = .073$, $p > .05$).

Table 8

T-test Results of Employers' Perceptions Toward Importance and Satisfaction on Particular Skills

	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	sig. (2-tailed)
Importance	3.84	74	.66	1.82	73	.073
Satisfaction	3.73	74	.60			

Note. * $p < .05$. No significant difference was found.

The results are illustrated in Table 9, the employers rated setting and achieving work goals was the most important ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.71$), but other foreign language skills was not very important ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.94$). Also, the results show that employers rated the most satisfied was setting and achieving work goals ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.66$), but the least satisfied was other foreign language skills ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.74$). Among the particular skills, setting and achieving work goals was rated higher scores both on satisfaction and importance. The findings reveal that AFL graduates show high responsibility at their work according to employers' perceptions and the category of particular skills was rated less important and satisfied than other categories.

Table 9

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Rank of Importance and Satisfaction on Particular Skills of AFL Graduates (Rated by Employers)

Items	<u>Importance</u>			<u>Satisfaction</u>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>
1. Ability to manage business resource	3.71	.83	4	3.62	.68	4
2. Other foreign language skills	3.63	.94	5	3.58	.74	5
3. Ability to instruct or train groups	3.84	.78	3	3.77	.71	3
4. Setting and achieving work goals	4.11	.71	1	4.01	.66	1
5. Application of theoretical concept in on-the-job situation	4.08	.68	2	3.83	.74	2

Figure 1 shows the number of employers who rated satisfaction level regarding AFL graduates' abilities and performance at work from 2005 to 2009 academic year. It is clear that employers rated high percentage to show their positive attitude toward the graduates' attributes. The results reveal that three-fourths employers evaluated higher scores regarding graduates' performance.

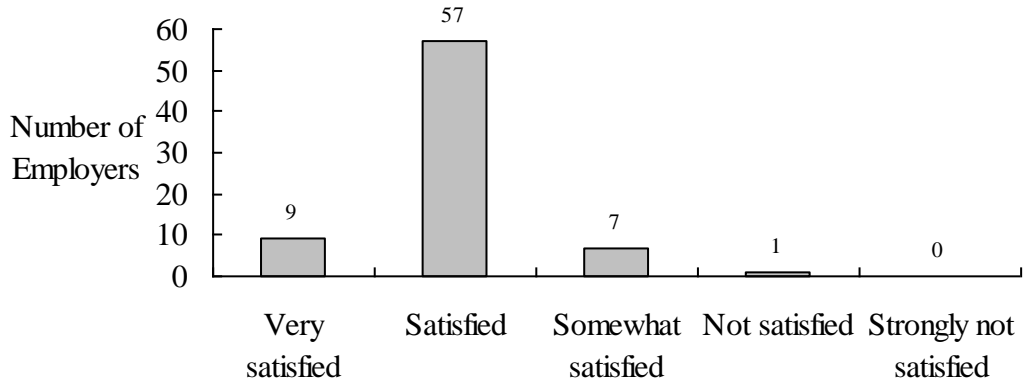


Figure 1. Number of employers on satisfaction regarding AFL graduates' performance at work from 2005 to 2009 academic years.

Employers were asked to answer whether they would employ AFL graduates for future hiring needs (see Table 10). Responses to this question were very positive.

Table 10

Willing to Employ AFL Graduates for Future Hiring Needs

	Frequency	Percent Responding (%)
Yes	72	97.3
No	2	2.7

Note. $N = 74$.

In sum, the top of five items (10%) of satisfaction among 44 items that employers represented in order were (a) self-discipline, (b) understanding and implementing works, (c) working effectively with team members, (d) positive attitude toward work, and (e) taking the responsibility on the result of tasks. The employers support the views that AFL graduates are enthusiastic, cooperative, and responsible. These results of this current study support the curriculum provided by the AFL Department and suggest the ongoing need to continually update the professional skills, knowledge contents, and employability.

In addition, *t*-test showed that all categories were rated satisfaction lower than importance by employers. The five items which were rated the least satisfied were (a) quantitative reasoning, (b) possessing leadership qualities, (c) ability to negotiate, (d) familiarity with required facility, and (e) other foreign language skills. It reveals that the faculty members should be more aware of leadership and communication when developing and training students' employability. Surprisingly, English listening, speaking, and writing skills were rated lower satisfaction than importance by employers. It seems that students should put more efforts in English skills. In addition, the increasing diversification of teaching method would be noticed by lecturers.

Results of Curriculum Importance Survey for the Faculty

Faculty members were asked to rate the importance level of AFL students' abilities and all skills. In this study, the independent samples *t*-test was utilized to answer research question 3, and descriptive statistics of the data were used to answer question 4.

Both employers and faculty members were asked to rate the importance on selecting an employee. According to the independent samples *t*-test, Table 11 yields that there was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of employers and faculty members ($t = -2.15$, $p = .034$, $p < .05$).

Table 11

T-test Results of Employers' Perceptions and Faculty Members' Perceptions Toward Importance on Selecting an Employee

Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	sig. (2-tailed)
Employers	3.86	74	.57	- 2.15	94	.034*
Faculty members	4.14	22	.44			

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 12 shows that dealing well with sudden or unexpected changes was the

most important from faculty members' perceptions ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.50$), but possessing master degree emerged as not very important ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.86$). Both faculty members and employers rated "dealing well with sudden or unexpected changes" as the first and "possessing master degree" as the last. It seems both of them expected that graduates had practical experience and abilities to manage emergent situations, not higher education level.

Table 12

*Mean, Standard Deviation, and Rank of Importance on Selecting an Employee
(Rated by Faculty Members and Employers)*

Items	Faculty Members			Employers		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>
1. Possessing previous working experience	4.27	.77	3	4.07	.80	3
2. Possessing professional skills or relevant training	4.41	.50	2	4.09	.76	2
3. Possessing professional certificate	4.00	.82	7	3.80	.97	7
4. Possessing relevant skills and knowledge in core study areas	4.14	.71	5	3.82	.78	5
5. Possessing bachelor degree	4.18	.91	4	3.81	.99	6
6. Possessing master degree	3.55	.86	8	3.00	1.02	8
7. Possessing second language skill	4.05	.79	6	3.95	.92	4
8. Dealing well with sudden or unexpected changes	4.59	.50	1	4.36	.61	1

Table 13 reveals that no significant difference was found ($t = -1.68$, $p = .097$, $p > .05$).

Table 13

*T-test Results of Employers' Perceptions and Faculty Members' Perceptions
Toward Importance on Foreign Languages and General Skills*

Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	sig. (2-tailed)
Employers	3.97	74	.43	- 1.68	94	.097
Faculty members	4.15	22	.42			

Note. * $p < .05$. No significant difference was found.

The results of Table 14 show that oral communication in English was the most important ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 0.43$), but quantitative reasoning was not very important which were ranked by faculty members ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.76$). Both of faculty members and employers agreed that listening to others intelligently and working effectively with team members were very important. It seems that both employers and faculty members take cooperative and English skills as significant important. Since Taiwan has changed from an importer to a leading exporter of industrial products and has become the world's 13th largest trading nation (Ministry of Education, 2000), second language proficiency has been more important. English could be considered crucial knowledge content in curriculum and be given more attention (Ho, 2008).

Table 14

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Rank of Importance on Foreign Languages and General Skills (Rated by Faculty Members and Employers)

Items	Faculty Members			Employers		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>
1. Writing communication in English	4.45	.67	8	4.12	.94	9
2. Oral communication in English	4.77	.43	1	4.26	.83	6
3. Reading ability in English	4.55	.60	5	4.15	.87	7
4. Other second language skills	3.77	.81	12	3.47	.93	13
5. Basic computer skills	4.55	.80	4	4.26	.83	4
6. Advanced computer skills	3.82	.80	11	3.84	.80	10
7. Critical thinking skills	4.45	.60	7	4.12	.73	8
8. Processing and managing information	4.50	.67	6	4.26	.71	5
9. Familiarity with required facility	3.32	.65	14	3.35	.85	14
10. Ability to negotiate	3.91	.81	10	3.78	.97	11
11. Quantitative reasoning	3.00	.76	15	3.19	.87	15
12. Possessing leadership qualities	3.64	.73	13	3.66	.95	12
13. Working effectively with team members	4.55	.60	3	4.49	.63	2
14. Listening to others intelligently	4.59	.59	2	4.50	.56	1
15. Ability to serve consumers	4.32	.78	9	4.28	.77	3

Table 15 yields that there was a significant difference between the perceptions of employers and faculty members on professional knowledge and judgment ($t = -3.78, p = .000, p < .05$).

Table 15

T-test Results of Employers' Perceptions and Faculty Members' Perceptions Toward Importance on Professional Knowledge and Judgment

Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	sig. (2-tailed)
Employers	4.05	74	.40	-3.78	94	.000*
Faculty members	4.42	22	.40			

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 16 shows that the faculty rated possessing knowledge of specific technical job skills as the first ($M = 4.68, SD = 0.48$), but understanding on society, humanity, and culture was rated as the last ($M = 4.00, SD = 0.46$). Both of the faculty members and employers agreed that possessing knowledge of specific technical job skills and understanding job-related skills were very important.

Table 16

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Rank of Importance on Professional Knowledge and Judgment (Rated by Faculty Members and Employers)

Items	Faculty Members			Employers		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>
1. Possessing knowledge of specific technical job skills	4.68	.48	1	4.26	.60	2
2. Understanding job-related information	4.64	.49	2	4.35	.56	1
3. Possessing specific job-related skills	4.36	.58	4	4.01	.69	4
4. Ability to use computer software	4.50	.60	3	4.09	.62	3
5. Understanding basic information related to job	4.32	.65	5	3.99	.73	5
6. Understanding on society, humanity, and culture	4.00	.46	6	3.69	.83	6

Table 17 reveals that no significant difference was found between the perceptions of employers and faculty members ($t = -1.74, p = .086, p > .05$).

Table 17

T-test Results of Employers' Perceptions and Faculty Members' Perceptions Toward Importance on Quality of Work

Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	sig. (2-tailed)
Employers	4.52	74	.49	-1.74	94	.086
Faculty members	4.72	22	.36			

Note. * $p < .05$. No significant difference was found.

Table 18 reveals that taking the responsibility on the result of tasks was the most important ($M = 4.95, SD = 0.21$); however, solving predictable problems with creative solutions was the least important ($M = 4.55, SD = 0.67$). Both of employers and faculty members rated that taking the responsibility on the result of tasks was the most important. The mean scores, on the whole, were rated slightly higher by faculty members, and both of employers and faculty members rated highly scores in terms of quality of work which the mean scores of all items were above 4.50.

Table 18

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Rank of Importance on Quality of Work (Rated by Faculty Members and Employers)

Items	Faculty Members			Employers		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>
1. Reacting to sudden incidents	4.59	.59	8	4.52	.53	7
2. Solving predictable problems with creative solutions	4.55	.67	10	4.48	.53	8
3. Understanding others' feelings and motivations, or handling incidents	4.68	.48	6	4.42	.60	10
4. Implementing working goals dependability	4.86	.35	2	4.61	.55	4
5. Implementing tasks with a good	4.59	.67	9	4.46	.56	9

	work ethic and make decisions						
6.	Self-discipline	4.64	.58	7	4.53	.56	6
7.	Positive attitude toward work	4.77	.43	4	4.66	.50	2
8.	Possessing a high level of learning	4.82	.40	3	4.64	.54	3
9.	Understanding and implementing works	4.73	.55	5	4.59	.52	5
10.	Taking the responsibility on the result of tasks	4.95	.21	1	4.69	.50	1

Table 19 indicates that there was a significant difference between the perceptions of employers and faculty members on particular skills ($t = -2.21$, $p = .030$, $p < .05$).

Table 19

T-test Results of Employers' Perceptions and Faculty Members' Perceptions Toward Importance on Particular Skills

Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	sig. (2-tailed)
Employers	3.84	74	.66	- 2.21	94	.030*
Faculty members	4.19	22	.62			

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 20 shows that setting and achieving work goals ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.74$) and application of theoretical concept in on-the-job situation ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.67$) were the most important; however, other foreign language skills was rated the last. ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.78$). Setting and achieving work goals emerged as the most important one which was rated by both employers and faculty members.

Table 20

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Rank of Importance on Particular Skills (Rated by Employers and Faculty Members)

Items	Faculty Members			Employers		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>
1. Ability to manage business resource	4.27	.83	3	3.71	.83	4
2. Other foreign language skills	3.68	.78	5	3.63	.94	5
3. Ability to instruct or train groups	4.00	.82	4	3.84	.78	3
4. Setting and achieving work goals	4.50	.74	1	4.11	.71	1

5. Application of theoretical concept in on-the-job situation	4.50	.67	1	4.08	.68	2
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Overall, according to the perceptions of importance from faculty members, the top of five important items (10%) are the same as the perceptions of employers and mean scores of each item were rated highly above 4.5 on a scale of 1 to 5. The most important skills are (a) taking the responsibility on the result of tasks, (b) implementing working goals dependability, (c) possessing a high level of learning, (d) positive attitude toward work, and (e) understanding and implementing works.

According to the results, the least important items for employers and faculty members are quantitative reasoning and possessing master degree. The reason that both employers and faculty members disagreed with possessing master degree may be the higher education degree is not significantly required in the workplaces. In addition, experiential learning methods better reflect the real-world business environment (Navarro, 2008).

Suggestions from Employers

Nearly two-thirds the employers provided additional suggestions at the end of the survey. The followings are the details of the most frequent comments and responses.

1. Communication skills.
2. Listening, speaking, reading, writing skills in English.
3. Practical experience.
4. Team work.
5. Interpersonal relationships.
6. Work Attitude.

Generally, these comments and suggestions are in accord with the results of this survey. The comments are practical information with many compliments and suggestions to motivate AFL graduates to improve the skills. All of the positive and

negative comments may be the best reflection of employers to the AFL Departments.

Suggestions from Faculty Members

Faculty members provided additional suggestions at the end of Curriculum Importance Survey for the faculty. Details of these comments are presented in the following.

1. Students need to work on learning attitudes, learn to respect themselves and teachers, pass required courses, and get English certificates.
2. Sense of work ethic, communication skills, and marketing skills need improvement.
3. Students need continuous learning.
4. Students need to improve English reading and writing skills.
5. Students need to have passions at work and develop second professional skills.
6. Students need to obtain the professional knowledge regarding business, finance, commerce as well as international trade.
7. Team cohesion is one of key factors for students to achieve better performance at work.

It is clear that the two most valued skills by employers and faculty members are communication and English four skills. These characteristics are important for not only the graduates of AFL Department but also all students studying in college/university.

Conclusions

The results of this study reveal that most employers were very satisfied with the preparation, professional abilities, and performance of AFL graduates. Most employers believed that the graduates they hired were very enthusiastic, cooperative, responsible, and would be excellent at English skills on the job. Furthermore, employers showed their positive attitude toward the graduates of the AFL Department and they were willing to hire AFL graduates again for the future

needs. Nonetheless, the results show that satisfaction sections were all rated lower than importance by employers. Thus, there is still a disparity between the needs of employers and the abilities of AFL graduates.

According to the results of importance, the employer perceptions of AFL graduates match with the responses from the faculty members of the AFL Department. It seems that faculty members felt responsible for developing these professional skills, knowledge contents, and employability in their students which employers agreed and stressed most. Therefore, the goals of the AFL Department are entirely consistent with the general hiring requirements of employers. Nevertheless, the faculty members tended to rate English skills highly important, such as speaking and reading, whereas the employers felt serving consumers and critical thinking were more important and less satisfied. Thus, the further efforts of the AFL Department may be focused on identifying the current requirements from the job market and making changes to design proper curriculum for students to learn and apply in the workplaces.

In this study, the employers stressed English skills are required at the workplaces, but it seems employers presented lower satisfaction about English skills based on graduates' performance. The faculty members should notice that students need to improve their proficiency since English was seen as a useful tool when entering the job market. In discussing the factors provided by employers and faculty members, quality of work and professional skills are two major issues at the workplace. However, the goals of AFL Department of CYUT were focused on language and technology training as well as business. There are also dimensions highly valued by employers that faculty members seem to overlook. The educational institutions should make an effort to prepare students with specialized skills for the career development.

Finally, the employers emphasized that communication, team work, and work attitude are valued highly and used by their firms to select college students

for employment. Therefore, faculty may concentrate on developing useful activities in order to arouse students' spirits of team work and leaderships.

In sum, although employment of the graduates is not the goal of colleges, it is still important for faculty and employers to open a channel of communication and discussion in order to provide an effective link.

Limitations of the Study

There were some limitations of this survey research. First, the participants were limited to current employers who employ the graduates from the AFL Department of CYUT. The results of this study may not be the representation of most employers. Second, some problems may occur since the survey questionnaire was applied for the first time. In addition, listening skills in English was not included in this survey. The findings of this study may not be generalized to a wide variety of settings.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the limitations of this study, suggestions for future study are addressed as follows.

1. Future research may need to build a workable database of employers.
2. The survey questionnaire should be modified and revised to avoid confusing questions.
3. Listening skills in English should be added into the survey.
4. Students and the experts of curriculum design can be recruited to participate in future research in order to draw more meaningful and persuasive conclusions.

The core curriculum should be included in the questionnaire and evaluated the importance both by employers and faculty.

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