

# COMPETENCY OF STUDENTS GRADUATING FROM DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES STUDIES, THE UNIVERSITY OF DANANG, VIETNAM

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**Accepted date:** 05 August 2018

**Published date:** 03 October 2018

**To cite this document:** Phan, T. Y., & Pham, T. T. N. (2018). Competency of Students Graduating from Department of English And Department of International Studies, University of Foreign Languages Studies, The University of Danang, Vietnam. *International Journal of Humanities, Philosophy, Language, 1*(3), 48-59.

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**Abstract:** *Renovating university training towards capacity development is the foundation for creating a qualified labour source to meet career requirements. Businesses are the ones who always accompany with the schools in developing the training quality and the outcomes of students. At the present time, the economic zone in the Middle Area of Vietnam has attracted a huge source of labourers from universities, especially those who has language skills and knowledge related to economics, politics, and cultures of other countries. As a consequence, accessing competency of students after graduations will work as a basis so as both to assert the training quality to the whole society and adjust the training process to produce good quality suitable with labour need.*

**Keywords:** *Competency; Need Satisfaction; Accessing Capacity; Training Quality; Career Capacity*

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## Introduction

In the period of strong competition on human resources of high quality, universities pay much attention to students' competency in order to meet the employers' requirements. In terms of professional aspects, the study of competency and accessing outcome of students is of great importance as this helps to form a strong foundation for all universities to ensure the outcome quality to meet the requirements of labour market.

Vietnam education aims to internationally integrate and improve quality of training. Building and enhancing researches on competence and capability evaluation of graduates are

fundamental foundation for adjusting training program in order to fulfil society's demand. In the context of global competition, universities highly concentrate on training human resource who are qualified and competitive enough to participate in international labour market.

In order to demonstrate their competence, graduate students shall both employ their knowledge and skills which were taught in school and their experience gained from outside (family, community and society). Thus, by accomplishing a task in real context, people can assess both cognitive skills, performance skills and value of emotion of learners. In the other hand, competence evaluation does not fully depend on learning programs such as assessment of knowledge, skills as the capacity is convergence of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, emotions, values, ethical standards, etc. which are formed from many fields of study and from the natural development of social aspect in a human.

One of the most important criteria to access the training quality of any university is the level of society satisfaction. In order to identify this level of satisfaction of the training products, the universities need to have surveys and assessment done by employers, the ones that directly use those products. Those products mean the results of universities in particular and the whole education system in general. Accessing training quality is done regularly in any universities in Vietnam. The assessment can be done in various ways but the most reliable would be the one based on employers' assessments so that the level of job requirements' satisfaction could be measured. This, in turn, will help university's graduates identify their own competency so as to have the right choice for suitable jobs and update necessary knowledge and skills as well.

### ***Definition of Competence and Outcome Competence***

There is a variety of definition and concept of competence such as:

"The ability which is formed and developed enables people to achieve success in a physical, mental or occupational activity. Competence is demonstrated through the ability to execute an activity or perform a task (Dictionary of Education, Encyclopaedia Publisher, 2000).

"Competence is a characteristic of an individual who demonstrates the level of proficiency - that is to say, masterfully and reliably perform one or several types of activity. Competence associated with the qualities of memorization, sensitivity, intelligence and personality. (Vietnamese Encyclopedia, Volume III).

"Competence is the ability to employ the knowledge, experience, skills, attitudes and excitement to take action in an appropriate and effective way in various situations of life" (Québec- Ministère de l'Éducation, 2004).

"Competence is demonstrated as a system of ability, expertise or essential skills that can help people meet specific goals" (F.E. Weinert, OECD, 2001).

According to Dooley, L. M., Paprock, K. E., Sun, I., & Gonzalez, E. G. Y. (2001), concept of competency derived from Latin "competentia". Nowadays, the concept of competence is understood in many different ways. Competence is interpreted as the proficiency, ability of the individual to perform a job. The concept of competence used here is the object of psychology and education. Competence is a complex psychological attribute, a convergence of many factors such as knowledge, skills, experience, willingness to act and responsibility.

Capacity is built on the foundation of knowledge, established through value, structure as possibilities, formed and reinforced through experience, actualized through will. In addition, factors such as occupational standards, demand of labour market and employers existing at the time of designing program should also be taken into consideration as the dominant factors. In some cases, the "Career Standard" may also be interpreted as "Essential Capacity to Form".

Researchers have studied and pointed out some components of capacity including knowledge, skills and attitudes; therefore, the capacity is formed based on natural abilities and practice (Bloom et al., 1956). Besides, psychology divides capacity into different forms: common capacity, key capacity and specific capacity (Dave, 1975; Tran Khanh Duc, 2013) in which common capacity and core capacity are basic ones that form foundation to develop professional capacity and professional capacity is the special one in some certain aspects (Dave, 1975; Tran Khanh Duc, 2013).

Outcome capacity is the ability to receive and apply knowledge, skills and attitude into real life at the most effective level and the lowest cost of resource. This will depend much on problem-solving ability of each individual in his/her context which is called competency (Kumpikaitè và Ribeiro, 2012; Robert, 1974; Volkwein, 2003).

According to Tran Khanh Duc (2013), common competency is the basic and essential one forming the foundation for all human activities in life and work by achieving such abilities as cognitive ability, intellectual ability, language and calculation ability, communication ability, mobility ability, etc. All these kinds of abilities are formed due to instinct, education, training and experience in life with rightful adaption to suit different activities.

Core abilities for students are those related to self-study ability, problem solving ability, creativity ability, communication ability, ICT ability (Klein, 2007; Tran Khanh Duc, 2017). Specific abilities in education are those formed and developed on the basis of general competence in the tendency of specific expertise for each type of activities, work or orientation of training curriculum to meet the goals of different aspects of activities and human requirements (Kirkpatrick, D. L., 1998; Tran Khanh Duc, 2017).

In short, outcome competence is final expected results at the minimum level that students need to achieve in both knowledge and career competence regards to the training. In other words, they are the professional knowledge, practice ability, ICT ability, problem solving ability and other specific requirement concerning with the level and career aspects that students need to master after graduation.

### ***Work Competency***

It can be seen that outcome competency is ability to receive and apply knowledge, skills and attitude into problem solving in order to get the best results at the lowest cost. This will depend on each individual in different context.

According to Rychen (2004, p.7), competency is the ability to meet requirements or complete a task. Winch and Foreman-Peck (2004) hold the viewpoint that 'competency is a combination of activities, knowledge, values and goals that change the context.'

Competency is the ability to apply the whole of knowledge, skills and attitudes into work which is divided into 2 kinds: cognitive competency and non-cognitive competency (Erpenbeck, 1998; John Muller, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Nordenfelt L, 2008).

In addition, competency is formed thanks to a process of education and training with knowledge, skills which help to form personalities, work attitude and human value (Tran Khanh Duc, 2013; Mulder, 2014; Volkwein, 2003; Walker, 1996).

### ***Work Competency System***

According to Mulder M. (2014), work competency is the ability to do tasks of a career or do a professional task that can meet the quality requirements. Work competency can be considered a combined competency to do tasks effectively in a long term (which includes problem solving, change making and renovation making abilities) in a professional aspect in different contexts.

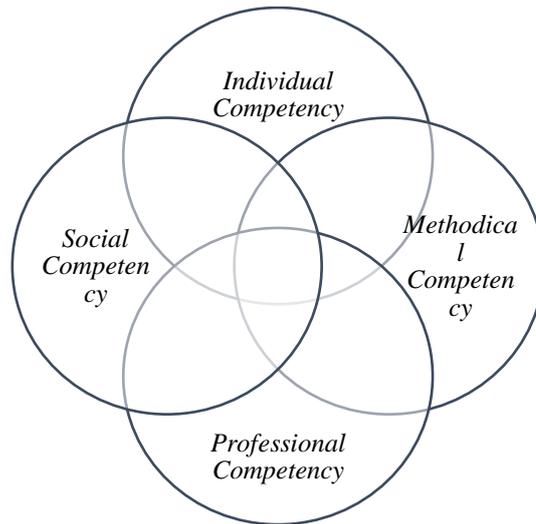
According to ASTD (The Association for Talent Development in the U.S.A.), in order to work well, labourers need to have 13 basic skills as follows: learning skill, listening skill, communicating skill, problem solving skill, creativity skill, self-confidence and self-control skill, goal setting and self-motivating skill, self-developing and professional development skill, communicating and relationship maintaining skill, group working skill, negotiation skill and leadership skill.

According to Conference Board of Canada, the employability 2000 + includes communicating skill, problem solving skill, critical thinking skill, adaptability skill, skill to work with others, research skill, ICT and calculating skills.

Singapore Workforce Development Agency has built up Singaporean Skills System with 10 skills including office and calculation skill, ICT skill, communicating skill, lifelong study skill, open mind skill, self-control skill, organization skill, skill for working safely and healthily (Erpenbeck, 1998; John Muller, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Nordenfelt L, 2008; Tran Khanh Duc, 2017).

It could be seen that the work competency system contains main human skills. These skills are formed and developed via training and practice in real life. With the help of training and knowledge development, intellectual forming and development, skills to do activities, students develop their own personalities, career attitudes and values.

The work competency is formed with 4 components (Figure 1)



**Figure 1. Different components in work competence**

In short, competency is the combination of different kinds of capacity (individual competency, social competency, professional competency and methodical competency) to complete tasks in different aspects. Tran Khan Duc’s study just mentions systems of professional competency. This study would use these systems to evaluate the specific training program towards career requirements.

### **Purpose of the Study**

One of important criteria in evaluating quality of educating unit is the ability of meeting the demand of society. In order to specify the level of meeting the demand of society, School needs a variety of surveys and evaluation through employers who directly use products of training. Evaluation of quality and efficiency is a regular and continuous work in every units of Vietnamese training system. This work can be performed in various way; however, direct evaluation on labour (product of training) is the most reliable method to quantify the ability of meeting job’s requirements and the demand of society. Simultaneously, it helps gradutors identify their capability to choose a suitable job as well as develop essential knowledge and skills for their job. This study aims to evaluate the ability of meeting competence of fresh graduate students with published Program Outcome Standards result. Besides, the study would give university graduates some recommendations in identifying their own competency in order to have the right choice of employment as well as to self-equip with necessary knowledge and skills during their education and training.

### **Design and Methodology**

In the scope of the study, the data were collected through survey and the outcome test of 167 students of 2 departments (i.e. Department of English and Department of International Studies) of 3 different universities in different areas of Vietnam namely University of Foreign Language Studies- Danang (U1), University of Social Sciences and Humanities- Hanoi (U2) and University of Foreign Languages-Hue (U3). The survey includes the tools of 4 standards, i.e. knowledge, skills, moral quality, and competency. These standards would be analysed using Likert scale.

The evaluation toolkit was designed to consist of four criteria for knowledge, skills, ethical qualities, working and study environment with 20 criteria, 82 indicators to survey the capacity

of 167 students major in International Studies 2013-2017 of the University of Foreign Languages, University of Social Sciences and Humanities- Vietnam National University, Hue University and 252 graduate students of the English Language Department of the University of Foreign Languages – Da Nang University. The survey toolkit for graduate students in English language also includes four standards, 18 criteria and 63 indicators. Criteria and indicators are used in the Likert scale for evaluation. In addition, there is an indicator on foreign language certificates that does not use the scale but only ask the level of attainment of the certificates required by the Program Outcome Standards. The scale used in this study was a combination of the Bloom and Likert capacity scales to categorize the following five groups: 1-Knowing (ability to remember and recognize information); 2-Understanding (including ability of knowing, demonstrating, explaining or reasoning provided information (predict results)); 3- Handling (implementing information and knowledge into job relating to their major (from a specific situation to another, implementing knowledge in a new situation)); 4- Well Practicing (ability of recognizing detail, discovering and distinguishing components of the information or situation, integrating knowledge to suit learner’s purpose, generalizing issues and knowledge); 5-Creativity (ability of evaluating or using information in proper criteria).

**Table 1. Criteria for evaluating working competence of graduate students major in International Studies and English language**

Code	Criteria	International Studies	English language
<b>Standard of Knowledge</b>			
KT1	General knowledge of history, politics, culture and society	x	x
KT2	General knowledge of language	x	x
KT3	Professional knowledge	x	x
KT4	Intensive knowledge of phonetics, morphology, grammar, syntax, semantics		x
KT5	Intensive knowledge of economics, law, politics, international understandings	x	
KT6	Intensive knowledge of regional studies (Europe, Asia, America, Asia-Pacific ...)	x	
KT7	Intensive knowledge of international relations	x	
KT8	Intensive knowledge of the foreign policy of Vietnam	x	
KT9	Intensive knowledge of social culture and cultural communication in the United Kingdom and the United States		x
<b>Standard of skills</b>			
KN1	Professionalism skill	x	x
KN2	Communication skill	x	x
KN3	Reasoning, logical thinking and handling skill	x	x
KN4	Research skill	x	x
KN5	Systematically and creatively thinking skill	x	x
KN6	Building and analyzing context skill	x	x
KN7	Applying knowledge to work skill	x	x
KN8	Organizing and management skill	x	x
<b>Standard of attitude</b>			
TĐ1	Personal qualities	x	x
TĐ2	Professional ethics	x	x
TĐ3	Social ethics	x	x
<b>Standard of working and learning</b>			
MT1	Working position after graduating	x	x
MT2	Ability of improving competence	x	x
<b>Number of criteria</b>		<b>20</b>	<b>18</b>

In order to audit the professional competence of graduate students major in English language and International Studies, the study used the criteria in Table 1 and collected data from self-assessments of learners and evaluation of the training unit and the employers. Results are analysed by criteria group then compared with the teacher's assessment. The assessment of students is conducted accordant with the model shown in Figure 2.

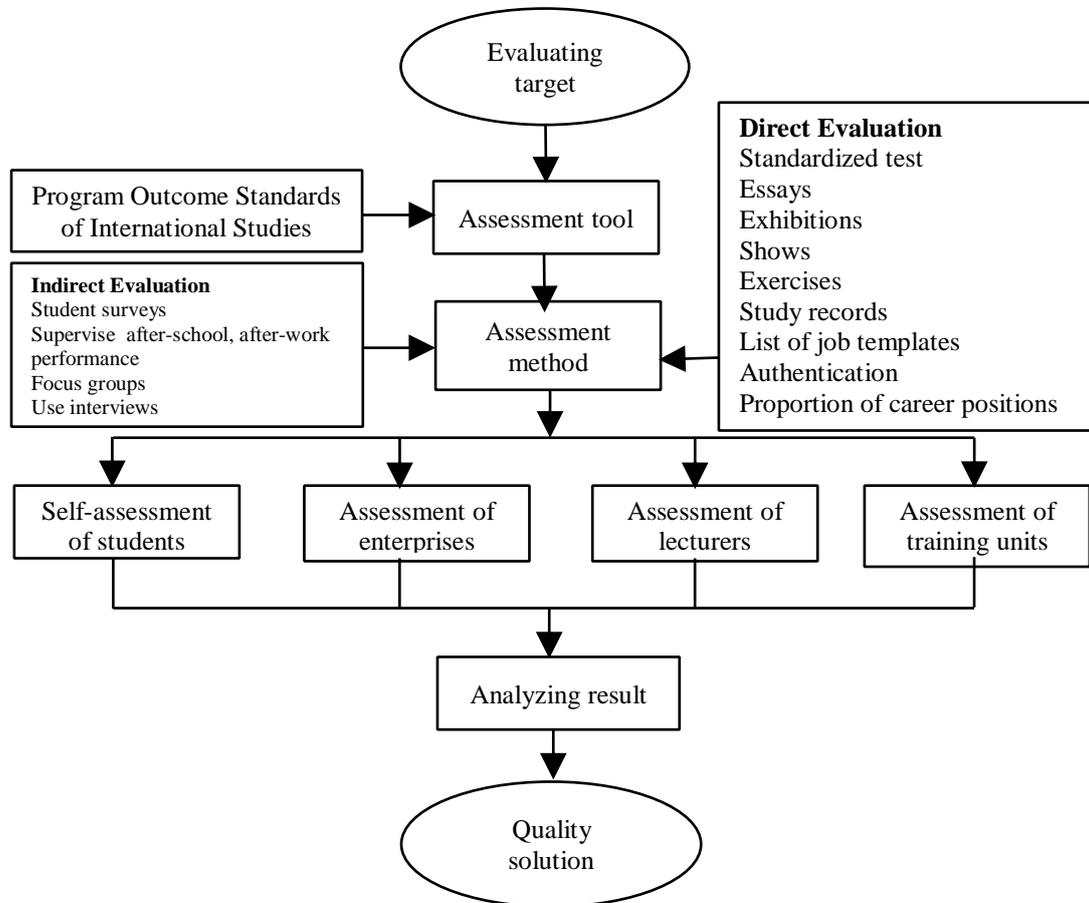


Figure 2. Model of evaluating graduate student's career competence

### Discussion

With the use of SPSS to evaluate the reliability of the survey with 4 standards, the results were as follows in Table 2.

Table 2. Reliability of the scale

Reliability Statistics					
Cronbach's Alpha	The tools	Standard 1	Standard 2	Standard 3	Standard 4
Department of International Studies (DIS)	.917	.763	.935	.928	.796
Department of English (DE)	.925	.751	.955	.946	.800

The reliability of the scale through students' survey was rather high, however, it was still in good and acceptable level. As a result, all observed variables would be accepted and used in analyzing other components.

### ***Intellectual Capacity Evaluation***

Evaluating intellectual capacity is to evaluate the capacity of receiving knowledge related to memorizing and redoing things and situations through the process of carrying out the training curriculum. The result is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Self-Assessment' Results in Terms of Intellectual Capacity**

		Self-assessment's results of students	
		DIS	DE
Standard 1 <sup>a</sup>	Remembering	23.4%	4.1%
	Understanding	33.8%	33.2%
	Applying	28.9%	26.9%
	Analysing	11.1%	25.9%
	Creating	2.9%	9.8%
Total		100.0%	100.0%

Standard1<sup>a</sup>: The standard on common knowledge

In terms of the standard related to common knowledge, 23% students from the Department of International Studies reached the level of remembering, 33.8% at the level of understanding, 28.9% at the level of applying, 11.1% at the level of analyzing and only 2.9% at the level of creating whereas for those of the Department of English, 33.2% were at the level of understanding, 26.9% at the level of applying, 25.9% at the level of analyzing and 9.8% at the level of creating.

### ***Practice Capacity Evaluation***

Evaluating practice capacity is to evaluate the capacity of communication, discussion, information organization, system analysis, critical thinking, problem solving and creativity. The businesses' evaluation of students' practical capacity was as follows. The result is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Self-Assessment' Results in Terms of Practice Capacity at Businesses**

		Self-assessment's results of students	
		DIS	DE
Standard 2 <sup>a</sup>	Remembering	10.0%	7.8%
	Understanding	27.6%	15.7%
	Applying	36.1%	27.3%
	Analysing	15.3%	28.1%
	Creating	10.0%	18.0%
Total		100.0%	100.0%

It could be seen from Table 4 that Applying has the highest rate of 36 %.1% of students of the Department of International Studies and 27.3 % those of the Department of English reached the level of applying. Besides, the students of the 2 Departments were highly evaluated at the level

of creating, i.e. 10-18% in which those of the Department of English were more appreciated. Relating to the standard of skills, to those of the Department of International Studies, there were 16,5%, 27.6%, 36.1%, 15.5% and 4.5% at the levels of remembering, understanding, applying, analysing and creating respectively.

***Moral Quality Evaluation***

Evaluating moral quality is to evaluate the personal moral value, professional moral value and social moral value. The result is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5. Self-Assessment' Results in Terms of Moral Quality**

		Self-assessment's results of students	
		DIS	DE
Standard 3 <sup>a</sup>	Remembering	16.5%	3.1%
	Understanding	27.6%	22.1%
	Applying	36.1%	10.7%
	Analysing	15.3%	35.1%
	Creating	4.5%	29.0%
Total		100.0%	100.0%

To those of the Department of International Studies, there were 27.6% and 36.1% at the levels of understanding and applying while those at the Department of English were at 22.1%, 10/7%, 35.1% and 29.0% at the levels of understanding, applying, analysing and creating respectively.

***Competency Evaluation***

Students of the Department of English were more appreciated in terms of competency evaluation in comparison with those of the Department of International Studies. The result is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6. Self-Assessment' Results in Terms of Competency**

		Self-assessment's results of students	
		DIS	DE
Standard 4 <sup>a</sup>	Remembering	16.3%	14.0%
	Understanding	29.0%	23.8%
	Applying	26.7%	16.7%
	Analysing	16.5%	26.3%
	Creating	11.6%	19.2%
Total		100.0%	100.0%

In contrast, businesses highly appreciated the suitability of the training curriculum with the job requirements with the rates of 91.5% and 87.5% for students of the Department of International Studies and the Department of English respectively. This may form a foundation for the related Departments and Universities in order to better the training program as well as facilitate the consultancy for current and potential students.

## Assessment Results

### Self-assessment Results

The survey on the self-assessment results before the graduation of 2017 shows that there are 4.19%, 20.96%, 64.67% and 10.8% for high distinction, distinction, fair and average respectively.

### Assessment Results by Teachers

The real results of students from the 2 departments (DIS and DE) in 2017 are shown in Table 7.

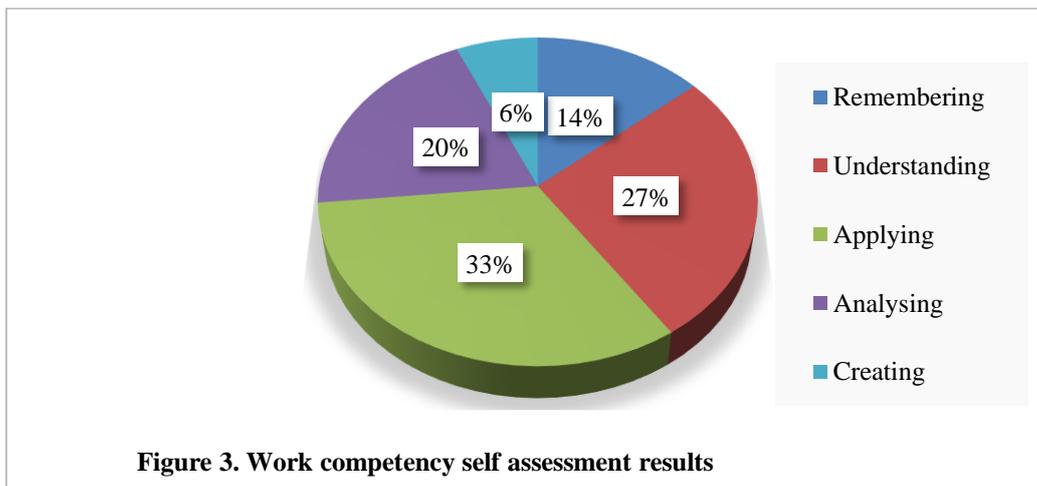
**Table 7. Percentages of graduation ranking of students from DIS and DE (terms: 2013-2017)**

Department	Total	High Distinction (%)	Distinction (%)	Fair (%)	Average (%)
DIS	96	1.04	21.92	72.87	4.17
DE	372		17.43	80.18	2.39

Source : <http://ufl.udn.vn/vie/totnghiep/totnghiep.html>

### Comparison between self-assessment results and work competency self-assessment results

The outcome competency made by students shows that there are high percentages of students are at remembering and understanding level. This is clearly illustrated in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Work competency self assessment results**

From the aforementioned, it could be seen that students have had the right assessment relating to their own graduation ranking and competency. The high rates of students at levels of remembering, understanding and applying are corresponding to the high rates of graduates with fair and average ranking. This also matches with the graduation results in 2017.

## Conclusion

On one hand, in regard to different standards used to assess students' competency, there should be suitable recommendations as follows.

- Improve training method to increase students' competency in terms of intellectual capacity development.
- Have credits related to professional development and work competency.

- Increase the number of credits related to skills, especially those that apply knowledge in practice.
- Increase knowledge of foreign languages for specific purposes for students by teaching them their majors in foreign languages.
- Consolidate and improve the relationship between universities and employers.

The evaluating competency is a process aiming at affirming students' competency in comparison with the outcome so that students themselves can identify their own competency. As a consequence, they can feel self-confident in finding suitable jobs as well as creating employment for themselves. For this sake, during the time at university, students should be assigned to do different tasks of different levels of evaluation so that students could recognize their competency at different levels and aspects. All these forms of evaluation will help to fulfil all the requirements of the outcome competency so that students will get the full benefits of the training program. Henceforth, evaluating competency has to be done continuously to get the results which in turn, helps to adjust the training curriculum in order to meet the requirement of job market after graduation.

### **Acknowledgment**

This research is funded by Funds for Science and Technology Development of the University of Danang under grant number B2017-DN05-13.

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