

## Conference Paper

# Vocational Public Relations Education: Does It Meet Employers' Entry-level Needs?

Mareta Maulidiyanti and Pijar Suciati

Universitas Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia

## Abstract

In this new age of globalization, higher education plays an increasingly important role in preparing a workforce that meets the rapidly changing industry needs. The article examines the entry-level skills and competency gap that exist between Public Relations (PR) and employer needs (agency, corporate and government) in entry-level positions and curriculum in Vocational Public Relations (PR) in Universitas Indonesia. This idea comes up from the phenomenon that there are so many PR positions handled by people from other fields, not from PR (engineering, politics, etc.)

We used a content analysis of entry-level public relations job postings and also deep interview. Content analysis data are measured to explore the areas that have a greatest and least demand in entry-level public relations positions in relation to education. This research analyzes PR job posting by PR Agency, Multinational Private Company and Government Institution. The result shows us the gap between curriculum and entry-level requirement through its gap analysis. To strengthen the data, we also use qualitative gap analysis from in-depth interview with users from three different sectors. This study found that there are four gap items in vocational PR curriculum, such as: Media Monitoring Skills, Digital Communications Skill (plan, execute and evaluate), PR Documents writings and Photography & Videography basic skill. Author's suggestion is also provided for strengthening the current vocational public relations curriculum and improving the communication of key strengths in job posting.

**Keywords:** public relations, education, curriculum, requirement

Corresponding Author:

Mareta Maulidiyanti  
mareta20@ui.ac.id

Received: 8 June 2018

Accepted: 17 July 2018

Published: 8 August 2018

Publishing services provided by  
Knowledge E

© Mareta Maulidiyanti and Pijar Suciati. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the 2nd ICVHE Conference Committee.

 OPEN ACCESS

## 1. Introduction

Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (PRSA, 2011). It means Public Relations is a management function that is responsible for building good relations with the public.

The problem of curriculum mismatch with work requirements was common in developing countries as was shown in studies done in Benin and Senegal – [15]. In Indonesia, vocational education has only recently developed. Public Relations industry has not familiar with the qualifications of vocational graduate students. This phenomenon is seen from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted by Vocational Communications of Universitas Indonesia which stated that industry currently prefer to hire Public Relations from undergraduate program. Today, The educational background of public relations practitioners is dominated by people with other education such as engineering, literature, and others.

McKinsey just published a worldwide research that examine the impact of education on employment. That research shows the challenging mismatch between our educational system and the job skills employers need (Forbes, 2012).

That research also compared student 'perceptions of value' between traditional education and vocational education and apprentice programs. In the research every country values traditional education over vocational education except for Germany, where 49% of respondents say academic education is more valuable. This phenomenon also happened in Indonesia. It also happened in Indonesia that people values undergraduate education over than vocational higher education. Furthermore, employers are among the most important stakeholders to graduates employability.

Then this research seeks to see whether Public Relations Vocational Education Universitas Indonesia is able to meet the needs of the industry or still need to be adjusted and improved.

## 2. Literature Review

Commission on Public Relations Education in Public Relations *Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century—A Port of Entry* (1999) said that curriculum were used to develop knowledge, skill, and personality trait coding categories for a content analysis of 223 job postings representing 73 public agencies.

According to Pratt (1994) and Barriw Milburn (1990) in Wen Shu (2012) said, the word 'curriculum' is derived from the Latin verb *currere*, 'to run'. 'Currere' became a diminutive noun and meant a 'racing chariot' or 'race track'. An extension was made by Cicero who associated the term with *curriculum vitae* that means 'the course of one's life'. He also associated it with *curricula mentis* that metaphorically refers to 'the (educational) course of the mind'. It was not until the nineteenth century that the term was commonly used in the educational field.

Chen (2007) said that curriculum is an interactive process developed among learners, teachers, materials, and the environment. The enumeration of the definitions, thus, can be illustrated in algebra equations as follows [19]:

1. Curricula as a set of objectives = **goals or objectives**
2. Curricula as courses of study or content = **content + goals**
3. Curricula as plans = **content + goals+ teaching methods**
4. Curricula as documents = **content + goals + methods + assessment**
5. Curricula as experiences = **content + goals + methods + assessment + extracurricular activities and learning environment + hidden curriculum + cultures**

According to Brady (1995, p.75) and Nunan (1988, p.4), the curriculum development process generally entails four elements: objectives, content, methods, and evaluation. Reynolds and Halpin (1982, p.23) have extended this view by considering 'outcomes' as a fifth element of any curriculum by some educators. An even wider view of curriculum is recommended: one that includes the learning environment and considers the social dimensions of the schooling experience as an important element in achieving curricular effectiveness.

Jefkins (2003) states that Public Relations (PR) always related with the effort in creating public understanding through knowledge. PR is a form of communication that is applicable to all types of organizations in both the commercial and non-commercial, public sector (government) and private sector. Jefkins (2003) stated that PR is defined as the communication effort that is planned and sustainable in order to create, maintaining a goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its public.

Belch & Belch (2012) said that public relations is a management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the company's policy against the public interest and implement a communications program to gain public understanding and acceptance. Effective PR activities can only be achieved when implemented consistently and continuously.

PR as a profession has a professional competency standard. Professional competencies are the qualifications practitioners need to execute those tasks ([18]; Sha, 2011b). Today PR practitioners need communication skills, media knowledge and management, problem-solving abilities, motivation, intellectual curiosity, solid writing skills, an understanding of one's specific business or industry, ability to relate to people, able to deal with stress, and have a knowledge of current issue [3].

Meanwhile, Vocational Education is every form of education that aims to the acquirement of qualifications related to a certain profession, art or employment or that provides the necessary training and the appropriate skills as well as technical knowledge, so that students are able to exercise a profession, art or activity, independently of their age and their training level, even if the training program contains also elements of general education [14]. In this study, the vocational refers to Public Relations Vocational Higher Education with diploma degree graduates

### 3. Methodology

This research is a descriptive research. Descriptive research is a research method where the variable indicator is the answers to the verbal or written questions (Michael H. Walizer, 1993, p.225). According to Neuman (2003), descriptive research give the complete picture about the situation, social phenomenon and a relationship. This method makes it possible to examine only one variable or more ([12], hal.12).

This research design is qualitative which implement based on natural condition to collect data from informant without any interversion ([9], p.4). The result of this qualitative research may be applied to the similar situations and circumstances ([10], p.29). Content analysis and comparative method were used as strategies of inquiry. Comparative method was used to match the employer needs and Public Relations curriculum offerings.

The primary data collection were conducted in qualitative approach, which involved interview methods with Public Relations practitioners (18 practitioners) from three different sectors (private company, agency and government institution).

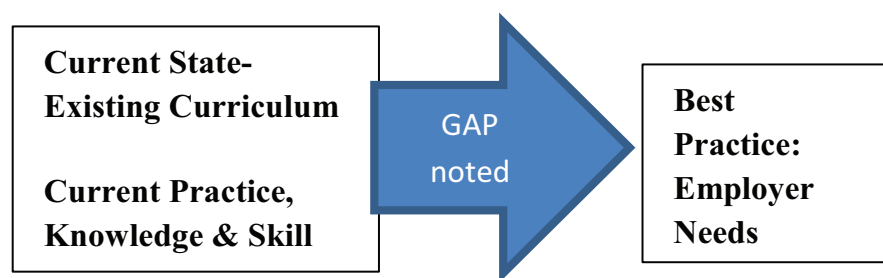
**Data Analysis** – We use gap analysis to find the connection between Vocational Public Relations Curriculum with the Entry-level requirement. Gap analysis is a technique that businesses use to determine what steps need to be taken in order to move from its current state to its desired, future state. Also called need-gap analysis, needs analysis, and needs assessment, (Business Directory, 2017)

Gap analysis consists of:

1. Characteristic factors list (such as attributes, competencies, performance levels) of the present situation ('what is'),
2. Listing factors needed list to achieve future objectives ('what should be')
3. Highlighting the gaps that exist and need to be filled. Gap analysis forces a company/institution to reflect on who it is and ask who they want to be in the future.

A Gap analysis can be defined as the determination of the difference between current knowledge/practices (what we are doing) and current Evidence-based Practices (what we should be doing). Gaps can occur in knowledge, skills or practice. [13]. Steps to Performing a Gap Analysis:

1. Find the need- through conducting a Needs Assessment
2. Is the gap a knowledge, skill or practice? Determine 'What is the best practice?'
3. Determine the Purpose of the Activity then develop the learning objectives to 'closing the gap'.



**Figure 1:** Gap Analysis Model [13].

The interview result analyzed with a qualitative content analysis method that was chosen to analyze many words of texts, which are transcribed from interview discussions. Content analysis is a technique for compressing large amounts of data from the interviews, field notes, and various types of sources into systematic and fewer categories of text which is based on specific rules of coding (Steve, 2001). Many previous studies have shown that content analysis can be a useful method for allowing researcher to discover and describe the focus of individual, group, institutional, or social attention (Weber, 1990). In this study, the crucial process in content analysis is categorizing some key words from the given texts into certain themes. Content analysis and interview data were triangulated and compared against Junior PR competency certification standards and PR Professional qualification to explore the areas of greatest and least demand in entry-level public relations positions in relation to education.

The informant comes from:

1. PR Agency : 5 Companies
2. Private Company: 7 Companies
3. Government : 5 Ministries/Companies

## 4. Results & Discussion

The interview result from 18 informant show that there are four gaps in PR Vocational Curriculum, such as:

### 4.1. Media monitoring skill

Employers said that they found some difficulties in training the entry-level employee to do a media monitoring activity. Most of the entry-level employee know about media monitoring but cannot do the execution. They do not know how to search the news and count the PR Value. They also can't make a media monitoring report which is the most important part in this activity.

Media monitoring skill is very important because it is the first step in PR work. PR workflow is start with situation analysis and follow with program planning & evaluation. Media Monitoring is used to analyze the company situation and public perception to the company. This competency is also required in the junior public relations certification test.

Today, Media Monitoring is only given as a knowledge for PR student and they are not taught about how to do it in practical area.

### 4.2. Digital communications skill

In this digital area, digital communication becomes an effective strategy for some publics. So, the employers expect that entry level should know how to implement digital communication strategy. Not only maintaining the digital communication like social media and website, the employers also expect that the entry level is able to plan, execute and evaluate the digital communication program.

Today, PR student only get the knowledge about digital communication from some subjects along the semesters. There is no a special subject for it so student is not familiar with digital communications tools and cannot operate it, such as Search Engine Optimization (SEO), evaluation software, google analytics and others.

### 4.3. PR documents writings

The employers expect that entry level has a writing competency. They expect that employee knows & able to write all PR documents such as: press release, back-grounders, Q&A anticipated, fact sheet, photo caption, features & cue card.

Today, the writing class focus in major document like press release, features, printed media writing (brochure, magazine, article)

### 4.4. Photography and videography basic skill

The employers said that entry level should be equipped with photography and videography basic skill. Those skill are important because PR job always related to the pictures and video. This competency is also required in the junior public relations certification test.

Today, there is no subject talking about photography and videography. So, student make a photo and video based on their own knowledge and capability.

TABLE 1: PR curriculum current state & employers assessment.

Gap Should be Fulfilled	Suggestion
<b>Media Monitoring</b>	
PR Vocational Education Universitas Indonesia doesn't provide and develop media monitoring competency for its students.	Create a Media Monitoring subject that give the student skill and practical in clipping, content analysis and counting PR Value. This subject will be a hallmark of Public Relations Vocational Higher Education
<b>Digital Communications Skill and Practice</b>	
PR Vocational Education Universitas Indonesia doesn't provide a specific subject for Digital Communications. It should develop Student to have digital communication competency (planning, operate and evaluate all the use of Digital Communications tools)	Create a Digital Communications subject that give the student skill and practical experience in Digital Communication management
<b>Development PR Documents</b>	
Student don't get all PR Document exercise so they do not understand the function and the different between of all those documents	Include all PR Documents writing technic in a basic writing skill subject syllabus
<b>Photography &amp; Videography</b>	
PR Vocational Education Universitas Indonesia doesn't provide and develop a basic knowledge Photo & Video for PR Publicity	Include basic Videography & Photography in one of subjects syllabus or create a special subject for it

From the employers need assessment, author's summary the gap and give some suggestion to improve the connection between Vocational PR Curriculum with the industry. Here are the suggestions:

1. Create a **Media Monitoring** subject that give the student skill and practical in clipping, content analysis and counting PR Value. This subject will be a hallmark of Public Relations Vocational Higher Education
2. Create a **Digital Communications** subject that give the student skill and practical experience in Digital Communication management
3. Include all **PR Documents** writing technic in a basic writing skill subject syllabus
4. Include basic **Videography & Photography** in one of subjects syllabus or create a special subject for it

TABLE 2: Gap and suggestion.

Gap Should be Fulfilled	Suggestion
<b>Media Monitoring</b>	
PR Vocational Education Universitas Indonesia doesn't provide and develop media monitoring competency for its students.	Create a Media Monitoring subject that give the student skill and practical in clipping, content analysis and counting PR Value. This subject will be a hallmark of Public Relations Vocational Higher Education
<b>Digital Communications Skill and Practice</b>	
PR Vocational Education Universitas Indonesia doesn't provide a specific subject for Digital Communications. It should develop Student to have digital communication competency (planning, operate and evaluate all the use of Digital Communications tools)	Create a Digital Communications subject that give the student skill and practical experience in Digital Communication management
<b>Development PR Documents</b>	
Student don't get all PR Document exercise so they do not understand the function and the different between of all those documents	Include all PR Documents writing technic in a basic writing skill subject syllabus
<b>Photography &amp; Videography</b>	
PR Vocational Education Universitas Indonesia doesn't provide and develop a basic knowledge Photo & Video for PR Publicity	Include basic Videography & Photography in one of subjects syllabus or create a special subject for it

Other secondary data comes from job posting content analysis, the data said:

1. 9 out of 10 Public Relations Requirements mentioned a communication education background
2. 8 of 10 required undergraduate fresh graduate
3. 2 out of 10 allowed a diploma fresh graduate to apply
4. 10 job postings required English proficiency



Competency is demonstrated in the ability to effectively manage the varying perceptions and expectations of others (Chong, 2011). Nayan., et al. (2012) said the literature review showed that most of the PR practitioners in Europe and Asia have weaknesses in mastering the professional competencies which PR practitioners in U.S considered as important and needed in current situations.

Nayan et al. (2012) said a stronger cooperation between academicians and practitioners is needed in building the relevant PR professional competencies model based on European and Asian culture and environment.

This study findings also revealed weaknesses amongst vocational students including personality traits and characteristic. Those two factors play a significant role in hiring decision of public relations practitioners in relation to entry-level position. When areas of weakness were revealed, practitioners generally agreed that public relations students we be educated.

## Acknowledgment

The completion of this study would not have been possible without the help and support of friends and family, especially my lecturer friends, VOKKOM squad. Special thanks to my second authors, Pijar Suciati. Thanks for the support in data collection.

## References

### Books

- [1] Belch, George E and Michael A. Belch. (2012). *Advertising and Promotion: An Integrated Marketing Communication Perspective International Edition*. McGraw-Hill Book Co.
- [2] Brady, L. (1995). *Curriculum development*. Sydney: Prentice Hall.
- [3] Broom, G.M. (2009) *Cutlip & Center's effective PR (10th ed)*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- [4] Effendy, Onong (1999). *Hubungan Masyarakat Suatu Studi Komunikologis*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, hal. 107
- [5] Effendy, Onong (2005). *Ilmu Komunikasi & Praktek*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya
- [6] Frans, Jeffkins (2003). *Public Relations*. (Haris Munandar, Penerjemah). Jakarta: Erlangga.

- [7] Irawan, Prasetya. (2007). *Penelitian Kualitatif dan Kuantitatif untuk Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial*. Depok: DIA FISIP UI
- [8] Iriantara, Yossal. (2004). *Dasar-Dasar Humas*. Jakarta: Ghalia Indonesia
- [9] Kasali, Rhenald. (2008). *Riset Kualitatif dalam Public Relations & Marketing Communications*. Jakarta: Penerbit Bentang
- [10] Kountur, Ronny. (2003). *Metode Penelitian: Untuk Penulisan Skripsi dan Tesis*. Jakarta: Peberbit PPM.
- [11] Newman, Lawrence. (2003). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approches*. London: Allyn and Bacon
- [12] Ruslan, Rosady. (2003). *Metode Penelitian Public Relations dan Komunikasi*. Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada.

## Research Journal

- [13] Anthony J. Jannetti, Inc. (2012). *A representation: Incorporating a needs assessment and gap analysis into the educational design*. Pitman, NJ: Author.
- [14] Kotsikis, V. (2007). *Educational Administration and Policy*. Athens: Ellin.
- [15] Megnigbeto, E. (2007). *Library and information science education in developing countries [Online]*, *The International Information and Library Review* 39 (2): 64-71.
- [16] Nayan, Liana Mat. (2012). *The Need for Public Relations Professional Competencies in Europe and Asia*. *The International Journal of Social Sciences* Vol.6.
- [17] Pasipamire (2014). *Examining the Gap between Employers' Skills Needs and Library and Information Science Education in Zimbabwe*. National University of Science and Technology
- [18] Sha, B.L. (2011a). *Does accreditation really matter in PR practice? How age and experience compare to accreditation*. *Public Relations Review*, 37, 1-11.
- [19] Wen Shu, Shao. (2012). *The Various Concepts of Curriculum and the Factors Involved in Curricula-making*. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, Vol. 3. PP.155