

An evaluation of the curriculum of a graduate programme in Clinical Psychology

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Abstract

Introduction: The objective of this study was to evaluate the Masters Degree programme in Clinical Psychology, offered by the Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, Siriraj Hospital, Graduate Study, Mahidol University.

Methods: CIPP Model was used to evaluate the programme. The sample consisted of 44 lecturers, 36 current students, 56 graduates and employers of 56 graduates. Data was collected using questionnaires and by an informal interview. Content analysis and descriptive statistics were used for analysis.

Results: The research findings in the context evaluation indicated that the curriculum objectives were clearly stated, practice oriented and corresponded to social needs. The curriculum structure was well designed. The instructional and evaluation activities corresponded to the curriculum objectives.

The input evaluation showed that the students who attended the programme found the selection criteria appropriate. The students' readiness was found to be high. The results show that the working committee and lecturers could conduct the course successfully. The educational resources were available to serve the teaching and learning process. However, some of the resources were not adequate.

With regard to the process evaluation, the operation instruction and evaluation process were very good. Product evaluation suggests that graduates have achieved the general and specific competencies as mentioned in the programme objectives.

Introduction

The Master of Science programme in Clinical Psychology was established under the approval of the Ministry of University Affairs on June 21st 1980. The Office of the Civil Service Commission certified the degree on January 20th, 1982. The objective of the programme is to produce Masters graduates in psychology who have the ability to work in the psychology field, to lecture in Clinical Psychology and to scientifically conduct research that would benefit society.

The graduates are now working in psychology fields for both government agencies and in the private sector throughout the country. According to the input data of the last 5 years, students who enrolled in the Clinical Psychology programme had excellent academic records. Their GPAs were higher when compared to those who were enrolled in other programmes. Their entrance examination score in the social sciences field was also higher than that of those who were not enrolled in this programme.

These data suggest a high level of popularity for the Clinical Psychology programme. The average time to graduate from this programme is three and a half years. Still, there is a need to analyze and identify the problems and hurdles in this programme.

The Clinical Psychology programme has never been evaluated since its establishment. During this study Phi Delta Kappa (the Phi Delta Committee Model), commonly called "CIPP

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Model": an acronym for context, input, process and product evaluation, was chosen by the research team as the evaluation model. In order to analyze the potential of the programme in the aspect of producing exceptional students, the research team had to study fundamental factors such as lecturers, students, the campus, and the process (programme management, course management, course evaluation including the products of the programme).

The findings of the research would serve as a guideline to discover the effectiveness or weaknesses of the Master of Science in Clinical Psychology programme and can be used for its improvement and development.

Methods

Design

The study design for this research is based on the CIPP Model. CIPP is a model for programme evaluation which categorises evaluation into four levels (Pithiyauwat, 2006).

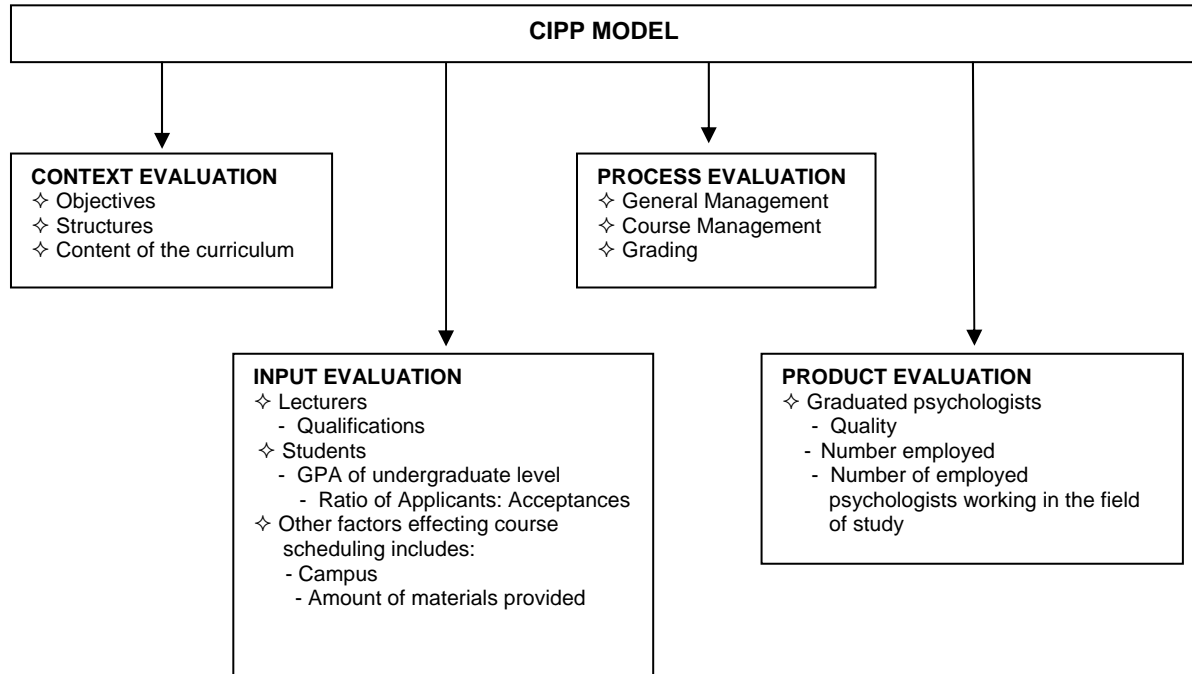
C) Context Evaluation: To evaluate the principle, the reason, the necessity of the process, the problems and the suitability of the objectives of the project.

I) Input Evaluation: To evaluate the possibility of the project, the suitability, the quantity of resources such as funds, personnel, equipment, time and technology and the project plan.

P) Process Evaluation: To find insufficiencies of the project with the intent of developing, resolving and improving. It also observes the activities, the time, the usage of resources and the participation of the project's members.

P) Product Evaluation: To compare the product with the goal of the project or given standard. Also, to contemplate on areas in the project to be cutback, canceled, expanded and modified.

Figure 1: CIPP Model in this research framework



Subjects

The subjects included:

- 44 full time and external lecturers (academic year 2006)
- 36 current students (academic year 2006)
- 56 graduates (2000 to 2006)
- The employers of 56 graduates (2000 to 2006)

Sample group

- Non randomly selected

Materials

The evaluating format consisted of 4 rating scales and was divided into 4 parts: lecturers, students, graduates and employers of the graduates.

Part 1: Questionnaire for the lecturers comprised of 5 sections:

Section 1. Personal Data

Section 2. Questionnaire for Curriculum Evaluation (on the Objective, Structure, Context)

Section 3. Questionnaire for Input Evaluation

Section 4. Questionnaire for Process Evaluation

Section 5. Questionnaire for Product Evaluation

Part 2: Questionnaire for the current students comprised of 5 sections. The contents of the questionnaire were the same as for the lecturers except the part on administration.

Part 3: Questionnaire for the graduates comprised of 5 sections. Contents of the questionnaire were the same as for the current students but with more information on the applied competency for their job.

Part 4: Questionnaire for the employers of the graduates comprised of 2 sections:

Section 1. Personal Data

Section 2. Questionnaire on the competency of the graduates

Statistical Analysis

Calculation of Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation

Once the average value was obtained, the standards below were used to make comparisons (Best, 1977).

3.50 – 4.00	indicates	Highest
2.50 – 3.49	indicates	High
1.50 – 2.49	indicates	Low
0.50 – 1.49	indicates	Lowest

Results

Part 1: Subjects

1) Lecturers

The majority (85.4%) of the lecturers were aged between 41 to 50 years. 91.3% of the lecturers had a doctorate, and 79.5% of them were working at an administrative level and a service level while 78.3% had teaching experience of 10 to 20 years.

2) Current Students

The average GPA of undergraduates was 3.20. 80.6% were very interested in this profession and 80.6% were already employed. 97.2% chose this programme as their first choice and 97.2% were accepted on their first attempt.

3) Graduates

Most of the graduates (75%) were aged between 23 to 25 years. 61.1% study in this field. All students had chosen this programme because of its reputation.

4) Employers

Most of the employers (74%) were between the ages of 50 to 55 years and had completed their doctorate (95%) with at least 25 years of work experience. Most of the employers worked for hospitals in a supervisory capacity.

Part 2: Context Evaluation

1) Objectives

It was found that the objectives of the programme were aligned with the needs of the society.

2) Structure

The programme structure consists of 42 credits and was divided into mandatory courses (23 credits), selective courses (7 credits) and a thesis (12 credits). Most of the credits granted in each course were found to be appropriate (mean = 3.75, SD = 0.25).

3) Content

The content was found to be in compliance with the students' needs and updated regularly (mean = 3.57, SD = 1.65). Courses of the programme were appropriate to the line of work, especially the courses which were related to psychological examination. The contents of most courses were satisfactory on evaluation (mean = 3.44, SD = 1.69).

Part 3: Input Evaluation

1) Lecturer evaluation by students and graduates

It was found that the number of lecturers in the courses was well distributed (mean = 3.44, SD = 0.45). Moreover, the lecturers were well qualified and had positive attitudes towards the programme (mean=3.50, SD= 1.33).

2) Student evaluation

The characteristics of students of the programme were found to be appropriate such as the background knowledge from undergraduate level, enthusiasm to learn, relationship within the class and positive attitudes towards the programme (mean = 3.88, SD = 0.15).

3) Course-management supplement evaluation

The availability of most course-management supplements such as documents, textbooks, reference books, visual aids, class materials, classrooms, common room and evaluation facilities was found to be deficient including availability of patients (mean=1.75, SD=1.35).

Part 4: Process Evaluation

1) General management evaluation

The curriculum is especially designed to compliment the programme and the previous results of the course management evaluation were considered with the intent of improving the programme (mean = 3.66, SD = 0.77).

2) Lecturer evaluation

Lecturers were found to be very well educated, able to relate their experiences and be open-minded to students' questions. The lectures were well prepared. Nevertheless, classes were frequently rescheduled and the delay in concluding the report was due to the delay in confirming appointments between the study-case patients and the lecturers (mean = 3.75, SD = 0.55).

3) Grading evaluation

It was found that most courses had a suitable grading system (mean = 3.49, SD=1.88) except for the Psychotherapy course (mean = 1.45, SD=1.33). In the Psychotherapy course, each student was supervised and graded by different lecturers which meant that the grading was subjective.

Part 5: Product Evaluation

1) Quality evaluation:

Most of the graduates had the general and professional competencies in diagnosing psychological problems, psychological therapy,

conducting research in clinical psychology, lecturing in clinical psychology, incorporating research results with clinical psychology, bearing responsibility of self and professional development and the ability to cooperate with other professionals (mean = 3.66, SD=0.66).

2) Profession evaluation

All graduates were employed and 90.3% worked in the field of study.

3) Amount of publishing research

About 95% had research published in journals in clinical psychology.

Discussion

Method and Analysis of Evaluation

CIPP Model was used in order to study the efficiency of the Masters Programme in Clinical Psychology. The factors that were considered included input (such as lecturers, students, campus), process (such as general management, course management, grading) and output (graduate psychologists). There are many models of evaluation which are categorized by the object. Lewy (1997) has categorized the method of evaluation into 3 models, which are: Goal Attainment Model of Objective Base Model, Judgmental Model and Decision Making Model. Of the three models, the Decision Making Model evaluation is the most well known technique. This model evaluates the data, which will assist in decision making.

When a programme evaluation is conducted, the whole process (information storage, information analysis and result presentation) must be performed systematically. CIPP is a programme evaluation system which is categorized as a Decision Making Model. In addition, Stufflebeam has introduced types of decision making which is in accordance with the matter of the evaluation (Tyler, 1990). The 1999 National Education Act took educational-quality assurance as the prime priority and stated the regulations for this particular matter, and plays the institutional role in this mechanism. The purpose of the regulations is to guarantee to the public that each institution is able to produce qualified graduates (The Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment, 2003). This was the first time that the Clinical Psychology programme was evaluated in a systematic manner.

Context and Input Evaluation

The purpose of context evaluation is to study the objectives of the programme. All the

subjects met the competency which the programme has offered with ratings of high and extremely high. It showed that the objectives of the programme were useful and that graduates were able to apply them in their operation.

The objective of the programme is to produce psychologists who have the ability and the standard in accordance with the principle: *the profession of a psychologist is important to psychological practice, must have the responsibility and involve with people, also create happiness and quality of life for the society* (Division of Mental Health, 2000). The dialect which is used in the programme is clear and applicable. It complies with the need of the society and promotes the values of culture and tradition. It also states the uniqueness of the profession and clarifies the personal characters of the students, yet the characters can be adjusted to different circumstances (Galen & William, 1996).

The total of 42 credits of the programme are divided into mandatory courses (23 credits), elective courses (7 credits) and thesis (12 credits). The overall structure as well as the credit granting is suitable in most courses. Even so, the credits granted for some courses that are useful for the career should be increased while some others should be decreased.

The contents of the programme fulfill the needs of the students. Moreover, the content in all the courses were found to be up to date and useful for the career. It was also suitable for educational activities, course management and grading. As Taba (1992) has stated, the content of a course must be precise, important, practical in real situations and suitable for the needs of the society. The content must have the balance of covering both and scope and the depth. The content must be aligned with course objectives and learning needs of the students. The content in most courses of the programme were included based on the practical relevance.

The numbers of lecturers for the courses were found to be adequate. However, there was frequent postponement of classes and class rescheduling due to the workload of lecturers which included administrative functions, hospital service and social service. The particular lecturers who work for the Department of Psychiatry have to supervise many programmes at diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The department should have an urgent development plan for fulltime lecturers to cope with the course management of each curriculum.

The availability of most course-management supplements such as documents, textbooks, reference books, visual aids, class materials, classrooms, common rooms and evaluation facilities were found to be deficient including the availability of study-case patients. The Faculty of Medicine, Siriraj Hospital has recognized these problems and has come up with a solution by allowing classes to be held at the Adulyadejvikrom Building. However, the building has to be shared by other faculties, which has lead to the difficulty of moving patients into the classes.

Process and Product Evaluation

The content of courses is designed with practical application based on inputs from expert instructors of the Department of Psychiatry and from specialist fields such as the Department of Pediatrics, Department of Pharmacology, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Public Health, Institution of Technology, Research and Development Mahidol University, Educational and Psychological Test Bureau Srinharinwirot University, and instructors from psychological organizations such as Somdet Chaopraya Institute of Psychiatry, Yuwaprasart Hospital and Institution of Neurology. The programme focuses on hands-on training with real patients under supervision so that students are able to directly gain experience. Moreover, students were trained with real patients under supervision of a psychological instructor in clinical psychotherapy. However there was a shortage in the patients available for operational training in psychotherapy and psychological testing.

There are two practical courses; an internship at the Department of Psychiatry and an off campus internship at a hospital under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Public Health by rotating the training through the Department of Mental Health and the Department of Psychiatry (Department of Psychiatry, 2006). This builds the experience of being a psychologist at a professional level and integrates learning and operational experience. Besides the specific knowledge in clinical psychology, the training involved areas such as statistics, research and basics in information technology.

There were field trips to observe the psychological operation and mental health. Seminars provided the opportunity for students to practice their skills as academic speakers and psychologists. The aforementioned learning also included group and individual operational skills, focusing on up-to-date information, encouraging new experience input and the quality of work.

The programme also realizes the importance of ethics and proper self-management. Instructors function as role models for psychologists and closely look after the students. It can be said that the learning experience of the programme focused on the competency of students that complied with the objective of the programme. Graduates themselves see the learning experience which the programme has offered as of a high standard. When considering the product of the programme, it was found that the overall competencies of the graduates are at a high level. The programme management has the capacity to produce graduates according to the program's objective.

In general the graduates possess ethical integrity which complies with the recommendations on the role of Thai psychologist, as described by Phattharayuttawat *et al.* (2003). However, according to the feedback from the service receivers, some graduates practice unethical behaviour. Therefore, the programme should focus on the methods of practicing ethics more correctly and appropriately.

Moreover, it was found that in some areas the competencies of graduates who work as psychologists are at a medium level (neuropsychology, group process, statistics and research, mental health and law, psychopharmacology, public health, drug addiction and English language). As the content necessary to fulfill those competencies span a wide range, the programme may not be able to complement all of them in depth. However, the programme encourages graduates in self-development, as reported in the feedback of students after graduation. Graduates who have registered in short courses gain more knowledge in psychology testing, various techniques in therapy, group process, English language, and statistics and research. Moreover, some graduates take further studies at Doctorate level to gain more knowledge in psychology. Superior officers are satisfied with the competencies of the graduates in all aspects.

Recommendations

Applicable Recommendations

1. There should be an improvement of objective, structure and content of the programme at least every five years according to the development plan of the Commission on Higher Education and the Office of National Education Standards and Quality Assessment. The programme should be given more support on class materials.

2. There should be an improvement in the quantity, quality and convenience of use of the visual aids, course material and class rooms.
3. A closer relationship between lecturers and students should be encouraged.
4. Student activities which widen the students' social knowledge should be encouraged.

Further research recommendations

1. There should be an analytical research on the programme at least every five years according to the development plan of the Commission on Higher Education and the Office of National Education Standards and Quality Assessment.
2. There should be an evaluation comparing the same programme with those of other exceptional foreign universities.

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