Research

RELEVANT GOVERNANCE FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER OUTCOMES AT TERTIARY LEVEL IN TAIWAN

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Abstract

Through observations in my various visits to Taiwan, I am convinced that the education system there has been operated well which provides positive influences on the student academic and job performances. Therefore, I find that Taiwan as a research site meets the criteria for my twofold project: studying and providing an insight into the influences of university educational structures and management policies on the learning outcomes of students at a university level in Taiwan, and learning from the educational models in use in Taiwan to apply and adapt to a more effective role for learner outcomes in Vietnam and other Asian countries with similar contexts. The data show that the Taiwanese University is quite advanced in terms of quality, curriculum design, learning environment in an effort to ensure an effective outcome for the students within a general framework. The educational activities are guided, supported and accredited within a well-organized general education system, through the Ministry of Education and other national-level institutes, such as the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan, and the National Academy for Educational Research. Different sources and levels of the educational structure (national, institutional, departmental, class and individual) have given Taiwan education strength, with the ultimate goal of meeting the needs of students, gaining the most possible effective learning outcomes to serve

the workforce and socio-development of society. The rich data also reflect the depth and diverse opinions from different stakeholders of the educational sectors.

Keywords: Taiwan, university education, learning outcomes, students, workforce.

ปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อผลการเรียนรู้ในระดับอุดมศึกษาที่ไต้หวัน

บทคัดย่อ

จากการสังเกตในการไปไต้หวัน ผู้วิจัยเชื่อว่าระบบการศึกษาของไต้หวันมีการดำเนินการอย่างดีซึ่งทำให้มี

ผลทางบวกต่อผลสัมฤทธิ์ทางวิชาการของนักศึกษาและผลการปฏิบัติงาน ดังนั้นผู้วิจัยจึงเชื่อว่าไต้หวันเป็น

แหล่งการวิจัยตามเกณฑ์สำหรับโครงการที่ศึกษาสองเรื่อง: การศึกษาและความเข้าใจอิทธิพลของโครงสร้าง

การศึกษาของมหาวิทยาลัยและนโยบายการจัดการผลการเรียนรู้ของนักศึกษาระดับมหาวิทยาลัยในไต้หวัน

และการเรียนรู้จากแบบการศึกษาที่ใช้ในไต้หวันเพื่อนำมาใช้และปรับให้เข้ากับบทบาทที่มีประสิทธิภาพ

มากขึ้นสำหรับผลเรียนในประเทศเวียดนามและประเทศอื่น ๆ ในเอเชียที่มีบริบทคล้ายกัน ผลแสดงให้เห็น

ว่ามหาวิทยาลัยไต้หวันมีคุณภาพในการออกแบบหลักสูตรและ สภาพแวดล้อมการเรียนรู้ค่อนข้างสูง ใน

การพยายามที่จะให้ผลการเรียนรู้ที่มีประสิทธิภาพสำหรับนักศึกษาภายในกรอบกว้างๆ โดยมีกิจกรรม

การศึกษาที่มีขอบข่ายที่ชัดเจน มีการสนับสนุนและระบบการศึกษาที่ได้รับการรับรองจาก

กระทรวงศึกษาธิการและสถาบันระดับชาติอื่น ๆ เช่นสภาการประเมินผลการศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาไต้หวัน

และสถาบันการศึกษาเพื่อการวิจัยแห่งชาติ   แหล่งที่มาที่แตกต่างกันและระดับของโครงสร้างการศึกษา

(ระดับต่างๆเช่นชาติ สถาบัน แผนกและบุคคล) ทำให้ไต้หวันมีการศึกษาที่ดี โดยมีเป้าหมายสูงสุดในการ

ตอบสนองความต้องการของนักศึกษาเพื่อให้ได้ผลการเรียนรู้ที่มีประสิทธิภาพที่สุดสำหรับ แรงงานและ

การพัฒนาสังคม ข้อมูลที่หลากหลายยังสะท้อนความคิดเห็นเชิงลึกที่แตกต่างกันของผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียใน

ภาคการศึกษา

คำสำคัญ: ไต้หวัน การศึกษาระดับมหาวิทยาลัย ผลการเรียนรู้ นักศึกษา แรงงาน

Introduction

Through observations in my various visits to Taiwan, I am convinced that the education system there has been operated well which provides positive influences on the student academic and job performances. Therefore, I find that Taiwan as a research site meets the criteria for my twofold project: studying and providing an insight into the influences of university educational structures and management policies on the learning outcomes of students at a university level in Taiwan, and learning from the educational models in use in Taiwan to apply and adapt to a more effective role for learner outcomes in Vietnam and other Asian countries with similar contexts.

The case study begins with research questions which come directly from my own experience, interests and related research, specified as follows

1. How can the term "learner outcome" defined at a Taiwan University? What are the expected values of the outcomes of their university graduates?

2. What educational structure is commonly followed at a Taiwan University in relation to learner outcome?

3. What is the actual status of learner outcome at a Taiwan University in relation to learner outcome?

4. What lessons could be learned from a Taiwan University related to the educational structure and management policies?

The data show that the Taiwanese University is quite advanced in terms of quality, curriculum design, learning environment in an effort to ensure an effective outcome for the students within a general framework. The educational activities are guided, supported and accredited within a well-organized general education system, through the Ministry of Education and other national-level institutes, such as the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan, and the National Academy for Educational Research. Different sources and levels of the educational structure (national, institutional, departmental, class and individual) have given Taiwan education strength, with the ultimate goal of meeting the needs of students, gaining the most possible effective learning outcomes to serve the workforce and socio-development of the society. The rich data also

reflect the depth and diverse opinions from different stakeholders of the educational sectors.

Background to the study

This section discusses the basic framework related to this report, including discussions on the concept and research on learner outcomes and the general picture of the Taiwanese education structure.

Conceptual framework

The concept of learner outcomes has been well documented in the literature and the missions of many universities in the world. According to Adam (2004), "a learning outcome is a written statement of what the successful student/learner is expected to be able to do at the end of the module/course unit, or qualification." Similarly, the ECTS (EU, 2004) defines learning outcomes as "statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning". Similar definitions can be also found in the work of the Credit Common Accord for Wales (QCA /LSC, 2004), or University of Warwick (2004), UMIST (2001), CHEA (2003), AALL (2004) (to mention just a few).

Other authors and institutions choose to analyze further the required characteristics of learner outcomes. For example, the four categories of learning outcomes as defined in the course specifications of the University of Warwick (2004) cover the following:

- Subject knowledge and understanding;

- Subject-specific skills (practical skills integral to the course, such as skills for working in the laboratory, or language skills, or counselling- depending on each subject);

- Cognitive and intellectual skills (understanding of methodologies, synthesis and analysis, evaluation or critical thinking); and

- Key skills (those to be readily transferable to employment in other contexts required for survival in the work place.

Furthermore, the University of Exeter (2004) analyses further from the different perspectives of learners, of modules and programs. According to them, a learning outcome relates to a description of what a student is able to demonstrate when they complete a module satisfactorily. A learning outcome should reflect the level of the learning, the projected achievements in terms of knowledge and skills, and (more importantly), all these should be interpreted in terms which are capable of being assessed. The module/program outcome is defined as the requirements of what a typical learner should achieve at the end of the module/program, related to the qualification level and the experience of learners on an accomplished module/program.

Furthermore, Adam (2004) and Moon (2002) suggest distinctions between learning outcomes and course's aims and objectives'; with the former seen as the achievements of the learner rather than the intentions of the teacher, whereas the latter refers to the intention and expectations of teaching and the teacher.

In addition, it is worth noting that it is of great necessity to have a defined learner outcome for a course of a program, or any learning/training activities. Having the requirements for learner outcomes in mind when designing a course will help the teacher/designer to focus more on a student-cantered approach, giving priority on what students are able to achieve after the course rather than what and how the teacher should deliver the course.

In a word, learner outcomes can help:

- Offer a background to develop the format, content and assessment means for a course;

- Inform the teacher about what they should focus on in the course to help the students achieve what they should achieve after finishing the course

- Provide information for the learners to know what is/are expected of them once they accomplish the course;

- Help the prospective participants to decide if the course is suitable and relevant for their needs and capacity;

- Give a general picture for the potential employers about what values, knowledge and skills a student should possess after finishing a particular course. (based on http://www.asha.org/ce/for-providers/Learner_outcomes.htm, and http://www.ssdd.bcu.ac.uk/outcomes/, retrieved 20th October 2011).

The next section will discuss general information related to the status of the educational structure, governance and learner outcomes at the research site, a famous university in Taiwan.

General picture of Taiwanese Education

Taiwanese education is well-known for its quality and effectiveness. According to the information given by the Ministry of Education of Taiwan (MOE), the present educational system supports 22 years of formal study. However, the required duration for studies is flexible, tailored to the needs of the students. Generally speaking, the entire education system includes two years of preschool education, six years of primary school, three years of junior high school, three years of senior secondary school, 4-7 years of college or university, 1-4 years of a master's degree program and 2-7 years of a doctoral degree program.

The Taiwan, MOE has conducted a pilot scheme of ten-year compulsory education programs for the whole country, covering the junior high school and senior vocational school levels. Senior High and Senior Vocational Education are the two types of education above junior high school level, both taking three years to complete. Junior College Education is divided into two categories: the five-year junior college and the two-year junior college, each needing to meet a different set of admission requirements. Five-year junior colleges accept junior high school graduates and provide five-year study whereas two-year junior colleges accept senior vocational high school graduates and provide two-year program of study.

University Education, as a normal practice, is divided into undergraduate and graduate programs. University undergraduate programs require four years of study; but they also allow students to extend the duration of studies up to 6 years in total. Other specialized undergraduate programs such as dentistry or medicine require six to seven years, including an internship requirement of

one year. Graduate Education (at a master or doctoral level) requires one to four years for a master degree, and two to seven years for a doctoral degree. For those who study part-time, they can be granted an extension depending on the progress of their studies and time for conducting research for their thesis.

In addition, Taiwan provides Special Education at designated schools for students who are mentally or physically challenged with similar requirements in the normal education system. Furthermore, Supplementary Education offers the people an alternative way to reach their educational goals. The supplement system is categorized into three main entities: basic education, advanced education, and short-term supplementary education with study periods varying according to the required curriculum design.

In Taiwan, the education system develops strongly. The number of universities and colleges has increased by 120% in the past ten years with more than 174 institutions. According to the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT, http://www.heeact.edu.tw, and the interviews with the HEEACT administrator), student enrollment with a total number of 1.3 million has increased 65%, and the university entrance exam admission rate is now more than 98% in comparison with that rate in 2009, with the net increase in enrollment in higher education of 55.3%. Thus, the gross enrollment rate has increased 78.6%.

The education system in Taiwan has been invested in to ensure good learner outcomes. One should notice the three key external quality assurance agencies, including:

1. The Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT), in charge of the 79 four-year comprehensive universities and colleges;

2. Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA), in charge of 38 universities of science and technology; and

3. National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, in charge of the 40 technical colleges.

According to HEEACT, the challenges to Taiwan Higher Education cover issues such as a quick expansion of higher education but accompanied with a

decreasing governmental financial support and a lack of institutional autonomy. The possible solutions suggested by HEEACT includes 1. establishing a quality assurance system; 2. building a quality culture on campus; and 3. strengthening the international academic competitiveness. To help with the assurance of the education system, there is a development of external quality assurance with the Government playing the key role, based on the University Law of 2005, in an attempt to assess the academic performance of an institution

HEEACT also emphasizes that the ultimate goal of the Taiwan education system is to serve the students and to obtain good and comprehensive learner outcomes. Therefore, the HEEACT standards of accreditation include two cycles:

- First Cycle Program Evaluation: the focus is on teaching, which is considered the core value to ensure a sound learning environment for students and a sufficient input;

- Second Cycle Program Evaluation: the focus is on student learning outcomes, with the core value to establish student learning outcome assessment mechanisms and output;

- Furthermore, the next process will be the Institutional Evaluation, focusing on student learning outcome-based evaluation.

It can be seen in this section that Taiwanese education is well organized and operated, with a clear understanding and awareness of the need to obtain learner outcomes at the Governmental and institutional levels. The next part of this report will go into details of the implementation of the educational structure and mechanism in relation to learner outcomes at a specific university, from the perspectives of administrators, teachers and students.

Methodology

The research involves the cataloguing, examination, and analysis of the triangulation data collected from questionnaires, interviews, and review of the relevant documents. All qualitative data were categorized using NVivo at different levels of triangulation.

The questionnaire participants are 50 students and 12 teachers, together with two teachers (experienced), three students (one female and two males), and two administrators for in-depth interviews. The project is a case study; and the in-depth different sources of data give it strength. The questionnaire data (from both teachers and students) produce general and basic information, and is elaborated and enriched by the interview data (from university administrators/ course coordinators, teachers and students). These two sources of data strengthen, justify, consolidate or counter each other and I do not aim for typicality and generalization.

Participants

The participants took part in the research with one questionnaire and in-depth interview. In this report, no universities, administrators, coordinators, teachers or students were identified by their names. I guaranteed confidentiality and all records were deleted when the research report was completed.

After receiving the agreement to collect the data from the students, I discussed the study with the administrators, coordinators and teachers of the host university prior to the research being implemented.

Questionnaire Participants

One questionnaire was issued to the students through the presentations I gave them, or through the internet of the host university, totalling 50 students. Their ages ranged from under 20 to 29 years. Most of the students came from different parts of Taiwan, two from Malaysia and two from Vietnam. Also a teacher questionnaire was distributed to 12 (Taiwanese) experienced and less experienced teachers, aged from 30 to 39 (8) and over 50 (4). The participants came from the College of Education, The Department of East-Asia, English Department, Institute of International Relations; and programmes such as Future Imagination and Creativity, History, English, Journalism, Chinese Studies, Political Science, Politics, and graduate students of Communication/Advertising.

Information, including gender, about the participants who responded to the questionnaires is summarized in Table I below.

Table 1: *Questionnaire Participants*

Teachers			Students		
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
5	7	12	19	21	62

It is worth noting that three administrators and two teachers, together with three students volunteered to follow up their questionnaires with interviews.

Interview Participants

Numbers and roles of interviewees are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: *Interview Participants*

Interview	Teacher	Student	Administrator
	2	3	3
Sex	1 female 1 male	2 males 1 female	1 female 2 male

The interview participants were two teachers (experienced); three students (one female and two males), and three administrators. The two teachers were from the Department of Education and the Institute of International Relations. The administrators were from the National Academy for Educational Research, Higher Education Evaluation, the Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) and the Office for International Relations. The three students were one third year student (Political Science), a second year (Journalism), and a fourth (History).

Collecting Data

The data collection instruments consisted of document reviews, questionnaires, and interviews. To ensure the effectiveness of the research design and methodology, before collecting the data for my research, I contacted the host university and carried out some data collection practice. Thanks to careful preparation and the host staff's willingness to help, I had no difficulties obtaining sufficient numbers of teachers and students to volunteer for my data collection.

Document Review

The relevant documents were those related to Taiwan educational structures, policies and classroom practice, including related recent changes and evaluation, administrative documents, such as proposals, progress reports, agendas, announcements, and minutes of meetings and other internal written documents, and articles appearing in the mass media.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires were constructed within Asian contexts, aiming to provide a general picture of and background to the situation, and to capture the participants' own perceptions and reflections. The questionnaires were essentially a measurement tool for the collection of data (Oppenheim, 1992), and were designed with great care because they were unique and tailored to fit the circumstances of my study (Berdie, 1986). The questions were developed based on my knowledge, observation and experience of previous research.

In designing the questionnaires, I made a great effort to ensure their reliability and validity. Reliability here refers to the purity and consistency of the questionnaires as a measure, aiming to obtain the same results if they were to be duplicated (Oppenheim, 1992). Each question aimed to convey the same meaning consistently to all participants (Berdie, 1986). To ensure the validity, I made sure that the questionnaires measured what they were supposed to measure.

The questionnaires consisted of both closed and open-ended items. I was careful to keep a balance between the proportion of closed and open-ended questions, aiming to obtain full answers with relatively rich and in-depth information. The questionnaires were of reasonable length to engage but not overburden the participants' concentration. The questions were simply and positively worded and structured so that they were not complex and confusing, and each question only asked about one issue or aspect at a time. The questionnaires had been drafted and redrafted many times and were tested with the teachers and students during the trial period to make sure that they worked as intended.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted after the receipt and preliminary analysis of the initial questionnaires. The purpose of the interviews was to collect insightful information which was related to the research questions and issues raised in the questionnaire answers. I conducted one interviews with the administrators, teachers and students, each interview lasted from 20 to 40 minutes.

According to Nunan (1993), there are three types of interviews: (1) structured, (2) semi-structured and (3) unstructured. I chose to use in-depth semi-structured interviews in my research, aiming to develop ideas related to the research questions, rather than to collect facts and figures. In carrying out interviews, I was always aware of the objectives of the research, asking many open-ended questions or probes, and I tape-recorded the interviews, accompanied by personal notes. I had no fixed questions, but was equipped with a list of general topics or areas around which the interview was to be conducted as unobtrusively as possible. Only a few topics were covered in the interviews with the emphasis was on obtaining further information. I endeavoured to encourage the participants to express their ideas spontaneously in their own words and avoided giving leading questions. I also used a "reflective approach" (White, 1999), trying to give regular feedback to the participant to make sure that comprehension was complete on both sides. After each interview, I noted ideas and suggestions that were stimulated by the interview as well as anything that might have affected the interview. Later, I prepared a short summary of the interview, highlighting the key issues.

Analysing Data

The data were collected, classified and categorised for all broad areas of the research. In no instance was a single set of data used exclusively to validate a point of research. To avoid bias, different sets of data, different sources of data were used to identify patterns and the worth of various points.

Both quantitative and interpretative methods were applied to the analysis of the questionnaires. Frequencies were measured, calculated and assessed. Since coding is crucial in qualitative research with such rich and complicated data, NVivo (Fraser, 1999; Richards, 1999) was chosen as the analysis tool, which made coding creative, fluid, visual, and part of the process of

interpretation, not merely a clerical routine. The data were cycled through for categorization repeatedly at different levels, and interpretations and personal notes were integrated with data records. Different sources of data give this research strength. The questionnaires produced general and basic information, which was elaborated and enriched by the interview data.

This section has discussed how the research design and participants were selected, and how data were collected, analyzed and reported. The data thus collected are reported in the next section.

Findings and discussion

This section will report the main patterns identified through different sources of the data collected, including

1. The general understanding of universities (perceptions about the missions/ purposes of a university, specific understanding of own university's missions and its implementation in university life);

2. Ways the universitv/ department organised and operated;

3. University and learner outcomes (general views on and concepts of learner outcomes, specific categories of learner outcomes, expectations of learner outcomes after graduating; inclusion of learner outcomes in the missions of the university /department, and initiatives to measure graduate performance after graduation); and, finally

4. Attitude and beliefs toward the relationship between the university structure and governance, and learner outcomes (meeting requirements of expected learner outcomes, students' satisfaction with their achievement and the university, effect of the educational structures and governance on learner outcomes, and advantages and challenges in the relationship between the institution and learner outcomes.)

General understanding of universities

Perceptions about the missions/ purposes of a university

The data collected provide rich information related to the participants' perceptions about the purposes of a university, which reflects a high level of understanding and concerns of the participants about the expected comprehensive purposes of a university.

All participants (62/62) agreed about the basic functions of a university as training, with 40/62 chose to elaborate further the function of preparing young people "to do useful and needed work in society at a high level of skill and knowledge," and 26/42 chose to stress the duty of the university to train young people "to be leaders of their organizations and professions." Another majority choice (48/62) is for the research function of a university, "to advance knowledge, to create new knowledge."

The choice for the cultural function of a university is quite popular too, with 40/62 agreed, including 36/62 choosing to emphasise the responsibility "to make the knowledge of the past available to be passed on to new generations" and 22/62 on "collecting and conserving the knowledge of the past." A university has a critical role in "proposing how to do things better, for change" received 36/62 votes for this function. Furthermore, the students added that the University is a "free place to practise freedom of choice'; to help "students earlier get used to the society", and to fulfil the social function, as helping the students "to make many friends from everywhere in Taiwan and the world."

Table 3: Participants' perceptions about the purposes of a university

Participants' perceptions about the purposes of a university	Total/62
Training function	62
▪ *to prepare young people to do useful and needed work in society at a high level of skill and knowledge*	40
▪ *to be leaders of their organizations and professions*	26
Research function: to advance knowledge, to create new knowledge	48
Cultural function	30
- *to collect and conserve the knowledge of the past*	22
- *to make it available to be passed on to new generations*	36
A critical role: proposing how to do things better, for changes	36

Specific understanding of own university's missions and its implementation in university life

This section includes the discussion related to the missions of the participants' own university and the implementation of these missions in the university life. In response to the question on their knowledge of the missions or purposes of their university, more than half of the participants (36/62) said they knew about the these missions, 18/62 admitted that they were not sure what it meant, and 8/62 gave "no" as an answer (see Table 4).

Table 4: Knowing about the missions/purposes of own university

Knowing the missions of the university	Yes	No	Not sure
	36/62	8/62	18/62

The participants chose to comment further on this issue in their questionnaires and interviews. These range from the general such as "Talents should devote themselves to the country and the people", "Education is for the development of the country." To more specific interpretations:

- to be a tough [top] university in Taiwan (a student)
- to educate students as a mature person who can think independently and critically; to help students know how to solve problems correctly (asking for help, doing research, cooperating with others, etc.); to give students enough professional knowledge to apply to their future work (a teacher);
- To make students learn about what they really like and what they really need (a student)
- Training-research skills (a teacher)
- Preparing the skill and knowledge for the students (an administrator)
- To create high-end knowledge and applied technologies, to cultivate best quality students (an administrator)
- To gain more international collaboration (a teacher)
- To enhance the study of learning outcome (a teacher)
- To be profitable for students 'life after university (a student)

-   Originally to train students to become officials (a student)

It is worth noting that in their official website, the University documents did not explicitly specify the official missions of the University, but as a statement integrated in the general introduction of the University:

> In the future, (the University) will pass on the outstanding traditions of humanities and social sciences, balancing both teaching and research, theory and practice, internationalization and domestication in academic disciplines including humanities, social sciences, law, business and communications, reinforce dialogues between humanities, technology and society, and promote multi-variant academic research development.

They also state their vision in vivid terms: "Our vision is to build a first-rate international humanities and social sciences academic temple, and nurture 'Humane, Global, Innovative' successors for the new century."

The data show that no participants quoted the above-mentioned document in their response. However, though most of the participants had a vague idea of the stated mission, they had their own ways of interpreting the University missions in their own terms, which are relevant and realistic to what they needed and the goals they wanted to achieve for their university career.

Related to the question on if the missions of the university are carried out in the teachers' and the students' daily (teaching and learning) tasks, the participants gave various answers. The data show that only 22/62 of the participants said yes, 4/62 said no, and a bigger figure (24/62) admitted that they were not sure (see Table 5).

Table 5: Realisation of university missions in university's life

If the missions of	Yes	No	Not sure
the university realised	22/62	4/62	24/62

In explaining their choice, the participants elaborated from different perspectives. For those who said yes, they were quite happy with the issue raised. Some of them commented further, as listed below:

- The University is to make us better people and let us make contribute to the society

- They develop many good programmes and hold some cultural activities for students and teachers

- Because many teachers repeatedly include such information in their lectures

- For we are made policy towards this aim. We've tried to rebuild our university. We've invited a lot of international professors to give lectures. We've tried to train sophisticated and special students to serve for our country.

- (...) through the activities and studies.

For those who chose "no" as an answer, they stated quite strongly:

"No: Because the missions of the University are not carried out. They only been listed on the wall and they don't emphasise it so many people really don't know what they are."

"Some courses are just teaching students theory, which seems difficult to apply to a real work which needs more technical skills." Some teachers added, stating, "I am not sure, University are just theory", and that "Depending on teaching styles of each teacher that we can decide if the missions are carried out in daily teaching life."

Ways the University/Department organised and operated

The data show that most of the participants thought their University and Department were organised according to a uniform national standard (46/62) (sharing the same form in the whole country). While 16/62 participants claimed their system had a centralized structure, the same number (16/62) thought they followed a diversified structure. Other participants considered their organisation worked autonomously (12/62),

with a decentralized structure (8/62) and conformed to sub-national standards (see Table 6). The findings show the answers of the participants depended on which department they studied or worked in, and the educational structure in Taiwan is basically based on a uniform national standard.

Table 6: The Format of organisation and operation of the University/ Department

Organisation and Operation of the University/ Department	Total/62
According to a uniform national standard	46
Centralized structure	16
Diversified structure	16
Autonomously	12
Decentralized structure	8
Conforms to sub-national standards	4

University and Learner Outcomes

General views on and concepts of "learner outcome"

The participants shared similar understanding of the terms, with some variety in their focuses and personal and professional perspectives. In general, the majority (40/62) agreed that learner outcomes should be a statement which describes the expected knowledge, understanding and the capacity to apply what the students learn at the end of the programme. The details are presented below.

Table 7: Participants' perceived understanding of "learner outcome"

Participants' perceived understanding of "learner outcome"	Total/ 62
Description of what students should know, understand, or be able to do at the end of a module/ programme	40
Description of what students should learn as the result of a period of specified and supported study.	18
Related to student achievements	14
A written statement of what the successful students are expected to be able to do at the end of the module/course unit, or qualification	8

Specific categories of learner outcomes

The participants made very clear their choices for what should be included as the specific categories of learner outcomes. Top of the list of choice (50/62) is the comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the major subject, followed by cognitive skills (40/62), then soft skills (36/62) and the subject specific (practical) skills (34/62). The details are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8: Specific categories of learner outcomes

Specific categories of learner outcomes	Total/ 62
Subject knowledge and understanding	50
Cognitive skills (intellectual skills such as an understanding of methodologies, synthesis, evaluation or ability in critical analysis)	40
Key soft skills (skills readily transferable to employment in other contexts, such as written and oral communication, working within a team, problem solving, numeracy and IT skills	36
Subject-specific skills (practical skills integral to the course, e.g. laboratory skills, language skills, counselling skills)	34

Expectations of the learner outcomes after graduating

In the questionnaire and interview, the participants provided insights into the specific expectations of the learner outcomes after the students graduate from their university and department. Many participants chose to comment on the education to be "International citizens" "with "international capacity." A teacher elaborated in her interview, "Our students have to be ready not only for the workforce in the country, but also for the region and the world. We are helping them to be ready." A student emphasised, "Be a great leader in the world: it's the ultimate goal of our education."

The second popular theme the participants commented on is the general scope of the education. A student claimed that his expectations of his University were as follows:

> Our university offer the general knowledge of my major, it can let we
> organize all of practical knowledge easily help us to face the entire problem
> we meet. Or we can use the resource from the university to make research
> about our professional area.

Therefore, what the students needed were the survival or soft skills, as
specified by many participants emphasised that they expected the graduate to
"be creative", "be critical", and "be rational and critical thinkers". In their
interviews, the administrators emphasised that they expected their students
apart from the knowledge-based competence, should be good at
communication (especially able to express himself/herself well), with a high
EQ (Emotional Quotation), able to work under pressure and challenging
working conditions. Furthermore, they should posses a more international
perspective and have the competence to with deal with diversified situations
at work and life in general.

All the administrators, teachers and students agreed that being able to have a
good job after graduation was the strongest expectation; as one student
claimed, "The biggest expectation is getting a good job and able to raise
their family." Another added, "Having a job is most important, because
with resource, after supporting ourselves and family, if there are the remains
of strength, we can try contributing to the society, for instance: donation."

Furthermore, many participants added details of specific expectations from
different perspectives. Some of these are listed as follows:

- To equip students comprehensively with necessary skills (with a
  specific major):
- Language: having a good command of English;
- Possessing ability to do critical thinking in a specific content area;
- Being able to do culture study and application in different cultural
  contexts and situations.

Two students of Literature made their expectations very close to their
major; for example:

- Having a comprehensive idea about Western/ American/ English
  literature (their origin, importance, impact, meaning behind the

texts, how to admire a work of literature);

- English and American literature knowledge; linguistics; oral, listening, writing and reading skills; translating skills.

It can be seen from the data that the participants have a relatively good understanding of learner outcomes, with some very specific and practical interpretations of the concepts and related framework.

Inclusion   of   learner   outcomes   in   the   missions   of   the University/Department

Many participants commented on the inclusion of learner outcomes in the missions of the University /Department. Quite a few participants (36/62) thought learner outcomes were expressed explicitly or understood implicitly in the mission, 20/62 said they were not sure, and 10/62 said they knew nothing about this issue. In the interview, a teacher emphasised, "Yes, the learner outcomes are expressed explicitly in the missions of my University, and everyone should notice it." A student agreed, commenting further:

> In a very specific terms: our university offers the general knowledge of my major, it can let we organize all of practical knowledge easily, help us to face all of the problem we meet. Or we can use the resource from the university to make research about our professional area.

Initiatives to measure graduate performance after graduation

In answering the question related to whether the University /Department had any initiatives to measure graduate performance after graduation, several respondents (20/62) chose "yes", the same amount of participants (16/62) chose "no" and "not sure " respectively. Many chose to comment further in their interviews on how the university tried to ask for the students' opinions after university, for example:

- "My university will ask students to fill out some forms which include 'what is your profession' after graduation. Also, they will hold regular informal discussion meeting to know what most students' situation. Finally, my department set up a website for

graduated students to communicate. Behaviours above are all for knowing what their students' performance after graduation." (a student)

- "We try to build up a production of graduation (in the radio and television department)" (a student)

- "We run evaluation sheets after the end of the courses offered." (a teacher)

- "The University will send a survey by e-mail to know about the student's vocational performance after graduation." (an administrator)

It can be seen that though the percentage acknowledging what the University did for evaluating the students' outcomes after graduation is not high, the interview data provide information about the University's effort in measuring the students' outcomes.

Attitude and beliefs toward the relationship between the university structure and governance and learner outcomes

This part deals with the investigation on the attitudes and beliefs of the participants toward the relationship between the university structure and learner outcomes.

Meeting requirements of expected learner outcomes

In response to the questions on whether the students meet the requirements of the University and whether they were satisfied with their achievement and the University's training. The participants are diversified in their answers, showing that there is no common agreement on this issue, and learner outcome is a very difficult issue for the participants to show a solid attitude towards. Only 28/62 participants said yes, 14/62 said no and 10/62 marked unsure to the question.

Table 9: Meeting requirements of expected learner outcomes

Meeting requirements of expected	Yes	No	.Not sure
learner outcomes	28/62	14/62	10/62

Students' satisfaction with their achievement and the University

The participants shared a common attitude when asked if the students were satisfied with the training and achievement they gained during their time at the university. Only 18/62 participants said yes, 12/62 said no and 18/62 marked unsure to the above-mentioned question.

Table 10: Students' satisfaction with their achievement and the University

Students' satisfaction with their	Yes	No	Not sure
achievement and the University	18/62	12/62	18/62

In their interview, the participants gave further comments on this issue. One teacher claimed, "It's really very difficult to say: I think some students do but some students don't and the students' satisfaction depends on the department". A student said, "Generally, it means a lot to be graduating from my University: we rank number two in the country in general and number one in social sciences so naturally the University require highly of the students and on the other hand, the students try very hard to study well." An administrator added, "Our core values are we just not finish the jobs but do it with guaranteed quality, and we aim for excellence with persistent and advanced progress made. Therefore, the pressure for the students and faculty to perform well is very high and many of our population meet the requirements and we are quite happy with that." Another student showed a different point of view, "It's still difficult to find a good job after graduating. So I guess the students have to try more; our achievement at the University is not sufficient." Another agreed, showing his qualm, "I think there are many students unclear about what they wants and needs, until they graduate or meet some questions of their life and vocation."

Effect of the educational structures and governance on learner outcomes

Nearly half of the participants saw that the effect of the educational structures and governance of the university/department on learner outcomes is "strong", "very important", "surely certain". One teacher emphasised, "Yes; for example, the course of general education system has been improved for years that helps the effects" and another added, "The effects have both positive and negative ones."

Table II: Effect of the educational structures and governance of the university on learner outcomes

Effect of the educational structures on learner outcomes	Yes	No	Not sure
	30/62	16/62	12/62

Many others (16/62) showed their doubts about the effect, saying that they were not sure, using terms like "perhaps", "possibly", "may be...". One teacher claimed, "It depends on the program and lecturers, on structure, no." One student shared his concern in the interview:

> Actually, I am not sure. I think most students in our university are active, they know studying hard for getting a good job in the future, on the other hand, university offers resources, and students use resources autonomously. From my perspective, it depends on students' attitude. But there is still a problem in my university. Even though students are active to learn, but every student can't share same resources. In my university, most resources are focus on business school. It's not fair to students in the same university.

For those (12/62) who disagreed, there was any effect at all, they also gave some reasons for their choice. For example, one student said, "Maybe, our department is more research-oriented than teaching oriented, its influences the educational structure, then further influences the goal, content and the expectation of classes."

Advantages and challenges in the relationship between the institution and learner outcomes.

Many participants offered their comments on the advantages and challenges in the relationship between the institution and learner outcomes. The participants thought that the University supported the students to:

- Concentrate on what and how to study;

- Have ability of different aspects;

- Have opportunity to learn how to think critically and make my own opinion, rather than just learning some practical skills;

- Have more opportunity to know and experience many lifestyles;

- Choose what to learn, especially economics and finance, and mainstream Arts;

- Be aware of formal and standardised expectations/ process; and

- Meet linguistic requirements.

In their interviews, the participants provided more specific details of the advantages. They thought that how the University was structured and operated had advantageous impacts on learner outcomes. One administrator emphasised:

> I think the advantage is that my university emphasizes internationalization very much; they know internationalization is very important in the age of global-village, and the curriculum and extra curricula activities are designed toward that trend, which include language program, volunteer services overseas etc...."

Other teachers and students were confident that "the University is well famed (a bit influence)", that it provides "High quality of education (with professors educated/ graduated from overseas, broaden views), and with a lot of seminars held at the university, with lecturers from famous companies." In addition, "the University provides a variety of courses to choose from, the basic training is highly valued and very clear about the teachers 'requirements for students." Therefore, "the students can study and get good grades in exams, meaning that they have prepared and read the class materials, preparing well for the future."

On the other hand, the participants also commented on the disadvantages caused by the educational structure. Some of these are listed as follows:

- Causing some gaps between the academic circle and practical realm.
- [with structure] nevertheless, the studying becomes less leisurely and overly authoritative then, which could lead to a lack of creative studies.
- Some teachers detach from 'the industrial demands and social expectations, being unrealistic and impractical.
- A lack of foreign language competence, especially English, with a lack of well-established structure in teaching.

Therefore, the participants suggested that the University should have more cooperative programmes with practical realms, and many more subjects should be taught in English, with the materials prepared in English. Another issue of great concern of the student participants was job security after graduating from the university. Some claimed that "Although students get good grades at school, it does not necessarily mean they can make use of or link their learned skills in future jobs. They are sometimes confused about their future," so "if some programs of connecting study and work can be provided more generally, students may get chances to understand how they can apply their knowledge to their future."

Implications

The data give some indication that this Taiwanese university is making advances in terms of quality, curriculum design, learning environment in an effort to ensure an effective outcome for the students within a general framework. The educational activities are guided, supported and accredited within a well-organized general education system, through the Ministry of Education and other national-level institutes, such as the Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan, and the National Academy for Educational Research. Different sources and levels of the educational structure (national, institutional, departmental, class and individual) have given the Taiwan education system strength, with the ultimate goal of meeting the needs of students, gaining the most possible effective learning outcomes to serve the workforce and socio-development of the society. The

rich data also reflected the depth and diverse opinions of different stakeholders of the educational sectors.

The main outcomes from the analysis of the situation are:

- Possible positive and negative influences of university educational structures and management policies on learner outcomes in Taiwan;

- Many aspects of the structures and management policies in Taiwan could be introduced into the current teaching and learning situation for university classes in Vietnam and other countries to enhance learner outcomes;

- New insights and implications for effective programs with focus on establishing and developing learners outcome could be made available for Vietnam and other countries.

The study aimed to raise the awareness and provoke thought to suggest changes to the structures and management policies for the Vietnamese university context to enhance learner outcomes. An introduction as well as in-depth analysis of some respects of the Taiwanese education system having positive impacts on learner autonomy should be made public in Vietnam to enhance our understanding of the Taiwanese education system and its effectiveness. A review of the research related to the studied subject shows that it will potentially fill a gap, as no research on learner outcomes in higher education of Taiwanese universities appears to have been undertaken and made available in Vietnam.

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE

I am collecting data for my research project entitled 'Relevant Governance Factors influencing Student Performance at Tertiary Level in Taiwan and Vietnam: a comparative study". The project investigates the influences of university educational structures and management policies on the learning outcomes of students at a university level. I would like to invite you to take part in this project by answering the following questions.

Please indicate your responses either with a (✔) in the appropriate box or by writing your response in the space provided. Your feedback will be very valuable for my research. I am grateful to you for your contribution.

(Note: if there are any questions you would prefer not to answer for any reason, please leave them blank.)

How old are you?

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐
Under 20   *20-29*   *30-39*   *40-49*   *Over 50*

Are you: ☐ male   or   ☐ female?

Where do you study/teach/work? ....

In which programme?   ....

In which country did you grow up? ....

What is your name? (*optional*)   ....

I. In your opinion, what are the purposes of a university (check as many as applies)?

☐ Training function:

   . ☐ *to prepare young people to do useful and needed work in society at a high level of skill and knowledge*

   ☐ *to be leaders of their organizations and professions*

☐ Research function: to advance knowledge, to create new knowledge

☐ Cultural function:

    ☐ *to collect and conserve the knowledge of the past*

    ☐ *to make it available to be passed on to new generations*

☐ A critical role: proposing how to do things better, for changes

☐ Others

....

....

....

2.a. Do you know about the missions/purposes of your university?

    ☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Not sure

2.b. If yes, what are they?

....

....

....

2.c. If yes, do you think the missions of the university are carried out in the teachers' and the students' daily (teaching and learning) tasks?

    ☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Not sure

Why do you think so?

....

....

....

3. How is your University/ Department organized and operated (check as many as applies)?

☐ according to a uniform national standard	☐ conforms to sub-national standards
☐ centralized structure	☐ diversified structure
☐ decentralized structure	☐ autonomously

☐ Others

Additional comments:

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

4. What is your general understanding of "learner outcomes"?

☐ description of what students should learn as the result of a period of specified and supported study.

☐ related to student achievements

☐ a written statement of what the successful students are expected to be able to do at the end of the module/course unit, or qualification

☐ description of what students should know, understand, or be able to do at the end of a module/ programme

☐ others

Additional comments:

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

5. What specific categories can learner outcomes include? (check as many as applies)

☐ Subject knowledge and understanding

☐ Subject-specific skills (practical skills integral to the course, e.g. laboratory skills, language skills, counselling skills)

☐ Cognitive skills (intellectual skills such as an understanding of methodologies, synthesis, evaluation or ability in critical analysis);

☐ Key/soft skills (skills readily transferable to employment in other contexts, such as written and oral communication, working within a team, problem solving, numeracy and IT skills.

☐ Others

Additional comments:

....
....
....

6. What are the specific expectations of the learner outcomes after students graduate from your university/ department?

....
....
....

7a. Are learner outcomes expressed explicitly in the missions of the University /Department?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Not sure

7b. Are learner outcomes understood implicitly in the missions of the University/Department?

☐Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Not sure

Additional comments:

....
....
....

8a. Does the University /Department have any initiatives to measure graduate performance after graduation?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Not sure

8b. If yes, what are they?

....
....
....

Additional comments:

....
....
....

9. Do the students in general meet the requirements of the learner
    outcomes expected by the University/Department?

    ☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Not sure

Further comments:

....
....
....

10. Are the students satisfied with the training and achievement they have
    gained during their time at the university?

    ☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Not sure

Additional comments:

....
....
....

11. Do you think the educational structures of your university/department
    have an effect on learner outcome?

....
....
....

12. If yes, what are the advantages and challenges in the relationship
    between your institution and learner outcome?

12a. Advantages

....
....

12b. Challenges

....
....

13. What can be done to strengthen the advantages and overcome the challenges?

....
....

14. Are there any further comments you would like to make?

....
....

If you are willing to take part in a follow-up interview, please give me your email address:

....
....