

Preparing Students for the Globalized Workforce: A Mission Statement for Taiwanese Universities

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Abstract

It is uncertain whether institutions of higher learning, can effectively prepare students for the global workforce. Employers want to employ recent graduates with skills and competencies that reflect best practices, provide domain knowledge, and introduce cognitive, social, and personal skills that fit their human resource needs. Universities must devote more resources and become more intentional about developing learners' intercultural competencies. Internationalizing campuses in Taiwan continues in recent years; yet, there remains the need for more purposeful and structured intercultural experience that will provide students with the skills and competencies employers are looking for in ever-globalized workforces. The real mission statement of universities is to make absolutely certain that students have demonstrated skills. Global workforce development has become a focus within higher education – in the classroom, internships, and shared experiences of travel

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Introduction

It is a common concern that the primary mission of universities should be to prepare students for the modern workforce. Taiwan is no exception when it concerns addressing this concern head-on. Today, with an increasingly interconnected and competitive economy around the world (Play foot, & Hall, 2009), universities have made it their focus and purpose to adapt to the pressures of globalization. Although higher education may feel that reformist curriculum changes are needed to connect the classroom to the workplace by providing more practical and marketable skills, higher education should not choose to discount so-called non-professional courses by focusing only on the improvement of students' employability skills at the expense of purely academic learning.

Universities in Taiwan are making greater efforts to obtain a ranking in the upper-echelons of institutions of higher learning. To ensure the effectiveness of academic programs in a globalized society, it is imperative to take into account both teachers' and students' understandings of what globalization means to realize the problems, challenges and realities faced upon graduation. Likewise, it is essential to consider that the skills and merits provided as part of a comprehensive university education may fall short of employers' expectations if they are irrelevant to the local and global marketplaces.

Unfortunately, universities have become more like companies, and they have forgotten their main responsibility of developing academic knowledge for students. "Further work is needed to understand the diversity of student background along economic, social, and gender dimensions, and how it correlates with the range of expressed attitudes and values" (Coverdale-Jones, & Rastall, 2009, p. 3). Mostly, higher education must help students to realize their goals of becoming human resources in society. This essay will discuss why higher education should not only teach students to adapt to the workplace by focusing on the aims of higher education, the requirements of students, and the needs of corporate human resources. The aim of higher education should be to improve the acquisition of academic knowledge for students rather than teaching practical skills. Universities are able to develop values and to expand the intellectual vision of students without limitations. Higher education is necessary for society to transmit knowledge and cultural competency to students. It is based on giving a forum to people where students can explore the truth and improve critical thinking.

It is said that nearly a third of all college leaders think that universities should teach students critical thinking more than employability skills (Time/Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2012).

Not all university courses can prepare students for the workplace. For instance, certain academic courses are inappropriate for providing professional skills and technical aptitude, such as English literature, art, and philosophy. However, there is no doubt that some changes in the traditional approach towards higher education must take place because of the increasing competition on society due to globalization. For example, higher education can increase vocational and technical skills for students, so they will not feel stressed about finding jobs. In other words, universities cannot lose focus on developing academic knowledge but they will need to change some of their educational policies to adapt to globalisation. Universities need to clearly estimate how to meet the supply of practical skills without sacrificing their founding principles to educate students in every way.

If universities only focus on students' work-related requirements, then they will lose their basic purpose of teaching how to acquire knowledge. Some universities tend to teach more practical courses since students want to satisfy students' expectations of learning job-related skills. Higher education has become a service provider to supply job skills, so that the relationship between universities and students is like companies and consumers. Nevertheless, students' purposes and goals are of greater importance for schools to design course curriculum today. Pryor, et al. (2012) suggests that a student's purpose and goal in obtaining a degree 'has been increasingly motivated by personal and economic benefits, rather than intellectual or social good'.

In all walks of life, businesses are expected to create their own advantages and competitiveness. The hiring practices of any business are usually the first place excellence will be realized. Students who become employees are expected to meet their new employer's demands of providing high efficiency and high performance in the workplace. In addition, recent graduates are expected to become part of a staff that can do well under high pressure situations; therefore, work pressure as a part of doing business cannot be ignored. This means that universities should be ready to integrate real-world scenarios in which the notion of "pressure" is a real component of the curriculum. For example, students are often given sufficient time to participate in organization and planning activities that will ensure the performance of their work; however, participation in too many academic activities is divorced from the real workplace environment. Collapsed schedules, changes in components, changes in deadlines, and added expectations within the same scope are necessary to provide real-world exposure that will result in better levels of eventual performance.

In a recent study, Yang (2014) reviewed performance expectation factors related to past research enterprises and found that the performance of the whole enterprise and for the study of individual employees more rarely, follows this pattern. Therefore, it is suggested that employees' work pressure and work performance can be linked. This should be simulated in all classrooms. Any student understanding of corporate attitudes toward employees' behaviour is useful in understanding work under high pressure, regardless of the type of activities students eventually participate in.

Lin (2012) stated that in an era of knowledge, human beings are the most important competitive factor for businesses, so a measure of the performance appraisal system of human assets is particularly important. Performance assessment of student development rarely mirrors the type of workplace assessment which takes place on an annual or semi-annual basis. Most teachers lack sufficient corporate background in human resources practices that determine appropriate assessment vis-à-vis the workplace and classroom. The results and guidelines are also few from the university, aside from the tradition paper-and-pencil or group presentation efforts that are made.

It is widely acknowledge that no enterprise or university would dare to claim that their assessment system is perfect. The reason is that teachers and students themselves, organizations, other subjective factors, and external situational factors can affect the context of the performance / assessment evaluation results. The link between the use of the results by an enterprise or by a school of a student's past or present performance assessment is aimed at the future development of an individual. The meaning of this assessment is becoming ever more crucial. In the establishment of the appraisal / assessment system, much literature has pointed out that the fairness of the performance appraisal often brings about different feelings and reactions from students and new employees, and the effectiveness of the performance appraisal is of great concern to most people.

Students fully expect universities to be a springboard for them into the labour force, which means that higher education is a place that directly connects school and the workplace, “The importance of various skills and abilities are necessary for graduates’ career success” (Chi, &Gorsy, 2009: p. 312). In order to fulfil such student requirements, higher education may support available opportunities such as internships and improved communication skills to help graduates get better jobs in the future. Therefore, universities should balance between academic learning and training skills. Higher education’s primary goal is to help students to find their own direction in life. When universities put too much emphasis on vocational skills for students, it will lead these institutions to become employability-skills training centres and a direct door into the workforce for those few people who can afford tuition.

However, many companies believe tertiary education is ultimately palace for preparing students to face the workplace. Because the global economy has changed rapidly, companies think that specialized qualities and positive attitudes must be learned as part of the university curriculum; therefore, it will be easier to find and recruit these employees if they have a university degree. It is always assumed by companies that students will gain academic awareness and insight while studying at university. Play foot, and Hall (2009) reported that businesses want to find people who have the required and transferable qualities needed such as interpersonal and communication skills. In addition, companies require high value employees who possess creativity and innovation more than vocational skills. Gibbs, et al. (1994) suggest that 12 transferable skills such as problem solving and team-working are essential for employment, so it is better to hire people who have studied at a university.

Companies do not want to waste time and money on costly preparation and training sessions. Play foot, and Hall (2009) identify that work-ready recruits are needed by businesses. Companies must remain current in the marketplace with the skills and services customers demand. For these reasons, increased educational opportunities for the workforce are considered to be the key for companies to increase their overall profits (Ibid.). Universities provide human resources with a competent workforce. Nevertheless, the result of Industry and education still remain less connected because not all companies and universities have plans for cooperation and collaboration.

Competitive assessment is a powerful tool of both instructional design and to meet future employer expectations. Unfortunately, demonstrating competition is not often done at a level that will measure the impact of classroom performance or other performance improvement interventions conducted as part of an employee training regime. If assessment is made in a competitive environment properly, it can provide the requisite information for continuous improvement and full-employment. Once the academic process has begun to reform, more opportunities for added assessment may be provided that go beyond simple task repetition and transactional satisfaction.

Conclusion

Students are missing skills for career readiness in the globalized workplace. Students may learn useful academic subjects, but haven’t gained all the knowledge necessary to fit into a successful working environment. A fundamental digital literacy is essential. Additionally, students need to be ready to meet specific employer needs by demonstrating workplace habits that employers prioritize, which includes reliability, punctuality, positive attitude, superlative written and spoken presentation ability, effective interpersonal communication, and high-quality task completion. Chief constants among the desired attributes in any business context are teamwork and problem solving. Students about to enter the workforce must exhibit non-paradigmatic thinking and genuine creativity. Declarative knowledge is insufficient, what is required is procedural knowledge. The ability to demonstrate professional writing skills for clear, concise and appropriate communication is paramount since more work is now done in globalized teams made up of people from around the world—face-to-face and virtual. Therefore, it is realized that students must be prepared to join a globalized workforce where culturally sensitive communication reflects global awareness.

The primary goal of higher education is to help students find direction, to seek moral values, and to develop academic thinking. Universities should add vocational skills to course content to meet students’ and employers’ expectations, but universities need to have a clear plan which balances academics with employability skills. Greater global competition means that critical thinking and innovation are needed more than ever by companies seeking qualified graduates. Higher education must not become a simple vocational program that teaches only employability skills to students. It must therefore become based on developing students’ ways of thinking and acquiring knowledge without having to compromise to a skills-based educational system.

The added value of an internationalized education to a students' future career development will be lost if students are unable to articulate how their experience and specific intercultural competencies may be of interest to prospective employers. Globalization, increased student mobility, rising employer demand for competent graduates, and digital literacy are some of the key challenges impacting traditional educational experiences. External influences should serve to focus higher education policy and planning with respect to campus internationalization. In particular, business and industry partnerships have the potential to widen opportunities for experiential learning and practical work experience which prepare students to join the global workforce.

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