

Business Education in Taiwan, Some Observations

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Abstract

In summer 2004, the Business School of Soochow University in Taipei organized a panel to share teaching experiences in business schools in Taiwan. Nine professors from two of the national universities and two of the private universities participated. Observations of these professors are summarized and discussed in this paper. These observations are classified into the categories of teaching methods, coursework, teaching, social issues, textbook, and test. In this paper, it is discovered that business ethics, gender issues, and other social issues did not attract attention in business education in Taiwan yet. It is also noted that better quality Chinese business textbooks may be useful. This paper presents a comprehensive observation on business education in Taiwan. The paper is simple and interesting.

1. Introduction

This paper presents observations of nine professors on the business education in Taiwan. In summer 2004, the Business School of Soochow University in Taipei organized a panel to discuss and share business school teaching experiences. Nine professors from two national universities and two private universities participated in this panel discussion. Topics discussed in the panel are both interesting and many. A summary report is provided in this paper. The topics discussed in the panel, and observations brought up by these professors are summarized and classified into the categories of teaching methods, coursework, teaching, social issues, textbook, and test.

The paper starts with a simple research on past research on business education. It then follows with current emphases on business education research worldwide. Observations made by professors on business education in Taiwan are then summarized and discussed. There is little business education research in Taiwan in print. This paper presents some interesting and useful observations.

2 Research Emphases on Business Education

Research in Business Education goes a long way back. The titles of research completed in 1933-1953 were studied [13]. It was also found that [8], approximately 90 percent of the business education studies completed in the 1950's were

descriptive surveys for which the questionnaire and library methods of gathering data were used. Business education attracts even more attention today. It is noted that traditionally management has been constrained by the conceptually limiting horizon of management knowledge and practice with an emphasis on control and efficiency [9]. Researchers suggested that topics such as entrepreneurship should be in the management education. Experiential Learning Theory that conceptualizes management development as a series of concurrent reflective conversations was also proposed [10]. Implications for the efficacy of various pedagogies, such as lectures, simulations and experiential exercises, critical facilitation, and problem solving are also useful methods to improve the business education.

When business education started in Taiwan in the 1960s, it was embraced by all as one of the best means to quickly improve human resources in the business management area in Taiwan. Since the demand is growing, and because it is relatively inexpensive to set up and operate a business school, business education has been one of the fastest growing divisions in the higher education in Taiwan. The demand for business education is still rising, and efficiency of the business education remains the most important concern.

In order to facilitate understanding of readers, current business education research emphasis are summarized and presented here. These findings are presented in short under the categories of teaching methods, coursework, teaching, and social issues.

2.1 On Teaching Methods

Many teaching methods have been studied. Researchers, however, noted that although various teaching methods were studied, most method evaluation research is carried out by method enthusiasts studying their own preferred method [2]. It is therefore suggested that a deepening of the quality of the research and teaching within the basic disciplines of management, and a broadening of our focus to include both additional disciplines and an expansion from a domestic to an international focus may be useful [12].

2.2 On Coursework

Coursework has always been a major concern in

business education research. It was found that courses of first tier business schools show a tendency to move away from interdisciplinary thinking and practice toward an almost exclusive emphasis on theory and analysis. It is suggested that more emphasis to practice, and implementation, without sacrificing essential theories and analytical skills may be needed [4]. Although in the international context, setting up a universal model of system of reference may be difficult, case study [7], novel approach [6], and Critical Management Studies (CMS) may be useful tools to improve teaching [5].

It is also noted that course sequence that provides a synthesis of theory development, measurement, and structural equation modeling may be needed [15]. Teaching history of business or business discipline is considered of critical value to the ability of students to think critically about current problems [18]. Since business teaching may exert social influences by challenging the traditional assumptions of educational institutions, and those of business and economic functions [1], coursework of management needs to be organized to explicitly acknowledge the political, ethical, and philosophical nature of its practices [5].

2.3 On Teaching

In some research on the function of endowed chair in business schools in the 1990s, it was recognized that the primary purpose of the endowed chair may be to enhance the reputation and provide better recognition for the college or university [16]. Research is the most important objective of the endowed chair, although excellence in teaching is considered important as well as compared to professional and college service among the duties of the chaired professor. It was noted that the amount of time chaired professors spent on teaching activities is less than that on research and service. Similar time allocation of teachers is found in research oriented business schools. Some argued that teachers and managers alike, strives to be determining causes, and leading those whom we instruct or supervise to act in some ways rather than others. For this reason, teachers ought to admit to our first mission of all, and spent time on monitoring how well we are doing in our teaching [11].

2.4 On Social Issues

In recent years, due to incidents such as the cheatings found in the Enron case and many others, the topic of business ethics attracts increasing attention. Also, business majors are more likely than non-business students to make questionable choices when competitive pressure increases. It is possible, that business educators might be unknowingly contributing to unethical decision-making of business graduates by

emphasizing in their teaching the very importance of reacting to competitive pressure to accomplish business goals [14]. This is more of concern when students of business schools as tomorrow's business leaders believe that there are ethical standards that should be followed in business but that current ethical standards do not meet society's needs adequately [3]. It should be of concern that although there was widespread agreement among students about whether business ethics should be taught, still not too many business schools offer required business ethics courses.

The topic of gender issues also attracts attention these days [17]. Some suggests that in order to reduce impediments to equal representation of women in management, a major overhaul of university management education should be on the way, whereby institutions would review their own role in shaping corporate management cultures and practices.

3 Business Educations in Taiwan, Some Observations

Since business education was introduced in Taiwan in the 1960s, it was regarded as one of the best means to improve human resources that are in urgent need in the business management area in Taiwan. Since it is relatively inexpensive and, at the same time, profitable to start and run business schools, business education is now offered in almost all universities and colleges in Taiwan. It is probably for these reasons; business education research in Taiwan seems only concerned with the efficiency of the business education, whereby many other research topics are in fact also important.

In summer 2004, the Business School of Soochow University in Taipei organized a panel to share teaching experiences in business schools in Taiwan. Nine professors from four universities, of which, two national universities, and two private universities, participated in the panel discussion. Observations of these professors are summarized in this paper. These observations are classified into the categories of teaching methods, coursework, teaching, social issues, textbook, and test. In order to provide with our readers the entire picture, all observations and comments made by these professors are included. On each observation or comment, the number of professors that showed concerns is also provided.

3.1 On Teaching Methods

In the area of teaching methods, eight out of nine professors that participated in the panel discussion said that the major approach used in teaching is lecture in classroom (Table 1). At the same time, team or group projects and reports, case study, MSN/DVD/VCD, provide students opportunity to attend training courses organized by school for companies, and student class presentations are also known teaching methods.

Table 1. Teaching Methods Used in Business Schools

Current Teaching Methods	# of Respondents
Teaching mainly by Class lectures	8
Team or Group work	7
Projects and reports	6
Case study	5
Use Internet/MSN/DVD/VCD in class	5
Students have chance to attend Training Courses For Firms	3
Class presentation	3

3.2 On Coursework

Since the Department of Education (DOE) in Taiwan has a course standard set for all business schools in Taiwan to follow, business schools in Taiwan offer a similar set of basic managerial functional courses. Textbooks used for these courses in different schools are, however, various. Textbooks used in business schools in Taiwan are in general of two types: books in English published mostly in the States, or books translated into Chinese from English books published in other countries. Domestic scholars, although some do try, only produce very few good textbooks. Because of this, English textbooks are the most commonly seen. This may be the reason that some panelists think that some textbooks have a poor coverage on political sciences, social sciences, philosophy, and, especially, in local or area specific knowledge (Table 2). It is also recognized in the coursework; too much emphasis is placed on economics and mathematics. Some also suggest as we may have directly copied the coursework lists from our counterparts in the States, courses in the business school programs are sometimes poorly organized. At the same time, some suggest more should be included on E-Commerce, objectives and action programs in general, technology management, international knowledge and skills, and also on personal development in the coursework.

Table 2. Comments on Business Schools Coursework

Observations	# of Responds
Cover all 5 Managerial functions	5
Not enough Political Sciences, Social Sciences and philosophy	5
Poor coverage in Local/Area knowledge	4
Poor coverage in creativity/enterprising	3
Centered only around Economics and Math	3
Not enough coverage on E-commerce	2
Poor coverage on objectives and action programs	1
Not enough coverage on Technology management	1
Poor coverage on International knowledge and skill	1
Poor organization of program/courses	1
Not enough personality development	1
Offer Vocational training courses	1

In terms of the coursework, this may also be of interest to our readers. The Department of Education (DOE) in Taiwan has been promoting the so called LAST MILE COURSES: vocational or practitioner training business courses jointly taught by professors in schools and practitioners from other institutions including firms to help students to acquire starting knowledge and skill in work place. The trend for offering such courses is coming strong. Many business schools in Taiwan are planning to offer such courses soon.

3.3 On Teaching

It is noted in the panel discussion that some business professors in Taiwan may lack of hands on or practitioner experiences. Therefore, we are probably not providing with our students useful hands on experience or practitioner trainings (Table 3). In order to push for students to attend classes and learn, some private universities and professors conduct roll calls in every class. It is also mentioned that professors sometimes do not have enough time to cover all subjects in the textbook they choose to use. They also think that in their teaching, there is not enough coverage on current issues and developments.

Table 3. Observations on Teaching

Observations	# of Respondents
Lack of hands on/practitioner training	2
Having roll calls in every class	1
Not enough time to cover subjects in the textbook	1
Not enough coverage on Current issues and development	1

3.4 On Social Issues

It seems that social issues do not attract as much attention of business professors in Taiwan. It is surprising for the author to note that although social issues attract worldwide attention, business professors in Taiwan, for some reasons unknown to the author, do not feel the necessity to include these in their class discussions. In the panel discussion, one professor mentioned briefly that there is not enough coverage in classes on business ethics (Table 4). Another expressed that it may be useful to have more coverage in the class on the subject of social responsibility.

Table 4. Comments on Social Issues

Comments	# of Respondents
Not enough coverage on ethics issues	1
Poor coverage in social responsibility	1

3.5 On Students

Before commenting changes observed in business students in Taiwan, the ongoing educational reform in Taiwan should be discussed first. The latest educational reform in Taiwan started in the 1990s. Courses, teaching methods, and student selection process are among the

changes. Courses offered in the primary and secondary schools are modified to make learning fun and creative. Many new universities are set up to accommodate all high school graduates that wish to receive university education. The policy has been a big success, and by the year of 2005, there are 151 universities in Taiwan. According to the statistics, by the year of 2004, there are 1.04 vacancies in the university for every high school graduate in Taiwan.

These changes bring profound effects. Some universities are having trouble attracting enough enrollments. The DOE is encouraging large universities to get into strategic alliances. It also encourages small universities to integrate into larger ones. It is said that if the operations is not improved soon, some universities may eventually go bankruptcy.

The educational reform also changes students. Some business professors believe we have students coming in that are clearly not well prepared in English, economics, mathematics, social sciences, and local/area knowledge (Table 5). Teachers may also find students that have problems in communication and writing. Some even claim that they have met students do not know how to operate personal computers. Students are in general more passive and relying on only the textbook in studying. Although some professors enjoy good interaction with students in class, some do have interaction problems in class. It is suggest that universities in Taiwan should make transferring between majors easier for those not fit in business schools.

3.6 On Taking Tests

Help students to do well in tests is also a challenging and important task of business professors in Taiwan. In this, there are three interesting points to note. First, half of the panelists noted that students can have problems in taking tests (Table 6). In order to help students to prepare for tests, some private universities already set up test banks for reference use of students. Second, business schools in Taiwan, especially those in the vocational education system, are encouraging students to acquire trade licenses when they are still in school. Some business schools offer test preparation courses to help students preparing for license tests.

Table 5. On Students

Observations	# of Respondents
Poor prior English Language training	6
Poor prior trainings in Economics and Math	5
Poor communication skills	5
Poor interaction in class	5
Poor writing skills	4
Students are passive/ rely on textbook only	3
Good interaction in class	2
Poor prior Local/Area knowledge	2
Poor prior trainings in social sciences	1
Poor Computer proficiency	1
Should allow transfer between majors	1

The DOE and other departments in Taiwan are offering financial support for Ph. Dissertations and/or Master

Thesis study in many areas. Some academic associations in Taiwan hold contests annually to encourage good Ph. Dissertations and Master Thesis. Although there are many contests for the graduate students to participate, some professors noted that more activities of this kind should also be organized for undergraduate students.

Table 6. On Taking Tests

Observations	# of Respondents
Students having difficulties in taking tests	4
Database support for questions in tests	3
Encourage to attend License tests courses	1
Lack of chance to attend competition or contest	1

3.7 On Textbooks

As was mentioned before, most business schools in Taiwan encourage the use of English textbooks. Several observations are made here. First, it is noted that there are not many good English textbooks in the market that fit the use of local students. Second, not only students may have problems with English textbooks because of poor English comprehension, teachers may also be the victims. Since good Chinese textbooks are difficult to find in the market, professors and students are left with the decision of either using English textbooks, or to accept poor quality Chinese textbooks.

4. Conclusions

In summer 2004, the Business School of Soochow University in Taipei organized a panel to share teaching experiences in business schools in Taiwan. Nine professors from four universities, of which, two national universities, and two private universities, participated in the panel discussion. Observations of these professors are summarized and discussed in this paper. The observations of these professors are classified into the categories of teaching methods, coursework, teaching, social issues, textbook, and test.

Table 6. On Textbooks

Observations	# of Respondents
Use English textbook	7
No good English textbook for locals	2
Teachers' having difficulties with English textbook	1
Lack of good Chinese textbook	1

In the panel discussion reported in the paper, the panelists agree that lectures in class are probably the main means in business teaching in Taiwan. Most business schools in Taiwan, although not explicitly in any way spelled out, encourage the use of English textbooks published in the States. Team/group work on projects and reports, case studies, class presentations, and internet are also useful teaching methods. In general, most schools have similar coursework that includes all managerial functions, such as production, marketing,

personnel/organization, accounting, and financial management. In order to help students to do well in tests, some schools set up test banks for reference use of students. Sometimes students also have opportunity to attend training courses organized for firms.

At the same time, there are also points to improve. More than half of the professors participated in the panel discussion observe frustration of students due to poor English proficiency. They believe students need better preparatory training in economics, communication, writing, and English language. The coursework of business schools should be improved to include more coverage in local/area knowledge, and that of creativity/enterprising.

In this paper, it is also discovered that business ethics, gender issues, and other social issues did not attract attention in business education in Taiwan yet. In order to upgrade business education and business operations in Taiwan in general, business ethics, gender issues, and many other social issues should probably also be studied and discussed. It is also worthwhile to note that better quality Chinese business textbooks may also be useful.

This paper presents observations made on business education in Taiwan. The paper is simple and interesting. It should be useful.

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