



Identifying Lifelong Learning Skills of Students in the Bachelor of Business Administration Program

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Abstract. The business world has been changing over time and skills for future jobs are important to foster employability among business administration graduates. Thus, a business administration program should focus on developing lifelong learning skills of students because such skills enable students to accomplish long-term success or sustainable living in the real world. However, different fields of study as well as similar programs of study in different countries emphasize different lifelong learning contexts. At the stage of curriculum design, lifelong learning skills that are relevant to program learning outcomes should be properly identified. Whereas the past studies have paid less attention to the development of lifelong learning skills for undergraduate students in a particular field of study, the objective of this paper is to identify lifelong learning skills that are linked to program learning outcomes of the Bachelor of Business Administration (B.B.A.) under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Pattani Campus in Thailand. This study developed a conceptual framework which was based on Kolb's experiential learning theory. A scoping review was adopted to reveal lifelong learning skills of undergraduate students in the field of business administration. In this paper, lifelong learning skills were in accordance with national policy on education, international standards of education, university's educational philosophy, and the requirements of stakeholders (comprising internal and external stakeholders). Lifelong learning skills of the B.B.A. Program presented in this paper could be applied to the similar study programs. But they may not be generalizable to those study programs in other countries with different national policies on education.

Keywords: Curriculum Design · Learning Outcome · Lifelong Learning Skill · Sustainable Learning

1 Introduction

In the 21st century, educational programs face a challenge of meeting the requirements of current and future professions [1]. Skills are regarded as critical input to sustain employability of graduates and to increase their capability in career transition [2].

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According to the changing context of business, students in the field of business administration should have necessary skills for further learning that will enable them to ensure continuous employability [3]. Lifelong learning refers to all learning activities that have been undertaken throughout individuals' lifetimes [4]. Lifelong learners are able to deal with all circumstances [4].

The notion of lifelong learning has been regarded as one of important criteria of educational standards. Many universities aim to be certified by international standards of education, for example, the ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance provides educational standard used among ASEAN countries [5] and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business is known as the global standard [6]. Thus, universities that achieve success in developing lifelong learning of students can possibly reach such educational standards.

However, educational programs in different countries emphasized different lifelong learning contexts [7]. This was based on national policies on education [7]. National qualification framework has been adopted for facilitating lifelong learning in many countries (e.g. Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia) [8].

Thailand, a developing country in Southeast Asia, has a national qualification framework called "Thai Qualification Framework (TQF)" for higher education [9]. Based on TQF, there are five domains of learning: 1) knowledge, 2) conceptual skills, 3) interpersonal skills, 4) analytical and communication skills, and 5) ethical and moral development [9]. This framework has been applied to all Bachelor programs in Thailand.

Likewise, business administration programs are supposed to develop lifelong learning skills of students matched with TQF and the relevant educational standards. Meanwhile, promoting students' lifelong learning skills in any study program may be influenced by university's educational philosophy and the requirements of stakeholders as well [10]. This paper presents a comprehensive view of lifelong learning that is applicable to curriculum design.

2 Background to the Problem

A particular study program may emphasize different lifelong learning skills depending on its expected learning outcomes. Students with appropriate lifelong learning skills will not only accomplish the expected learning outcomes of a study program, but they will also achieve success in their future professions. However, research on lifelong learning skills of students in a particular field of study was neglected.

This paper aims to identify lifelong learning skills that are linked to program learning outcomes of the Bachelor of Business Administration (B.B.A.) under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Pattani Campus, located in Southernmost Thailand.

The two terms "expected learning outcomes (ELOs) at program level" and "program learning outcomes (PLOs)" are used interchangeably. Evidently, PLOs of the B.B.A. Program were derived from the requirements of the key stakeholders, especially external stakeholders (e.g. employers, entrepreneurs, and domestic companies) [11]. Therefore, students who acquire a set of lifelong learning skills matched with PLOs of the B.B.A. Program could enhance employability [11].

To design a curriculum, it is necessary to specify lifelong learning skills which are linked to PLOs to ensure that B.B.A. students will have a certain set of lifelong learning skills.

3 Theoretical Review

Lifelong learning is “the idea that learning is a lifelong process” [12]. Lifelong learning is related to the concept of sustainable learning which emphasizes long-term development or learning throughout one’s lifespan [13]. Lifelong learning skills support students’ thinking, social interaction, and self-management that would enable them to meet career readiness [14]. Lifelong learning skills are seen as the basis of learning and working [14]. Recently, lifelong learning can serve as a good way to enhance employability and self-employment capabilities [15].

From theoretical viewpoint, Kolb’s experiential learning theory is applicable to this study. It is commonly cited by the previous studies of learning [16]. It provides the learning process used to acquire lifelong learning skills [16]. Experiential learning theory includes both cognitive and subjective aspects of learning [16]. Based on an experiential learning cycle, students engage in a concrete experience by evaluating existing concepts [11]. Secondly, students are involved in reflection on the experience [17]. Thirdly, students conceptualize ideas or theories and apply their abstract conceptualization in an active way [17]. Fourthly, students develop lifelong learning through practice [17].

According to Wesarat et al. [10], lifelong learning skills of business undergraduate students encompass four components that are international standards of education, government’s policy on education, educational philosophy of a university, and the requirements of stakeholders (a conceptual framework is shown in Fig. 1). But the certain lifelong learning skills of students in the B.B.A. Program at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, PSU have not been identified. Therefore, this paper reviewed lifelong learning skills which were linked to PLOs of this study program.

Inevitably, the B.B.A. Program is influenced by government’s policy on education. The vision of Thailand’s national scheme of education (from 2017 to 2036) emphasizes

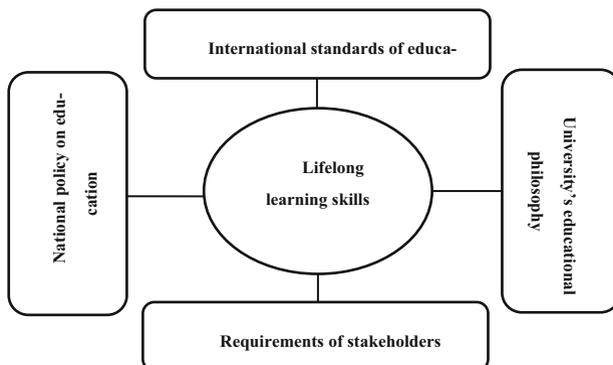


Fig. 1. A conceptual framework of lifelong learning skills of B.B.A. students [10].

lifelong learning and 21st century skills [18]. This paper therefore views 21st century skills as important to the B.B.A. Program. Furthermore, educational standards affect the development of students' lifelong learning skills. Thailand is a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the educational standards called "ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance (AUN-QA). It has been carried out by many universities in Thailand, including Prince of Songkla University in Southern Thailand [10]. AUN-QA Version 4.0, Criterion 3 focuses on developing lifelong learning skills [5]. AUN-QA suggested that university's educational philosophy should be integrated into teaching and learning process [5]. Consequently, the B.B.A. Program should adopt PSU's educational philosophy which places a value on Progressivism, Outcome-Based Education, and lifelong learning [19].

Additionally, the requirements of stakeholders have an impact on the B.B.A. Program because its purpose is to serve internal and external stakeholders [11]. Thus, the requirements of stakeholders regarding students' lifelong learning skills need to be considered at the stage of curriculum design.

4 Methodology

4.1 Scope of the Study

This paper focuses on linking lifelong learning skills to PLOs of the B.B.A. Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus, Thailand. The B.B.A. Curriculum 2020 consists of nine PLOs as follows [11]:

PLO1 "Apply knowledge of business administration in different contexts"

PLO2 "Solve management problems in accordance with situations, spatial and cultural contexts"

PLO3 "Manage the organization on the basis of ethics and social responsibility"

PLO4 "Communicate across cultures and build diverse networks"

PLO5 "Have leadership skills, be able to control emotions, and deal with pressure in various situations"

PLO6 "Be a human resource professional in various contexts".

PLO7 "Be an entrepreneur both in the local and non-local areas".

PLO8 "Manage a business based on the principles of Islam in accordance with local and non-local areas"

PLO9 "Apply information technology in business administration to pursue work".

However, the means to accomplish PLOs of the B.B.A. program is still not mentioned by the past research [11]. This paper views the establishment of lifelong learning through curriculum design and implementation as the means to achieve PLOs. Based on PLOs mentioned above, lifelong learning skills of students matched with each PLO were identified in this paper.

4.2 Data Analysis

A scoping review was adopted to identify lifelong learning skills. The relevant articles are searched and selected using the keywords including "lifelong learning", "lifelong learning skills", and "21st century skills". Then, lifelong learning skills linked to PLOs of the B.B.A. Program were put in a table form.

5 Result

This section highlights the review results. Based on literature, lifelong learning skills matched with each PLO were identified in Table 1.

Based on Table 1, the definitions of lifelong learning skills are then indicated below.

LLS 1: “Analytical thinking” allows a person to divide the base thing (or event) into smaller parts [25]. It is helpful for identifying existing problems [25].

LLS 2: “Critical thinking” is the ability to realize hidden values, justify evidences, and assess conclusions [26].

LLS 3: “Problem solving skills” means the ability to realize the problem and implement appropriate solution to eliminate obstacles [24].

LLS 4: “Collaboration” is the ability to cooperation with others [27]. Collaborative relationships can lead to higher productivity as well as reducing risks and costs [27].

Table 1. The Link Between PLOs and Lifelong Learning Skills

PLOs	Lifelong learning skills
PLO1	LLS 1: Analytical thinking [20] LLS 6: Communication skills [21]
PLO2	LLS 2: Critical thinking [21] LLS 3: Problem solving skills [21] LLS 4: Collaboration [22]
PLO3	LLS 2: Critical thinking [21] LLS 4: Collaboration [22]
PLO4	LLS 4: Collaboration [22] LLS 5: Interpersonal skills [23] LLS 6: Communication skills [21] LLS 7: Teamwork [24]
PLO5	LLS 5: Interpersonal skills [23] LLS 6: Communication skills [21] LLS 8: Intrapersonal attitudes [23]
PLO6	LLS 3: Problem solving skills [21] LLS 4: Collaboration [22] LLS 5: Interpersonal skills [23] LLS 6: Communication skills [21]
PLO7	LLS 3: Problem solving skills [21] LLS 4: Collaboration [22] LLS 5: Interpersonal skills [23] LLS 6: Communication skills [21] LLS 9: Creativity skills [21]
PLO8	LLS 2: Critical thinking [21] LLS 4: Collaboration [22]
PLO9	LLS 10: Digital information literacy [21]

LLS 5: “Interpersonal skills” is a person’s ability to interact effectively with others [28].

LLS 6: “Communication skills” refers to the ability to oral express, to read and listen perceptively, and to write clearly [29]. Communication is a major part of work role [29].

LLS 7: “Teamwork” is the ability to play a role and work effectively in a team [30].

LLS 8: “Intrapersonal attitudes” refers to beliefs or values inherent in the individual [23].

LLS 9: “Creativity skills” refers to an person’s ability to think in a new way or to generate new ideas [24].

LLS 10: “Digital information literacy” is the ability to recognize, locate, store, and use the digital information [31].

Henceforth, LLS 1 – LLS 10 should be integrated into the courses provided by the B.B.A. Program to assist students ready for effective learning and achieving learning outcomes.

6 Discussion

Similar to the previous study by Güven [21], this paper views lifelong learning skills as the means to prepare students to be ready for achieving learning outcomes at university and working in the real world of business. The development of lifelong learning skills of B.B.A. students is guided by university’s educational philosophy, AUN-QA at program level, the requirements of stakeholders, and national policy on education (e.g. Thai Qualification Framework: TQF).

In line with Thai Qualification Framework that mentioned “interpersonal skills”, “analytical and communication skills” as the domains of learning for all Bachelor programs [9], the review results found that “interpersonal skills” [23], “analytical thinking” [25], and “communication skills” [21] have been widely addressed by scholars as lifelong learning skills.

Lifelong learning skills mentioned in Table 1 are in accordance with the requirements of the real world of business. For instance, “collaboration” is regarded as a key to success of firms because collaborators can help them to increase the number of customers and to achieve a competitive advantage [32]. However, the past studies argued that business schools still faced difficulty in building students’ analytical thinking [33] and critical thinking [34] while they are expected in the workplace.

Furthermore, “problem solving skills” is one of business skills required by employers [35]. Thus, the B.B.A. Curriculum should be aligned with actual business problems [35]. This is consistent with PSU’s educational philosophy that aims at providing students with lifelong learning through various learning approaches such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, service learning, and work integrated learning [19]. The B.B.A. Program under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, can apply PSU’s educational philosophy in terms of teaching and learning approach to build lifelong learning skills of students. Similarly, Kolb’s experiential learning theory is applicable to designing teaching and learning process of the B.B.A. Program because the theory emphasizes learning through practice or experience [17].

7 Conclusion

This paper identified lifelong learning skills corresponding to PLOs of the B.B.A. Program. It maintains that students who acquire such skills will be ready to learn, which in turn they will achieve learning outcomes and increase employability. Lifelong learning skills of students presented in this paper can probably be applied to other study programs. But the degree to which each element of lifelong learning is important may be different among different areas of study. Future research may examine students' lifelong learning skills to ensure that students acquire lifelong learning skills and ready for pursuing their future careers.

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