

Students' Perceptions of Outcome-Based Learning Activities: A Case Study of University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City

Cao T. C. Thuy

ABSTRACT

This case study has two aims: to analyze the internal structure of outcome-based learning activities in the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City and to understand the implementation of these outcome-based learning activities. An exploratory factor analysis of data from 400 undergraduate students in Year 3 and 4 revealed a four-factor structure with the selected 19 items. 70,648 percent of the total variance was explained by these four factors. The results also show that students have positive attitudes towards all the outcome-based learning activities, especially how information about the learning outcomes was communicated to them and the activities designed to develop transversal skills.

Keywords: Learning Outcomes, Outcome-Based Education, Student Learning Activities

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C. T. C. Thuy*

University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Viet Nam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
(e-mail: chauthuy@hcmussh.edu.vn)

**Corresponding Author*

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, higher education has undergone significant changes due to progressive and ambitious educational initiatives that are expected to transform the nature of the educational processes. Outcome-based education (OBE) is one such initiative and has a great impact on a global scale.

OBE focuses on ensuring that all students can achieve the intended learning outcomes. The role of OBE does not end with providing a flexible system of assessment and recognition of learning outcomes; rather, OBE becomes a paradigm to restructure the whole nexus of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment to transform teaching and learning into flexible and learner-centered processes. OBE is a learner-centered approach in the sense that it puts the success of all learners at the heart of education. This focus is reflected in the key principle of OBE, which is laid down by Spady (1994, p.9): "Success for all learners and teachers". This principle comprises two ideas. First, education should ensure all learners are fully equipped with the necessary knowledge, competencies and qualities to succeed at the end of the learning process. Second, learning outcomes should be designed to be realized and maximized for each student.

Barr and Tagg (1995) argue that students should be empowered to take responsibility for discovering and constructing knowledge for themselves by providing them with information on the requirements of the intended learning outcomes, which are clearly defined publicized. When it comes to OBE, time isn't as important as it is in traditional education, but the students' success is. OBE emphasizes that all learners can learn and succeed, however,

not at the same time and not in the same way. Educational institutions need to have faith that they can have the power to create the conditions that make it possible for all learners to succeed.

Two policy documents issued by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam, "The Directive on key tasks of higher education in the academic year 2009-2010" (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009) and "The Guidelines on formulating and announcing the educational outcome standards" (Ministry of Education and Training, 2010) have set up the expectations towards the OBE for Vietnamese universities. However, relatively few studies have investigated how these expectations have been translated into reality. This article aims to fill this gap by exploring students' perceptions of the outcome-based learning activities at the University of Sciences and Humanities (USSH) – a member of the Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM).

This case study has two aims: to analyze the internal structure of outcome-based learning activities in USSH (VNU-HCM); and to understand the implementation of these outcome-based learning activities. An exploratory factor analysis and a descriptive analysis of the data from a sample of 400 Year 3 and Year 4 students in 12 majors of the USSH (VNU-HCM) has been conducted to achieve these aims.

II. METHODOLOGY

To examine the perceptions of outcome-based learning activities by USSH students, the study employed a questionnaire with 19 questions asking about a range of activities implemented in the USSH, which reflect the key principles OBE approach. The survey in Vietnamese was distributed to the students in Year 3 and 4 in social sciences and humanities fields (Vietnamese Studies, Linguistics, Anthropology, German Language, Chinese Language, Japanese Studies, International Relations, Sociology, Culture Studies, Han Nom Studies, English Language, Geography Studies). The participants were selected using random sampling.

The sample size of 400 participants is calculated using the formula developed by Watson (2001) for the total population under 100,000 participants, with 95% confidence and 50% variable value.

III. RESULTS

A. Exploratory Factor Analysis – The internal Structure of Outcome-based Learning Activities

19 outcome-based learning activities were identified in the USSH, and the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to discover the structure of these activities, in other words, how different activities relate to one another.

Results of data analysis by SPSS with KMO index = $0.937 > 0.5$ and Sig value. of the Bartlett test = $0.000 < 0.05$, showing that the data is consistent with the ongoing factor analysis model. The data is shown in Table I below.

TABLE I: KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.937
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	4864.829
	df	171
	Sig.	0.000

Source: Researcher, 2021.

TABLE II: ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX

	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4
c1.14	0.747	0.224	0.341	0.161
c1.7	0.746	0.192	0.048	0.290
c1.13	0.709	0.267	0.346	0.235
c1.8	0.664	0.314	0.362	0.089
c1.11	0.639	0.302	0.348	0.256
c1.6	0.591	0.472	0.180	0.243
c1.1	0.243	0.825	0.235	0.144
c1.2	0.270	0.788	0.245	0.215
c1.3	0.274	0.783	0.262	0.122
c1.12	0.398	0.578	0.225	0.398
c1.9	0.243	0.339	0.774	0.083
c1.10	0.204	0.245	0.734	0.225
c1.16	0.324	0.030	0.686	0.258
c1.5	0.167	0.370	0.614	0.234
c1.4	0.315	0.470	0.522	0.051
c1.18	0.249	0.094	0.112	0.873
c1.19	0.228	0.137	0.129	0.854
c1.17	0.092	0.225	0.288	0.629
c1.15	0.491	0.208	0.230	0.535

Source: Researcher, 2021.

When the Sum of Eigenvalues is initialized to a value greater than 1 (the criterion for performing factor extraction – according to Gerbing and Anderson (1988) - in this case, is 1,013), the Cumulative % of the total variance extracted (Total Variance Explained) is 70,648, and there are 4 factors extracted.

The above data – Table II show that the factor analysis model is suitable for the 4 extracted factors (4 latent variables), and these 4 factors explain 70,648% of the observed variables (greater than the minimum required level, which is at least 50%).

TABLE III: FACTOR STRUCTURE

Code	Item label	Factor
c1.14	You receive support and advice from the lecturer in charge of the subject for learning activities	Outcome-based teaching activities
c1.7	Learners experience many practical activities practice professional skills in subjects	
c1.13	You have the opportunity to improve learning results in assessing the learning process of subjects	
c1.8	Trained in teamwork, communication, and reflection skills	
c1.11	Testing and assessment of learning outcomes are organized appropriately to assess the achievement of students' output standards	
c1.6	Teaching and learning activities are organized appropriately for students to achieve standards output	
c1.1	You are informed about the output standards of the subjects	Activities provide information about the learning outcomes
c1.2	The output standards of the subjects are stated clearly and understandable	
c1.3	The rules, regulations and criteria for assessing results are publicly announced to students	
c1.12	The regulations and criteria for assessing learners' learning outcomes are clear and appropriate to assess the level of achievement of the learning outcomes of students	
c1.9	You actively carry out the required learning activities (group work, individual activities, speeches, criticisms, reading study materials)	
c1.10	You are active, actively carry out learning activities in addition to the required activities	
c1.16	You take the initiative in discussing learning activities with the lecturer	Student's learning activities
c1.5	You make a study plan for each subject/semester	
c1.4	You use the information provided from the course outline for study planning, self-study, assessment, etc.	
c1.18	The university's self-study space ensures self-directed activities and individual learning	Conditions to support learning
c1.19	The university's self-study space ensures group study activities	
c1.17	Study materials of the subject/module are adequately provided by the library	
c1.15	Mentoring and orientation activities from academic advisors of the Faculty/Department	

Source: Researcher, 2021.

The factor matrix Table III shows that the variables in the factors have good convergence, no variable has a factor loading factor less than 0.500 and no variable has a factor loading factor greater than 0.500 at the same time.

From Table III, 19 items were grouped into four factors labelled as follows.

B. The Implementation of Outcome-based Learning Activities

Descriptive analysis was conducted to evaluate the completion in implementation of each of the above groups of learning activities.

TABLE IV: IMPLEMENTATION OF OUTCOME-BASED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Types of outcome-based learning activities	Quantity	Average	Rank	Standard Deviation
Outcome-based teaching activities	400	3.89	2	0.788
Activities provide information about the learning outcomes	399	4.03	1	0.808
Student's learning activities	400	3.85	3	0.677
Conditions to support learning	400	3.58	4	0.871
Status of implementing outcome-based learning activities	400	3.84		0.670

- Average 1.00 to 1.80: Very incomplete; Average 1.81 to 2.60: Incomplete; Average 2.61 to 3.40: Normal; Average 3.41 to 4.20: Fairly complete; Average 4.21 to 4.80: Very complete. Source: Researcher, 2021.

Data from Table IV show that all four types of outcome-based learning outcomes are rated at 4/5 (i.e., fairly complete), with *Activities provide information about the learning outcomes* receiving the highest average rating while the *Conditions to support learning* receiving the lowest average rating.

The evaluation of each item within the four groups of outcome-based learning activities are discussed in detail below.

All six items within the group of Outcome –based teaching activities (Table V) are rated at 4/5, in which the highest is the *Trained in teamwork, communication, and critical skills*, the lowest is *Learners experience many practical and practical activities. practice professional skills in all subjects*. No more than 2.5% of students said that the mentioned OBE teaching activities were "not implemented".

Concerning the activities mentioned in table, all four items are rated at 4/5, in which the highest is *Regulations and criteria for assessing learning results are publicly announced to students*, the lowest is *Regulations and criteria for assessing learners' learning outcomes are clear and appropriate to assess the achievement of students*. 1.5% of students thought that *Activities provide information about the learning outcomes* were "not implemented".

TABLE V: OUTCOME-BASED TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Outcome-based teaching activities	Quantity	Average	Rank	Standard Deviation	Number of students rated "Not implemented"
Teaching and learning activities are organized appropriately for students to achieve the output standard	397	3.90	3	0.908	3
Learners experience many practical and practical activities. practice professional skills in all subjects	395	3.61	6	0.995	5
Trained in teamwork, communication, and critical skills	390	4.04	1	0.972	10
Testing and assessment of learning outcomes are organized appropriately to assess the achievement of students' output standards	391	3.88	4	0.920	9
You have the opportunity to improve your results in the assessment of the learning process of the subjects	393	3.85	5	0.954	7
You get support and advice from lecturers in charge of the subject for their activities	391	3.99	2	0.965	9
Overall average level of agreement with the questions of Factor 1	400	3.89		0.788	

Source: Researcher, 2021.

TABLE VI: ACTIVITIES PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT THE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Activities provide information about the learning outcomes	Quantity	Average	Rank	Standard Deviation	Number of students rated "Not implemented"
You are informed about the output standards of the subjects	396	4.11	1	0.917	4
The output standards of the subjects are clearly stated, easy to understand	396	3.98	3	0.917	4
Regulations and criteria for assessing learning results are publicly announced to students	394	4.09	2	0.980	6
Regulations and criteria for assessing learners' learning outcomes are clear and appropriate to assess the achievement of students	397	3.91	4	0.907	1
Average overall agreement with the items of Factor	399	4.03		0.808	

Source: Researcher, 2021.

TABLE VII: STUDENTS' LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Student's learning activities	Quantity	Average	Rank	Standard Deviation	Number of students rated "Not implemented"
You make a study plan for each subject/semester	393	4.01	2	0.848	7
You use the information provided from the course outline for your study. study planning, self-study, assessment...	392	3.63	5	0.896	8
You actively and actively carry out the required learning activities (group work, individual activities, speeches, feedback) argue, read study materials)	392	4.03	1	0.881	8
You actively and proactively carry out learning activities in addition to the required activities	392	3.84	3	0.770	8
You take the initiative in communicating about activities study with lecturers	393	3.68	4	0.878	7
Overall average agrees with the items of Factor 4	400	3.85		0.677	

Source: Researcher, 2021.

TABLE VIII: CONDITIONS TO SUPPORT LEARNING

Conditions to support learning	Quantity	Average	Rank	Standard Deviation	Number of students rated "Not implemented"
The school's self-study space ensures individual self-study activities	390	3.68	1	1.000	10
The school's self-study space ensures learning activities. group	393	3.67	2	0.976	7
Study materials of the course/module are met by the library	397	3.44	4	1.117	3
There is mentoring and orientation activities from the academic advisors of the Faculty/subject	394	3.47	3	1.117	6
Overall mean of agreement on the items of Factor 2	400	3.58		.871	
The school's self-study space ensures individual self-study activities	390	3.68	1	1.000	10

Source: Researcher, 2021.

All five items in Table VII are rated at 4/5, in which the item *You actively and actively carry out the required learning activities (group work, individual activities, speeches, feedback) argue and read study materials)* receives the highest rating, and the item *You use the information provided from the course outline for study planning, self-study, assessment* receives the lowest rating. Under 2% of students rated that the activities were "not implemented".

As for activities in Table VII, all four items are rated at 4/5, the highest of which is *The university's self-study space to ensure individual self-study activities*, the lowest is *Study materials of the course/module are adequately provided by the library*. Only under 2.5% of students said that learning support conditions were "not implemented".

IV. DISCUSSION

The finding shows that USSH students highly evaluate how information about the learning outcomes was communicated to them, indicating a shift to OBE in the USSH. This factor is crucial because students can only be independent in their learning experiences if they are sufficiently informed about the expected learning outcomes. Students also have positive attitudes towards the Outcome-based teaching activities, especially activities that provide them opportunities to develop their transversal skills such as communication and critical thinking.

Although activities that require the independent work of students and activities that provide conditions to support learning were rated above average, these activities were rated lower, suggesting areas for improvement.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) The university should design detailed guidelines or short courses to help students learn how to use the information of the learning outcomes to navigate their studies.
- 2) Counselling activities for students in the form of face-to-face sessions or via email and social networks should be improved.
- 3) Classroom infrastructures should be renovated to align with student-centered learning activities (e.g., role-play, presentation, group work).
- 4) The library should improve the materials and services to better meet the needs of students.

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Dr. Thi-Chau Thuy is Head of Department of Pedegogy in Faculty of Education at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities – Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City (USSH-VNUHCM). She received her Master's degree in Educational Studies from Leeds Univesity, United Kingdom. She graduated Ph.D program in Educational Management at the Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences. Her works focus on teaching and learning activities, curriculum development, and school, family and community partnership.