

## HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIs) REALIZING ITS EDUCATIONAL GOALS

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### **Abstract**

*The quality of education and effectiveness of higher education once overpoweringly based itself on reputation, resources, program outcomes and overall institutional characteristics. However, based on the quality and accountability in teaching and learning, it no longer fulfills these expectations. The essential factor of any institutions mission is based on student learning and its outcomes that functions as a component of institutional effectiveness. Accordingly, this study reviews the dimension of educational, institutional effectiveness consecutively with institutional goals. In the literature review, studies show how institutions have reviewed their criteria to clearly accentuate assessment of student learning outcomes to determine educational effectiveness. The assessment complements an institutional and educational outcome. This shows its clear relationship between and among faculty program or courses, curriculum and subject level goals and interrelationships among institutional goals. Therefore, the overall process of assessment is interlinked whether an institution opts to measure learner competency or institutional effectiveness; simultaneously both objectives and outcomes are explored. Higher education institutions have developed and are developing capacities for quality of education and to adapt to the commercial behavior becoming more innovative and self-regulating.*

**Keyword:** educational and institutional effectiveness, higher education, student learning outcomes, sustainability and competency areas.

### **Introduction**

In the globalized world, the need for sustainability and its development based on the needs of society, economy and environment has caused most higher education institutions (HEIs) to develop their vision, mission and goals on their country and individual society's needs. In other words most HEIs develop their goals for the benefit of developing society and creating sustainability to ensure that their learners and graduates not only capture the knowledge and skills but have the ability to contribute, communicate effectively and adapt towards the assimilating changes of the society (Johnston, 2007). Public policies and global economic forces in many countries have reformed the way HEIs operate and have changed overtime due to the changing needs of the society and international competition on cross border education. Thus HEIs have developed and are developing capacities to adapt to the entrepreneurial behavior becoming more innovative and self-regulating institutions (Knight, J., 2008).

Traditionally, quality of education and HEIs effectiveness deeply based themselves on reputation, resources and overall institutional characteristics reflecting on programme and student's grades. However, the quality and accountability in teaching and learning especially in undergraduate programmes no longer fulfills this expectation (Lindholm, 2009). The essential factor of any HEIs mission is based on student learning and its outcomes that serves as an

essential component of institutional effectiveness. However, the overall assessment processes assist and benefits HEIs to ensure that the mission and goals of the institution are clearly defined to the students, faculty and the public. The resources and programs are planned and coordinated appropriately and the assessment results are used for continuous improvement of student learning and institution advancement (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2005).

In most cases, results of student assessments are used to reflect on how well the HEIs vision, mission and educational goals are being accomplished. To achieve the mission and goals of the institution, the contribution depends on the effectiveness of the programs, curriculum and the services it provides to the faculty, students and the community. The planning and assessment cycle clearly defines the institutional goals, assessing achievement of these goals and using the assessment results for continuous improvement of the programs and its services (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2005). The assessment cycle includes planning, conducting, analyzing, evaluating and monitoring. Therefore the assessment reflects the institutional effectiveness based on the evaluation results and recommendations provided for continuous improvement (ibid).

The common question that is asked during accreditation of the HEIs “is the institution meeting the mission and goals set to achieve its educational purpose”. It further defines what is being done and how well the institutions are doing and if it supports student learning which shows the fundamental institutional effectiveness. In accordance with the Middle States Commission of Higher Education, the fundamental component of student learning is the achievement of the institutions missions and goals that reflects institutional effectiveness. Therefore the assessment of student learning is mostly reflected as a third step of the four step teaching and learning cycle as in Figure 2. This involves the articulation and delivery of student learning and its outcomes. The articulation of learning is developed clearly reflecting the skills and knowledge the students are expected to attain at the end of the course; how to offer programs and courses that provide opportunities for students to achieve its learning outcomes and lastly assessing the learning outcomes based on what the students have achieved. These assessment results are used to further improve teaching and learning (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2005). The achievement of quality learning outcomes and success of education reforms are dependent on the quality of programs and its outline. A program of study or curriculum also serves as a fundamental concern affiliated between university, teaching staff and most importantly the students (Totté, Huyghe, & Alexandra, 2013)

#### **Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) Realizing its Goals**

Emphasis is placed more on the culture of “evidence” in the current trend of higher education in order to see the transformation of the academic and documenting its educational effectiveness where the process is as important as the outcome. Documenting educational effectiveness is an ongoing process of analysis and reflection that focuses on continuous improvement which benefits and enhances institutional efficiency (Lindholm, 2009). Whether it is academic or institutional assessment, two questions that primarily gauged “*are the students learning what the institutions want them to learn as per the educational and curriculum objectives and are the institutions learning from the student assessment reflection and or how are the institutions using these assessment results to enhance student learning ?*”

Educational goals are broad categories which should include literacy, numeracy, competencies or general skills that link the framework of curriculum, teaching and student learning. Nevertheless, without breaking it down to more specifically measurable parts, student’s accomplishment of these goals is difficult to assess. Learning outcomes fully describe the course or program goals and its mechanism to assess whether students have achieved and mastered the specific objective thus this is said to be an essential tool that gathers student

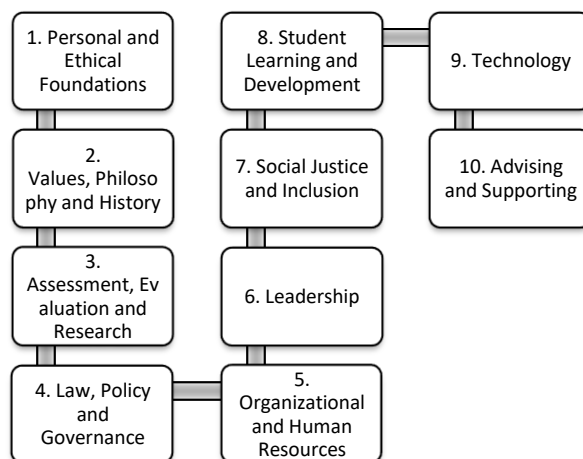
learning evidence (Lindholm, 2009). According to Western Association of Schools and College's (WASC), student learning evidence includes and covers core skills, competencies and knowledge established in the curriculum, includes multiple judgment methodologies to measure student performance and delivers multiple dimensions and information on student performance [Lindholm, 2009].

With the considerable rise of global pressures on sustainability and creating new generation with vision or empowerment and assumption of responsibilities for creating sustainable future, quality of education plays an ultimate role (Kanbar, 2012). Most higher education that is subjected to accreditation framework, creating assessment onto the accreditation process becomes vital as this ensures accountability of institutions and program to its students, faculty and public thus resources are coordinated in such a way to advance the institution and to achieve its program goals promoting continuous improvements (O'Neill, G., Huntley-Moore, S., Race, P., 2007). For successful implementation of educational assessment it involves a development process that reflects the views of students, staff and faculty members actively that allows institutional trust overtime for the integrity of the assessment process. Based on the importance of institutional mission and goals, assessment of students and institutions approach varies extensively. This is cost effective as it yields dividends where institutions tend to consider assessment measures such as graduation, surveys, retention, financial ratios and transfers (Lovell, C.D., & Kosten, L.A., 2000).

According to the comparative study of seven institutions by University of Michigan, student assessment efforts vary where institutions are decentralized compared to centralized institutions where the student assessment efforts are more uniform (University of Michigan, 2001). This is also subjected to variations based on the objectives of the institutions, its geographical locations, society needs, development goals of each nation and business requirements. This paper uses literature review to obtain the facts and arguments in relation to the institutional effectiveness and learner competency. The review defines, firstly, what the institutional assessment aims to involve and secondly what the assessment of educational effectiveness involves giving a wider thought on the ways they can complement and support each other.

### **Dimension of Institutional and Educational Effectiveness**

Higher Education is an initiative facing exceptional changes where there is demand in terms of accessibility, diversity, innovations and global interactions leading students toward new educational understanding. The most significant challenges highlighted by College Student Educators International (ACPA) are the rising cost of higher education, accountability and proving better expectations for the employers [ACPA, 2010]. At the same time as in the globalized world, employers require graduates who are competent, innovative and those that are able to bring in change or adapt to the changes. Based on this context, the need for holistic educational performance is subjected to be taken into account to craft learner outcomes and how HEIs need to comply with minimum requirements in order to fulfill the graduate competencies. The report from ACPA & Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) established scope and content of professional competencies as shown in figure 1 allows institutions to prosper within the current environment and projected future environment of the higher education (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). The report further stated that the importance of these competencies is significant in understanding how students learn and develop or attain the know how in business without failing to understand the core values of the educational profession.



### **Linking Learner Outcomes to Educational and Institutional Effectiveness**

Student learning outcomes define what the learners should value, know and be able to do by the end of their respective course or program accordingly. These outcomes are generally recognized by knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and behavioral outcomes. While these dimensions signify important aspects of student learning they are further divided into direct (skills, knowledge and behavioral) and indirect evidence (attitudes and values), nevertheless it is not viewed as less important than any other types of learning outcomes. In other words indirect evidence is mostly used in the analysis of direct evidence as argument while at the same time it enriches the institutions and faculty's non-judgmental of student learning and its educational practices (Lindholm, 2009).

A study from Scott, shows the seven stage approach to identify learner outcomes; (1) Learner profile, to map the learner's perspective as graduates with learner interactions; (2) Content of the course should be recognized by listing the skills and knowledge necessary to accomplish and that it is consistent with the requirements of sustainability; (3) knowledge and skills identified to reflect graduates ability to contribute to sustainable society; (4) desired learning outcomes are specified; (5) mechanisms and methodology of delivery is designed; (6) evaluation or audits planned to check programs compatibility; (7) final guide preparation for the course (Scott, 2006). Several institutions use student assessment for the purpose of internal improvement whereas some institutions practice it for the purpose of external accountability. However, measures of student assessment vary by institutions, faculties and nationality (University of Michigan, 2001). This reflects the overall student achievement and those maps to the educational objectives of the HEIs which link to the institutional performance.

The outcomes statements are representative of the overall aim of the competency area, however, they may not be fully representative (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). These outcomes are represented into three distinctive features that are foundational, intermediate and advance level outcomes. Now these outcomes are expected to be outcomes of the programs or subjects at each level. Individual learners meeting the full scale of outcomes within a level demonstrates proficiency at that particular level whether meeting in a singular level or meeting at manifold contexts. This may also differentiate between the learners as each may demonstrate foundational level proficiency at a later stage and achieve several intermediate or advance level outcomes for that competency at an earlier stage (ACPA, 2010).

These outcomes or learner assessment can be in the form of measuring competencies. Applying competencies in practice consists of various best practices rather than standardized approaches which are likely to progress overtime reflecting on the nature of competencies. Therefore, their application should be mindful of the HEIs unique mission, needs for the faculty and its professional associations (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2005). This also encourages the usage of competency areas for the related outcomes of self-assessing the institutions current goals and levels of proficiency and pursuing towards attaining and sustaining those goals. In order to ensure continuous improvement, the institutions should apply and adapt to the competencies whilst designing courses or other professional development practices. These competencies should also serve as a means of reviewing programs and setting subject level learning outcomes fulfilling the expectations of student learning (ibid). During student assessment and assessment of learning outcomes, the academic management which comprises of quality of education, program goals and strategic directions with resources and educational improvement such as teaching and learning innovation remain apparent (University of Michigan, 2001).

Student's project, course assignment and exams are direct measures of expected learning outcomes whereas indirect evidence pertains to self-perceptions, interpersonal and emotional intelligence of students and their view points. Even though indirect evidence does not provide direct answers to test whether students are meeting the specified learning outcomes

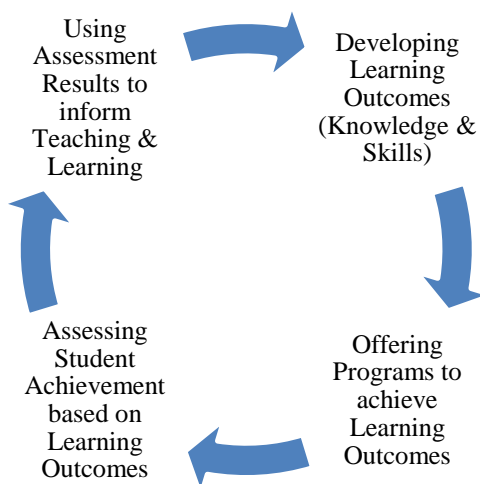
or no, it is still potentially useful information to the faculty and overall institutional performance (Lindholm, 2009). The most essential components of educational effectiveness in teaching and learning are created thoughtfully into direct and indirect methods of student learning and is reviewed, evaluated and assessed collectively as educational effectiveness for the deliberation of curriculum review and development (ibid).

On the wider range the student office would subsequently utilize these competency areas as a framework for quality education on international, regional and local level to meet the requirements of the cross border education and recognition of its qualifications. Each competency should be able to prove the work of all learners and promote its profession such as building outreach programs and career development aimed at the interest of learners thus reflecting the holistic student development and success in institutional effectiveness (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). The assessment determines to what extent the learners have demonstrated the proficiency upon completing the program and the expected learning outcomes are met. By use of this approach the HEIs not only provide evidence within but to external stakeholders as well as this information demonstrates the student learning evidence of accountability (Lindholm, 2009).

### Analysis

#### HEIs Goal and Educational Objectives do complement each other

For HEIs, setting a clear statement on the institutional goals should include expected educational objectives and outcomes which allows to measure educational effectiveness. This educational effectiveness reflects on the undertaking and goals of the institution. This is in fact based on the requirements towards economic development, environment and social needs. Regardless of the higher education and regulating agencies, most HEIs usually have the freedom to design or conduct curriculum planning and development. These ultimately includes institutional guidelines, assessment activities, plans to develop and implement future initiatives, resources coordination, obtaining results that demonstrate institution and students achievement and plans to use assessment results to further enhance student learning and institution efficiency ( Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2005).

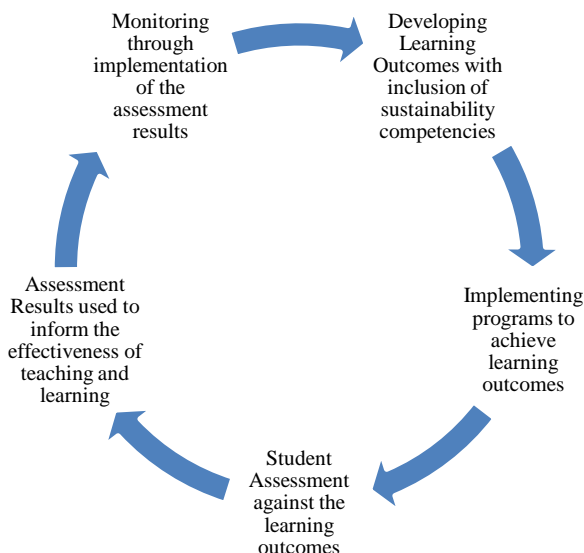


**Figure 2. Four Step Teaching Learning Assessment Cycle. Source (Adopted from); (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2005)**

In the process of evaluating and assessing institutions both the institutional and program level goals are assessed which shows how well the resources and learning objectives are defined thus reflecting whether the institutions is indeed achieving its goals or not. Based on the assessment results it is further used to improve the student learning and for the advancement of the institution. However, this includes the four cycle planning assessment process in parallel with the teaching learning assessment cycle as shown in Figure 2. The teaching and learning assessment cycle measures the program effectiveness at faculty level whether it's achieving its objectives and outcomes based on the assessment of student learning outcomes. The program effectiveness reflects the effectiveness of educational outcomes and objectives

set at an institutional level thus reflecting the mission and goals of the institution measuring institutional effectiveness. Therefore, the overall process of assessment is interlinked whether an institution opts to measure learner competency or institutional effectiveness; simultaneously both objectives and outcomes are explored.

The four step teaching and learning cycle can be further enhanced by incorporating the sustainability skills while developing the student learning outcomes and inclusion of the fifth step that is deemed important which is monitoring for continuous improvement as shown in figure 3.



**Figure 3. Showing the Five Step Process of Effective Teaching and Learning Assessment (Source: Author)**

These sustainability competencies can be linked to the seven competencies introduced by the UNESCO education for sustainable development. The seven sustainability competencies required to develop learners or students general skills are critical thinking, strategic, collaboration, self-awareness, integrated problem solving, normative and anticipatory. How this need to be incorporated into the courses depends on how these competencies are incorporated into the curriculum or syllabus and used as measurable outcomes. Student learning is a dynamic aspect of the HEIs

mission and goals therefore assessment of student learning plays an essential role and contributes towards the assessment of institutions effectiveness. Operational and effective assessments are systematic, cost effective and reasonably useful and accurate as well as continuous. It is useful since it assists faculty or colleges to make informed decisions on what is required to improve its goals and plans regarding courses or curriculum review and its services. However, these reviews should be done periodically in order to be useful. Assessments results reflecting institutional and educational outcomes are used in confidence making the required decisions as these assessments are reasonably known to be accurate and precise. However different assessment tools shall be applied but should clearly reflect the strategies and goals of the institutions, strategies and curriculum policy. In designing institutional mission and goals, the main element that the management and faculty look into is students and or learners as their products who are “*quality graduates*”. Based on institutions mission and goals, services and programs or curriculum are developed therefore while institutions provide the services, their end products are supposed to be quality graduates. As mentioned above in the reviews student learning and development is one of the key competency areas of the institution therefore this reflects the educational objectives and its effectiveness that is interlinked with the mission and goals of the institutions.

### Conclusion

To conclude a planned assessment is purposefully linked to institutional goals to ensure that all goals and plans are addressed which generally involves academic planning to ensure that those plans have effectively helped students or learners to achieve the program’s key

learning outcomes. The assessment complements an institutional and educational outcome which shows its clear relationship between and among faculty program or courses, curriculum and subject level goals and interrelationships among institutional goals. In order for the institutions to be successful, they also need to think critically as well in order to develop programs and allocate resources wisely. Global economic forces and the need for sustainability education has transformed the way in which institutions operate and have changed overtime to the changing needs of the society and international cooperation. As part of continuous planning HEIs need to dovetail with society to ensure their graduates are well recognised and able to adapt to a peaceful and productive life.

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