Aligning Student Learning Outcome with their Societal Culture: The Case of Global Campuses in the Arab World

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Abstract

While the value of western education is highly prominent in the Arab world, recent literature has reported that instructors need to critically consider students' national culture when selecting teaching styles/methodologies to facilitate students' learning outcomes. The problem is that due to the differing national/societal cultures between Arab students and Western students, Arab students find it difficult to interpret, or learn from, certain teaching methods, which would typically be welcomed by Western students. Even though learning outcomes reflect the teaching methodologies, such choices of teaching methods should be further customized and localized within the context of the students' national culture. Such a research topic is new and rarely investigated in Arab countries. Hence, the aim in this conceptual paper is to profile current research to justify the importance of recognizing and to a degree accommodating students' national culture with respect to learning outcomes. A literature-driven theoretical framework was proposed in this article and is viable for future empirical assessment. Also implications and limitations have been mentioned in this paper.

Key Words: Students' national culture; Learning Outcome; Teaching Methodology; Husted's framework.

Introduction

In order to understand the importance of such a research topic, it is first important to comprehend why such a topic was of particular interest to the authors. As faculty of the New York Institute of Technology (NYIT), both authors had teaching experience at NYIT's New York - USA, Vancouver – Canada as well as Bahrain campus (New York Institute of Technology, 2015). It was observed that the instructors in NYIT's Bahrain campus incorporated varying teaching styles. This was mainly because some instructors were hired locally within the national culture where the campus resided, while others were sent from NYIT's western campuses to teach at its global campuses. As observed, instructors who aligned their teaching methods with the national cultures of their students received higher student satisfaction versus those who taught using teaching methods incorporated within NYIT's western campuses. To comprehend why such was the case; this paper draws upon the review of its literature and presents its critique as follows: (1) Section one offered an introductory critique of current literature. (2) Section two framed a critique of reviewed literature to define students' national culture and students' learning outcomes. (3) Section three justified the relationship between students' national culture and their learning outcomes in order to propose this paper's conceptual framework. (Figure 2), (4) Section four outlined the research methodology by describing the kinds of resources we considered eligible in order to conduct the literature review critiqued in this paper and (5) Section five described the importance of this research topic, concluded the future of such a research topic and outlined the limitations and implications of this study.

Literature Review

The authors observed NYIT instructors arriving at NYIT's global campuses from western campuses, and attaining lower student evaluations than compared with the local faculty within those global campuses, even though both, local and global faculty, held substantial academic teaching experience. Such common cases were also observed and reported in other academic campuses. For instance, Prowse and Goddard (2010) reported that there is a lack of research to assess the impact of western education on international students. It should be noted that culture sensitivity is an important consideration when designing learning outcomes. This is why western instructors have a challenging time when they try teaching from western oriented syllabi without considering the effect of students' culture on their adapted teaching methodology. Furthermore, even though there is ample research describing the development and delivery of teaching quality, training and education, there is a dearth of literature assess the effect of teachers' in-class training (their knowledge, behavior and their teaching practice) on their students' learning outcomes (The DFID Human Development Resource Centre, 2011). This is not surprising considering that there is no clear definition of effective teaching (Adams, 1997). To further critique literature; the next two sub-sections (1.1 and 1.2) furbish a detailed definition of students' national culture and students' learning outcomes.

Defining National Culture

Images, ideas and practices are fundamental in societal culture. This is not a new theory but an idea, also stated by Plato. Culture can be defined from an anthropological perspective, i.e. a culture is a merger of in inborn knowledge, values and ideas to formulate a social action. On the other hand, Plato also considered the material characteristics from the concept of a societal culture, e.g. the society's artifacts, buildings, landscapes, etc. According to Plato, material culture is reflected through style, which is an expression of a one's soul. Plato discourages his students to follow style, i.e. our styles of furniture, embroidery, etc. According to Plato, style is bad taste and he advised youth not to pursue such qualities so to

perform proper tasks. He also recommended grace in material culture in order to positively affect one's soul. Hence, culture can be classified in two categories: hearing and seeing, where music and poetry can be related with hearing and painting or architecture or furniture can be associated with seeing (Burnyeat, 1999).

Further on, in order to understand the concept of the national culture, one should try to analyze the theory of culture from the perspective of innovation; especially when one wonders why some countries are quick, while others are slow, at adapting innovation. National culture is composed of four dimensions, using Hofstede's framework: (1) power distance index (PDI), (2) uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), (3) individualism index (IDV) and (4) masculinity index (MAS). Further on another dimension can add value to Hofstede's frameowrk, i.e. the culture classifications from Hall's culture classification (Van Everdingen & Waarts, 2003).

Societal culture has been deemed important for a while. Culture is a set of beliefs and values which underpin the structure, practice, processes and the structure of a group of people. Such a group can be an organization, e.g. an academic institution reflecting the notion of an organizational culture or a nation reflecting the notion of a societal culture. Societal culture has received greater preference in the academic based literature. From an organization's point of view, culture is considered from the perspective of management and leadership (Dimmock & Walker, 2000).

From the national culture's point of view, the Hafstede's PDI reflects decision structures, e.g. countries with high PDI have highly centralized DM structures with authority and rules where hierarchy dictates information sharing. Countries with high UAI tend to resist innovation and are highly formulated by management with low risk taking and thus show a low rate of innovation adaption. Countries that are individualistic, i.e. high in IDV, tend to have individual DM rather than countries with low IDV, i.e. being collectivist countries that conform to group norms and perform collective decision making. Countries with high IDV have a higher rate of innovation adaption. A country is either characterized as masculine or feminine. A feminine characteristic is reflected by social relationships, equality, etc while masculinity is reflected through competition, focus orientation, competition, etc. A masculine characteristic harbors innovation. Countries with Hightower LTO are more positively focused towards the future and show persistence while short term orientation tend to focus in the past with less resection or change. Countries with high LTO more likely adapt innovation. Furthermore, Hall's culture classification is first based on high or low context culture and second on monochromic or polychromic culture. Context of culture is portrayed by how messages are communicated. A high context culture communicates more through contextual cues, like Japan, China or Italy attain information through trusted sources, while a low context culture is more reliant upon explicit communication through words, like US, Germany or Switzerland attain information from reports or journals (Van Everdingen & Waarts, 2003).
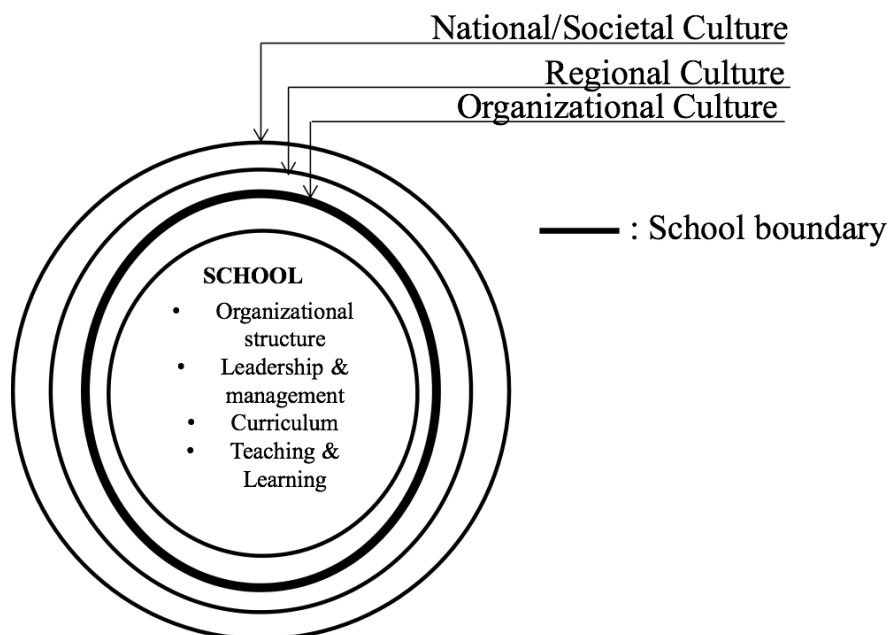
Figure 1 Cross cultural school oriented model. Adapted from Dimmock & Walker (2000)

Within the academic sector, Figure 1 depicts a cross-cultural comparison model, where the school is an academic institution built on supporting factors being: (1) organizational structure, (2) leadership and management, (3) curriculum and (4) teaching and learning. The organizational structure reflects the physical and financial resources along with the organizational policy based framework. The core of the school is the curriculum to form the purpose based skills, and knowledge setup to deliver to students. Teaching and learning are activities pertaining to methods and approaches based within the understood context of the national, regional or organizational culture of an academic institution. In this study the national culture was based on six dimensions: (1) power concentration/dispersion modeled after the Hofstede's framework, (2) group/self-orientation, where a group oriented culture has strong ties with people while self-oriented culture is individual performance and accomplishment oriented, (3) aggression/consideration, which was modeled after Hofstede's framework, (4) fatalistic/proactive, which was also modeled after Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension, (5) generative/replicative, where a generative culture thrives innovation while the replicative culture is more towards adapting innovations and (6) limited/holistic relationship, meaning that a limited relationship culture tends to make decisions based on strict rules while a holistic culture will manipulate decisions based on obligations in relations (Dimmock & Walker, 2000).

Defining Students' Learning Outcomes

For universities to attract local and international students, their curriculum design should be focused on their learning outcomes, i.e. abilities attained by students reflected through their attained knowledge and skills after they have graduated from their academic institution. In other words; an organization hiring the student will judge his/her learnt outcomes (Asgari & Borzooei, 2013). To attain and sustain an academic institutional effectiveness learning outcomes are a norm. Learning outcomes are a product of a process of learning based on cognitive as well as affective outcomes (Asgari & Borzooei, 2013). Such learning outcomes, also, are the focal point for children schools (United Nations Childrens FundUNICEF & Save the Children, 2014).

Learning outcomes can occur at an: (1) individual level such as a student attaining knowledge and skills or (2) organizational level, i.e. an employee being cumulative or

adaptive (Froehlich, Segers & Bossche, 2014). There are three aspects to learning outcomes: (1) cognitive outcomes, (2) behavioral outcomes and (3) affective outcomes. Through cognitive outcomes an instructor can harvest knowledge and skills creation while non-cognitive outcomes simply focus on improving the individual's attitude and values. Learning outcomes are reflected through attained skills like critical, analytical, problem-solving and creatively thinking skills. Such forms of learning outcomes stem from a student's psychological and behavioral outcomes. Learning outcomes can further possess four more dimensions: (1) vocational, i.e. cognitive learning outcomes, (2) personal development, (3) general educational and (4) intellectual advances. Personal development, general educational and intellectual advances are geared towards behavioral and affective learning outcomes (Asgari & Borzooei, 2013).

Rowe and Rafferty's (2013) study aimed to assess the effect of students' self-regulated learning on their learning outcomes. Rowe and Rafferty reported that students' learning outcomes are affected by various factors of students' self-regulated learning, i.e. management of time, setting of goals, reflection and self-motivation, possessing the ability to modify learning strategies, ability to seek help, regulating feedback and able to learn through the use of resources. In this context, students' self-regulated learning refers to a student's actively constructive procedure to set learning goals and monitor their cognition and motivation and behavior in accordance to reach his/her learning goal/s. Also, Mansson (2014) reported that students' participation affects their learning outcomes. Student interactions are important to students where interactions could relate to a: (1) student's in-class comments, (2) student's interaction out of class and (3) student's motivation to communicate with their instructors. E.g. students prefer to communicate with their instructors when they express their concern for failing or not doing well in a course. Hence, Bhandari (2012) recommended that in order to improve students' performance, the students' evaluation should also providing his/her instructor feedback on how to customize an individualized instructor-student interaction. A student's satisfaction is effected by the product s/he received from his/her academic institution through the quality of the non-educational, i.e. economic consideration or social matters, and educational attributes, e.g. setting of clear goals in teaching in an academic setting (Asgari & Borzooei, 2013).

The earlier mentioned three aspects of learning outcomes are positively associated with the student-instructor motivation/reason for communication. Furthermore, every academic course presents "*academic service learning experience*" (ASLE) where each ASLE varies depending on students' emotional responses and their level of goals achievement as well as instructors' identified learning outcomes for each ASLE. An example of ASEL is students' practicum experience, etc (Corso, 2008). ASLE occurs outside the class room where students can participate by providing a service at an organization, e.g. during a practicum, to further understand the content of their course while applying critical thinking, problem solving and interpersonal and intercultural communication skills (Yang, 2014). The relation of service learning with learning outcomes is important to appreciate since service learning is an educational tool, which is an integration of the community (i.e. public service) and the classroom (i.e. the planned academic outcomes through academic work). To assure the success of ASLE, course content should to directly integrated with the students' reflection component, i.e. their accomplished service based experience gained by students through their voluntary community work. This way, students can get a chance to test and apply their in-class attained theories at a work/site setting to improve students' social-growth (Shastri, 1998). The idea of ASLE can be analyzed from the perspective of how an organization can assess the role of workplace learning outcomes on organizational performance, as conducted by Park and Jacobs (2011). Workplace learning can be evaluated through three factors: (1)

competency at work, (2) self-assessment of one's own enthusiasm to improve and (3) productivity of the labor force (Park & Jacobs, 2011).

It is not enough to just propagate knowledge in our current innovation oriented knowledge society where knowledge and intelligence have shown significant changes since the past twenty years. From the perspective of learning collaboration and creativity were reports most essential to sustain a quality oriented teaching methodology. While intelligence is based on the physical and social problem-solving environment, and is no longer a stable commodity, teaching methodology needs to adapt a more creativity-inspiring social, rather than a simple knowledge transmitting environment to form a sociocultural approach to share knowledge. This occurs through the inquiry of information, mediated by the cultural norms. From the social perspective the outcome of learning is the act of storing newly created knowledge in students' minds, through students' self-inspired thinking, while they collaboratively participate within the contexts of their cultural norms during their learning activities (Vedenpää & Lonka, 2014). Student participation facilitates learning. It is up to the instructor to keep students' culture diversities in mind so to assure facilitate understanding so to raise each student's level of creativity and innovation. One way is by appropriately utilizing e-learning technologies, e.g. chat room, discussion boards, etc., for teaching purposes (Davies, 2014).

AACSB accredited business schools aim to brand their curriculums as international, i.e. global, thus making culture an important factor when structuring learning outcomes with such curriculums. From the point of view of the learning outcomes, such institutions prefer to adapt applied teaching and learning strategy where students gain experience to learn in group assignments (Green & Farazmand, 2013). Bearing in mind that the 21st century market demands socially skilled knowledge workers, workers who are able to think analytically and critically and to innovate, the significance of designing effective learning outcomes within curriculums becomes even more important (Asgari & Borzooei, 2013). The research area on learning outcomes is not a research topic only within the academic world of schools and universities but also recently has picked up attention within the culture of an organization, i.e. informal learning as a byproduct of an activity, i.e. implicit learning during socialization within a working environment. This is more efficient than seminars or trainings (Froehlich, Segers & Bossche, 2014). Recently research expressed a rise in attention towards organizational informal learning (Froehlich, Segers & Bossche, 2014).

National Culture & Learning Outcome Relationship

There is a need for research to assess the relationship of students' national culture on their learning outcomes. There is current but scarce literature critiquing the relation between students' learning outcomes and teachers' training. Further, the literature indicates a need for empirical evidence to provide a robust suggestion as to what actually is the effect of teachers' training, i.e. teachers' evaluation of their teaching practice – as the case of this research context, on students' learning outcomes (The DFID Human Development Resource Centre, 2011). Since a while now, there have been practical initiatives, e.g. where 15 years old students were assessed for their learning outcomes, from fourteen non-"organization for economic Cooperation and Developing" (OECD) countries. The aim was to assess the scientific, mathematic and reading literacy of such students. Such assessment was further compared with the data collected from OECD countries in the year 2000 (Katherine, 2003). The DFID Human Development Resource Centre's (2011) expression of the need to assess the relationship between students' learning outcomes and teachers' training tallies with this research since it is the authors' view that the provided training for an instructor should bear the sensitivities of the culture within which s/he is implementing the academic course/academic program. After all, it is the students' evaluation, as well as other

stakeholders' evaluations, such as that provided by their parents, governments and employees, that will play a mediating influential role between students' learning outcomes and their perception of the academic program, in which they are enrolled in (Asgari & Borzooei, 2013). Henceforth, it is important to transform the culture of an academic institution where an instructors' role becomes important. It boils down to the instructor who should, hence, change their beliefs, values and attitudes towards their processes of instructing in order to improve students' learning outcomes (Cavanagh & Waugh, 2004).

Another rationale behind the importance of understanding the role of students' national cultures on their learning outcomes is when considering the unfortunate academic incident recently reported in literature, e.g. various factors, like "*apartheid*", low morale among teachers, parents, and students; absence of discipline; negative attitude towards academics, etc. collectively degraded the learning and teaching culture in South African schools. Such a drop in learning and teaching culture reflected through the declining results of matriculation exams. Even though recent studies have focused on the academic performance of students in schools, these studies have been ignoring the outcomes of their learning culture to change the students' behavior so to make them willing to acquire knowledge to improve academic performance (Weeks, 2012).

Learning outcome as a theory can also be understood from the perspective of distance learning. Al-Harthi (2005) reported that distance learning is better adapted by those students who are from individualistic cultures, rather than students from a collectivist culture. E.g. Asian students, like Arab students, would struggle in distance learning programs where they would feel isolated from their instructors. There is lacking history of distance learning in the Arab world where the first generation of distance learning, during the 1960s, was introduced in the Arab University of Beirut. The second generation of distance learning, during the 1980s, was the initiation of open universities, e.g. Arab Open University. The third generation of distance learning was introduced when electronic media tools supplemented courses where there is face-to-face students-instructor interaction. Such tools were incorporated in the Zayed University, University of Bahrain and Sultan Qaboos University. An added difficulty with distance learning is that English is a second language for such students. With Arab students coming from a high femininity index, their participation is lower than American students since in high power distance culture students tend not to question the course material or participate if they do not have a substantially important point to contribute.

The role of national culture on learning style is further important since it is the way that the training is conducted within a particular location has a lot to do with the culture of that location, i.e. where communication and implementation of a training program is the well-focused requirement in meeting customers' needs. This study reported that learners from different cultures have differing interpretations and empathies of what they were exposed to. Also it was reported that international programs should introduce room for learning based on localization of the cultural context within which the course is taught (Chang, 2004). In conclusion, research to assess the impact of western education on international students is lacking. It should be noted that culture sensitivity is an important consideration when designing learning outcomes. This is why western instructors have a challenging time when trying to teach from western oriented syllabi without considering the effect of students' culture on their adapted teaching methodology (Prowse & Goddard, 2010). Prowse and Goddard's (2010) case study research, conducted in St. John's Newfoundland and Labrador's Canada and Qatar campus, aimed to assess cultural context of a transnational training program offered in the Canada and Qatar campus. Hence, findings suggested that (1) Canadians are not sensitive of saving their face or maintaining traditions, (2) Qatar students tended to not stay on schedules with their assignments or showing up in class made

instructors change their teaching styles, like penalizing late assignment etc, to discipline Qatar students, (3) flexibility was asked for instructors teaching Qatar students since Qatari students required more guidance than Canadian students.

Culture plays a significant role in students' learning outcomes since culture influences their learning style. Some students learn from practical, social and collaborative involvement with other people when working on a project and thus attain experience. This is a concrete experience approach. Such students do not prefer to learn theories well. Other type of students who can learn from theories can analytically think out the theories and learn from attained intellectually explored and rationally thought out ideas. Such learning style is referred as abstract conceptualization. Since learning style is developed based on the cultural context of the society within which a student comes from (Black & Kassaye, 2014), the learning outcomes of the academic programs need to be tailored with the societal culture of those students of the program.

Henceforth, based on the critiqued literature argued in this and the previous sections it is evident that in regard to the first proposed theoretical framework, depicted in Figure 2. As per authors' observation, recently only Froehlich, Segers and Bossche (2014) empirically assessed the moderating role of organizational culture between: (1) learning approach and learning outcomes and (2) leadership style and learning outcomes wherein the context of organizational informal learning work environment. Al-Kloub, Salameh and Froelicher (2014) quantitatively and qualitatively assessed how students' background culture affects their self-direct learning where the target population, i.e. nursing students from clinical pediatric course, adapted problem based learning (PBL) teaching strategy to attain student centered small-group based self-directed learning. It should be noted that Al-Kloub, Salameh and Froelicher assessed the impact of, not students' national culture but, cultural background on a teaching style, and not on students' learning outcome. This is why the authors stated that the theoretical framework proposed in Figure 2 is one of the first to propose that there is a positive and significant effect of students' national culture on their learning outcomes.
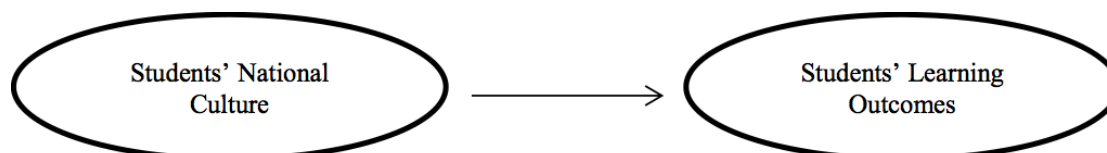

Figure 2 Role of Students' National Culture on their learning outcomes within an academic institution

Research Methodology

Only peer-reviewed conference papers, reports and journal articles were considered for critiquing the review of literature for this paper. Online databases, like Proquest, Emerald, EBSCO Host, ERIC Institute of Education Sciences, etc., were considered to search on national culture, learning outcomes and the relation between both of these constructs, as depicted in Figure 2. An exhaustive research was conducted to review all papers within this research area to pin-point all relevant articles to support the theoretical framework. Then only, did the authors propose the theoretical framework depicted in Figure 2. Reviewed literature was not only limited to academic related education research based papers but also to those pertaining to culture and learning outcomes in other sectors like healthcare, banking, etc.

Discussion & Conclusion

Based on the just mentioned argument and justification, the critiqued literature in this paper successfully evidenced that culture sensitivity should have been a central focus in in NYIT's global campuses so to avoid substantially capable Western faculty from attaining lower student evaluations than those faculty who were locally hired in NYIT's global campuses. Furthermore, innovation in the education sector is based on four categories: culture, structure, personal innovation and leadership. Little study has been conducted in the area of innovation management and innovative processes in international or education related research (BÜLBÜ, 2012).

It is also the authors' observation that the Arab world aims to incorporate an academic system similar to that in the West. This is a response to a general complaint that their students are more inclined towards rote learning while rarely emphasizing creative\ity or problem solving. This view is similar to the one observed in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea and Japan (Dimmock & Walker, 2000). While rote learning is referred to as a surface approach to a students' learning process, critical, analytical and creative problem-solving based thinking is a deep approach to the students' learning process (Vedenpää & Lonka, 2014). Considering that research lacks in assessing the effect of culture on students' learning styles (Charlesworth, 2008), it would be interesting if future research could assess the mediating role of students' learning style between their national culture and their learning outcomes. This is important for assessment since students from one culture may find a particular teaching technique or learning style preferable, than students from another culture may not. For example, a passive teaching technique is one in which lectures provide a low instructor's control since the students are left to learn on their own. Other examples of passive learning techniques are textbook readings, guest speakers, in-class presented videos as well as computer based learning assignments. An example of an active learning style is students problem solving for their projects that are composed of highly controlled learning objectives, e.g. case study, research based projects, group projects and classroom discussions. While the Western culture appreciates exploration and self-discovery; the Asian culture expects a leading teaching technique where learning points should be indicated by the instructor (Charlesworth, 2008). Furthermore, as Lizzio, Wilson, & Simons (2002) mentioned that students who prefer a deep approach tend to express a higher level of course satisfaction they are enrolled in.

This study has limitations. The reviewed literature of this study could have been conducted deeper, such that the authors could have performed research profiling to critique all culture models rather than just few main ones. Also literature review was restricted to only current publications, i.e. publications from 2005 to 2015. Only those intellectual contributions which were cited as most valuable and relevant to this research topic were considered if they were published before the year 2005. The authors' future research aim is to critique a deeper research profile of literature review to later empirically assess this paper's theoretical framework.

Furthermore, it is not surprising why this paper only cited less than 35 studies. The authors' experience of pinpointing relevant publications for review and critiquing was along the same lines as Burston (2015) who evaluated 291 studies in the "mobile-assisted language learning" (MALL) area, since the past twenty years, and concluded that only thirty five studies met the minimum standards, to determine the learning outcomes for applying MALL.

An instructor will appreciate the importance of learning outcomes if his/her teaching methods are evaluated from the lens of the students who are going to learn via such teaching methods. Every country is pursuing itself forward academically for national development by pushing forward its education reform, where policies focus on quality education, aiming to

attain higher achieving students in schools (Yun, 2007). Henceforth, to understand the theoretical and practical implications of this study's theoretical framework, the implications begin and end with an instructor who should responsibly re-think and apply the essence of this framework in his/her teaching methods and get inspired by the realism of the learning outcomes. Henceforth, this theoretical framework is a wake-up call for instructors to realize that their traditional role, i.e. delivering classroom instructions is of equal importance in addition to other duties, i.e. development of a curriculum, active researching, team leadership and development of staff. A school is not a factory where exams will have multiple choice questions but a productivity based institution with a sellable student to available employees (Yun, 2007).

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