

## **An Exploratory Study of the Key factors and Impact of a First Year Course in the University of the West of England Programme on the Quality of Student Learning**

V. RASIAH, R. Ratneswary

The University of the West of England Programme,  
Taylor's Business School, Taylor's College, Malaysia

**Abstract:** This paper investigates the key factors and impact of a first year course in the University of the West of England programme upon the quality of student learning. It provides an insight into the students' perception of the key factors that they considered influenced their learning. The conceptual framework for this study is based on the guidelines of good practices advocated by the various researches done on the enhancement of the quality of student learning. The study used a specifically-designed questionnaire to elicit information with regards to the overall effectiveness of the first-year syllabus of this programme in terms of the lecturers' attributes, the teaching and learning methodologies adopted, the skills attained by the students and the development and enhancement of their values and attitudes. The findings showed that the students appreciated the empowerment efforts by their lecturers which prepared them to be responsible and independent learners. The various active teaching and learning methodologies implemented by the faculty members of this programme had empowered the students and this contributed to the eventual ownership of their learning. As a result of this, the students found themselves equipped with the various soft and hard skills that are industry-relevant which would become essential to them when they start working. It is hoped that the findings obtained from this study will provide institutions of higher learning and their respective faculty members a set of considerations for devising educational policies and practices that will successfully enhance student learning.

**Keywords:** Quality of Student Learning, Empowerment, Lecturer Attributes, Teaching and Learning Methodologies, Learning Outcomes

### **Introduction**

Numerous studies have been carried out to find ways to improve student learning. The focus of this study is to specifically find out the factors that can influence student learning in terms of the learning process and the learning outcomes. The results of this study would benefit institutions of higher education in general and academics in particular. It would provide an opportunity for them to reflect on the various factors that students' perceive as having helped or hindered the achievement of their learning outcomes as part of a broader and more holistic approach to higher education. It is hoped that the findings of this study would encourage institutions of higher education and their faculty members to take a closer look not only at the course contents of the subjects offered in their programmes but also at the pedagogical practices of their faculty members to ensure a meaningful and lasting impact is left on the students' learning.

With this interest in mind, this exploratory study was conducted to determine the key factors and its impact on the quality of student learning of the first-year students who undertook the University of the West of England (UWE) programme in Malaysia. The UWE programme at Taylor's Business School (TBS) is a comprehensive degree programme that offers a holistic education in the field of business majoring in either Accounting and Finance or Business Administration. The programme began its maiden journey at Taylor's Business School in January 2005.

## Literature Review

There has been an overwhelming interest in the area of research in higher education on the various factors that affect student learning. Various researches have introduced guidelines on best practices that are considered effective in enhancing student learning and empowering them to be responsible learners. These include the work of the various advocates of teaching and learning such as Chickering and Gamson (1987), B.G. Davies (1993), Biggs.J (1999) and Ellington.H (2000).

Ellington.H (2000) suggests that teachers should investigate the different approaches to learning and how their students prefer to learn because different students learn in different ways. This would ensure that the learning outcomes of the students are met. He also advocates that teachers give thought on the type of teaching/learning methods they should employ to ensure that students' learning outcomes are achieved. He suggests the use of active teaching/learning methods to help students develop high-order cognitive skills such as analysis, evaluation, problem-solving, communication and interpersonal skills.

Academics have a responsibility not only to keep up with developments in their content discipline but are also responsible for addressing the body of knowledge that underwrites good teaching (Biggs, 1987). Biggs (1987) cites Ramsden (1992: 9) that

“The professional authority of the academic-as-scholar rests on a body of knowledge; the professional authority of the academic-as-teacher should rest on a body of didactic knowledge. This comprises knowledge of how the subject he or she professes is best learned and taught”.

Biggs (1987) further advocates the virtues of reflection as an important aspect for improving teaching and explains that expert teachers are known to continually reflect on how they might teach even better. He cites the work of Dunkin and Precians (1992) that “A characteristic of award winning university teachers is their willingness to collect student feedback on their teaching, in order to see where their teaching might be improved”.

Chickering and Gamson (1987) on the other hand, offered seven principles of best practice in undergraduate education with the most important principle being the frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes which has been known to enhance student motivation and involvement in the learning process. The other principles that are highly advocated include encouraging active learning and also respecting students' diverse talents and ways of learning.

Several researches have been conducted on the key factors affecting student learning and the impact these have had on their learning outcome. These include studies on students' perception of what helps them learn and develop in higher education. As Drew.S (2001) puts it:

“Student perceptions specifically relate to what helped or hindered their achievement of their learning outcomes and that they indicate a totality of experience”.

B.Greimel-Fuhrmann & A.Geyer (2003) conducted a study that aimed at gaining a comprehensive insight into the students' perception of what constitutes good and poor teachers and the distinctive features of their teaching behaviour. The results of this study indicated that “while the students' global ratings of teachers mainly depend on their teaching

behaviour, it was also affected by the attitudes of the students in evaluating their teachers and their liking for their teacher and the subject concerned” (B.Greimel-Fuhrmann & A.Geyer, 2003).

Further studies done by A.Lizzio et al. (2002) “confirmed students’ perceptions as influencing both ‘hard’ (academic achievement) and ‘soft’ (satisfaction, development of key skills) learning, both directly and mediated through their approaches to study”.

Students are seen as the primary customers in the current higher education climate as mentioned by Sander.P *et al* (2000) who cited the work of Hill, 1995, p.15 and Thorne & Cuthbert, 1996, p.176 that students “are increasingly aware of their customer rights, one of which is regularly exercised through formal and informal feedback processes”. This is further reiterated in the findings of a study conducted by Ahmadi.M, Helms.M and Raiszadeh. F (2001) that students perceived that their evaluations of faculty members’ teaching performance as very important and definitely necessary to be conducted every semester for every course. The majority of students’ in this study also felt that these evaluations be taken into account when addressing the issue of the faculties’ advancement and salary increases. Sander.P *et al* (2000) further cites the work of Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990 that as service providers, teachers in higher education must have knowledge of the expectations of their customers as a means in ensuring the provision of a quality service.

Halstead and Taylor (2000) cited the work of Hansen (1993a, p. 671) that moral meanings evident in classroom teaching are often the ‘expression or enactment of the person the teacher is, which can encompass far more than self-conscious intent’. Teachers are known to stimulate the development of specific values as mentioned by Veugelers and Vedder (2003) who cites the work of Goodlad *et al.*, 1990 and Gudmundsdottir, 1990 that “teachers can never be value free; their values are being reflected by their subject matters, their explanations and their behaviours”.

### **Objective of the Study**

There have been various studies done on the factors that affect the quality of students learning. Many of these studies either look at subject matter or teacher’s attributes, motivational aspects or teaching and learning methodologies used or other specific factors. With this interest in mind, this study was carried out to generally find out the effectiveness of a British franchise programme conducted by local faculty members in an Asian country, specifically in Malaysia. The study tried to elicit information from the students as to whether or not, the first-year syllabus of the University of the West of England’s (UWE) franchise programme created an impact on the quality of students’ learning. It also aims at gathering and analysing the relevant data required in order to establish the effectiveness of the first-year syllabus of the UWE franchise programme.

The study hopes to answer these questions:

- 1) What are the main reasons why students chose to pursue a British business degree, specifically the UWE programme?
- 2) What are the key factors that students’ perceive as having had the greatest impact on their learning process?
- 3) Do the students’ learning experience in doing the various first-year modules in this programme help to shape their values and attitudes as well as to ensure the attainment and development of skills?

- 4) How do the students generally perceive the TBS-UWE first-year programme?

### **Significance of the Study**

There has been a rise in the number of franchise and off-shore programmes offered in many Asian countries. Education comes in the form of both public and private education with the latter beginning to account for a larger share of the industry.

The results of this study would benefit institutions of higher education that are either already conducting franchise or off-shore programmes or those that are intending to do so in the near-future. It would provide an opportunity for institutions of higher education in general and academics in specific to reflect on the various issues that need to be addressed when conducting franchise programmes and the proactive measures that should be taken to address the weaknesses that may arise.

It is hoped that the findings obtained from this study on the effectiveness of the various key factors and educational strategies for improving the quality of students' learning will provide institutions of higher learning and their respective faculty members a set of considerations for devising educational policies and practices in order to successfully implement a franchise programme. The findings will provide the franchisor of the programme an indication of whether their programme is being effectively implemented in the host country.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design and Instrument**

The study was conducted in two stages, that is; a preliminary study and the actual study. The preliminary study involved the students reflecting on what factors they perceived as having had the greatest impact on their learning process. A content analysis was done on the written reflection. The actual study, on the other hand, involved a survey of students after they completed their first-year course in the UWE programme using a structured questionnaire to obtain five types of information from the respondents:

- a) Identify the main reasons why students chose to pursue a British business degree, specifically the UWE programme.
- b) Elicit opinions from the first-year students on whether they perceive their lecturers' attributes and the teaching and learning methodologies employed as having had an impact on their learning process.
- c) Investigate whether the students' learning experience in doing the various first-year modules in this programme helped to shape their values and attitudes.
- d) Assess the usefulness of the UWE programme in ensuring the attainment and development of skills among the students upon finishing their first year in this programme.
- e) Evaluate the students' general perception of the TBS-UWE course curriculum.

#### **Data Collection and Analysis**

A structured questionnaire was handed out to all the students after they completed the first-year course of the University of the West of England programme conducted at Taylor's Business School for the 2005/2006 academic year. There were a total of 83 first-year students, out of which 75 of them (90.36%) returned the survey forms which were taken into account for this study. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to process the data. The results were summarized using descriptive statistics such as frequency

distribution, mean scores and standard deviations. The utilisation of factor analysis also provided useful insights into the patterns of lecturers' attributes, teaching and learning methods employed, skills attained and values and attitudes enhanced and developed.. The other statistical analysis tools employed included both correlations and the reliability test.

### **Research Results**

The study provides an insight into what the first-year students perceive as the key factors that enhance their learning process and how this in turn influences their learning outcomes. The findings are divided into two components, that is, the results of the preliminary study and that of the actual study.

#### **Reflective Feedback (Preliminary Study)**

This involved a qualitative approach based on the reflective feedback given by 35 students, conducted in May 2006. The students were asked to reflect and provide written feedback on their perception of the overall effectiveness of the first-year syllabus of the UWE programme based on the lecturers' attributes, the teaching and learning methods employed, the skills attained and the values they gained from doing this programme. The preliminary findings were indeed very encouraging. In terms of lecturers' attributes, the majority of students perceived their first-year lecturers to be kind, helpful, caring and approachable. They found that their lecturers mostly conducted their lessons in an interactive manner that motivated and encouraged them to work harder. The lecturers were also perceived as knowledgeable and experienced in their subject content and this enhanced student learning. As far as the teaching and learning methods were concerned, the students perceived the learner-centred workshops and the participatory approach to learning as most beneficial to them in terms of learning. The students appreciated the efforts of their lecturers in adopting active learning and student-centred methods that empowered them to take ownership of their learning.

The preliminary findings also indicate that the greatest impact of this programme and its faculty members was the enhancement of the students' business communication and presentation skills. The students also felt that the various student-centred strategies adopted by their lecturers also honed their reading and writing skills especially in the English Language, their teamwork and cooperation skills and also their analytical and critical thinking skills. Finally, preliminary findings also indicate that as a result of their first-year experience, the knowledge the students gained increased their level of awareness about the various global issues and hence made them more open-minded, compassionate and responsible. (Please contact the author for the summary findings of this preliminary study).

#### **Survey (Actual Study)**

The findings of the preliminary study prompted further investigation via a quantitative study using a structured questionnaire, with regards to the students' perception of "what mattered" in terms of student learning.

### **Study Findings**

#### **Reasons for Pursuing the UWE Programme**

The students were asked why they chose the UWE programme over the many other franchise programmes that were available in the market. Based on Figure 1 below, the main reason (62.7%) why the students chose to pursue the UWE programme was because they were told that the British degree is of a higher quality and value. The other reason (58.7%) was the fact that the UWE programme gave the maximum number of exemptions for the

ACCA examinations which is indicative of the high standards of this programme. 37.3% of the students also perceived that this programme would ensure them better career opportunities in the future and that the programme had high quality standards (34.7%).

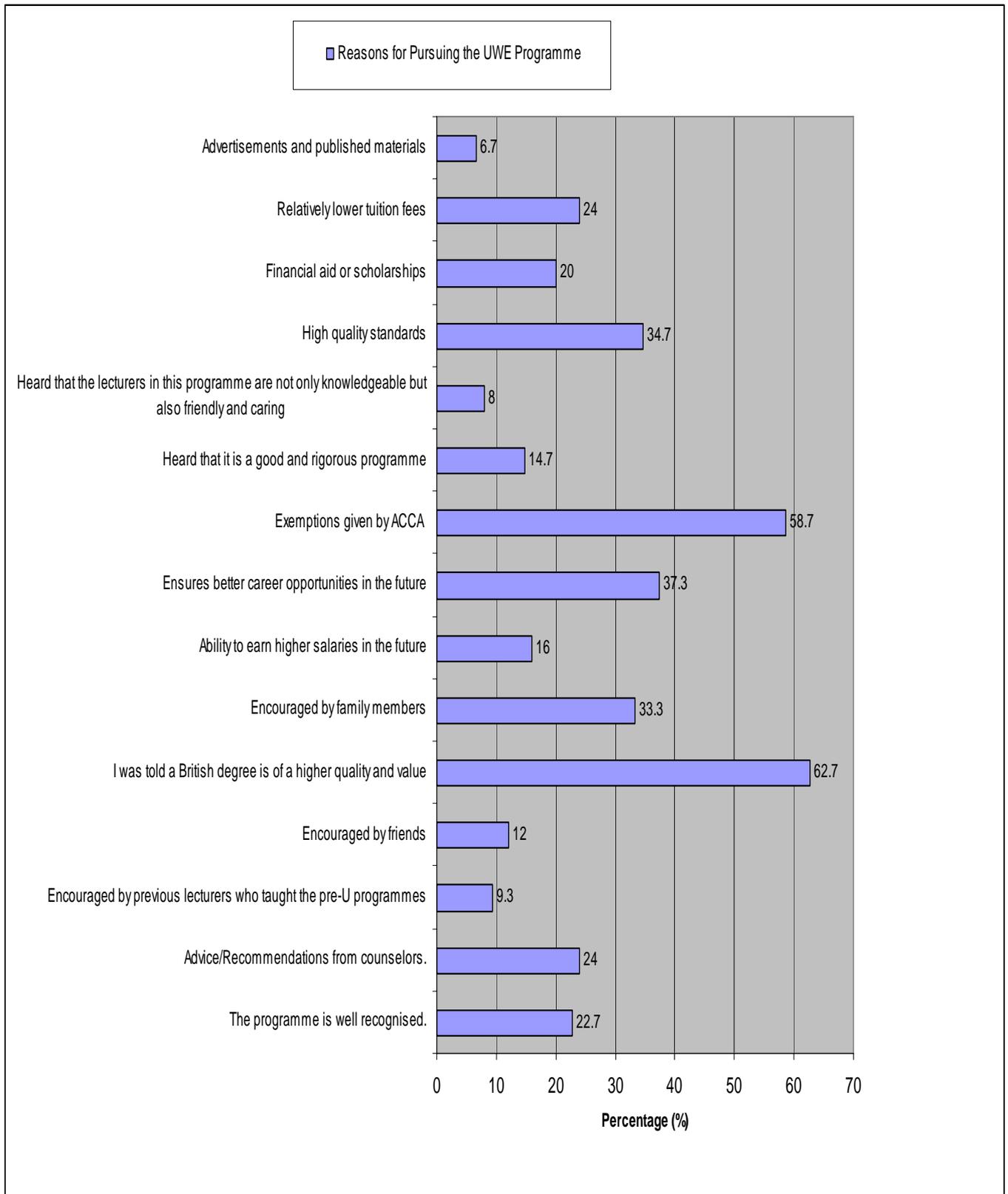


Figure 1: Reasons for Pursuing the UWE Programme

**Lecturers' Attributes**

The students perceived the knowledge ability of their lecturers as the most important attribute in enhancing and empowering them in their learning process. This was followed by their lecturers' friendliness and approachability and also their interesting and humorous nature. The students also indicated that their lecturers' skill in teaching and effectiveness in delivering the subject matter further enhanced their learning process. The lecturers' sense of responsibility and commitment, their dedication and passion and the encouragement and motivation displayed were also perceived as having had a great impact on the students' learning process. The ranking of importance of the various lecturers' attributes as perceived by the students is shown in Figure 2.

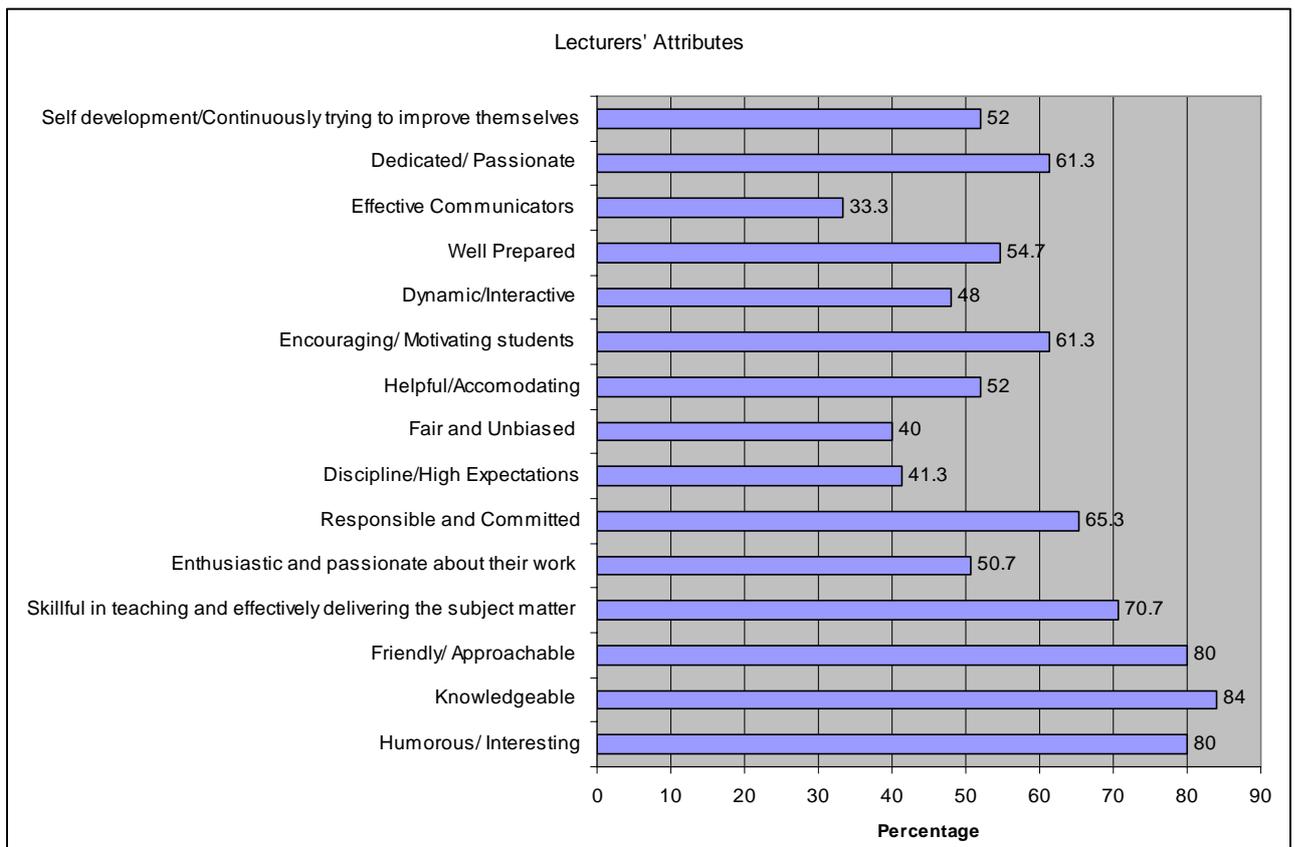


Figure 2: Lecturers' Attributes that have had the greatest impact on the students' learning process

The use of Factor Analysis categorised the lecturers' attributes into five components (Compassionate and Knowledgeable, Dedicated and Committed, Fair, Proactive and Receptive and Firm respectively) which accounted for 66.412% of the total variance in the criteria variables. The Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha showed that the categories were reliable. The variables involved are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Rotated Component Matrix(a)*  
*The Factor Loadings and Selection of Relevant Variables (Lecturers' Attributes)*

VARIABLES	Component				
	Compassionate & Knowledgeable (1)	Dedicated & Committed (2)	Fair (3)	Proactive & Receptive (4)	Firm (5)
"The lecturers can be approached not only for educational matters but also for private matters"	.781				
"I am really motivated to study because my lecturers really care about my studies"	.744				
"I appreciate the lecturers being strict about punctuality and homework because it certainly has helped me to become more disciplined and responsible"	.731				
"The one thing that I appreciate about my lecturers is that they can treat me like a friend and yet maintain a professional distance when it comes to work matters"	.647				
"The lecturers have an in depth knowledge about the subject matter and this has certainly helped me understand the subjects concerned"	.616				
"The lecturers are well prepared in their lessons and try their level best to answer all questions"		.739			
"The lecturers are skilful in their teaching and manage to deliver the lessons effectively"		.728			
"I am truly inspired by my lecturers because they are dedicated and will go the extra mile to help in whatever manner they can"		.683			
"The high levels of commitment and expectations displayed by the lecturers have pushed the students to achieve their maximum potential in both their education and personal development"		.598			
"All students are treated in a fair and unbiased manner irrespective of race, gender, religion or ability"			.826		
"The lecturers do not favour certain students over the others. Students are treated equally"			.824		
"The lecturers are not only available during scheduled consultation hours but will also readily available during non-consultation hours"				.711	
"The lecturers constantly use active learning methods to encourage students to be responsible and independent learners"				.697	
"It is reassuring to know that my lecturers value my opinion even though it contradicts with theirs"				.539	
"I do not mind the lecturers punishing me for not doing my homework or being late for class because they care enough to do so"					.930
<b>EIGENVALUES</b>	<b>4.652</b>	<b>1.580</b>	<b>1.368</b>	<b>1.279</b>	<b>1.082</b>
<b>Cumulative Percentage of Variance (%)</b>	<b>19.643</b>	<b>34.620</b>	<b>46.644</b>	<b>58.487</b>	<b>66.412</b>
<b>Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha</b>	<b>0.8156</b>	<b>0.7060</b>	<b>0.7465</b>	<b>0.5611</b>	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

### Teaching and Learning Methodologies Employed

Figure 3 shows the ranking of importance of the various teaching and learning methodologies employed by the first-year lecturers in enhancing the students' learning ability and empowering them to be responsible learners, as perceived by the students themselves.

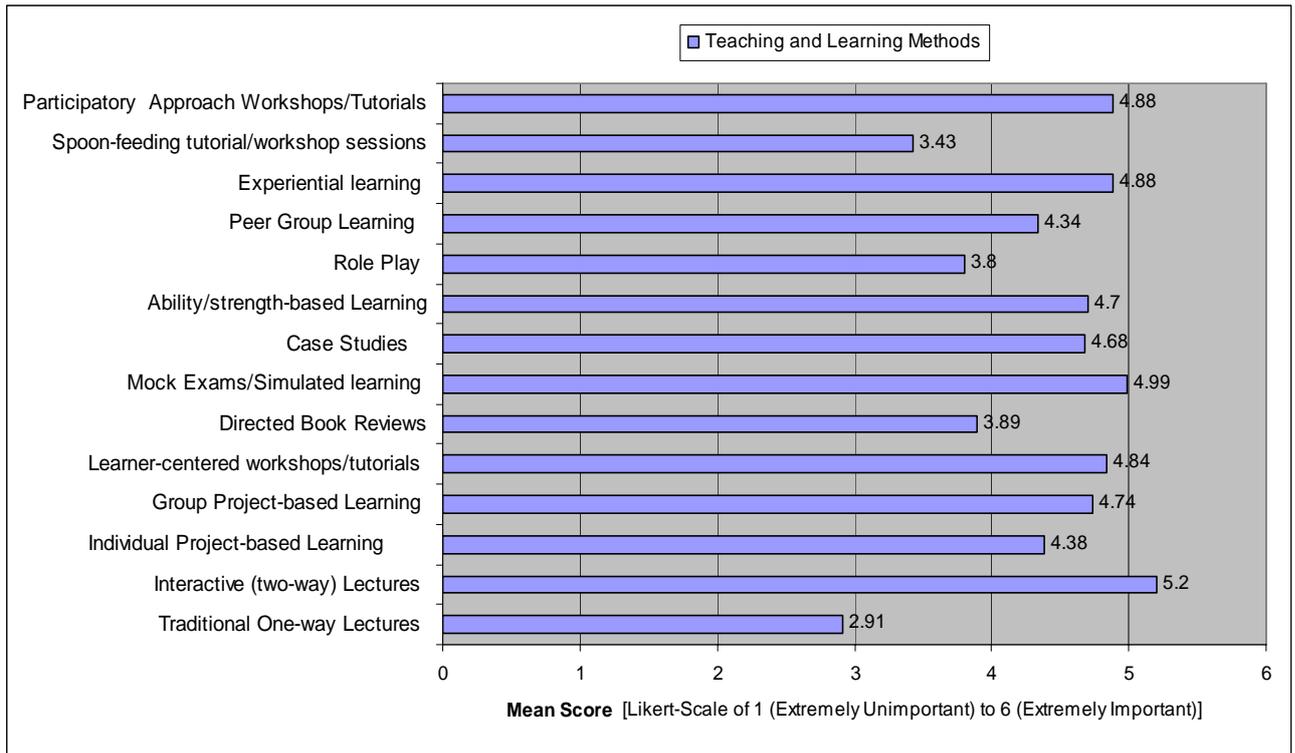


Figure 3: *The Teaching and Learning Methods Employed by the Lecturers*

It is interesting to note that the interactive (two-way) lecture was perceived as the most effective method in enhancing students’ learning. This was followed by the use of mock exams/simulated learning which was also perceived by the students as an effective tool in improving their learning abilities. This is a tool that is adopted by every first-year lecturer in the UWE programme at Taylor’s Business School. The third most important method perceived as effective is the use of participatory workshops/tutorials and experiential learning method. This was followed by the learner-centred workshops/tutorials and finally, the fifth most important method is the group project-based learning method. All of these are considered active learning methods that have time and again been advocated as important and effective methods that are considered best practices by the various advocates of teaching and learning such as Chickering and Gamson (1987), Davies B.G. (1993), Biggs. J(1999) and Ellington. H(2000). It is also worth noting that the traditional one-way lectures were least appreciated by the students in terms of enhancing their learning.

The use of factor analysis categorised the teaching and learning methods employed by the first-year lecturers into four components (Learner-centred Methods, Participatory Learning Methods, Simulated Learning, Conventional Teaching and Learning Methods respectively) that accounted for 62.627% of the total variance in the criteria variables. The Eigenvalues and Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha for each factor are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: *Rotated Component Matrix(a)*  
*The Factor Loadings and Selection of Relevant Variables (Teaching and Learning Methods)*

VARIABLES	Learner-centred Methods (1)	Participatory Learning Methods (2)	Simulated Learning (3)	Conventional Teaching and Learning Methods (4)
“Role Play”	.830			
“Peer Group Learning”	.801			

“Ability/strength-based Learning (the use of various teaching and learning methods to cater for the various strengths/abilities of the students)”	.595			
“Directed Book Reviews”	.594			
“Experiential learning (learning by doing)”	.588			
“Individual Project-based Learning”		.733		
“Group Project-based Learning”		.726		
“Participatory Approach Workshops/Tutorials”		.707		
“Interactive (two-way) Lectures”		.605		
“Mock Exams/Simulated learning”			.855	
“Case Studies”			.697	
“Spoon-feeding tutorial/workshop sessions”				.868
“Traditional One-way Lectures”				.812
<b>EIGENVALUES</b>	<b>3.511</b>	<b>2.068</b>	<b>1.353</b>	<b>1.209</b>
<b>Cumulative Percentage of Variance (%)</b>	<b>20.028</b>	<b>37.342</b>	<b>49.997</b>	<b>62.627</b>
<b>Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha</b>	<b>0.7415</b>	<b>0.7027</b>	<b>0.6001</b>	<b>0.6784</b>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

### Values and Attitudes Enhanced

Figure 4 summarises the impact that the UWE first-year course had on the students’ value system. The students were of the opinion that the programme had increased their awareness of global issues that included the plight of child labour around the world, genetically modified food, free trade and the environment, corporate governance and many other issues that had now become very important to them. The students also believed that companies needed to be more ethical and to ensure that human welfare was not sacrificed for the sake of profits. The third most important impact on the students’ value system is that they had clearly become more vocal on issues such as human rights, the environment and the lack of transparency and accountability of governments of some countries and companies that were not socially responsible. The programme clearly increased their knowledge of global issues and this has had a positive impact on their value system by making them more responsible, compassionate and mature people with high levels of integrity. The students had also acknowledged the important role that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) played in ensuring that marginalised groups were well-represented. In conclusion, it can be seen that the programme had inculcated global awareness among the first-year students which has left an indelible mark on their value system representing an important aspect of their learning outcome.

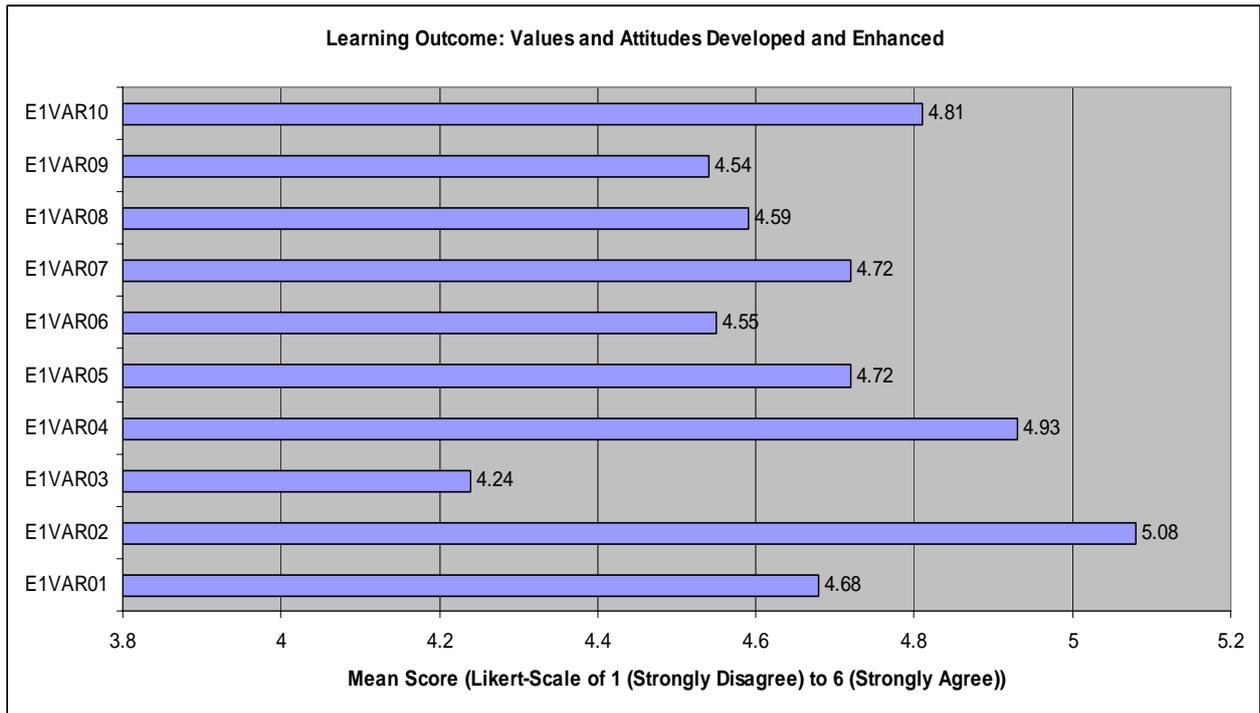


Figure 4: *Learning Outcome: The Students' Value System*  
 \* *Details of the variables involved are in Appendix I.*

The values and attitudes could be categorised into two main components (Socially and Ethically Conscious and Sense of Responsibility/Leadership) based on factor analysis which accounted for 63.490% of the total variance as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: *Rotated Component Matrix(a)*  
*The Factor Loadings and Selection of Relevant Variables (Learning Outcome - Values and Attitudes)*

VARIABLES	Component	
	Socially and Ethically Conscious	Sense of Responsibility / Leadership
This programme has truly opened my eyes and made me aware of issues I never bothered to know or even think about which have now become very important to me. These issues include the plight of child labour around the world, genetically modified food, free trade and the environment, corporate governance and many such issues	.855	
My values and attitudes have changed tremendously over the past one year because I was constantly exposed to the various global issues in some of the subjects taught in this programme	.841	
The programme had made me realize that the existence of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) is very important to ensure that marginalized groups are well represented	.793	
I am a far more compassionate person now because the various subjects in this programme have exposed me to the numerous issues and problems faced by people around the world and this has made me more sympathetic towards their plight	.791	
I am more compassionate now and am willing to donate money for a worthy cause such as funding projects to help the poor	.783	
I am far more concerned about the environment now than ever before because of exposure to such topics in this programme	.690	
The programme has had a positive impact on me because it has taught me to become a more responsible, compassionate and mature person with	.653	

high levels of integrity		
The programme has made me realize that companies should be more ethical and ensure that human welfare is not sacrificed for the sake of profits	.649	
The various management concepts I have learned has certainly made me a better leader and team player who can manage people more effectively		.915
After doing one year of this programme, I have become more vocal on issues such as human rights, the environment and the lack of transparency and accountability of governments of some countries and companies that are not socially responsible		.553
<b>EIGENVALUES</b>	<b>5.104</b>	<b>1.245</b>
<b>Cumulative Percentage of Variance (%)</b>	<b>49.150</b>	<b>63.490</b>
<b>Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha</b>	<b>.9014</b>	<b>.4735</b>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

### Skills Acquired/Enhanced

The first year course of the UWE programme was perceived by the students as enabling them to attain or develop various skills. All 26 skills identified in the questionnaire (as shown in Figure 5) showed a mean score of more than 4 (effective), hence indicating that this course was indeed quite effective in enhancing and developing the students' skills.

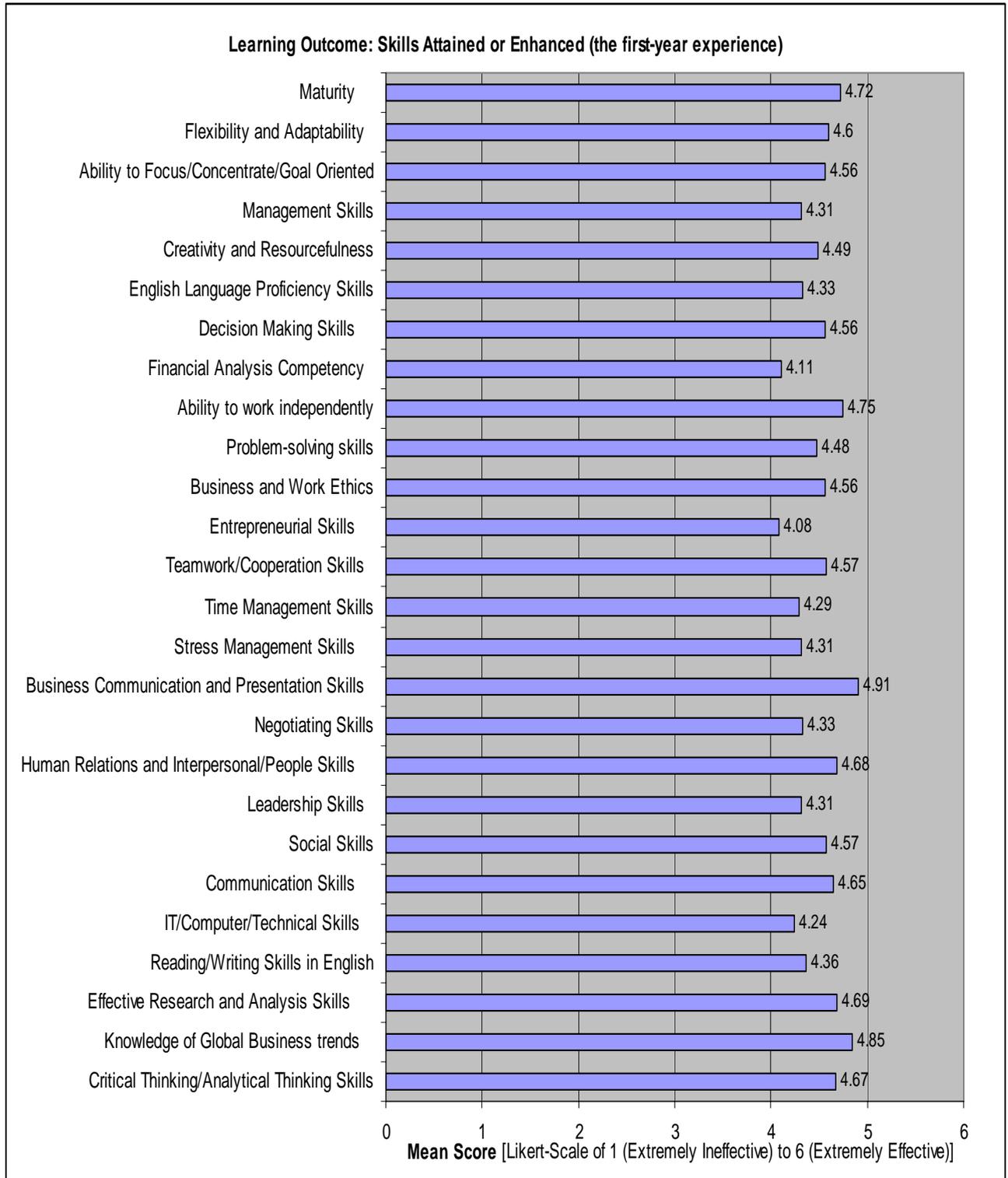


Figure 5: *Learning Outcome: Skills Attained or Enhanced after completing the First-Year Course of the UWE Programme*

The top five skills acquired or enhanced included the students’ business communication and presentation skills, their knowledge of global business trends, their ability to work independently, their maturity levels and finally their critical thinking and analytical skills. The modules in the first-year course and the teaching and learning methods employed by the lecturers did enhance the learning outcomes of the students in terms of the skills that they had

attained. The skills acquired or enhanced were further categorised into four main components (Social and Interpersonal Skills, Strategic Management Skills, Resource Competency Skills and Self-Directed Skills respectively) through the factor analysis process, which accounted for a total of 66.140% of the total variance explained as shown in Table 4. The Cronbach's Coefficient Alphas for all 4 categories are above 0.7 which is considered high and therefore reliable according to Nunnally (1978).

Table 4: *Rotated Component Matrix(a) The Factor Loadings and Selection of Relevant Variables (Learning Outcome – Skills Acquired/Developed)*

VARIABLES	Component			
	Social and Interpersonal Skills	Strategic Management Skills	Resource Competency Skills	Self-Directed Skills
Social Skills	.835			
Communication Skills	.804			
Human Relations and Interpersonal/People Skills	.741			
Leadership Skills	.710			
Business and Work Ethics		.847		
Problem-solving skills		.651		
Creativity and Resourcefulness		.630		
Management Skills		.603		
Entrepreneurial Skills		.548		
Stress Management Skills			.828	
Time Management Skills			.795	
Flexibility and Adaptability			.525	
Ability to work independently				.686
Decision Making Skills				.663
Effective Research and Analysis Skills				.616
Business Communication and Presentation Skills				.600
Critical Thinking/Analytical Thinking Skills				.507
<b>EIGENVALUES</b>	<b>7.248</b>	<b>1.531</b>	<b>1.307</b>	<b>1.158</b>
<b>Cumulative Percentage of Variance (%)</b>	<b>19.742</b>	<b>36.241</b>	<b>51.477</b>	<b>66.140</b>
<b>Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha</b>	<b>.8768</b>	<b>.8295</b>	<b>.7976</b>	<b>.7518</b>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. a. Rotation converged in 11 iterations.

### General Evaluation of the First-Year Course of the TBS-UWE Programme

The quality of the first-year course of the UWE programme was generally perceived to be rather good with a mean score of 4.08 (on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Excellent)). Table 5 shows that a total of 85.3% of the students perceived that the quality of the programme was good, if not excellent.

Table 5: *The General Evaluation of the TBS-UWE Programme (the first-year experience)*

Criteria	Very Poor (1)		Poor (2)		Neutral (3)		Good (4)		Excellent (5)		Total	Mean	Std. Dev.
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%			
Quality of Programme in general.	0	0	1	1.3	10	13.3	46	61.3	18	24	75	4.08	0.653
Practicality and Relevance of the programme to your needs in the future.	0	0	0	0	11	14.7	47	62.7	17	22.7	75	4.08	0.610
Teaching and Learning Methods used.	0	0	0	0	16	21.3	45	60	14	18.7	75	3.97	0.636
High Level of English Language Proficiency Expected.	0	0	4	5.3	13	17.3	39	52.0	19	25.3	75	3.97	0.805
Ability to Conduct in depth and effective research.	0	0	2	2.7	13	17.3	41	54.7	19	25.3	75	4.03	0.735
Effectiveness of programme to improve self-esteem and self-confidence.	0	0	3	4	15	20.0	32	42.7	25	33.3	75	4.05	0.837
Opportunities for discovering new knowledge, intellectual stimulation and development.	0	0	1	1.3	4	5.3	38	50.7	32	42.7	75	4.35	0.647

It is interesting to note that the students perceived the first-year course of this programme as almost excellent (mean score of 4.35) in terms of the opportunities it provided in discovering new knowledge, intellectual stimulation and development (93.4 % of the students acknowledged this) as shown in Figure 6. 85.4 % of the students were of the opinion that this course was rather good (mean score of 4.08) in terms of its practicality and relevance to their future needs. The course was also found to be rather effective in improving the students' self-esteem and self-confidence (mean score of 4.05). On the whole, the first-year course of the UWE programme was indeed evaluated as a rather good programme in enhancing the students' learning outcomes.

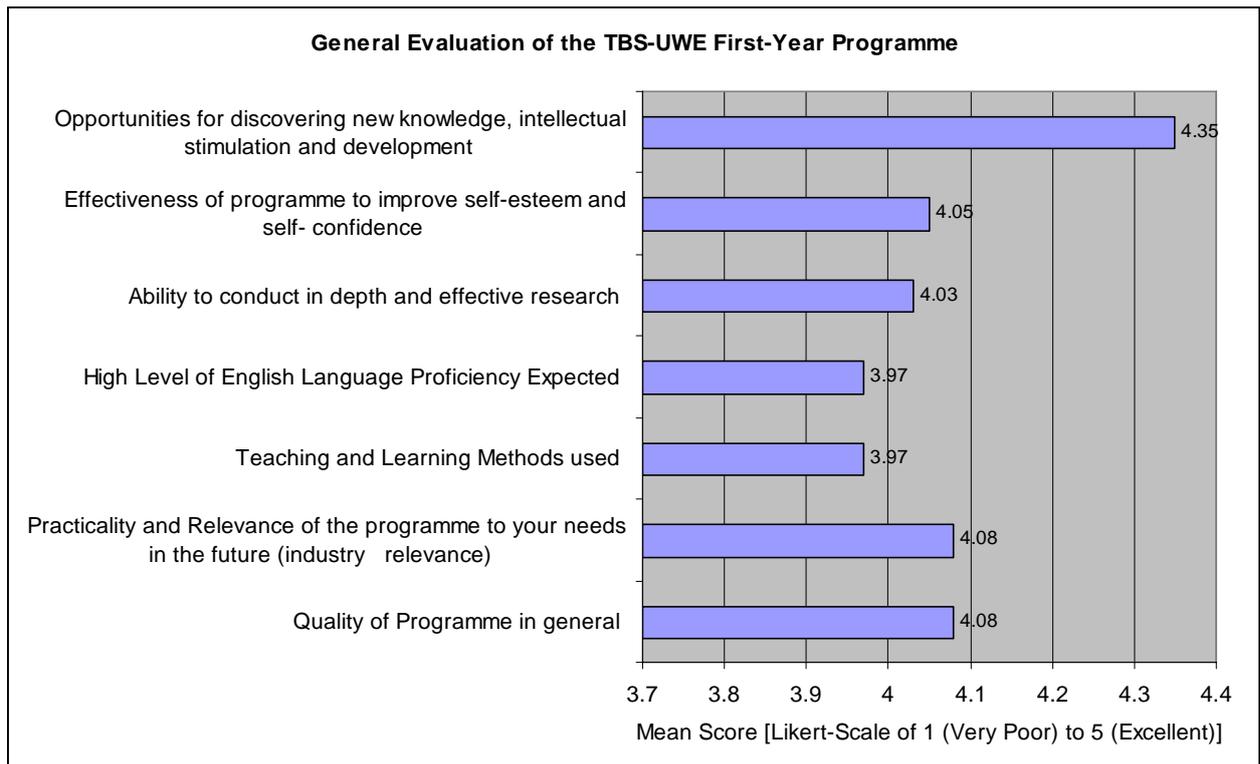


Figure 6: *The General Evaluation of the First-Year Course of the TBS-UWE Programme*

### Further Findings

The study was taken a step further to include investigations into whether the key factors affecting student learning had a correlation with the learning outcomes achieved. Do the lecturers' attributes and the teaching and learning methods they employ influence students' learning outcomes?

### The Influence of Lecturers' Attributes on Students Learning Outcome

Table 6 and 7 clearly indicates that lecturers' attributes do influence students' learning outcomes. Table 6 shows that for the students to gain or enhance their values of being socially and ethically conscious, they need to have lecturers' who are compassionate, knowledgeable, dedicated, committed and also fair. The students developed a sense of responsibility and leadership because their lecturers were not only compassionate and knowledgeable but also proactive and receptive. Table 7 indicates that the skills attained by the students were also influenced by their lecturers' attributes. The most important attributes of the first-year lecturers that influenced all four categories of students' skills were their compassion, knowledge, dedication and commitment. The lecturers' proactive and receptive nature enhanced the students' social and interpersonal skills, their strategic management skills and also made the students more self-directed in that they attained the ability to work independently; making their own decisions and also thinking analytically. It is interesting to note that besides being compassionate, knowledgeable, dedicated and committed, being firm as lecturers does also positively influence students' resource competency and self-directed skills.

Table 6: *Correlations between Lecturers' Attributes Components and Values and Attitudes Components*

Lecturers' Attributes		Compassionate & Knowledgeable (1)	Dedicated & Committed (2)	Fair (3)	Proactive & Receptive (4)	Firm (5)
<b>Socially and Ethically Conscious</b>	Pearson Correlation	.425(**)	.416(**)	.462 (**)	.078	.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.508	.351
	N	74	74	74	74	74
<b>Sense of Responsibility/ Leadership</b>	Pearson Correlation	.585(**)	.184	.128	.353(**)	.092
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.117	.279	.002	.437
	N	74	74	74	74	74

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7: *Correlations between Lecturers' Attributes Components and Skills Attained Components*

Lecturers' Attributes		Compassionate & Knowledgeable (1)	Dedicated & Committed (2)	Fair (3)	Proactive & Receptive (4)	Firm (5)
<b>Social and Interpersonal Skills</b>	Pearson Correlation	.459(**)	.285(*)	.034	.370(**)	.075
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.013	.770	.001	.524
	N	75	75	75	75	75
<b>Strategic Management Skills</b>	Pearson Correlation	.621(**)	.323(**)	.196	.355(**)	.034
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.005	.092	.002	.769
	N	75	75	75	75	75
<b>Resource Competency Skills</b>	Pearson Correlation	.445(**)	.281(*)	.108	.211	.230(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.015	.357	.070	.047
	N	75	75	75	75	75
<b>Self-Directed Skills</b>	Pearson Correlation	.437(**)	.441(**)	.057	.576(**)	.263(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.628	.000	.023
	N	75	75	75	75	75

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### The Influence of Teaching and Learning Methods on Students' Learning Outcome

There is evidence to show that the various methods employed by the first-year lecturers did influence the students' learning outcomes both positively and negatively. Table 8 shows that learner-centred methods are positively correlated to the students' values of being socially and ethically conscious and to their sense of responsibility and leadership. This sense of responsibility and leadership of the students were further enhanced by their lecturers engaging the students in participatory learning methods.

Table 9 on the other hand, shows that the employment of participatory learning methods enhanced all four categories of students’ skills. It is important to note that learner-centred methods are positively correlated to the students’ social and interpersonal skills as well as their strategic management skills. This is inline with the various researches done that advocate the virtues of learner-centred teaching and learning methods. The most interesting discovery in this study is that conventional or traditional teaching and learning methods are negatively correlated to students’ self-directed skills. These methods do not empower students to take responsibility for their own learning and hence students find themselves unable to work independently, to make decisions and to think critically among others.

Table 8: *Correlations between Teaching and Learning Methods Components and Values and Attitudes Components*

Teaching & Learning Mtds Values & Attitudes		Learner-centred Methods (1)	Participatory Learning Methods (2)	Simulated Learning (3)	Conventional Teaching and Learning Methods (4)
<b>Socially and Ethically Conscious</b>	Pearson Correlation	.485(**)	.061	.060	.042
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.607	.611	.721
	N	73	74	73	74
<b>Sense of Responsibility/ Leadership</b>	Pearson Correlation	.387(**)	.289(*)	-.022	.023
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.013	.856	.849
	N	73	74	73	74

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 9: *Correlations between Teaching and Learning Methods Components and Skills Attained Components*

Teaching & Learning Skills Attained		Learner-centred Methods (1)	Participatory Learning Methods (2)	Simulated Learning (3)	Conventional Teaching and Learning Methods (4)
<b>Social and Interpersonal Skills</b>	Pearson Correlation	.246(*)	.360(**)	-.094	-.033
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.035	.002	.427	.780
	N	74	75	74	75
<b>Strategic Management Skills</b>	Pearson Correlation	.402(**)	.300(**)	-.091	.014
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.009	.439	.908
	N	74	75	74	75
<b>Resource Competency Skills</b>	Pearson Correlation	.135	.347(**)	.018	-.222
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.250	.002	.879	.056
	N	74	75	74	75
<b>Self-Directed Skills</b>	Pearson Correlation	.221	.557(**)	.166	-.259(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.059	.000	.158	.025

	N	74	75	74	75
--	---	----	----	----	----

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study imply that the learning outcomes of the students in terms of the skills and values attained are indeed affected by the modules of the programme, the attributes of the faculty members and the teaching and learning methods employed. It further implies that as primary customers of higher education, the students' needs must be clearly understood and their satisfaction must be continuously measured via feedback and evaluation. The importance of students' evaluation of the faculty members' teaching performance and the quality of the overall programme must not be underestimated in terms of its contribution towards further improving and enhancing the programme concerned.

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study:

- i. This study was limited to only the first-year students' perception of the programme. As such, it is recommended that a similar study be conducted to cover a larger sample that includes the second-year and third-year students of this programme to present a clearer picture of the overall impact that this programme has on the quality of students' learning.
- ii. It is also recommended that a pre-test and post-test study be conducted on the first-year students to ascertain their expectations of the programme when they initially embarked in the course and whether or not this programme fulfilled their expectations after they successfully completed their first-year course.
- iii. It would also be interesting to conduct a study to find out the faculty members' perceptions of their teaching environment which influences both what and how they teach and the impact this would have on their students' learning.

### Conclusion

The study does have some limitations, especially with respect to the sample size which is quite restricted. The questionnaire developed for this study has room for further improvement. Despite this, the preliminary and actual findings certainly provide an insight into the students' perception of the key factors that they considered influenced their learning and the impact that this rendered on the skills they attained and the values and attitudes that they developed or enhanced along the way. The study discovered what the students perceived as "mattered most" and "made the difference" in terms of their learning. The results of this study would certainly be beneficial to both Taylor's Business School and the University of the West of England in that it provides them an opportunity to further enhance their policies and practices to ensure that this business programme continues to be conducted in the most effective manner.

### References

- Ahmadi.M, Helms.M and Raiszadeh. F (2001). Business students' perceptions of faculty evaluations. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 15(1), 12-22. Retrieved July 19, 2006, from Emerald database.
- Biggs,J. (1999) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* (pp. 1 - 10). Buckingham, UK: SRHE and Open University Press.
- Chickering, A.W., & Gamson, Z.F. (1987). Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 3-7.

- Davis, B.G. (1993). Tools for Teaching: *University of California, Berkeley*. Retrieved August 14, 2006, from <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/motivate.html>.
- Drew, S. (2001). Student Perceptions of What Helps Them Learn and Develop in Higher Education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 6(3), 309-331. Retrieved February 20, 2006, from EBSCOhost EJS database.
- Ellington.H (2000). How To Become an Excellent Tertiary-level Teacher. Seven golden rules for university and college lecturers. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 24(3), 311-321. Retrieved August 14, 2006, from <http://www.rgu.ac.uk/celt/learning/page.cfm?pge=4539>.
- Greimel-Fuhrmann,B., & Geyer, A. (2003). Students' Evaluation of Teachers and Instructional Quality – Analysis of Relevant Factors Based on Empirical Evaluation Research. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 28(3), 229-38. Retrieved February 20, 2006, from EBSCOhost EJS database.
- Halstead, J.M., & Taylor, M.J. (2000) Learning and Teaching about Values: a review of recent research. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 30(2), 169-202. Retrieved May 29, 2006, from EBSCOhost EJS database.
- Lizzio, A., Wilson,K., & Simons,R. (2002). University Students' Perceptions of the Learning Environment and Academic Outcomes: implications for theory and practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 27(1), 27-52. Retrieved February 20, 2006, from EBSCOhost EJS database.
- Nunnaly, J.C. (1978). *Psychometric theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Sander.P, Stevenson.K, King.M and Coates.D (2000). University Students' Expectations of Teaching. *Studies in Higher Education*, 25(3), 309-323 Retrieved February 20, 2006, from EBSCOhost EJS database.
- Veugelers.W and Vedder.P (2003). Values in Teaching. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, 9(4), 378-389. Retrieved June 23, 2006, from EBSCOhost EJS database.

**APPENDIX I: *Details of Values and Attitudes Variables***

E1VAR01	I am far more concerned about the environment now than ever before because of exposure to such topics in this programme.
E1VAR02	This programme has truly opened my eyes and made me aware of issues I never bothered to know or even think about which have now become very important to me. These issues include the plight of child labour around the world, genetically modified food, free trade and the environment, corporate governance and many such issues.
E1VAR03	I am more compassionate now and am willing to donate money for a worthy cause such as funding projects to help the poor.
E1VAR04	The programme has made me realize that companies should be more ethical and ensure that human welfare is not sacrificed for the sake of profits.
E1VAR05	The programme has had a positive impact on me because it has taught me to become a more responsible, compassionate and mature person with high levels of integrity.
E1VAR06	My values and attitudes have changed tremendously over the past one year because I was constantly exposed to the various global issues in some of the subjects taught in this programme.
E1VAR07	The programme had made me realize that the existence of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) is very important to ensure that marginalized groups are well represented.
E1VAR08	I am a far more compassionate person now because the various subjects in this programme have exposed me to the numerous issues and problems faced by people around the world and this has made me more sympathetic towards their plight.
E1VAR09	The various management concepts I have learned has certainly made me a better leader and team player who can manage people more effectively.
E1VAR10	After doing one year of this programme, I have become more vocal on issues such as human rights, the environment and the lack of transparency and accountability of governments of some countries and companies that are not socially responsible.