

## Assessment in university courses must be innovative, realistic and relevant



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**A**SSASSMENT of student learning in a course, in general, is interpreted as a means to evaluate the attainment of the course content knowledge of each individual student. Assessment

primarily aims to measure what students know about the course; but it should be beyond that. The assessment of learning should be to make sure that students are acquiring not only the required content knowledge but also the competencies that they will need to utilise after graduation and whether the system is providing students with the appropriate education to acquire the specific outcomes of a programme.

In the old academic system assessment is not related to whether the education being offered is deemed effective or whether it can be used as a way to determine if the course is meeting the learning goals and outcomes. Teachers do not develop and assess their students as human capital in the old system.

Developing countries like Bangladesh where the government is working on reaching a developed country status will face possible stagnation unless the country is able to upgrade the quality and capability of the workforce in line with the demands of national and international markets. This is where our economies may struggle.

Academic programmes must have definite and measurable programme educational objectives (PEOs) and programme outcomes (POs) for their students and programme offering departments must have tools to evaluate their efforts to achieve those objectives and amend their programmes based on the results of the assessment. Therefore, universities will not only emphasise on content knowledge acquiring but also on high-level skill development to produce the most employable graduates.

A recent report (ADB 2015) finds that up to 28 percent of existing jobs in some economies could be at high risk of disappearing as a result of technological changes. While new job opportunities will arise, a solid base of cognitive skills

and non-cognitive skills will be required to translate opportunities to concrete benefits for a country's workforce. Universities ought to produce graduates who are ready for any workplace, and they should not be pigeonholed by their degree subject. The evidence (Docherty and Fernandez 2014) suggests that employers are recruiting graduates for jobs outside their specialism. The focus of a university is to develop students through a holistic programme of study, and approach to assessment should reflect this.

The evaluation and assessment framework for university students in Bangladesh is different from that in

subjects. Grade to a student for a course is assigned by the course instructor after aggregating the marks obtained in summative assessment, i.e. class tests and written examinations.

There is another type of assessment known as formative assessment. Research shows that assessment works best when it is ongoing in ways that help students and teachers gauge learning in progress. This ongoing, or formative, assessment provides feedback that allows students to address their shortcomings. Courses should include summative (at the ending of a learning segment) and formative (ongoing during a learning segment) assessments.



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universities in developed countries. As the university curriculum in Bangladesh is information-heavy, presenting facts to consume, and other analytic and operational tasks to practice and master, instruction and learning remain largely rote.

The curriculum is designed without employer engagement and embedding programme objectives, programme outcomes and course learning outcomes. This curriculum does not facilitate the production of a skilled workforce, and it also does not give any directives to a course instructor in assessing student learning. The instructor sets questions just to measure what the students know about the

Nowadays the most explicit response is the development of an "outcomes" approach or a competence-based model for curriculum development. Every programme has predefined Programme Educational Objectives (PEOs), Programme Outcomes (POs) and each course of the programme has its own Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs). Programme outcomes address knowledge, skills, and attitude to be attained by students. Course learning outcomes that are expected from the course are assessed and evaluated through various measurement tools.

Assessment is deciding what knowledge, skills, and attitudes students need to learn and then ensuring that

they learn them and are effective in applying them. Recognised assessment steps are: set learning goals, objectives and outcomes; design assessments to measure student learning achievement; assess student learning; collect and analyse results; use findings to inform decisions; and assess again. Assessment levels (SOE Assessment Plan 2012) are: student level; course level; and programme level.

For student level assessment the goal is to ensure that individual students achieve the designated outcomes for a course; students must clearly understand the expectations and the benchmarks for their learning; and achievement is summarised in grades.

The intent is to ensure that the students as a whole reach designated course outcomes and varied assignments and assessments from across the entire course are two important expectations at the course level. Programme level assessment should ensure that student as a whole achieve the outcomes; summative and informative assessments, portfolios, capstones or comprehensive exams.

The faculty members must view this assessment process as an opportunity to revise specific content curricula and make programme changes that result in furthering the development and growth of candidates. Assessment results provide evidence of the achievement of the learning goals of each individual student when measured against established acceptable and target benchmarks. Each student's performance is measured through the assessment and benchmark against either a standardised or assessment-specific scoring guide. These assessments are used to monitor student learning achievement and to provide indicators to guide support and learning experiences.

Built on the vision and mission, the university develops the assessment plan. It is the responsibility of a university to set some standards and each programme needs to be aligned with those standards. Thus reform in assessment and curriculum development in universities in Bangladesh is crucial.

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