

A new learning paradigm

Why educational institutions in Bangladesh should adopt the outcome-based approach to learning

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IN the beginning of the twentieth century, a growing number of educators, professionals and representatives of the business community in western countries began to realise the shortcomings of the traditional education (TE) system. The system cannot help learners effectively implement their knowledge in the real-world environments. Moreover, the TE model does not inspire learners to come up with their own ways of approaching and solving problems. As globalisation continues to shape national and international marketplaces, employers' needs are constantly changing. To help ensure a successful transition in students' careers, academic institutions in addition to imparting knowledge also need to focus on development of communication skills, entrepreneurship, innovation and creative systematic thinking in students. To develop a system that will be more appropriate in the present context, educationists and policymakers in Bangladesh need to spend time in understanding the advantages offered by the model implemented in some countries over traditional model.

The TE model gives students very little say in what they learn. The only way to gain knowledge is to follow a set curriculum in a set order. The curriculum design focuses on the transmission of discrete pieces of information and has not set any outcome goals. Teachers mainly focus on effective delivery of topics of courses and do not help students in developing the competencies and achieving mastery. They do not monitor academic progress of each student. Therefore, TE model is for mass consumption rather than individual needs, learning styles, and outcome goals. This trait suppresses the creative side of their personality and they never get to know their strengths.

Consequently, educators were looking for an alternative education model. Since that time the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) approach to teaching and learning has been receiving strong support at an international level and many universities in western countries have adopted OBE. Many countries in Asia have also implemented OBE substituting their old systems. OBE is a learning model (Spady, 1986) that organises curriculum content and learning activities around specific, demonstrable outcomes. Educators are embracing outcomes-based learning because it means that students are

coming out of the classroom with the skills they need for the real world.

In a traditional education system, actual achievement of a learner is not measured by the institution. Learners are given grades and rankings compared to each other. The highest-performing learners are given the highest grades and test scores, and the lowest performing learners are given low grades. The failure of some learners is accepted as a natural and unavoidable circumstance. On the contrary, OBE propositions every student can succeed by making learning meaningful, even though every student is not expected to perform at the exact same level—learning at the same pace

programme, that provide clear information—the knowledge, skills and essential qualities.

Learning outcomes help teachers to tell students more precisely what is expected of them, help teachers select the appropriate teaching strategy matched to the intended learning outcome, e.g. lecture, seminar, group work, tutorial, discussion, peer group presentation or laboratory class, help students to learn more effectively. Students know where they stand and the curriculum is made more open to them; it is made clear to students what they can hope to gain from following a particular course or lecture. Stakeholders such as teachers,



and in the same way as peers.

Sociologist William Spady and the originator of the OBE defines it as "a comprehensive approach to organising and operating an education system that is focused on and defined by the successful demonstrations of learning sought from each student". In the outcome-based approach, curriculum design of a programme begins with clearly defined student learning outcomes. Intended learning outcomes (ILOs) are statements of a learning achievement and are expressed in terms of what the student is expected to achieve on completion of the

students, parents and employers are involved in selecting learning outcomes of a programme. With a socio-constructivist base that makes allowances for stakeholder input, OBE is becoming a living educational model, adapting to new demands and needs.

There are two categories of outcomes. Students need to demonstrate some outcomes during their study. There are some outcomes called the exit outcomes. The drafting of exit outcomes is the most complex and difficult part of the implementation process and the most crucial to success. Educators need to understand the importance of involving

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all segments of the community in generating clearly defined outcomes, since these outcomes will ultimately reflect community values. The challenging task of developing performance-based indicators to gauge how well students will achieve essential outcomes is a critical step. Each course has 3-5 Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs). If a student fails to achieve any ILO or ILOs well, the instructor will give him/her time to achieve them before giving him/her any grade.

In Bangladesh about two million educated individuals enter the job market every year. Providing employment opportunities to such a huge population is a difficult task for the government as well as local private sectors. It is, therefore, imperative for institutions to mentor the youth for entrepreneurship, and also to develop high level skills and competencies for placing them in global job markets. The youth will create jobs for themselves and also make themselves more competitive in the global market.

Institutions in Bangladesh should think about adopting OBE for the improvement of the education system. However, there is a history of failure when it comes to implementing OBE in many countries. At the initial stage of implementation we will not change the existing grading and exam system but accept widely practised teaching methods. Curriculum of a programme will be designed targeting some predetermined objectives. Teachers will set questions to test whether students achieve CLOs and ILOs. However, the lack of expertise in the country may call for foreign OBE specialists to train our teachers and guide them on how to design curricula and for effective teaching and learning.

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