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## Outcome-Based Education for Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

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### Abstract

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Discussions are underway among educationalists on Outcome-Based Education (OBE) as the country changed its status from a provisional member of the Washington Accord to a permanent signatory in 2014 and decided to follow Outcome-Based Education and Accreditation (OBEA) in all Engineering Institutions. It is becoming mandatory for all Engineering Institutions in India to put into practice OBE in all respects. Consequently, concerns are raised at various segments, mainly in understanding the concept, exploring various elements and the possibilities of implementing it. Since AICTE took initiatives for the implementation of this approach, there is a stereotypic notion among many educationalists that OBE is applicable only to Engineering Education. Scholars from Arts and Science disciplines do not bother about the need for OBE and/or sometimes tend to think that it is an additional burden to introduce such new initiative into collegiate education. Some educationalists understand OBE in a very shallow way, purely in terms of the end-product and ignore the various other factors and the process that collectively constitute OBE. Taking into consideration the various problems facing the Indian Higher Education, this paper gives a rationale for OBE, evaluates the practicality and outlines an OBE model for Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

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Every education is outcome based; if this basic concept is not valued, colleges and universities would become degree producing corporate enterprise which annually generates graduates unscrupulously. Education in its truest sense is the formation of students, which in itself is the expected outcome. This formation is focused on transforming the young people and making noticeable changes in their attitude, vision, goals and skills. These outcomes are possible only when the higher education institutions become a temple of learning, which transform young people into mature individuals, skilled professionals and employable individuals, by the various inputs which are focused on developing the natural talents of the students, imparting knowledge in a way that is easy for them to understand and assimilate specific skills and thus achieve the end goal. If these things do not happen, it is not education per se. Today many entrepreneurs venture into education institutions as a lucrative business enterprise, labelling themselves under the cover of edupreneurs. In such scenario, educational institutions run like corporate houses and the desired outcomes do not take place.

Outcome-Based Education is not novel to educationalists and also not new in the global arena. There are elaborate discussions on this topic at various international and national forums and many countries have adopted this model in the last few decades. In the course of time, some education supervisory bodies have rejected OBE saying that it is not applicable (Hiatt, 2006). OBE is more of a philosophy than a uniformed set of practices (Brandt, 1998). Also, there is no one system of approach or model to hold or point out clearly that this is OBE, rather, there are different models practised in different educational systems and countries, all falling under the OBE umbrella. It is often used as an educational approach that aims at precise student-centric targets at the end. Sometimes it is labelled as results-based or performance-based education, competency-based training and, at times even called need-based education. It is different from various student-centred or other mastery learning approaches because OBE is



concerned with more specific learning outcomes, skills development by means of explicit objectives and sound rationale.

John Champlain's Outcomes-Driven Developmental Model (ODDM) in the early 1970s would be considered the prototype of OBE. The ODDM gives added emphasis on the role of students in acquiring knowledge and skills and teacher's responsibility is to monitor that students achieve the target and benefit from the program (Brandt, 1994). A popular model often identified with OBE is the one developed by Spady (1994). Outcome-Based Education according to Spady (1994) focuses on what is important for students to learn, then organize the curriculum, instruction, and assessment to make sure this learning ultimately happens with the help of four basic principles: a) focus on helping students to develop the knowledge, skills and personalities that will enable them to achieve the clearly articulated, intended outcomes, b) define plainly the intended outcomes that students are to achieve at the end of the program, c) set challenging standards of performance in order to encourage students to engage deeply in what they are learning, d) strive to provide expanded opportunities for all students (p.12). OBE is generally understood from two approaches: transitional one which focuses on the mastery of subject-related academic outcomes and the more sublime transformational approach which is related directly to student's future life roles such as being productive in a profession with social concerns (Killen, 2000).

The desired outcome, which an educational institution sets for students and expects from the students at the end, therefore, becomes the basis for OBE. To be an effective and meaningful OBE, it needs to be focused not only on the goals or objectives alone but also the process and the associated factors that contribute to the progression of transformation; not only the end but also the many means that play equally significant roles in bringing the outcome. Can the OBE be different from college to college? The answer is yes and no. The answer is yes and therefore academic freedom is given to colleges in the form of autonomous status. At the same time, a unified curriculum is followed in the State/Government university colleges, which looks for similar outcomes.

OBE is obviously a holistic education that focuses on the overall development of the students. The rationale behind holistic education is to prepare students to meet the challenges of life and a well-disciplined living, social consciousness and above all acquiring skills and knowledge. A lot of life-skills (psycho-social competencies) need to be incorporated into education by means of different supporting services, to offer an opportunity for comprehensive development. Thus, education should not be atomistic, confining to the subjects being taught, rather catholic in every possible way. OBE, therefore, aims at the complete development of students with precisely defined outcome goals, not only in the specific discipline of study chosen but also in acquiring various life skills. Although a short period of college life cannot transform a student to a full-fledged professional or mature personality, it can initiate the process in a healthy manner.

**The OBE Model:** The proposed model for humanities and social science education considers the following factors:

- a) Student-friendly campus environment
- b) Enrolling student characteristics
- c) Curriculum that is focused on specific skills-based objectives
- d) Teaching-learning process by qualified engaged employee in a student-centred way
- e) Assessment and evaluation process fitting to measure student transformation

**a) Campus Environment:** Preparation of the college campus is a must for OBE. Educational institutions are supposedly non-profit organisations, solely running for the welfare of the students with the sole intention of imparting knowledge and skills. The management must be hospitable and the teachers should be open-minded to accept that the well-being of students is

the top priority. The campus should have all the necessary facilities to feel at ease and learn. When the management is not ready to provide proper infrastructure to the students and faculty, they lack creditability to implement Outcome-Based Education. Loyalty to the organisation sometimes becomes a hindrance to many teachers to dedicate themselves fully to the welfare of the students, if the management is hostile to students as well as to the employees themselves (Janetius et al., 2016). *The management together with the teachers, do strategic planning and establish well-set norms, lay down guidelines to offer every possible facility, like appropriate classrooms, labs, IT centre, library and reading room, counselling services, emergency resting rooms, hostel, cultural cuisine in the canteen and sports and recreational facilities to create a relaxing atmosphere for learning.* It should be done not because it is mandated by UGC or other accreditation bodies, but genuinely provided with the philosophy that it is essential for imparting knowledge and the development of students.

Another important aspect of student wellbeing in the campus is the need for multiculturalism or culture sensitivity when students from different cultures are welcomed and admitted (Janetius et al., 2015; Mini, 2015). The active integration of cultures is accomplished in two ways: first, by creating a mindset to accept, respect and value people of different cultures in the classroom and campus; second, by organising various external activities to exhibit cultural diversity to understand and accept cultures for integration. Many institutions claim to be multicultural by organising some cultural fest and other external activities. A culture-sensitive campus is much more than few external cultural activities. The campus should be a place where both the employees and the students feel relaxed with a very friendly second home experience. This is essential for optimal learning for students and also be proud of their *alma mater*. In the case of the employees, the feeling of respect, personal satisfaction that they are accepted and taken care of, in tune with their individual cultural context, together with the obvious work-life balance, will make them more productive and committed. One of the inappropriate cultural insensitivity often noticed in many institutions is, not providing enough holidays during festive seasons, limiting the holidays to a bare minimal that make the employees suffocate, is a sure sign that the organisation is not culture-friendly. It is therefore not only the basic facilities and infrastructures that make a campus friendly for learning, but also the organisational culture that make culturally diverse students and employees feel at home. The non-teaching staff also should be given orientation in multicultural competency and informed rightly the various initiatives taken by the institution from time to time.

**b) Student Characteristics:** One of the commonly neglected areas when OBE is proposed or planned and discussed by scholars is the characteristics of enrolling student population. Contrast to the scenario a few decades ago when young people preferred jobs after completing their schooling, today, they prefer to have a college degree before looking for a job. It also should be noted that the number of girl students entering into higher education has rapidly increased. Apparently a positive change it might look so, it has paved the way for increased number of unmotivated and unfocused student force entering into institutes of higher education (Janetius & Mini, 2015). To prey on these unmotivated students, mushrooming entrepreneurs invest on educational institutions and take-up education as a lucrative business venture. These barefoot educationalists look for quantity rather than quality and pray for students to enter into higher education for their survival. Consequently, students are welcomed to any stream of study, irrespective of their marks, intellectual capacity, cognitive ability, aptitude or interest (Janetius & Shilpa, 2016). This situation aggravates further to poor study habits and procrastination leading to arrears in exams, absenteeism, dropouts and failures, indiscipline, alcohol abuse, gang activities and destructive behaviours inside the classroom and outside, lack of skills development, low self-esteem, and absence of leadership qualities, poor

communication and diminished general knowledge. When there is bigger number of unmotivated students in the classroom, OBE is impossible to think of or implement.

Another important factor in the higher education is that a majority of the students who enrol for a particular branch of study in the UG level, not because of their abiding interest or aptitude for a particular program but by their imagined ease of completion of the degree or presumed easy availability of jobs, parental influence and family pressure for lucrative jobs (Mini & Janetius, 2013). The majority of the colleges do not conduct entrance exams or other psychological/scholastic testing to identify the aptitude and interest of the students needed for a specific branch of study. Even the highly acclaimed IIM's don't measure the managerial aptitude of a student in their CAT exam. *OBE is basically possible only when student characteristics, namely, aptitude (the inborn potentials, capacity), intellectual capacity (inherent cognitive ability) and the overall interest for a specific profession are seriously taken into consideration.*

This concept is well explained by Gardner and his Multiple Intelligence theory that explains intelligence as a bio-psychological potential of humans to process certain kinds of information in certain kinds of way. Further, he explains that this biological or genetic potential and the cognitive processes that are carried out in the neurones and neural processes together with an amicable environment to foster it and the motivation of the individual to develop further plays a crucial role in the intellectual ability (Gardner, 1983; 1999). As against the traditional view of intelligence which is focused primarily on verbal and numerical scholastic abilities, Gardner tries to expand the notion of intelligence to all human cognitive capacities. Accordingly, every person is intelligent and can perform well in their area of intelligence. Therefore, an individual can develop or strengthen a biologically inherent intelligence, if s/he is motivated in an environment where suitable resources are provided. If this concept of Multiple Intelligence and the individual's cognitive strength is given priority and incorporated into the educational system, the outcome will be optimal.

An important question that comes to the forefront would be: whether such an education is possible in the current Indian educational context? When students enter into education institutions looking for mere degrees, and not knowledge and skills development, it could be a real challenge. Therefore, OBE to be effective, some fundamental extra preparatory work need to be done in educating the parents and students, of the importance of identifying aptitude, interests and the field of study; also, education based on the cognitive competence of the students. An overall awareness should be given at the school level, as a preparation for students and parents to go for real talent-based discipline of study or talent-based future profession. Probably, one simple model solution that could be thought of is the Liberal Arts Undergraduate curriculum in which a student can easily explore the inherent talents and choose a talent-based Postgraduate specialisation.

**c) Curriculum Design:** One of the qualifying characteristics of a curriculum is its focus on outcomes. The curriculum should have clear-cut objectives and also every syllabus should clearly articulate the learning outcome. As Rao (2015) points out, 'in Outcome Based Education, you develop the curriculum from the outcomes you want students to demonstrate, rather than writing objectives for the curriculum you already have'. *The curriculum must be application oriented by situating the student's learning in real-life context, problem-solving and skills development focused, to transform students into professionals in their specific area of specialization and thus student-centred.* Professional skills and job-related proficiency that are required for professional success should be identified from stakeholders and alumni from time to time should be incorporated into curriculum regularly for specific outcomes. It is done in such a decisive manner that once the course is completed, the students will be skilled and well equipped based on the demands of the job market and also have the self-confidence to be a professional in a given field.



It is, therefore, necessary to prepare a curriculum in a way that there is room for field-based learning, field work, community services, practicum, project works, internships, other hands-on training that will take the students to the real world situations and also enhance skills development. There is a myth among some teachers and educationalists who claim that only certain disciplines can have practical skills orientation and other fields are meant for abstract learning. A university put forward a specific branch of study because jobs are available, and there is a demand for graduates and skilled people for the application of that knowledge. In this way, every branch of study can be taught with application orientation and skills-based, more so social sciences. By identifying the kind of students who enrol themselves to specific disciplines, and the skill sets expected of them in the job market, the curriculum should be prepared and therefore the curriculum should be need-based. Therefore, it is the uniqueness of the college/university that should be reflected in the curriculum, by taking into consideration the type of students generally enrolls in the institution.

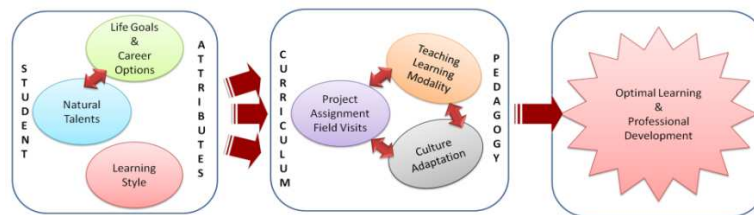
**d) Teaching-Learning Process:** The role of teachers takes precedence here, where a lot of novelty and creativity could be introduced. The teacher should be an engaged employee to perform the task in such a dedicated manner that it reaches to the students. *An engaged employee can be defined as 'one who is highly resourceful, driven by a pious and holy objective of helping and assisting students in terms of imparting knowledge, development of skills, inculcating values and thus committed to their overall welfare'* (Janetius et al., 2016). Besides being committed, the teacher should also be creative and innovative in managing the classroom. The originality of the teachers takes precedence here with the condition that the student's natural, inborn talents are taken into consideration. A teacher can opt for any unique style of imparting knowledge as per the student population and situational need.

- AVK model of teaching that encourages the individual learning style to facilitate classroom activities
- Multiple intelligence classrooms in which the individual student's distinctive intelligence is measured via Gardner's model to allocate assignments and project works specified in the unique intelligence of the learner
- Blended learning in which the use of the internet and other digital technology combined with the conventional methods
- Field-based learning where the students are taken to the real world life situation to optimize learning
- Practicum and internships that promote on-site work experience for skills development
- Case study and simulation exercises for problem solving and decision making skills
- Socratic Method, in which instead of giving answers to questions, raises questions to the students. Argument of refutation, cross-examination and interrogation, scrutiny, particularly for the use of negation to develop critical thinking

A novel model for better classroom management, which is similar to the Indian *gurukul* concept, is the Talent-based Futuristic Learning Model (Janetius & Mini, 2015). Impart knowledge in a way a student can easily understand and learn is the motto of Talent-based Futuristic Learning Model.

**Talent-based Futuristic Learning Model:** Educationalists in India are concerned about the unemployable graduates from both professional and non-professional streams. The current educational system is often blamed for this phenomenon. However, the poor admission criteria used in Indian colleges where students are permitted to any stream of study irrespective of their intellectual ability and aptitude is often ignored and overlooked. Indian youth often make a hasty stereotypic choice done under the compulsion of parents, the influence of friends and or carried away by the glamour of a particular career profile in vogue. Identifying the current dilemma in Indian education and the popular teaching-learning process in the country, Talent-

based Futuristic Learning (TFL model) focuses on individualistic learning which is similar to the highly acclaimed Indian traditional *gurukul* learning.



Gurukul (गुरुकुल) Model, Janetius (2015)

Figure 1: Talent-based futuristic individualised learning (*Gurukul Model*)

The model has two major components: first, it considers the basic student attributes like learning styles of students (AVK model), natural intelligence and cognitive ability (based on MI of Gardner) and life-goals and/or career aspirations. A teacher can adopt and apply multimodal strategies because a classroom always will have students of diverse learning style and intelligence. The natural talents are also identified using Gardner's multiple intelligence model. In tune with their natural talents, life goals and career options are taken into consideration. Secondly, after the student attributes are identified, a teacher can prepare the curriculum and pedagogy, in teaching as well as in evaluating students through continuing assessment, by giving projects and other assigned activities which are tailor-made for individual students or, students are given full freedom to do the assignments in their own learning style, based on the predominant talent and also guided by their future career aspirations. This will create interest among the students not only to learn the lessons in their own style but also will pave the way for optimal learning outcome as well as maximum skills development.

**e) Evaluation of student development:** Evaluation generally stands for the measurable goals specified in the curriculum, achieved by the students in a stipulated time. It also specifies specific benchmarks determined by the institution, to be achieved at the end of the program. In the traditional semester/trimester education setup, student's progression is defined in a time-frame and evaluated uniformly before they move on to the next semester/year whether or not skills are mastered. The only exception would be the mandatory prerequisites which need to be completed before taking another course. To be fully outcome-based, the variable outcomes must be defined taking into consideration the individual students, and the time and other learning resources needed to achieve the outcomes. It calls for achievement based rather than the traditional time-based progression which is not practical in the regular time-bound progression educational setup. However, some specific outcomes, taking into consideration the various elements like the diversity of student force, institutional expectation, and the program objectives, it can be defined in a stipulated timeframe providing provisions for multiple measurement criteria.

Generally, formative, summative assessments are commonly used in education to measure the learning outcome. A formative assessment is a collection of information about student learning during the progression of a course or program to improve learning. This continuing assessment gives insight to the teacher as well as the learner, a bit of the effectiveness of teaching-learning strategy, and also the level of learning reached towards the expected outcome (Popham, 2008). Summative assessment is done at the end of the program to meet the minimum accountability demands. *Preference should be given to performance-based assessment methods (case-studies, case analysis, project reports and performance-based tasks, simulations) which evaluate a student's skills to execute rather than mere theoretical knowledge.* Such an evaluation will measure the outcome accurately because skills and specific outcome-based

objectives are the keys for OBE and it is performance assessment that gives a directly observable, student generated evidence of learning (Drake & Burns, 2004).

### Conclusion

Outcome-based education is the need of the day in the Indian educational system, not only in the field of Engineering but also in Social Sciences because a lack of skills development has been identified in the higher education from many sectors. There is no rationale to restrict OBE to engineering alone when it is easily adaptable to any branch of study. In many countries, it is applied to all levels of education for desirable outcomes. A thorough paradigm shift is needed from various sectors if we desire to implement this approach as it starts from the institutional environment and culminates in the outcome-based evaluation process. An expressive curriculum and a meaningful teaching-learning process can be easily planned out whereas student characteristics which play a decisive part in the outcomes need an attitudinal change in the society. Since a lot of preparation and orientation is needed in the beginning stage of implementation, as the saying goes, 'slow and steady wins the race' would be the right approach for OBE to be successful rather than an abrupt revamping of the entire existing system.

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