



Outcome-based education: Significance for diverse learners

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Abstract

In India, diversity is demonstrated in its true sense. Diversity in the classroom is also expected. Hence, the concept of inclusivity in classroom is very apt. An outcome-based education (OBE) is a very suitable approach in such a classroom as the approach is highly individualized and measurable. The focus of this paper is to highlight the need of OBE for diverse learners. OBE therefore prioritize individualize, measurable and attainable learning outcomes rather than on the number of contact hours, content coverage or degree. The success of OBE is the attainment of outcomes in learners. The LOCF (2020) projected the key outcomes that underpin curriculum planning and development at the undergraduate level which include Graduate Attributes, Qualification Descriptors, Programme Learning Outcomes, and Course Learning Outcome. The fundamental principles of NEP 2020 recommended diversity and respect for the local context in all curriculum, pedagogy, and policy. The progression with OBE takes place by taking care of the curriculum, teaching learning process and assessment method. The OBE helps the learners and teachers in a comprehensive manner.

Keywords: Outcomes, outcome based education, diverse learners

Introduction

In India, diversity is demonstrated in its true sense. There exists diversity of language, culture, religion, region and ethnicity. Diversity in the classroom is also expected. Diversity eliminates monotony in the classroom. Hence, the concept of inclusivity in classroom is very apt. This enables the embrace and propagation of inclusive education. An inclusive classroom contains diverse learners which requires an education approach which is tailored in nature. Therefore, an outcome-based education (OBE) is a very suitable approach in such a classroom as it is highly individualized and measurable. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to highlight the need of OBE for diverse learners.

Diverse Learners

Diverse learners include students from diverse backgrounds with varied abilities, skills, and unique learning needs. In an inclusive classroom there is linguistics diversity, socio-cultural diversity, economic diversity-based education, gender diversity along with ability-disability diversity. The acceptance of inclusivity in its true sense in the classroom requires the need to understand, accept and respect diversity. Policies need to ensure that education is for all learners regardless of their background or features. With diversity, there is a need to focus on equal access to opportunities, active participation and concrete engagement of all learners.

Outcome Based Education

Opportunities for diverse learners means making sure that the curriculum, the educational institution, the physical infrastructure, the support system and the social system is for all learners. Thus, OBE is an educational philosophy and a framework that promotes education and learning of learners by attaining the already identified and planned learning outcomes. OBE prioritize individualize, measurable and attainable learning outcomes rather than prioritizing number of contact hours, content coverage or degree. OBE

means clearly focusing and organizing everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences (Spady, 1994) ^[11]. Further, OBE revolves around a learner-centric approach that focuses on defining desired learning outcomes and aligning educational processes to achieve those outcomes effectively (GU, n.d.). OBE is a transformative educational paradigm with intentional measurable learning achievements, competency development, and learner-centered instruction. It has been gaining obsessive emphasis to achieve quality. OBE is based upon educational theories which integrates every aspect of educational system with a set of avowed outcomes (Rao, 2023) ^[9]. It is a student-centric educational model that maps and measures students' performance at every step (Reva University, n.d.).

The success of OBE is the attainment of outcomes in learners. Outcomes are understood as measurable actions which should inevitably be attained by every student at the end of his or her educational experience. Outcomes which are decided upon should evolve out of the alignment with appropriate contents, instructional strategies, learning experiences, methods of evaluation and assessment. Learning outcomes specify what graduates completing a particular programme of study are expected to know, understand and be able to do at the end of their programme of study (Learning Outcomes Curriculum Framework [LOCF], 2020) ^[13]. There exists a hierarchy of outcomes which are required at different levels. The LOCF (2020) projected the key outcomes that underpin curriculum planning and development at the undergraduate level which include Graduate Attributes, Qualification Descriptors, Programme Learning Outcomes, and Course Learning Outcome.

The LOCF (2020) specified these as follows:

Graduate Attributes: The graduate attributes include capabilities that help strengthen one's abilities for widening

current knowledge base and skills, gaining new knowledge and skills, undertaking future studies, performing well in a chosen career and playing a constructive role as a responsible citizen in the society (LOCF, 2020). According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.) an attribute is a quality, character, or characteristic ascribed to someone or something. Graduate attributes are attributes expected to be displayed by learners in higher education that are undergoing undergraduate programmes. Graduate attributes defined the characteristics of a student's university degree programme(s), and describe a set of characteristics/competencies that are transferable beyond study of a particular subject area and programme contexts in which they have been developed (LOCF, 2020). They reflect the particular quality and feature or characteristics of an individual, including the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are expected to be acquired by a graduate through studies at the higher education institution (HEI) such as a college or university (LOCF, 2020) ^[13]. These include attributes such as Disciplinary knowledge, Communication Skills, Critical thinking, Problem solving, Analytical reasoning, Research-related skills, Cooperation/Team work, Scientific reasoning, Reflective thinking, Information/digital literacy, Self-directed learning, Multicultural competence, Moral and ethical awareness/reasoning, Leadership readiness/qualities, Lifelong learning, etc (LOCF, 2020) ^[13].

Qualification Descriptors: Generic statements of the defined outcomes that the holders of a specific qualification are expected to attain and demonstrate after successfully completing a programme of study leading to the qualification (National Higher Education Qualifications Framework [NHEQF], 2023) ^[15]. A qualification descriptor indicates the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of a particular type of qualification (LOCF, 2020). One of the important elements of the Bologna framework is the Qualification descriptors called the Dublin descriptors, which are general statements about the learning outcomes that are achieved by students after completing a curriculum of studies and obtaining a qualification (NHEQF, 2023). Qualification descriptors describes the academic standard for a specific qualification in terms of the levels of knowledge and understanding, skills and competencies and attitudes and values that the holders of the qualification are expected to attain and demonstrate (LOCF, 2020). These descriptors also indicate the common academic standards for the qualification and help the degree-awarding bodies in designing, approving, assessing and reviewing academic programmes (LOCF, 2020). The learning experiences and assessment procedures are expected to be designed to provide every student with the opportunity to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes (LOCF, 2020) ^[13]. The qualification descriptors reflect both disciplinary knowledge and understanding as well as generic skills, including global competencies, that all students in different academic fields of study should acquire/attain and demonstrate (LOCF, 2020). These include Demonstrate coherent understanding of an academic field of study, Use knowledge, understanding and skills, Demonstrate subject-related and transferable skills, etc. (LOCF, 2020).

Programme Learning Outcomes: The programme learning outcomes are aligned with the relevant qualification descriptors (LOCF, 2020) ^[13]. Programme learning outcomes include subject-specific skills and generic skills, including transferable global skills and competencies, the achievement of which the students of a specific programme of study should be able to demonstrate for the award of the certificate/ Diploma/Degree qualification (LOCF, 2020). They focus on knowledge and skills that prepare students for further study, employment, and citizenship (LOCF, 2020). They help ensure comparability of learning levels and academic standards across colleges/universities and provide a broad picture of the level of competence of graduates of a given programme of study. A programme of study may be mono disciplinary, multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary (LOCF, 2020).

Course Learning Outcome: The programme learning outcomes are attained by learners through the essential learnings acquired on completion of selected courses of study within a programme (LOCF, 2020) ^[13]. The term 'course' is used to mean the individual courses of study that make up the scheme of study for a programme (LOCF, 2020). Course learning outcomes are specific to the learning for a given course of study related to a disciplinary or interdisciplinary/multi-disciplinary area (LOCF, 2020). Some programmes of study are highly structured while some programmes allow learners much more freedom to take a combination of courses of study (LOCF, 2020). Course-level learning outcomes will be aligned to programme learning outcomes (LOCF, 2020) ^[13]. Course level learning outcomes are specific to a course of study within a given programme of study (LOCF, 2020) ^[13]. The achievement by students of course-level learning outcomes lead to the attainment of the programme learning outcomes (LOCF, 2020) ^[13].

The LOCF (2020) identified the teaching-learning process and the assessment methods as important parts of attaining the learning outcomes.

For addressing the diverse students, the LOCF (2020) focus on undertaking research into how students learn and the implications for teaching; and identifying teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020^[8] and Outcome-based Education for Diverse Learners

The fundamental principles of NEP 2020 recommended for diversity and respect for the local context in all curriculum, pedagogy, and policy, always keeping in mind that education is a concurrent subject. The policy ascertain full equity and inclusion as the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students are able to thrive in the education system. Further, the policy reiterates the approach to equity, and inclusion must be common across school and higher education and the policy initiatives required to meet the goals of equity and inclusion in higher education must be read in conjunction with those for school education.

For this to happen, NEP 2020 recommended the promotion and progression of multidisciplinary education in the universities and colleges. It recommended the need to move for more faculty and institutional autonomy. Also, there is a need to set up opportunities to revamping curriculum,

pedagogy, and assessment. There is a need to encourage faculty and institutional leadership where progression can move beyond classroom teaching and actively seed research in universities. There must be a more “light but tight” regulation in the system and thus increased access, equity, and inclusion. It is further recommended that there must be greater opportunities for outstanding public education, online education, and Open Distance Learning (ODL). This will happen when institutes are well equipped with infrastructure and learning materials made available and accessible to all learners including learners with disabilities.

The Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes (CCFUP) 2022^[14] and Outcome-based Education for Diverse Learners

The CCFUP (2022) specified equity and inclusion as the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students are able to thrive in the education system and the institutional environment are responsive to differences to ensure that high-quality education is available for all. The CCFUP (2020) ^[8] encourage multicultural competence and inclusive spirit amongst learners in higher education whereby through focus on outcomes of the graduates should be able to demonstrate:

- The acquisition of knowledge of the values and beliefs of multiple cultures and a global perspective to honour diversity.
- Capability to effectively engage in a multicultural group/society and interact respectfully with diverse groups.
- Capability to lead a diverse team to accomplish common group tasks and goals.
- Gender sensitivity and adopting a gender-neutral approach, as also empathy for the less advantaged and the differently-abled including those with learning disabilities.

The CCFUP (2020) focus on outcomes-based approach to higher education. The NHEQF (2023) ^[9] envisages that students must possess the quality and characteristics of the graduate of a programme of study, including learning outcomes relating to the disciplinary area(s) in the chosen field(s) of learning and generic learning outcomes that are expected to be acquired by a graduate on completion of the programme(s) of study.

Progression with Outcome Based Education (OBE)

How to move forward with inclusive OBE? The policies and framework documents had paved a way for Outcome Based Education. In line with the recommendations of NEP (2020), LOCF (2020) ^[8], CCFUP (2022), NHEQF (2023), the progression of OBE can take place smoothly with the following.

Outcomes-based approach to Curriculum planning and development

Curriculum development is the intentional process of designing learning over time and it is the bridge between standards and daily lessons (McGrath, 2026). Curriculum planning and development lays out materials, activities, and assessments across an entire course so learning can build with purpose, and so each educational resource is used intentionally rather than randomly (McGarth, 20). The LOCF (2020) has clearly stated the learning outcomes-based

approach to curriculum planning and development. The curriculum developed for the programme of study needs to undergo a rigorous process which is sensitive to bring about the desired outcomes through the designed course objectives and assessment objectives. The LOCF (2020) states that Bachelor’s Degree programmes are awarded on the basis of demonstrated achievement of outcomes (expressed in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values) and academic standards expected of graduates of a programme of study.

Outcomes-based approach to curriculum transaction and pedagogical approaches

The LOCF (2020) focus on curriculum transaction through the mentioned teaching-learning process. Curriculum transaction is the effective and desired implementation of the curriculum contents on the basis of aims and objectives listed in the curriculum. Curriculum transaction corporates effective planning and organizing for providing learning experiences for its learners. It also continuously monitors what and the how while being implemented. The conscious effort of delivering the content through outcome-based focus will help learners to achieve the same. The Learning Outcomes-Based Approach to curriculum planning and transaction requires that the teaching-learning processes are oriented towards enabling students to attain the defined learning outcomes relating to the courses within a programme (LOCF, 2020) ^[13]. This approach requires a significant shift from teacher-centric to learner-centric pedagogies, and from passive to active/participatory pedagogies. Planning for teaching therein becomes critical (LOCF, 2020). It includes the appreciation of the link between theory and experiment (LOCF, 2020). Teaching methods, guided by such a framework, may include: lectures supported by group tutorial work; practicum and field-based learning; the use of prescribed textbooks and e-learning resources and other self-study materials; open ended project work, some of which may be team-based; activities designed to promote the development of generic/transferable and subject-specific skills; and internship and visits to field sites, and industrial or other research facilities etc. (LOCF, 2020).

Outcomes-based approach to Resources

An education system encompasses resources that are tangible and intangible. Resources in a system include human, physical, and financial resources. Educational resources include materials and tools such as textbooks and multimedia resources, strategies used to support student learning and enhance the quality of instruction, learning management systems, and hands-on manipulatives, essential for effective teaching and student engagement. The availability of the required resources and the effective use of the resources in the manner aligned with OBE will help acquire the necessary objectives.

Outcomes-based approach to Learning assessment

The use of assessment during the course of instruction to directly inform and improve the learning process (UNESCO, n.d.). Assessment has been advanced as a tool for improving educational practice and the use of assessment during the course of instruction to directly inform and improve the learning process (Herman, 2010) ^[4]. Assessment methods include methods that are appropriate to

a given disciplinary/subject area and a programme of study (LOCF, 2020). Priority is accorded to formative assessment (LOCF, 2020). It includes time-constrained examinations; closed-book and open-book tests; problem-based assignments; practical assignment laboratory reports; observation of practical skills; individual project reports (case-study reports); team project reports; oral presentations, including seminar presentation; viva voce interviews; computerised adaptive testing; peer and self-assessment etc. and any other pedagogic approaches as per the context (LOCF, 2020). Further, at the individual level, evaluation of student comprehension, learning needs and academic progress is conducted by teachers during a lesson, unit or course to collect detailed information that can be used to improve instruction and student learning while teaching and learning are happening (formative assessment) (UNESCO, n.d.). Assessment is also conducted at the conclusion of a specific instructional period, usually at the end of a project, unit, semester, programme or school year to evaluate learning progress and achievement (UNESCO, n.d.).

Outcomes-based approach to Feedback and reflection

OBE emphasizes the importance of providing feedback to students to support their learning and development (Gauhati University, n.d.). Feedback is the transmission of evaluative or corrective information about an action, event, or process to the original or controlling source (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). When feedback is used, they need to be timely, specific, and constructive in order to help students understand their strengths and areas for improvement. Apart from the importance of feedback, reflection is also significant in OBE. Reflection is a process of personalizing and understanding the contents, process, and the rationales for what we have learned (Agouridas & Race, 2007; as cited in Chang, 2019) ^[1, 2]. Through reflection, we relate our personal experience to a wider perspective, which helps us to see the bigger picture (Chang, 2019) ^[2]. Additionally, opportunities for reflection allow students to think critically about their learning experiences and make connections between theory and practice (Gauhati University, n.d.).

Benefits of Outcome Based Education

The OBE helps the learners and teachers in a comprehensive manner. The benefits are as follows:

For Diverse Learners

- Helps students choose appropriate course/programme and focus on gaining mastery on the content and its application.
- Gives direction to students of what are they going to learn or achieve at the end of the class before the start of every class. They can accordingly manage their class and learning.
- Highlights what is intended to be learned exactly and indicates what students should achieve from that particular course.
- Demonstrates and establishes that one has reached the summit of the course and have achieved outcomes.
- Removes the risk of wasting time on unclear goals and eliminate trials with unnecessary course/programme.
- Reduces unnecessary stress on the students.

For Teachers

- Plans a lesson with a direction on what is to be focused and what is to be achieved through the course and programme objectives.
- Teaches efficiently and confidently knowing what and how the outcomes are to be achieved.
- Designs teaching material more effectively focusing on tailored course and approach for every individual student.
- Selects appropriate strategies for teaching and meet the objectives of every lesson for the overall course and programme outcomes.
- Assesses every individual by using the right assessment method specifically meant for every lesson.

Conclusion

There are innumerable profits in the propagation of OBE. The use of OBE can be fulfilled further by use of collaborative learning, differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching, incorporation of technology and digital tools, and building an inclusive classroom environment. The use of effective curriculum can help in bringing about an effective OBE. Thus, there is a need to be thorough with the curriculum, to know the learners, to have mastery over content, to develop pedagogical skills, to arrange for engaging classrooms, and to have appropriate assessment methods. This will help in catering for an outcome-based education to diverse learners.

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