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Implementing Outcome-Based Education (OBE): Are We Ready and Willing?

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ABSTRACT

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) is now making its way into our tertiary education system through the accreditation regulatory under the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) Act 2007. The main reason for the implementation of OBE is to ensure that accreditation practices in this country meet the practices of the international accreditation accords. However, this has raised the issue whether or not the spirit of the transformation will be willingly shared and the concept of OBE will be readily embraced by all involved. This paper reports the current situation of the lecturers' readiness and willingness to embrace the concept and implement OBE in the classroom.

Keywords: accreditation, Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA), Outcome-Based Education (OBE)

Introduction

'Assessment of learning is an essential element of outcome-based education. Without valid and reliable assessment procedures, you will simply not know whether or not your learners have achieved the learning outcomes that were the focus of the programme, unit or lesson, and neither will the learners know whether they have learnt well' (Van der Horst and Mc Donald, 1997, p. 170).

The above description clearly spells out the reason for the move towards a new approach to education in this country. The paradigm shift towards Outcome-Based Education (OBE) at the tertiary level has been prompted by the demands of the globalised and diversified economy and also for our graduates to remain globally competitive. Although OBE may sound like another prescription thrust upon the educators like its 'predecessors' (cf problem-based learning, student-centred approach, active learning), the move has to be applauded as it is an effort to set an educational standard which aims at preparing students to function effectively after graduating.

OBE is now making its way into the education system through the accreditation regulatory under the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) Act 2007 (Sharipah Hapsah, 2007). The main reason for the implementation of OBE is to ensure that accreditation practices in this country meet the practices of the international accreditation accords. The favour towards the OBE approach lies in its ability to improve the effectiveness of our education system. The conventional prescriptive-based education system does not ordinarily allow students to demonstrate what they have learnt. It only focuses on what students should be taught and how much time should be allocated for it. The question on whether students have really learnt the skills and able to apply them when they work has never been in the picture. However, the OBE approach focuses on what students can actually do after they go through the education process. In other words, this approach aims towards more effective *teaching, learning* (what the students learn) and *assessment* (to check if the students have learnt it).

With the engineering faculties piloting the approach nationwide, much thought has been given to the development of the education system. However, the main concern has been whether or not the spirit of the transformation is willingly shared and the concept of OBE is readily embraced by all involved. Thus, this paper reports the current situation of the lecturers' readiness to embrace the concept and implement it in their teaching.

Views on Outcome-Based Education

The move towards this transformation brought with it concerns as to the readiness of lecturers to implement the change. As expected, there would be the dichotomy of acceptance among the implementers. While there is the regular enthusiasm to defend the area of domain and the tendency to maintain the survival of the sub-disciplines, there would be another group who wants to incorporate new areas and specialisations. Table 1 below shows some common views from these two groups.

Views stated above indicate that as in any transformation or evolution, the paradigm shift towards OBE is not without any problem. However, as educators in the institutes of higher learning, we need to remind ourselves that we are obliged to fulfill the requirement laid by the government in terms of setting acceptable educational standards. OBE promises high level of learning for all students as it facilitates the

Table 1: Views on Outcome-Based Education

Views in Favour	Views Against
1. Promotes high expectations and greater learning for all students.	1. Conflicts with admission requirements and practices of most colleges and universities, which rely on credit hours and standardised score tests.
2. Prepares students for life and work in the 21 st century.	2. Some outcomes focus too much on feelings, values, attitudes and beliefs, and not enough on the attainment of factual knowledge.
3. Fosters more authentic forms of assessment.	3. Relies on subjective evaluation, rather than objective tests and measurements.
4. Encourages decision-making regarding curriculum, teaching methods, school structure and management at each school or district level.	4. Undermines local control.

(Education Commission of the States, 1995)

achievement of the outcomes, characterised by its appropriateness to each learner's development level and active experienced-based learning. In addition, it will be easier for the learners to get employment if the programmes that they had gone through are accredited. In the case of engineering, for example, the Malaysian Engineering Accreditation Council (EAC) is presently a provisional signatory to the Washington Accord and it has to demonstrate that engineering schools in Malaysia are embracing OBE before being accepted as a permanent signatory. Thus, if OBE is not implemented in UiTM, our engineering programmes will not be accredited. As a consequence, our graduates will not be able to sign up as Graduate Engineers with the Malaysian Board of Engineers. The danger of that is, we will face the risk of losing the trust of our students, stakeholders and partners from the industry. This is because we do not have a proper way to prove to them that the education we offer is sound and can prepare the students for a successful career after they graduate.

Lecturers' Readiness and Willingness to Implement OBE

Lecturers play a key role in the implementation of OBE. Without their commitment, OBE may just be another addition to the existing initiatives set up by the Ministry of Higher Education. Thus, the main concern of this paper is to find out UiTM lecturers' readiness and willingness to embrace and implement the concept of OBE in the classroom. For this, a small survey was carried out involving 86 lecturers from UiTM Pahang. Although this number does not represent the whole population of UiTM in the country, the value of the findings lies in providing information pertaining to the lecturers' readiness and willingness to relate themselves to the concept of OBE.

The 86 lecturers were selected from the non-engineering faculty. This is because those from the engineering faculties would have no choice but to practice OBE in their teaching because of the regulatory requirement by the MQA Act 2007. These respondents were asked to answer 10 simple questions from a self-designed set of questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

On the whole, the findings indicate that the concept of OBE has not been fully understood and embraced by the lecturers. Out of 86 respondents, 64 have heard about OBE while the other 22 claimed they have not. This indicates an alarming situation for the implementation of OBE to be successful in the classroom; although the concept has been introduced and stressed upon by MQA since 2005, some educators claimed that they have not heard about it. Table 2 shows the lecturers' attitude and acceptance level towards OBE.

As can be seen from the table, the findings point out that the spirit of transformation has not been shared by all. This implies that either: 1) the significance of this trend of transformation in education has not been made knowledgeable to all, or 2) the respondents are ignorant of the present changes that are happening in the context of higher learning. If the former is the case, a measure that can make the information available to all parties involved has to be taken urgently. However, if the latter is the case, a change of mind set (although it will definitely not be easy) is needed as these lecturers are putting the students' education and career at stake.

Table 2: Lecturers' Knowledge about, Readiness and Willingness to Implement OBE

Statement	Responses		
	Fully understand	Do not fully understand	Do not understand at all
1. I know and understand the concept of OBE	Fully understand (17)	Do not fully understand (62)	Do not understand at all (7)
2. I need exposure to OBE	Really need (68)	Need (18)	Do not need at all (0)
3. I have taken the initiative to find out/understand about OBE from reading, queries and peer discussion	I have (20)	Never (66)	
4. I am ready and willing to implement OBE in my teaching	Really ready and willing (63)	Not really ready and willing (23)	Not ready at all (0)
5. I am aware that the principles of OBE is one of the requirements for accreditation set by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA)	Fully aware (53)	Not aware at all (33)	
6. I am aware that every lecturer needs to implement OBE in teaching	Fully aware (53)	Not aware at all (33)	
7. For me, without OBE students can still be competent and competitive	Fully agree (24)	Do not fully agree (62)	
8. Implementing OBE will waste my time and energy	Fully agree (12)	Do not fully agree (55)	Do not agree at all (19)
9. Implementing OBE in my teaching will enhance my professionalism as a 'knowledge provider'	Fully agree (64)	Do not fully agree (22)	Do not agree at all 0

It is found that more than half of the respondents do not fully understand the concept of OBE. This calls for steps to be taken to raise their knowledge regarding the concept. Yet, any programme designed for this purpose will not be successful if the lecturers themselves do not want to put in effort to increase their knowledge. Thus, the 66 lecturers who have not taken any initiative to find out about OBE need to change their mind set and make the effort to increase their knowledge in this matter. Ignorance on their part will definitely see the failure of the approach.

Resistance towards the approach needs to be dealt with (although, again, will definitely not be easy). The results reveal that there are quite

a number of lecturers who are not willing to implement OBE and think that such approach is a waste of time and energy (refer to statements 4, 7, 8 and 9). This signals resistance and unfavourable attitude towards change.

On the bright side, all the respondents claim that they need more information and supportive training on OBE. This implies that with the right planning and approaches, the concept of OBE can be understood and, later, implemented by all.

Conclusion

This small scale study has established a legitimate concern for our accountability in embracing the concept and looking at the interest of the students. The spirit of continual improvement should be the driving force to keep institutions on the road to curriculum excellence. However, the road to success involves concerted effort from all. A strategic plan to the implementation of the OBE approach needs to be drawn so that OBE will be fully practised and not just be the 'flavour of the day' until a new approach takes place.

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