Role of Language Testing and Evaluating in Outcome Based Education

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Abstract

Testing and evaluation of language skills are as important as language teaching itself. Testing becomes an integral part of teaching because it provides significant information or inputs about the growth and achievement of learner's difficulties, styles of learning and anxiety levels. Effective teaching and effective testing are two sides of the same coin. Test evaluates not only the progress and achievements of learners but also the effectiveness of the teaching materials and methods that are used.

In response to the need for standardization of education systems and processes, many higher educational institutions in India has made a paradigm shift to implement Outcome-Based Education system in schools and colleges for testing and evaluating. This paper aims to identify the fundamentals and pros and cons of Outcome-Based Education and how outcomes demand paradigm shift in assessing and evaluating language teaching. The paper also deals with pitfalls and guidelines in implementing and carrying out the framework for the practice and methods of assessment and evaluation of student's performance in colleges.

Key words: language, testing, evaluating, outcome based education

Introduction

Testing and Evaluating is an imperative phenomenon from science to arts. It is unavoidable in day to day life to test, evaluate, and certify each and every activity to observe the nature and reliability of a person and the public as a whole. As it plays a significant role to test in all the phases of life, language teaching and learning process also includes its role in the testing

process. The purpose of testing language is to find out a person's knowledge or aptitude in the language and to distinguish that person's talent from that of others.

Testing and Evaluating language is generally classified into two types: testing - skills and knowledge of content. Skills like; listening, speaking, reading, and writing and sub- skills such as comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. There are different types of tests to test the knowledge of the student in language, for instance the tests like diagnostic test, language aptitude test, achievement test, progress test proficiency test, and so on.

Language teaching started many centuries ago. The novel ideas and techniques adopted in the practice provide valuable guidance and fine models for both language teachers as well as learners. To assess and evaluate the teaching-learning process on the whole, suitable language test batteries are expected to show a clear picture of the efficiency and usefulness in language teaching methods. In designing language testing survey, it is essential to indicate the communicative demands of different levels, types and disciplines, and to device workable instruments to measure how far applications can meet those demands. The demands and the testing process do not end with merely providing the test scores; it has to do more than that by providing valuable suggestions in order to meet out the desired needs by means of the learner's language proficiency, which could be achieved through the language learning system.

In 1994 All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) has established 'The National Board of Accreditation' (NBA), for periodic evaluations of technical institutions and programs based on specific norms. With this the testing and evaluation has taken a paradigm shift in the process of quality assurance and improvement, whereby a programme in an approved Institution is critically assessed to validate that the Institution or the programme continues to meet and/or exceed the Norms and Standards prescribed by regulator from time to time.
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What is OBE?

Outcome based education (OBE) is student-centered teaching model that focuses on assessing student's performance through outcomes. According to Spady "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 experience." Tucker further highlights OBE as a "process that should involve the restructuring of curriculum, assessment, and reporting practices in education". OBE focuses on evaluation of outcomes of the program by recognizing the knowledge, skill and behavior of a graduate after completion of a program in 4 to 5 years of graduation. In the OBE model, the required knowledge and skill sets for a particular engineering degree is programmed in such a way that the students are evaluated in all the necessary parameters (Outcomes) during the course of the program.

What are Outcomes?

The term outcome is defined as "something that follows as a result or a consequence", "an end-product or a result". Outcomes can be recognized at the start of a process to show what it aims to achieve at the end. According to Killen (2000), some outcomes are expected to be demonstrated at a course level (subject-related academic outcomes), and some are at the program and institutional levels (cross-discipline outcomes).

Why OBE?

In 2014 India has become signatory body in Washington Accord with the permanent status of The National Board of Accreditation (NBA) for the higher-education system. It means that an Indian Engineering graduate can be employed in any one of the countries which has signed the accord. According to the contract of the accord, to get accredited by NBA Indian Engineering Institutions should compulsorily follow the OBE model.

Higher education course certification in India has traditionally been done in terms of syllabi what is to be taught. But what teachers taught and what their students actually need to learn are often quite different. OBE helps to specify what thriving graduates should be expected to know or be able to do, i.e. the learning outcomes. Hence quality assurance developments in higher education have encouraged a move to an outcomes-based approach to teaching, learning and assessment.

OBE, basically deals with the course/subject-related and program level outcomes that are linked to the end or exit outcomes of education. This practice guarantees that education prepares the students to perform future life-roles. Thus, the focus of OBE is more on the results or products of education, rather than on the content and curricular processes.

The model of OBE deals with the progress of the graduate and it has three parameters:

- Program Educational Objectives (PEO)
- Program Outcomes (PO)
- Course Outcomes (CO)

Program Educational Objectives (PEO) are broad statements that depict the career and professional achievements that the program is preparing the graduates to attain. PEO's are assessed after 4-5 years of graduation. Program specifications define the students in terms of what they can do at the end of a program or a particular level of study.

Program outcomes are the statements that describe what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time of graduation. They must reflect the 12 Graduate attributes as described by NBA for under graduate engineering programs. Course outcomes are the measurable parameters which evaluates each students performance for each course that the student undertakes in every semester.

The implementation of OBE in the institution level would involve restructuring of appropriate systems and procedures to fruitfully facilitate the accomplishment of the desired outcomes of education. This includes the critical restructuring of assessment methods and procedures employed by educators and institutions in evaluating student performance, which serves as facts of the attainment of outcomes.

Methods of Testing

Testing plays a significant role in the educative procedure. It provides the foundation for determining the rate of learning progress for the students as well as the source of information of opportunities for additional upgrading. The method of assessment of the student during the program is left to the institution to decide. One of the most comprehensive definitions of assessment is provided by the American Association for Higher Education: "An ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well

performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance". (Angelo, 7)

The several assessment tools for assessing Course Outcomes comprise such as Mid - Semester and End Semester Examinations, Tutorials, Assignments, Project work, Labs, Presentations, Employer or Alumni Feedback etc,. These course outcomes are mapped to Graduate attributes and Program outcomes based on relevance. This evaluation pattern helps Institutions to measure the Program Outcome. The Program Educational Objective is measure through Employer satisfaction survey (Yearly), Alumni survey (Yearly), Placement records and higher education records.

The colleges those who follow OBE to assess may have diverse purposes and benefits. It not only provides educators the novel ideas about the progress of students, but also notifies them regarding the value of their teaching methodologies and approaches. Further, the results of assessment in OBE colleges are used as basis to improve educational services and systems on an institutional level. Thus implementation of OBE in the classroom as well as institutional levels would demand paradigm shift. The review of the shifts of assessment practices moving from the traditional practices to OBE practices are mentioned below.

Paradigm Shift 1: Teacher-Centered to Learner-Centered Approach Assessment in outcome-based education require a shift in mindset of educators and educational leaders. The shift requires a spin of approach from teacher-centered to learner-centered education (Bresciani, 2012; Bresciani et al., 2009; Ramoroka, 2006; Nieburh, 1996).

Table 1

Assessment: Traditional vs. OBE

Traditional	OBE
What are educators practices?	What students have achieved or able to demonstrate ?
Teaching (inputs, content)	What students have learnt? (demonstration of skills and competencies, outcomes)
Practice resolves the outcomes	Outcomes notifies the practice

Paradigm Shift 2: Being Outcomes-Minded

In outcome-based education structure everything is focused on outcomes. Thus, assessment methods and techniques should be reliable with the stated outcomes of education. According to Bresciani (2006), outcome-based assessment is a systematic and intentional

process. Along with teaching and learning activities, assessments used in OBE classrooms should be constructively aligned with the outcomes that are expected to be successfully demonstrated at specific stages and curricular levels (Biggs, 2011; Biggs & Tang, 2007). Spady (1994) specified four operating principles that will guide educators and academic leaders in the implementation of OBE. When applied consistently, systematically, creatively, and simultaneously the efforts of shifting to OBE can be almost guaranteed.

According to Spady there are various principles for testing and evaluating in outcome based education, however the four principles mentioned below plays a major role in testing. The four principles of OBE for Testing and Evaluating:

Clarity of focus: It indicates that whatever teachers teach must be focused on what students have learnt, understood and will be able to do. Hence Educators should have the awareness about the outcomes of education that each student can demonstrate at the course level and at the classroom level that are connected to the attainment of higher level outcomes. Thus, at the preliminary stage of academic or course planning, the higher outcomes serve as guide for educators in defining and clearly stating the focus of the course/subject. This principle implies that the criteria of student's learning outcomes can be obtained through testing will allow them to achieve the intended outcomes that have been evidently articulated.

Designing down: This principle focuses on the curriculum design must have a clear definition of the intended outcomes that students can obtain at the end of the program. As OBE implements a top-down approach in designing and stating the outcomes of education, it is essential to make all instructional decisions to ensure this desired end result.

High expectations: This principle mainly focuses on teachers to establish high, challenging standards of performance to encourage students to involve in what they are learning. This level of performance guarantees that student's productivity to meet preferred learning outcomes that are set for a course, and consequently enable them to demonstrate outcomes at higher levels. Thus, the kind of testing in OBE learning context should challenge students enough to activate and enable higher order thinking skills (e.g., critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, etc.), and should be more authentic (e. g., performance tests, demonstration exercise, simulation or role play, portfolio, etc.).

Expanded opportunities: This principle focuses on the idea that all the students cannot learn the same thing in the similar way and in the same day. However, most students can achieve high standards if they are given appropriate opportunities. This discourages teachers from simplifying demonstration of learned behavior from students, thinking that each student is a unique learner. Thus, an expanded opportunity should be arranged to the students in the process of learning and more significantly in testing their performance.

Testing Tools and Methods

Formative Test: Formative test is used to test the knowledge of the student during progression of a course or program in order to improve students' learning. Example:

Summative Test: This test is conducted to gather information at the end of a course, program, or undergraduate career to improve learning or to meet responsibility demands. When used for improvement, impacts the next cohort of students taking the course or program. Examples: Examining student's final exams in a course to analyze whether specific areas of the curriculum were understood less well than others; examining senior projects for the ability to integrate across disciplines.

To conclude, it is clear that the most favorable benefits of OBE can be realized if colleges seriously affix the execution of the framework on the theoretical underpinnings of outcome-based education. It means everything in the educational processes and systems should be based on the outcomes; outcomes which extend beyond academics and reflect real-life attributes that the different stakeholders deem it essential among students who graduate from colleges and then integrate to the society as professionals. Teachers and academics must advocate the true-to-form purpose of OBE, which transcends accreditation and goes beyond preparing students for high-stakes testing. This, in turn, challenges educators and testing experts to develop and implement genuine assessments that determine real outcomes of education, whether it is quantitative or qualitative measures. Ultimately, outcomes-based testing should encourage the reshaping of the various levels of outcomes and the rethinking of teaching and learning and assessment tasks to finally prepare the students not only for academic success, but also prominently for life success.

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