

Application of Outcome-Based Curriculum in Religious Studies: The Case of Madrasas in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The madrasah tradition is widely recognized by Muslims in Sri Lanka for its historical contribution to their education. However, the criticism is aimed at the quality of madrasah education, and relevance of madrasah studies to the community needs and its national development in Sri Lanka. The outcome-based Education is proposed as an approach to increase its quality of education and to target the national aspirations and benefits. This paper aims at examining OBE application in madrasah studies. The study is based on analyzed data from 98 responded madrasas to the survey and review of the related literatures and documentary review of curriculum of the respondent madrasas. The findings show that the outcome-based curricula have not been in place in majority of the madrasas. However, it is in the initial proposing stage in some of the madrasas, studies of which base on the integrated system of education. The vast majority madrasas need to outline their aims and objectives of studies to identify the set of competencies intended for the graduates. This study is an academic discourse on long lasting Islamic traditional education system.

Keywords: OBE, Madrasah studies, Islamic education, Madrasah in Sri Lanka

1. Introduction

1.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Outcome-based education (OBE) is one of the most significant global developments in education today. OBE is not a single idea but a set of procedures to the education, in which decisions about the curriculum are driven by the exit outcomes in terms of the complex abilities for students who will demonstrate at their graduation and similarly by the course outcomes on what students can do after the course was taught. These decisions include curriculum content, teaching strategies, learning activities, student selection and assessment. It efforts to embrace learning outcomes with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and mindset that suit the immediate socio, economic and cultural environment of community. Spady (1994) explains three broad types of OBE: - 1. Traditional OBE which measures the learning outcomes in terms of students' mastery of the established curriculum. 2. Transitional OBE which measures the learning outcomes of students in terms of generic or higher-order capabilities such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication skills and teamwork. 3. Transformational OBE which measures the learning outcomes of students in terms of broad category of disciplinary knowledge and skills generic competencies, attitudes and values required by the work place or society. Over the years of educational advancement, the paradigm of OBE has progressed from traditional OBE, through transitional OBE into the stage of transformational OBE. The transformational or rigorous OBE is now a worldwide tendency in education and which has been adopted by the educational institutions.

The mission of Islam is to build a peaceful and prosperous world in accordance with the will of the Almighty. As emphasized in the *shariah* objectives (*Maqasid al-Sharia*), the achievement of this mission predominantly depends on human resource development through knowledge and training, which occupies a substantial position within Islam. The Islamic theory of knowledge and entire conception of education is derived mainly from primary sources and interpretations reflects its concern on holistic development of human, who is made up of a multiple nature of spirit, intellect and body. The spiritual ability is identified as the *ruh* (soul), *qalb* (emotion), or *nafs* (self) according to the function that is ascribed to it. The faculty of reason (*aql*) as a exclusive feature to human beings, promotes them above the rest of creatures. Therefore, Islam has, from its inception, placed a high premium on education and has enjoyed a long and rich intellectual tradition. The Qur'an makes more than 800 references to the knowledge

and education and repeatedly highlights its importance with frequent injunctions (Verses 58:11; 20:114; 2:269; 2:282; 58:11). Similarly, several hadiths provide and develop an idea of universal and compulsory education. The Prophet himself has decreed knowledge to be obligatory upon every Muslim male and female whom Qur'an considers as benchmarks for all humans (Verse 2:143). In the Islamic theory of knowledge and concept of education, the three Arabic terms used for education represent the various dimensions of the educational process and major domains of learning. The most broadly used word for learning in a formal sense is *ta'lim*, from the root *'alima* to denote knowledge. *Tarbiyah*, from the root *raba* implying skills development. *Ta'dib*, from the root *aduba* proposes a person's attitude and development of sound social behavior. (Zaman, 2001).

It can be argued that OBE approach is appropriate for the educational attainments that Islam targets them. There is a need for statement of the exit- outcomes for madrasah education to produce graduates through the religious study programme offered. It is necessary to identify in advance the competencies and skills required of the graduates to undertake the responsibilities assigned to them. There are many advantages in adapting OBE in madrasah education for religious studies. Most importantly, OBE will help to hold discussion to improve its relevance to suit the community aspirations and national educational needs. Use of OBE model can identify the gaps from national policy for the general education for which madrasah study is criticized for its deviation. The model can also ascertain capacity of graduates with skills and attitudes to contribute to the community and to meet global challenges while recognizing the traditional aspects. Moreover, it can help to incorporate measures to raise the educational standards of the madrasahs in order to enhance the economic prospects of madrasah graduates.

Moreover, the madrasah study is claimed to be associated with conservatism, and stagnation of Islam. OBE model can be used to revise the study programme as it produces graduates for life in rapidly changing modernized world (Park & Niyozov, 2008; Steiner, 2011). In recent years, notably after 9/11, madrasah study has been linked to radicalism and extremism in the world. Madrasah curriculum is said to be hotbed of militancy which promotes fundamentalist views in the name of Islam (Florian Pohl, 2006; Hasan, 2011; Maliki, 2008). The recent Easter suicide attack on churches in Sri Lanka resulted in rise of voices against madrasah and demand for closure of it. It can be argued that OBE model can provide a concrete framework for components of social harmony and ethnic cohesion to be strengthened in the madrasah study. Consequently, application of OBE may result in readily acceptance of madrasah education by most of the critics.

In religious study of madrasah education, the learning outcomes can be presented in many ways as a list of the abilities for graduates. They are a guide for design and development to madrasah to establish outcomes to suit its own vision and goal of its study programme. An agreement can be achieved on basic attributes that madrasah graduates require, in order to enable them to fulfill the described tasks in literatures about Islamic education and to meet aspirations of the community and the country where they live. The modification of appropriate attitudes along with behaviours is an indispensable component of the educational process in madrasah study. In Islam, education primarily aims to train the sensibility of the students in a unique manner. The students' view and attitude to life, their actions, decisions and approaches to all kinds of knowledge are to be directed by the spiritual and ethical values of Islam. The students are trained, perceptually disciplined, and emotionally controlled as they acquire knowledge for not simply to satisfy an intellectual curiosity or just for worldly benefit, but to develop as coherent, righteous beings and bring about the spiritual, ethical and physical welfare of humankind.

The madrasah reform is matter of serious concern for the governments that appoint committees to study it. The scholars and researchers also discuss the reform proposals for the madrasah study and recommendations for curriculum design and revision to rectify their unfavourable outcomes and to enhance its relevance to economic needs and national prosperity (Nayyar, & Salim, 2003; Tan & Abbas, 2017; Steiner, 2011).

1.2 The Madrasah Tradition in Sri Lanka

Muslims constitute 9.4 of the total population as a second largest minority in pluralistic Sri Lanka. Muslims live in Sri Lanka for more than millennium years (Dewaraja, 1994; Mahroof, 1986, 1990; Mauroof, 1980; Vamadevan, 1999). It is observed by the researchers (Jazeel, 2010; Mahroof, 1988) that Muslims had indigenous madrasah system along with mosque from their early settlements to give the Muslim community a thoroughly Islamic upbringing and way of life. It is said that every early Muslim settlement had its *maktab* and madrasah. The colonial rules by Portuguese and Dutch in Sri Lanka had profound political, social and economic consequences, justifiably, "great grief to the Moors (Muslims)" due to their anti- Muslim policies (Abeyasinghe, 1986; Kotelawela, 1986). Moreover, Muslims necessarily exempted themselves from schools established by the Dutch, which were claimed to advocating proselytism. The British who replaced the Dutch continued a similar policy of education for the duration of their rule in Sri Lanka (Asad, 1993; Mahroof, 1972, 1973).

This circumstance compelled Muslims to depend on madrasah as the only source for their education. By mid-19th century, the economic and social conditions of Ceylon, particularly the Muslims, were changing fast. This resulted in the development of madrasah education into a strong structure. Leaders of the Muslim community of this period found it a viable alternative to the western-based English education. Inspired by the Indian tradition, Madrasah education became the institutionalized phenomena in Sri Lanka towards the latter part of the 19th century. The indigenous madrasah system flourished due to direct influence of Indian rich tradition and trends of madrasah education during the Middle Ages and thereafter. Furthermore, towards the latter part of the 19th century, madrasah education in Sri Lanka most likely connected with the establishment of mosques. Second half of the 20th century and at the beginning of 21st century marked great movement in the establishment and re-establishment of madrasah. The rapid increase in total number of madrasas is observed in most part of Sri Lanka.

2. Method

The institution of madrasah has generated considerable interest among Muslims and non-Muslims alike and captured their attention in recent years. With its religiously oriented curriculum and Muslim exclusive admission, it has progressively been subjected to review and critique. A discriminatory view of the madrasah institution is that it promotes deviant Islamic teachings which provides way for formation of extremism and violence, especially since these madrasas are not part of the mainstream educational method of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the Muslim scholars have low opinion of madrasah system as an alternative system of education for the Muslim community in Sri Lanka due to its quality. It is thus crucial to modernize the madrasas in Sri Lanka with latest development in educational philosophy and techniques of the learning and teaching approaches. This paper aims at examining the application of outcomes-based method in madrasah studies. The study is based on analyzed data obtained through a survey administered among 150 madrasas. The madrasas were randomly selected from more than 200 registered madrasas in Sri Lanka under the Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs (MRCA). The department categorizes the madrasah into two main types: senior and junior, in terms of their function, size, long run and the level of education they offer. The characteristics of the madrasah such as location, type, ownership and ideological differences were also considered in sampling. Of the 150 madrasas, 98 madrasas responded to the survey. 40% of these madrasas considered themselves as a senior level college. One third of them are exclusively for ladies. Majority of them (73%) function on full-time basis, though most ladies' madrasas are functioning on part-time basis. The analysis was supplemented with the review of the related literatures, reports and documentary review of curriculum of the respondent madrasas to the survey.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Graduate Profile of the Madrasah Study

The respondent madrasas offer programme of study in various qualification type with designators. They award graduates with a degree certificate of many titles namely "Mowlavi Aalim" (47%), "Mowlavi or Mowlaviya" (27%), "Aalim or Aalima" (11%), "Ash-Shaykh" (8%) etc¹. It is notable that these certificates are most likely not recognized to be accepted for recruitment in government services in Sri Lanka. To the lesser extent, the certificate holders were incorporated to the school teaching service. The respondents were questioned on the type of personalities they intend to produce through their madrasah studies. Table below demonstrates the varieties of personalities the madrasas intend to produce in percentage. Majority of the madrasas continue as Islamic mission schools which offer education for spiritual dimension. Similarly, madrasah education is to cherish and educate Muslim youth so that they would eventually become religious scholars and they become leaders and social workers in their community. The results affirm that the role of Sri Lankan madrasas almost similar to the Singapore madrasas (Mokthar, 2010). However, the analysis indicates the relationship between title of the certificate and intended personalities is not significant. OBE model advocates graduate profiles that are descriptions of attributes which an educational institution intends its graduates will develop through their study to equip them to play assigned role. Few of the madrasas describe some of the graduate attributes. A ladies madrasah identifies Islamic motherhood as its prime attribute for its graduates. Relatively, more madrasas also list good citizenship, Arabic language proficiency and lifelong learning. One prominent madrasah states scholarship, research skills, social contribution, and methodological skills to deal with fundamental sources of Islam as its personalities. However, vast majority of madrasas need to identify the generic attributes for graduates according to the outcome-based mode. It is very challenging to ensure these madrasas adopt immediately since they are uncertain of outputs and have intention to produce large variety of personality as given in below table.

Table 1. The types of personalities intended by the Madrasah study

S. No	Personality	%	S. No	Personality	%
1	Islamic Missionary	77.8	8	Islamic Writer	42.2
2	Islamic Scholar	71.1	9	Arabic Translator	37.8
3	Social Worker	63.3	10	Imam of Masjid	36.7
4	Arabic Teacher	56.7	11	Government Employee	32.2
5	Community Leader	56.7	12	Administrator	32.2
6	Islamic Teacher	53.3	13	Movement Activist	10.0
7	Educator	45.6			

3.2 Aims and Objectives of the Madrasah Education

The concept of the study programme traditionally includes aims and objectives of the programme as an element. The term 'objective' is distinguished from outcome. The educational purposes or goals can be articulated in the form of objectives which may represent something of a 'wish list' (Willis & Kissane, 1995). The articulation of the desired outcomes is based on the objectives of the study programme. Spady (1993) suggests "You develop the curriculum from the outcomes you want students to demonstrate, rather than writing objectives for the curriculum you already have". According to the responses of the madrasahs, the religious practice is primary objective of Madrasah education and this perception takes priority over other objectives in most of the madrasahs. Thus, the objective of madrasah education is to train and develop true custodians and protectors of Islam. Traditionally, the aim of religious education has been predominantly to train religious teachers, religious officials and religious leaders of the Muslim community.

The employability of madrasah graduates is much discussed aspects on modernization of the madrasah education. However, the purpose to secure the employability among the graduates is secondary in the madrasah education. In other words, it is not prioritized to a greater extent. The curriculum prospectus confirms this view that madrasahs are for students to learn about Islam and its cultural history and rituals. However, the Muslims academics (Jazeel & Yaseer, 2017) disagree from this point of view and see that the determination of madrasah study is to produce Islamic learned peoples, and to provide a delicate balance education combining both of secular and Islamic knowledge by overseeing the *tarbiyyah* or holistic education. They further argue that the goal and objectives of madrasah education are to attain inclusive development and improvement of a student's aspects that include their physical, mental, social, spiritual, ethical and humanistic development. The responses also indicate that some of the madrasahs have initiated to broaden their goals and objectives and define them in relation to social needs and development. For instance, building up of the character of the students, attention towards the women education, improvement of social, cultural, and moral standards, eradicate ignorance, and poverty alleviation are some listed objectives of madrasahs. However, the vast majority madrasahs need to incorporate objectives highlighted by National Education Policy which include communal harmony, secularism, democratic atmosphere, National integration and international understanding etc. Articulation of the vision, and specific objectives is required element to ensure that these madrasahs are equipped to adopt and implement OBE method.

3.3 Curriculum Design and Development

Programme of study is defined as a stand-alone curriculum implemented by madrasah for its students to follow during the duration of the study. There are few elements in curriculum of madrasah in Sri Lanka. With the mostly conservative orientation, it generally uses unique madrasah educational system developed throughout Islamic history from its early period. Moreover, the madrasah education of Sri Lanka takes most of the aspects of Indian tradition in their system of education. The periodical curriculum modification is most likely not a substantial process in the madrasahs. However, they were instructed by Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs (DMRCA) to make change in order to have a unified curriculum in all madrasahs. In a situation there is no central governance to regulates the madrasah and its operation in Sri Lanka, the responding madrasahs were questioned on their curriculum design and development.

The responses reveal that considerable number of madrasahs tend to adapt a syllabus of the prominent senior madrasahs in Sri Lanka. It is observed that no remarkable change was made in curriculum of most madrasahs from the traditional way of following the '*Dars Nizami*'² system though very few of them affirm adapting this system of education. It is important to note that some madrasahs of Sri Lanka recognize the importance of periodical

curriculum revision. It seems that the vast majority of the madrasas (77%) have already started to implement changes in their curriculum according to the guidelines recommended by the assigned syllabus committee, as per the guidance of DMRCAs. The motives for the revision can be attributed to accommodate job orientation (19%), curriculum enhancement (51%), adapting the instruction of DMRCAs (30%), joining the *Iththihad al-madaris* curriculum (40%), and introducing new courses of study (59%). Majority of the madrasas have implemented a syllabus which was introduced after 2005. Moreover, majority of the madrasas (54%) compare their syllabus with fellow madrasah system in order to make curricula changes or revision.

The duration of the course of study in madrasas ranges from 4 to 8 years. However, the course duration of ladies' madrasas is in comparison shorter and it is limited to four to five years. In almost all of them, seven courses of study can be identified. The students are mostly admitted directly from secondary education. A Muslim boy or girl who qualifies to enter the programme goes to a residential institution where his or her whole way of life is permeated with Islam. The medium of exposition is the Tamil language; less often, Arabic is used as the medium of instruction. The curriculum has only core components and it is mostly text book centric. The classification of subjects appears wide but in reality, they could be divided into two large groups – Islamic theology and Arabic linguistic. The subjects include Arabic Literature; Arabic language; Rhetoric; Islamic law (*Fiqh*); Principles of Islamic law (*Usul al-Fiqh*); Tradition (*Hadith*); principles of Traditions (*Usul al-Hadith*); Inheritance; Dialectics; Commentary on the Quran (*Tafsir*); Islamic history (*Seerah* and *Thareeh*) and theology (*Aqeedah*).

There is general resistance to attempt to include the secular subjects in the madrasah curriculum due to influence of the traditional thought, which views that such situation dilutes religious character of madrasah education. However, some madrasas that adopt an integrated education system by combining both the general government education as well as the religious education. The subjects of government school were included in the curriculum. As a result, the madrasas are able to prepare their students to sit for the examinations in both ordinary and advanced levels of General Certificate of Education. This system which is recommended in both Muslim-majority as well Muslim-minority nations was introduced during the 2nd half of last century in Sri Lanka. The mechanism included in this curriculum is the development of skills for national development. This inclusion gives students opportunity to obtain skills along with required knowledge that contribute to development of family and society that leads to the emergence of a unified nation. The emphasis on greater choice, curricular and structural flexibility, intense interschool competition (Gopinathan, 2007) is not place in madrasas. The whole process of curriculum planning, design and development seems to provide limited space for OBE framework. In OBE, exit outcomes are a critical factor, in designing the curriculum and the intended outcomes determine its content and its structure where content of curriculum must help learners to achieve the outcomes that have been specified. Moreover, under OBE model exiting components of madrasah curriculum to the certain extent may be considered as irrelevant.

3.4 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The concept of pedagogy in the madrasas employs strategies largely to shape students as a spiritual construct. Therefore, four broad claims were instrumental in defining the madrasah concept of pedagogy as Glenn & Sabki (2015) describe that the heartfelt interactions between the teacher and learner through orality facilitating memorization and the didactic approach towards sacred texts. The analysis shows that the madrasas most likely apply traditional teaching methods, in which the content of the subjects important and teacher or the textbook of the subject is vital. The teachers are of authority to the students in terms of content which must be transmitted. Students get every bit of information from the teacher and did not involve in active learning. In absent of the recruitment policy, teachers are appointed on basis of personal links to the madrasah. The qualification and professional outlook of the teaching staff is not up to the mark. The vast majority of them are those who completed the studies in a such madrasah. The staff development programme and continuous professional training is not place.

The nature of boarding school at madrasah convinces their learning process. Most of their learning activity is memory based. It is said that the memorization through repetition helps students to achieve greater awareness of their educational compass. Students do not take responsibility to show what they learned and how to use their knowledge. It was important that students to remember things and recall everything they learned.

The OBE influences the teaching methods and strategies. It encourages the teacher and the student to share responsibility for learning. OBE provides clear pictures to teachers what students are supposed to be learning and employ a range of teaching and learning methods. For application of OBE, madrasas need to have sufficient number of qualified teachers who trained in modern teaching methods which include interactive teaching, problem-based or case-based learning, role play and fish-bowl observation, tutorial, community visit, workshop, self-directed learning, student presentation, fieldwork etc. Similarly, the madrasas are to practice the multimodal assessments to encourage students to achieve the intended learning outcomes and to measure the level how far

they achieve them rather than the grading purpose. The convincing learning environment of madrasas can be improved with installation of modern equipment and enhancement of physical facilities.

4. Conclusion

Outcome based education (OBE) can be proposed as a model for religious studies of madrasah education. It has obvious advantages in uncooperating its components in the study programme. Consequently, it will reflect in effectively improvement of the quality and relevance of the study in a way to increase of the study's benefits to the community and the nation at large. It is required to articular specific aims and objectives of the madrasah education to suit the present context and demands in order to identify the graduate attributes. Whole this process advocates major changes and revision of Madrasas curriculum, implementation of appropriate teaching and learning methods to suit the OBE and effective assessment tools to make the students involved in activities towards enabling them to achieve intended outcomes of the course.

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Notes

Note 1. *Mowlavi* is term used to Islamic theologian, *Mowlaviya* indicate female theologian, *Aalim* is term derived from *Aalima* means scholar and *Aalima* means female scholar trained in Islamic Studies. *Ash-Shaykh* is used in similar meaning of *Aalim*.

Note 2. *Dars-e-Nizami* was the first System of madrasah curricula designed by Mulla Nizam Uddin As Sihaalwi (1748) to formulate of teaching and instruction used in Indian madrasahs.

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