THE INTEGRATION OF OUTCOMES BASED EDUCATIONAL MODEL IN DEGREE PROGRAMMES IN ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES: THE CASE OF FOUR STATE UNIVERSITIES IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT: Outcomes based education (OBE) is a trend in higher education and is being adopted by state universities in Sri Lanka. Arabic and Islamic studies are two study areas offered for the general and honours degree programmes in Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities at state universities of Sri Lanka. The main focus of this article is to investigate the integration of OBE in Arabic and Islamic study programmes offered by the concerned faculties and departments at the four state universities namely: University of Colombo, University of Peradeniya, Eastern University of Sri Lanka and South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. The article used the qualitative approach and content analysis by reviewing the present curriculum and related documents and analysis of interview responses of selected stakeholders based on purpose sampling technique. The findings show that the outcomes-based education is, to a certain extent, integrated into the content driven Arabic and Islamic study programmes, in line with the Sri Lanka qualifications framework (SLQF). The identified outcomes change process and implementation of the outcome-based model are described in the curriculum. Variations in the extent to which each faculty/department has implemented outcome-based education are discussed and key points towards implementation are highlighted. However, the stakeholders identify a range of challenges and obstacles in transitioning the study programmes and achieving the expected standards implied by OBE model. Moreover, the curriculum design along with appropriate pedagogy and assessment strategies is to be enhanced in attaining the intended outcomes. This research provides the understanding which may help the policy makers and relevant authorities to make decisions on programme revision.

KEYWORDS: Islamic studies; Arabic Language; Islamic Education; OBE; University Degree programme in Sri Lanka

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education in Sri Lanka is undergoing changes in terms of quality and relevance in recent past.   The ministry of higher education implemented two World Bank sponsored projects namely IRQUE and HETC. IRQUE was implemented with a view of improving the quality of education and enhancing the education to suit the national needs and global standards to produce competitive and employable graduates. HETC was oriented at preparing graduates who are equipped with the skills of the 21st century. As a result, higher educational sector has taken steps to incorporate the world standards in the system and support and incorporate such developments. Notable Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework (SLQF)[1] is an important element of systems in higher education to improve vital aspects of education. SLQF framework infers outcomes-based education is stated in two parts: a set of general abilities of the qualification holders expected to have developed by end of course or programme, and a set of specific outcomes of which the students are assessed on how they are able to demonstrate for the fulfilment of requirements of qualification. Moreover, the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) of University Grants Commission (UGC) conducts programme review (PR) on undergraduate study programmes, where the PR manual and standards paves the way for the universities to adapt outcome-based education (OBE).

Sri Lanka is currently practicing OBE at the tertiary level. Outcome-based education (OBE) is one of the most significant global developments in education today. It is a culminating demonstration of learning, which comprises of a set of procedures to the education by which decisions about the curriculum are driven by the exit outcomes. Those resemble in terms of the complex abilities for students who will demonstrate them at their completion of a degree. Similarly, the course outcomes imply what students can be able to do after they are taught. The educational outcomes are clearly specified and they support to make decisions on the followings: the content and way on how it is organized; the educational strategies; the teaching methods; the assessment

procedures and the educational environment to suit the context of the stated learning outcomes. It attempts to embrace learning outcomes with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that match the immediate social, economic and cultural environment of society and country. According to Spady[2], there are three broad types of OBE: -Traditional OBE which measures the learning outcomes in terms of students' mastery of the established curriculum. - Transitional OBE which measures the learning outcomes of students in terms of generic or higher-order competencies such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication skills and teamwork. - 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 workplace or society. Over the years of development, the paradigm of OBE has evolved from traditional OBE, through transitional OBE into the era of transformational OBE. The transformational or rigorous OBE is now a worldwide trend in education and has been adopted by the higher educational institutions. Concurrent to this, Spady[3] also suggests the dimensions of four principles in OBE, which are: design down, clarity of focus, high expectation, and expanded opportunity.

II. ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES IN SRI LANKA

Muslims are a minority in Sri Lanka and they have a history of over a thousand years[4]. It is observed that Muslims had indigenous madrasah system for learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies[5]. During the colonial rules by Portuguese, Dutch and British in Sri Lanka, Muslims depended on madrasah as the only source of education. By mid-19th century, Arabic and Islamic Studies has flourished because of the development of the madrasah education into a strong structure and its institutionalization owing to direct influence of Indian rich tradition. Second half of the 20th century marked great movement of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Sri Lanka with the establishment of madrasah in large numbers.

By this period, Arabic language was included in the subjects offered for the undergraduate degree programmes when the University of Ceylon was first established in 1921. Then, the department of Arabic was established in 1945 at the Faculty of Oriental Studies in the University of Ceylon. It is noteworthy that the department commenced Master of Arts programme in 1956 and extended its study areas to include Islamic civilization as main subject discipline. Subsequently, the department was renamed as department of Arabic and Islamic Civilization and was moved to the Vidyalankara Campus of the University of Sri Lanka, at Kelaniya. In 1980, the department was relocated to the University of Peradeniya (UPDN). In the following years, separate departments were established for Arabic language and Islamic Studies in the Universities of Jaffna and Eastern University of Sri Lanka (EUSL) respectively. Arabic language and Islamic studies were offered as main subjects in Faculty of Arts and Culture at South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL) which commenced in 1995. In 2005, SEUSL has highlighted the requirement of the establishment of the first faculty of its nature, the Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic language (FIA). The faculty consists of two stand-alone departments for Arabic language and Islamic and related Studies. The university of Colombo (UCMB) started its unit for Arabic and Islamic Culture under the Faculty of Arts.

The history of Arabic and Islamic studies at the university level in Sri Lanka expands over seven decades. It is necessary that changes and periodical revisions in these studies are made in response to the guidelines which directs that the study programmes are to undergo major revision in every five years' cycle. Thus, effective from the early 2000s, the study programmes in Arabic language and Islamic studies adopted the semester system, in which, academic year consists of two semesters and each semester comprises 15 weeks of academic activities. The course unit system was also incorporated in the academic progarmme, where each course is assigned credits, a time-based quantitative measure. A credit is equivalent to 15 direct contact hours of teaching and tutorials out of 50 notional hours demarcated for students learning. The Course Unit System provides flexibility and choice to both the students and teachers to enhance the teaching and learning process. Moreover, courses are categorized into core, elective, optional, and auxiliary. Another important development is the introduction of new courses in the curriculum and subject stream such as Islamic banking, Islamic finance, Islamic law, Arabic linguistic and translation.

However, the Arabic and Islamic studies programmes have generated considerable interest among Muslim and non-Muslim students alike and has captured their attention in recent years. With its religious-based curriculum and exclusive enrolment for Muslims, it has been increasingly subjected to scrutiny and critique. Furthermore, these studies provoke criticism for its quality, national relevance as well as coping with global demands and standards.

There is growing concern on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Arabic and Islamic studies programmes to achieve the educational objectives of Islam[6]. 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 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 dual nature of spirit and body. The spiritual faculty is known as the *ruh* (soul), aql (mind or intellect), *qalb* (emotion), or *nafs* (self) according to the function that is ascribed to it. The faculty of reason (*aql*), unique to human beings, elevates them above the rest of creation. 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 education and repeatedly highlights its importance with frequent injunctions[7.] Similarly, several hadith provide 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[8.] 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 widely used words for education in a formal sense are: *ta'līm*, from the root *'alima* to denote knowledge, *Tarbiyah,* from the root *raba* implying skills development, and *Ta'dīb*, from the root *aduba* suggesting a person's attitude and development of sound social behaviour[9].

In Islamic education, the learning outcomes can be presented in many ways as a list of the abilities for graduates. They are a guide for the design and development of institutions to establish outcomes to suit its own vision and goal of its study programme. An agreement can be achieved on basic attributes that graduates require, in order to enable them to fulfil the described tasks in literatures about Islamic education and to meet aspirations of the community and the country where they live. The development of appropriate behaviours and attitudes is an essential component of the educational process in Arabic and Islamic study. In Islam, education aims to train the sensibility of the students in such a manner, that in their attitude to life - their actions, decisions and approaches to all kinds of knowledge - they are governed by the spiritual and deep ethical values of Islam. They are trained and mentally disciplined, in that their desire to acquire knowledge is not merely to satisfy an intellectual curiosity or for material worldly benefit, but to develop themselves as rational, righteous beings and bring about the spiritual, moral and physical welfare of mankind.

It can be argued that OBE approach is appropriate for the educational attainments that are prescribed by Islam. There is a need for statement of the exit- outcomes for Islamic and Arabic studies to produce capable graduates through the study programmes 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 Arabic and Islamic studies. Most importantly, OBE will help to hold discussion to improve its relevance to suit the community needs and national educational aspirations. Use of OBE model can identify the gaps from national policy for the higher education for which Arabic and Islamic studies is criticized for its quality and relevance. 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 academic standards of the faculties and departments thus increasing the economic prospects of graduates and employability.

The Islamic and Arabic study is suspected to be associated with conservatism, and stagnation of Islam. This was evident when the April 21st Easter attack on Churches in Sri Lanka resulted in rise of doubt against Islamic related studies. It can be argued that OBE model can provide a concrete framework for components of social harmony and ethnic cohesion to be strengthened in these studies. Consequently, application of OBE may result in readily acceptance of this type of education by most of the critics. OBE model can be used to revise the study programme as it produces graduates for life in rapidly changing modernized world[10].

More importantly, unemployment of university graduates is a burning issue facing the government of Sri Lanka. Tracer studies done by MOHE, UGC and respective universities indicates low percentage of employability among the Arts graduates. It is said that this percentage is even lower among graduates in Arabic and Islamic studies. Only a handful are employed upon graduation and the waiting time for a job for most of these graduates exceed three years. This has resulted in the quality of these graduates to be debated. Findings of studies on employers' feedback for Arts Graduates have been consistent, with most of these graduates found to be inadequate in career competence skills such as communications and language, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, and leadership. With the expectation to produce quality graduates and meet the demand of workforce changes, the success of OBE implementation is largely contingent on the pedagogy methods, learning environment, assessment strategy, teaching staff competency and students support system.

Thus, OBE is a curriculum design which moves away from the traditional content driven curriculum, with the expectation to produce job ready graduates and meet the demand of work-world changes. The focus of this study is to investigate the integration of OBE in Arabic and Islamic study programmes offered by the concerned faculties and departments at the four state universities in Sri Lanka.

III. METHOD

This qualitative study is mainly based on analysis and documentary review of curriculum of Arabic and Islamic studies practiced at present by the faculty, departments, and units of four state universities of Sri Lanka. This review of the curriculum was supplemented by analysis of data obtained through interview with academics of the prescribed institutions, selected based on purpose sampling. The semi-structured interview questions consist on the type of graduates intended to produce, graduate attributes, components of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies, learning environment to attain the intended exit and course outcomes, major challenges to adapt OBE and suitability of OBE approach to Arabic and Islamic studies. A review of the related literatures was conducted to develop conceptual framework of the research.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Programme Structure: The department of Arabic and Islamic civilization of Faculty of Arts at UPDN offers honours degrees in Arabic studies and Islamic studies to a relatively small number of students. Though this maybe the case, Arabic and Islamic civilization are offered as two main subjects in the general degree conferred by the faculty.

At SEUSL, both departments of the faculty (FIA) enroll large number of students annually who are directly admitted to both Arabic and Islamic studies subject streams by UGC. The honours degree programme of the department of Islamic studies is in three study areas: Islamic thought and civilization, Islamic banking and finance, and Islamic law and legislation (*Shariah*).   The general degree programme of the department mainly covers courses in Islamic Studies. Similarly, the department of Arabic language conducts the honours degree in two study areas: Arabic language & literature and Arabic linguistic & translation. Arabic language is the main subject for General degree programme of the department.

In EUSL, the department of Arabic language offers honours degree programme in Arabic language which is also a main subject in General Arts Degree programme of Faculty of Arts and Culture. Department of Islamic Studies of this faculty now offers courses in Islamic studies as main subject of its general degree programme. UCMB's academic unit of Arabic and Islamic civilization, which functions under its Faculty of Arts, offers Arabic and Islamic courses for general degree programme as main subject and subject stream.

At SEUSL, UPDN and EUSL, the programme in Arabic and Islamic studies leading to honours degree is of four-year duration. Interested students apply for this at the beginning of their 2nd academic year in the university. In practice, based on their performance and results in first academic year, relatively limited number of students are selected. Registered students for this progarmme should complete a minimum of 120 credits. The curriculum consists of both core and other components. The curriculum comprises more than 70% core/main courses in Arabic or Islamic studies to enable students to pursue an in-depth study of one area. Foundation / compulsory courses, optional / elective courses and dissertation / internship training are included components in the curriculum. FIA include auxiliary courses as an extra requirement.

In all institutions, the programme leading to general Bachelor of Arts degree is three years duration. Arabic language or Islamic Studies are offered as one of the three main subjects and the registered students select from the listed courses based on their interest and future career plan. They must complete a minimum of 90 credits, comprising more than 70% of core/main courses, and other courses including Foundation/ compulsory courses, optional/elective courses. However, FIA has its own structure, in which the registered students must major in Arabic or Islamic studies and another main subject as a minor. Similarly, UCMB has a study stream for general degree, in which, Arabic and Islamic civilization is offered for the students who wish to follow it. Thus, the programme structure and student's workload provide the framework for volume of students learning and involvement in learning activities which the students are expected to complete to achieve the foreseen exit and learning outcome of the courses. The programme and curriculum structure are in compliance with SLQF that recommends OBE adaptation.

Curriculum Plan and Design: In OBE, Harden et al. suggest ''product defines process. OBE can be summed up as results-oriented thinking and is the opposite of input-based education where the emphasis is on the educational process and we are happy to accept whatever is the result''[11]. It is a key element in curriculum planning to conceptualize the type of graduate the programme intends to produce and what are the attributes they will possess. The programme planning and design involves a set of measures such as international and external stakeholder participation, employer and professional consultancy, willingness to act on feedback from alumni, employer and exit surveys etc. The analysis of data shows the institutions are to take these measures into consideration to identify realistic, deliverable outcomes for their graduates in Arabic and Islamic studies.

Traditional concept of curriculum development seems to be in place in these institutions as they include the content on what the students studied, and the examinations were designed to assess the extent to which the students had learned the content. Then only the learning outcomes are assigned to those contents. ''Outcome based'', as Spady insists, ''does not mean curriculum based with outcomes sprinkled on top. It is a transformational way of doing business in education.''[12]. The adoption of curriculum outcomes and OBE are different. In OBE, exit outcomes are a critical factor in designing the curriculum and the intended outcomes determine its content and its structure, where the content of curriculum must help learners to achieve the specified outcomes. Moreover, under the OBE model, many of the existing components of curriculum may be considered as irrelevant. Several approaches to curriculum evaluation need to be adopted to validate and make decision to continue with the identified outcomes.   This would enable the institutions to further intervene or improve the programme outcomes, and subsequently the learning outcomes of the courses. The study programmes comprise of a list of cores, elective and optional courses in Arabic and Islamic studies. These courses are designed with ILOs and they specify the credit value and workload in compliance with SLQF. However, it is questionable whether course outcomes are clearly aligned with the exit outcomes of the programme. The majority of teachers agree on gap exit in curriculum and few stated "they identified the gap and work on bridging it"[13.]

Graduate Attributes: Graduate attributes are foundation in OBE model to develop exit outcomes. SLQF suggests set of competencies in term of 'level descriptors' for general and honours degree programmes.   The programme outcomes are grouped into four categories, namely knowledge, Skills (hard skills, soft skills), attitude and mind-set, as given in table below. The faculties identify some of the above competencies for their degree programmes. For instance, FIA states that the study programmes at the faculty will endeavour to imbue in the graduates the following attributes: career competence, scholarship, good citizenship, lifelong learning, and leadership. However, the study programmes in Arabic and Islamic studies need to identify the generic attributes for graduates according to the outcome-based mode. The interview data demonstrates that academic staffs are confused to specify the type of the graduates intended to produce and the competencies they will possess through the Arabic and Islamic study programmes. Unlike the professional study programmes, it is very challenging to respond when questioned on the type of graduates intended for in social sciences and humanities discipline. One academic stated that "By engaging in Arabic and Islamic studies, they are better able to apply the knowledge they gain. general abilities they developed to be success in their personal, community and career life"[14].

Table: Level Descriptors

OUTCOMES	CORE AREA
1. Subject / Theoretical Knowledge	Knowledge
2. Practical Knowledge and Application	
3. Communication	Skills
4. Teamwork and Leadership	
5. Creativity and Problem Solving	
6. Managerial and Entrepreneurship	
7. Information Usage and Management	
8. Networking and Social Skills	
9. Adaptability and Flexibility	Attitudes, Values, Professionalism and Vision for life
10. Attitudes, Values and Professionalism	
11. Vision for Life	
12. Updating Self / Lifelong Learning	Mind-set and Paradigm

Source: SLQF, 2015

Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Teaching, learning and assessment are inherently intertwined, and this necessitates the holistic approach in OBE model. The course guide and interview data show the shift from a teacher-cantered toward a learner-centred teaching format in the institutions.   Over the past years, a range of teaching and learning strategies is employed in the Arabic and Islamic study programmes, signifying the acclaimed benefits of the outcome-based approach. This indicates the transition from the tradition mode of

delivery of lecture, which aims at simple knowledge acquisition and learners memorizing by rote, towards a more consequential knowledge construction with application of skills. The institutions employ discussion, group and individual activities, case studies, interactive lectures and directed self-studies and role play. This encourages blended learning as a way of maximizing the student's engagement in learning based on ILOs. Use of technology and modern equipment are also in place to some extent. However, smart classroom and lab-oriented demonstration are to be enhanced. Teaching and learning strategies, to a lesser extent, provide opportunities to work in study group to promote collaborate learning. All institutions need to improve the constructive alignment of teaching methods with stated outcomes in blueprint and course specification.

The assessment system must be capable of testing the students' achievement in all the outcomes. The respondents most likely agree that there is a clear and close relation between assessment tasks and the programme outcomes and thus, various assessment tools are to be employed. The programmes consist of continuous assessments that include open book examination, individual and group project, presentation, assignment etc. However, more emphasis is given to semester end examination. Having developed the programme outcomes and course learning outcomes, the Arabic and Islamic study institutions must ensure that the assessment and evaluation processes are in place to demonstrate that the outcomes are measurable and thereby, allow for intervention. Moreover, the teaching, learning and assessment methods and learning outcomes are to be closely aligned (constructive alignment) for students to study the prescribed content, using an appropriate learning approach, thus achieving the educational outcomes specified. Innovative teaching and learning methods and the use of newer, non-traditional exams are required. Assessments are to be blueprinted on the outcomes and the course contents.

Learning Environment: A supportive learning environment is much needed for student's success in achieving the programme outcomes. Teaching, learning, and assessment strategies requires the use of appropriate facilities, amenities and activities to engage in active learning to attain the learning outcomes. The institutions plan to ensure a conducive learning environment and provide students and staff with ongoing training of common learning resources such as library, ICT, and OBE. Academic unit of UCMB has ICT based platform such as virtual leaning environment (VLE) and Learning management system (LMS) operated to facilitate its multi-mode delivery and learning. None of the institutions has language laboratories even though Arabic language is taught for the degrees. FIA has insufficient and inappropriate infrastructure facilities to suit its large number of students. Libraries at all institutions use ICT-led tools to facilitate the learners to access and use information for academic success. However, learning resources in Arabic and Islamic studies are insufficient in UPDN, EUSL, and UCMB. According to majority of the teaching staff, infrastructure of the institutions is most important to implement OBE model in the programmes. The competency of the incoming students, lack of training for staff in OBE approach and teaching strategies, and the commitment of administrative section are the complications in adopting OBE model.

Jansen discusses the negative impact of OBE on a content-oriented programme of social science and humanities offered within the context of limited facilities etc[15]. The academic staffs were questioned on the appropriateness of OBE to the study programmes in Arabic language and Islamic studies, which is largely content preoccupied. Most of them are of the view that OBE approach can create changes in producing competent and capable graduates, particularly in Arabic language study. There is minor view that OBE trivialises contents of the progarmme which is considered as crucial in the Islamic studies.   Moreover, the fundamentals of Islam may be left behind in radical revision of curriculum required by OBE model.

V. CONCLUSION

All four institutions offering Arabic and Islamic studies tried to adopt OBE model to produce graduates with the prescribed competencies. Their evolvement in the direction of implementing OBE shows the different stages, each institution is at. Some of them are at the initial planning stages. The institutions need to enhance the exit outcomes of the programmes through consultation and participation of the stakeholders. The alignment of course outcomes, teaching, learning and assessment strategies with the programme outcomes will support the instructions for an effective process of OBE. The successful transformation of programmes to OBE model involves the realignment and installation of infrastructures of the institutions and competency of the staff. All the institutions need to take serious consideration in practicing all four principles of OBE model namely design down, clarity of focus, high expectation, and expanded opportunity.

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