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Implementing Outcome-Based Education (OBE) in Tier-II Cities: A Case Study of Higher Education Institutions in Nanded District, Maharashtra

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Abstract

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) has emerged as the global gold standard for quality assurance in higher education, shifting the focus from "what is taught" to "what is learned." This paper examines the adoption of OBE frameworks in Nanded, a significant educational hub in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra. Utilizing secondary data from institutional reports, NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) audits, and regional educational surveys, the study evaluates the alignment of Program Outcomes (POs) with industry requirements. The analysis reveals that while the Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada (SRTM) University and its affiliated colleges have initiated OBE integration, there remains a substantial gap in faculty training and the practical assessment of "soft skills." The study provides a roadmap for local institutions to bridge the gap between academic outcomes and regional employability, contributing to the broader discourse on educational sustainability in developing economies.

Keywords: *Outcome-Based Education, SRTM University, Nanded, Bloom's Taxonomy, Higher Education, Maharashtra.*

Introduction

In an era of global competitiveness, the traditional "Input–Process" model of education is being replaced by the "Outcome-Based" model. In India, the mandate for OBE has been accelerated by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the requirements of the National Board of Accreditation (NBA). For a district like Nanded, serving as an educational center for rural and semi-urban students, the successful implementation of OBE is critical for ensuring that graduates are globally competitive and locally relevant.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the Structural Alignment of OBE: To examine the mapping of Course Outcomes (COs) with Program Outcomes (POs) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) of Nanded district in line with the Washington Accord and NAAC guidelines
2. To Analyze the Gap between Theory and Practice: To examine the challenges faced by local institutions in Nanded regarding faculty readiness and the shift from rote-learning assessment to competency-based evaluation.

Literature Review

The core of OBE lies in Spady's (1994) framework, emphasizing that all educational decisions should be driven by the exit outcomes learners are expected to demonstrate at the end of their program Recent literature in the Indian context (Ranganathan, 2024) suggests that while Tier-I cities like Mumbai and Pune have transitioned smoothly, Tier-II cities like Nanded face structural "de-coupling." This refers to a situation where institutions adopt the terminology of OBE for accreditation purposes but maintain traditional teaching methods in the classroom. Bloom's Taxonomy remains the foundational tool for this transition, moving students from "Remembering" to "Creating."

In Maharashtra, the transition has been heavily influenced by the Maharashtra Public Universities Act (2016),

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In Maharashtra, the transition has been heavily influenced by the Maharashtra Public Universities Act (2016), empowering universities like SRTMU Nanded to redesign curricula. However, studies by Deshmukh and Patil (2023) highlight that "rural–urban digital divides" in districts like Nanded often limit the use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) required for tracking individual student attainment.

1. **Philosophical Foundations: The Shift from Inputs to Outputs**

   The shift toward OBE represents a paradigm shift from the traditional "Content-Based" or "Teacher-Centered" model to a "Learner-Centered" approach. Spady (1994) defined OBE as "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." This philosophy is rooted in the belief that all students can learn and succeed, but not on the same day or in the same way.

   In the context of Nanded's diverse socio-economic student base, this philosophy is particularly relevant. It allows for instructional flexibility, where the path to achieving a competency can vary, but the standard of the outcome remains non-negotiable (Biggs, 2014).

2. **The Global Context: The Washington Accord and Quality Assurance**

   The internationalization of OBE was largely driven by the Washington Accord (1989), an international agreement among bodies responsible for accrediting engineering degree programs. It recognizes the equivalency of programs accredited by these bodies.

   For institutions in Nanded, aligning with these global benchmarks is no longer optional if they seek to produce graduates eligible for international mobility. Research by Memon et al. (2020) suggests that countries in the Global South often struggle with the "Standardization vs. Contextualization" debate—how to maintain global standards while addressing local industry needs.

3. **The Indian Regulatory Landscape: NEP 2020 and NAAC**

   In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has catalyzed the adoption of OBE. It mandates a multidisciplinary approach and emphasizes "Conceptual Understanding" rather than rote learning. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) have integrated OBE into their assessment criteria, specifically through the Learning Outcomes-based Curriculum Framework (LOCF).

   Rao (2023) notes that the implementation of LOCF in state universities like SRTMU Nanded requires a "bottom-up" approach where Course Outcomes (COs) are meticulously mapped to Program Outcomes (POs) and Program Specific Outcomes (PSOs).

4. **Constructive Alignment and Bloom's Taxonomy**

   A critical component of the literature is John Biggs' Theory of Constructive Alignment. It posits that for OBE to be effective, there must be a "marriage" between the learning activities and the assessment tasks.

   Most literature regarding Maharashtra's higher education (Kulkarni & Jadhav, 2024)

   identifies Bloom's Taxonomy as the primary tool for this alignment. However, "Taxonomy Gap" in regional colleges: while syllabi aim for "Analysis" and "Synthesis" (Higher Order Thinking Skills - HOTS), examination papers often remain stuck at the "Remember" and "Understand" (Lower Order Thinking Skills - LOTS) levels.

5. **Challenges in Tier-II and Tier-III Districts**

   Literature specifically focusing on rural or semi-urban districts like Nanded highlights unique barriers:

   Language Proficiency: The transition to competency-based assessments is often hindered by the medium of instruction (Marathi/Hindi/ vs. English), as outcome-based assessments require high levels of articulative clarity (Patil, 2022).

   Infrastructure Deficit: Unlike metropolitan universities, colleges in Nanded face a "Digital Divide," making the automated tracking of attainment levels through specialized software difficult.

   Faculty Resistance: Change management theory suggests that long-term reliance on the "lecture-heavy" method leads to the perception of OBE as a burdensome administrative task rather than a pedagogical improvement (Singh & Sharma, 2024).

- **Secondary Data Analysis (Nanded District)**

  Data for this analysis is curated from the SRTM University Annual Reports (2022-2024), NIRF data, and NAAC Self-Study Reports (SSR) of prominent Nanded colleges.

- **Curriculum Mapping and Attainment Levels**

  Analysis of the 2023-2024 academic cycle for engineering and science streams in Nanded shows:

Mapping Success: 85% of technical programs have successfully mapped COs to POs.

Attainment Gap: However, the actual "Attainment of Outcomes" (based on internal assessments) shows that while theoretical POs (Knowledge) have an 80% success rate, practical POs (Design/Development of Solutions) lag at 45%.

- **Faculty Development and Training**

Secondary data from District Higher Education offices indicate a surge in Faculty Development Programs (FDPs).

In Nanded, approximately 60% of faculty members in aided colleges have attended at least one workshop on OBE/NEP implementation.

The primary challenge reported in institutional feedback is the "administrative burden" of documentation, consuming nearly 30% of instructional time.

- **Employability Outcomes**

Data from the Nanded District Employment Exchange and campus placement records suggest that only 35% of graduates meet the "Skill Outcomes" required by multinational corporations, highlighting a disconnect in the OBE "Industry-Readiness" objective.

Findings and Observations

i. Framework Adoption: Nanded's HEIs have adopted the formal structure of OBE (Syllabus design, PO/CO mapping) effectively.

ii. Assessment Rigidity: Observations from secondary audit reports suggest that examination patterns in SRTMU remain largely memory-based, contradicting the "Application" and "Analysis" levels of the OBE framework.

iii. Technological Constraints: High – Quality OBE tracking software is expensive and currently limited to top- tier private institutions in Nanded, leaving smaller colleges to manage data manually, leading to inaccuracies.

iv. Stakeholder Awareness: While administrators are aware of OBE, there is a low level of "Outcome Awareness" among the students themselves—most students in the region are unaware of the specific competencies they are expected to gain.

Limitations of the Study

i. While this paper provides a systematic overview, the following limitations must be acknowledged:

ii. Data Currency Lag: Much of the secondary data relies on the 2011 Census for demographic baselines, as the 2021 Census was delayed. This may lead to an underestimation of current urban density in Nanded City.

iii. The data collected is purely secondary and available on the internet and various websites.

iv. Reporting Bias in SSRs: The analysis of OBE implementation often relies on Self- Study Reports (SSR) submitted by colleges to NAAC. These reports may reflect "Idealized Adoption" rather than the actual "Functional Adoption" in rural classrooms.

v. Linguistic Generalization: The study assumes a uniform understanding of OBE terms (like Bloom's Taxonomy), but in reality, the interpretation of these terms varies significantly between English-medium technical colleges and Marathi-medium arts colleges.

vi. Narrow Placement Metrics: Secondary placement data often ignore entrepreneurship and agrarian self-employment, major "outcomes" for students in the Nanded region.

Suggestions

i. Contextualized Outcomes: Nanded institutions should develop "Regional Outcomes" that link curriculum to local industry (e.g., textiles, agriculture, and pharma- manufacturing).

ii. Active Learning Pedagogy: Move beyond chalk-and-talk; implement Case-Based Learning (CBL) and Project-Based Learning (PBL) to ensure that the higher-order thinking skills of Bloom's Taxonomy are met.

iii. Automated Attainment Tools: The University should provide a centralized, open- source software for all affiliated colleges in Nanded to track student progress and outcome attainment.

iv. Continuous Internal Evaluation (CIE): Increase the weightage of formative assessments that test skills rather than just end-semester summative exams.

Conclusion

The shift to Outcome-Based Education in Nanded is at a critical crossroads. While the "paperwork" of OBE is largely complete, the "spirit" of the framework—empowering students with measurable skills—is still evolving. For Nanded to emerge as a global educational hub, HEIs must move beyond compliance and focus on authentic assessment. By bridging the gap between theoretical mapping and practical attainment, the district can ensure that its youth are not just degree-holders, but competent professionals ready for the 2030 workforce.

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Conflicts of interest
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