

## **ULA AS 2014 - Oration**

### **Shifting paradigm of the university library in the evolving landscape of higher education**

**Dr. Pradeepa Wijetunge**

Librarian, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

[librarianpdn@gmail.com](mailto:librarianpdn@gmail.com)

#### **Introduction**

There are many changes in the landscape of higher education in Sri Lanka, but this paper selected the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) through Student-Centred Learning (SCL) as its scope considering its significant impact on the university libraries. A brief account of the OBE, SCL and the symbiosis between the two is followed by the challenges encountered by the teachers and students practicing SCL (other stakeholders are not considered here to limit the scope of the paper). The crucial role that can be played by the university library in the SCL environment is discussed with the emphases on providing access to increased volume of information needed, sharing information and other resources cost effectively, and enhancing information management skills through information literacy.

#### **Evolving landscape of Higher education**

A news item in the early part of 2014, publicised that, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) would bring in two new changes into the university education; Outcome-Based Education and Student-Centred Learning to produce skilled graduates with theoretical and practical knowledge to suit the current employment market. The Secretary to the MOHE, at a recent inauguration of workshop on OBE through SCL, justified why this change is needed. He argued that graduates of some disciplines have a problem in securing employment according to available data. For instance, the employability of IT, Medicine, and Engineering graduates are in the range of 94%, 92% and 93% respectively, while it is 72% and 70% for Agriculture and Science graduates, and 65% for graduates in Management. However, the employability of the Arts graduates is only 28%. This is despite the many new employment opportunities available in the fields of social science and humanities in the emerging economy. He opined that this mismatch has occurred because the current graduates especially in social sciences and humanities, of our universities do not possess the skills and competencies needed for the world of employment although they have the appropriate theoretical knowledge.

What then are the skills and competencies needed by the contemporary graduates? Navaratne, Ponnampereuma and Nanayakkara (2014), did compare the skills needed in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century with those required in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century; in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century job demand was based mainly on routine and repetitive tasks such as ones represented by clerical work, and staffing factory chains therefore possession of

certain abilities was the main requirement to get a job. For this, the education system based on the three "R"s, (reading, writing and arithmetic) was sufficient, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these routine and repetitive tasks have been largely automated, hence the employment opportunities have shifted to non-routine, non-repetitive tasks that a machine could not perform. These new employment opportunities require a new set of skills that goes beyond the three "R"s, to include creativity, problem solving, teamwork, effective interpersonal skills and managing information effectively. Not only the skills required are different, but also they keep on changing with the evolving customer needs. However, it is not possible to provide all these skills in any one degree programme. Navaratne et. al (2014) further comment that, the challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education system is to produce graduates with mastery of the subject and lifelong learning skills, so that they have not only the necessary skills to perform but also have the ability to learn, unlearn and relearn according to the changing needs.

### **Outcomes-Based education**

According to Spady (1994), one of the most quoted authors in the subject,

"Outcome-Based Education means clearly focusing and organizing every-thing 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 means starting with a clear picture of what is important for students to be able to do, then organizing curriculum, instruction, and assessment to make sure this learning ultimately happens." (Spady 1994, p.12).

Spady (1994) further comments that

"Outcomes are clear learning results that we want students to demonstrate at the end of significant learning experiences. They are not values, beliefs, attitudes, or psychological states of mind. Instead, outcomes are what learners can actually do with what they know and have learned - they are the tangible application of what has been learned. This means that outcomes are actions and performances that embody and reflect learner competence in using content, information, ideas, and tools successfully. Having learners do important things with what they know is a major step beyond knowing itself." (Spady 1994, p.13). Nevertheless, Spady (1993) insisted that "Outcome-based," does not mean curriculum based with outcomes sprinkled on top but it is a transformational way of doing business in education.

In the light of Spady's (1994) definition of OBE, MOHE of Sri Lanka has identified the following twelve learning outcomes to organise the curricula, instructions, and assessment around; 1) Subject / Theoretical Knowledge 2) Practical Knowledge and Application 3) Communication 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 10)

Attitudes, Values and Professionalism 11) Vision for Life and 12) Updating Self / Lifelong Learning (Navaratne et.al. 2014, p.12).

### **Symbiosis of OBE and Student-Centred Learning**

If all these skills are to be offered within one education programme, it is inevitable to use multiple teaching/learning methods which provide ample opportunities for the students to actively engage in learning activities, rather than engage in rote method of conventional learning in which teacher disseminates the knowledge to students. This leads us to the alternative approach of Student-Centred Learning in which the student is at the centre of learning and the teacher is only guiding the learning process. Student-Centred Learning (SCL) has no universally accepted definition (O'Neill and McMahon 2005) and is linked with many other terms like *flexible learning*, *experiential learning* and *self-directed learning* and it can mean different things to different people and there is no universally accepted definition (O'Neill and McMahon 2005). Many faculty members have developed approaches to teaching that fit the criteria for SCL i.e. *active learning*, *collaborative learning*, *inquiry-based learning*, *problem-based learning*, *team-based learning*, and *project-based learning*. Attard et.al (2011) comments that the conventional teacher-centred learning approach has been subject to criticism with the evolution of different learning theories, and the SCL is diametrically opposed to the conventional method of learning. "SCL allows students to shape their own learning paths and places upon them the responsibility to actively participate in making their educational process a meaningful one. Ponnampereuma (n.d.) asserts that SCL is the vehicle through which OBE is delivered.

In the conventional Teacher-Centred Learning (TCL), teacher plays the active role in designing the curricula, preparing notes, lecturing, and assessing the students and the student plays a passive role by taking notes, memorizing information and reproducing for assessment but in SCL, the roles of both the student as well as the student change considerably. O'Neill and McMahon (2005), perceives this dualism of learning as either end of a continuum. Low-level of student choice, student passivity and power primarily positioned with the teacher are at the end of TCL while high-level of student choice, student activeness and power primarily positioned with the student are at the end of SCL. Teachers as well as students encounter the need for fundamental changes in their deep-seated traditional TCL roles.

### **Challenges for teachers and students**

On the one hand, primary responsibility of the teacher would be to revise their curricula to incorporate the course outcomes as well as the national level graduate attributes paying attention to what the students will be able to do at the end of the course. Innovative teaching/learning methods, like problem-based and inquiry-based learning opportunities, fieldwork, and group work that make students more active in acquiring knowledge and skills than in the conventional classroom, need to be created. In the conventional TCL, giving marks and grades play a major role in assessment, but in SCL, more creative assessment methods like independent projects, reflective diaries, class presentations that motivates self-directed learning

and provide opportunities for more formative feedback have to be adopted. Not only teacher-assessment, but peer and self-assessments are used in SCL to give the responsibility of learning to students. Therefore, the teachers are expected to change their current assessment types into more SCL-oriented types. In addition to the revisions that need to be introduced to the curriculum, teaching / learning methods, assessment and evaluation, teachers need to acquire and update a wide range of generic skills, like giving continuous feedback, monitoring student work, creative teaching / learning methods and coping with individual learners with different learning styles, and many more in order to deliver SCL successfully.

On the other hand, students in SCL will have to take greater responsibility of their learning, than in the conventional TCL. Instead of being passive receivers of information from the teacher, they will have to find answers to their subject-related problems through active learning. Their success in learning will depend on a large extent on how active they are in the learning process. The students will encounter new and innovative assignments assessed under equal innovative methods. The assessment will not be on their subject knowledge but also on how they have achieved the learning objectives of the holistic programme. Under this novel learning environment the students will require a plethora of information of different types, i.e. background, historical, evolutionary, critical, comparative, analytical, statistical, theoretic as well as applied, and in different formats, i.e. in addition to textual information sources, they will need electronic, artefactual and human sources. It will not be sufficient for the students to depend on the lecture note or a couple of books borrowed from the library but they will have to move towards more electronic formats. They will also have to move beyond their comfort zones of Google and Wikipedia to more scholarly resources both open access as well as subscribed to. The wealth of information they need will not be available in their vernacular, but in other languages, especially in English. The students engaged in SCL will essentially need to determine the amount of information needed, access the desired information effectively and efficiently, appraise information and its sources critically, integrate information into one's own work, use information effectively to complete a specific purpose and use information ethically and legally.

### **Role of the university library**

The university library in the current Sri Lankan context is highly print-based. The strength of the library is measured by the number of the print volumes available in the library and the collection development is driven more by the principle of hoarding Just-In-Case they are needed. A significant proportion of the library staff time is spent on managing the physical collections and related issues and service delivery is oriented towards single users who will visit the library to borrow books, use the reference collection or use the reading space. A significant proportion of the library collection is stagnant, but not weeded in case they are needed by someone at some point (this is true mainly regarding the social science and humanities collections). Allocating space for modernistic services is becoming a critical issue in the older library buildings where a large proportion of space is taken up by the print collections. Most library websites are mainly guides to and descriptions of the physical collections, library layouts and rules and regulations although Institutional

Repositories and some tutorials are provided. Contrarily, university library has a substantial and heightened role to play in serving its user community moving into the sphere of SCL, in three aspects; providing access to increased volume of information needed, sharing information and other resources cost effectively, and enhancing information management skills through information literacy.

### **Volume of information**

Libraries at present are considered as the heart of the university and contain a wealth of curricula-related scholarly information. Yet, a colossal volume of more information is needed by the teachers and the students engaged in SCL. Of course the Internet provides convenient access to millions of resources but often they are not scholarly material published in high quality journals. Besides, grey literature like research reports and conference proceedings are not always available through the Internet. It is not always easy for the users to discover relevant material from the Internet using the appropriate search strategies. Moreover, with the ever-dwindling budgets and escalating publication prices, libraries cannot strengthen their collections to satisfy their user needs. To address these issues in the context of SCL, the traditional role of the library in selecting, acquiring and organising information resources need to be expanded upon the principle of access vs acquisition. While the conventional acquisitions has not completely ceased, the librarians must select material relevant to student-centred curricula and provide links to such resources by means of e-catalogues. The subject librarians can enhance their collections by creating e-collections. High-priced subscriptions to scholarly databases can be augmented by establishing Institutional Repositories and providing access to open access material through initiatives like DOAJ. Instead of Just-In-Case hoarding, a more rational Just-In-Time access can be provided by adopting more economical access models like pay-per-view.

Resource sharing- Implementation of SCL will require simultaneous access to resources by many and it is not viable to acquire multiple copies of even a limited number of resources, if not all due to high costs and space limitations. In a developing country like Sri Lanka, the majority of undergraduates are not in a position to purchase at least the basic reading material for their education programmes. Providing rational access to information resources through the library is the most sustainable alternative. The library must address this issue by hosting the reading material either using password controlled Moodle or the university Intranet, remaining within the limits of fair use of intellectual property. Library websites need to be exploited to their maximum to offer information to the users in a similar manner to that of Internet, so that the current rigidity is avoided and the library websites are made more relevant to the users. The e-repositories can be supplemented by providing e-directories to other Internet-based resources, e-directories of subject experts and other national and international sources of information (i.e. resources at FAO, World Bank, IMF, UNESCO etc.) through the library websites, so that the users are offered a similar service to that of the conventional library catalogue. In this endeavour, library must move beyond its physical boundaries to reach the university community within their own teaching/learning spaces, so that the services are delivered to their desktop avoiding

the need to visit the library in person. Librarians cannot forget the significant role played by the smart phones in the lives of their users, and must redesign the services to be delivered via mobile phones.

Opposing the customary individual studying, SCL will encourage collaborative learning through teamwork in which the students have to interact with one another in a space where they can discuss, and use a wide range of information resources as well as other equipment like video cameras, multimedia projectors, scanners, with flexible furniture and areas to display their work not forgetting food and drink to refresh and re-energise both the hard working students and their guiding teachers. What better space can they have for such activities than a library? The university library is the unique space which already contains a wealth of information and many of our libraries now have computer labs that can accommodate 50 or more students. University can provide a range of educational technologies needed to implement SCL successfully, cost effectively by providing such collaborative space in the library. However, creating these collaborative learning spaces known as Learning Commons (LC) need a radical shift in the conventional thinking and practice of the librarians as well as other stakeholders. Although it is possible to design new library buildings with allocated spaces for LCs, established libraries will have to reconsider their space allocation for physical collections, review the weeding policies and accept that the library need not be a silent place.

### **Enhancement of skills through information literacy**

It was mentioned above that the teachers as well as students engaged in SCL will essentially need to determine the amount of information needed, access the desired information effectively and efficiently, appraise information and its sources critically, integrate information into one's own work, use information effectively, ethically and legally to complete a specific purpose. The ability to perform all these tasks is defined as Information literacy (IL). The seventh national outcome mentioned above stresses the information usage and management resembling the other countries which have placed IL among their graduate attributes. IL programmes which develop a wide range of information management skills is the path for lifelong learning. In the Sri Lankan context this is especially needed, because the use of school libraries among our students is not well-established. They have been depending more on the teachers' notes and within the university system it is a common belief that they do not need any special guidance to use a library. Quite contrary to this misbelief, the new entrants need a considerable amount of guiding to use the advanced information system in the university. Currently around 70 IL programmes, of different lengths and depths are conducted in our universities but they do not adequately prepare the students for an SCL in the digital environment. Therefore the librarians must transform these programme to be more student-centric and geared towards more electronic resources than mere library tours and orientation programmes. Rather than restricting the IL programmes to first or final year students, all students must be provided with incremental training across their academic years. In addition to face-to-face programmes, there is a need to offer more web-based tutorials and guides so that support is available for students around the clock. However, as a recent study (Wijetunge 2014)

demonstrated, it is a consolation that the librarians have understood this need, but finding it difficult to implement due to various institutional constraints. Not only the students, but also the teachers and significant others need to be offered awareness programmes related to the services and resources and in offering such awareness, librarians must move out of the library building. If librarians and their staff remain in libraries, they will soon be placed on the list of endangered species” (Leonard 1994, p.29)

### **Conclusion**

MOHE has taken the initiative to introduce SCL in order to make the graduates, especially in the social sciences and humanities, more relevant to the world of work, but this imposes many challenges for both teachers and the students, especially in accessing information to fulfill the innovative teaching/learning opportunities. Teachers need access to more information not only in their own disciplines but also in curriculum design, and pedagogical methods while students need a wide range of information to enrich their learning experiences and they cannot escape the need to exploit the information offered in different types and formats, and the use of technology to manage and use information within the ethical and legal frameworks. The conventional role of the library has become further enhanced under the circumstances to provide access to the increased volume of information, to enable sharing information and other resources cost effectively and to improve the information literacy skills so that the students become lifelong learners with the ability to unlearn, relearn and learn when the need arises. In order to cater to the changing needs of the university community, librarians will have to radically redefine the service delivery models as well as the conventional professional roles they have been playing. Failure to do so will drive the users away from the library to Internet which offers convenient access to information notwithstanding the quality, leaving behind the libraries as outdated storages of printed volumes which will be considered as a liability by the funding authorities. However this change is not possible overnight, but need to be carefully planned in close collaboration with the teachers, higher authorities, policy makers, students and the administrators. LIS education programmes and professional bodies like ULA need to take leadership to provide the necessary training and motivation required for this radical change, as librarians too will need a range of skills and competencies, and the change of mindset to redesign their traditional service delivery models and principles.

### **Reference**

Attard, A., Di Loio, E., Geven, Koen and Santa, Robert. (2011). Student Centred Learning: an insight into theory and practice. Bucharest. Education International. <http://www.jfn.ac.lk/OBESCL/MOHE/SCL-articles/Books-chapters-reports/11.SCL-insight-EC.pdf>(Accessed on 4 January 2015).

Leonard, W.P. (1994). On my mind: libraries without walls-field service librarianship. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 20(1), 29-30.

Navaratne, Sunil, Ponnampereuma, Gominda and Nanayakkara, Vishaka (2014), K-SAM graduates for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Unpublished paper distributed at the TOT workshop held on 8-9 December 2014.

O'Neill, Geraldine and McMahon, Tim. (2005). Student-centred learning: what does it mean for students and lecturers. In O'Neill, G., Moore, S. and McMullin, B. (Eds). *Emerging issues in the practice of university learning and teaching*. AISHE, Dublin. <http://www.aishe.org/readings/2005-1/> (Accessed on 4 December 2014).

Ponnampereuma, Gominda (undated). *Implementing Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) using student-centred learning*. Colombo. HETC Project.

Spady, William G. (1994). *Outcome-Based Education: Critical Issues and Answers*. Arlington, VA. American Association of School Administrators. <http://www.jfn.ac.lk/OBESCL/MOHE/OBE-Articles/Books-chapters-n-Reports/2.OBE-Critical-Issues.pdf> (Accessed on 4 December 2014).

Wijetunge, Pradeepa (2014). A review of Information Literacy initiatives in the Sri Lankan public universities. To be published in Prof. Piyadasa Ranasinghe Felicitation volume.

---