

The Positive Impact of an Integrated Assignment Scheme for an Outcome-based Higher Curriculum

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Outcome-based education (OBE) refers to an educational approach that curriculum decisions are made according to the outcomes students should display by the end of a course (Harden, Cosby & Davis, 1999). Despite its popularity among primary and secondary schools (e.g., Brindley, 2001; Dabrowski & Wisniewski, 2011), general concerns have been raised over the disconnected learning experiences of OBE in a higher education setting, in which academic modules are potentially dissociated to form a unified whole. In addition, strenuous attempts are made to avoid the problem of over-assessment under OBE, especially when constructive alignment is not achieved, resulting in students being unnecessarily overloaded with redundant assignments. This study attempted to solve the aforementioned problems by a creative endeavor called the integrated assignment scheme, which refers to the incorporation of elements of different academic modules into a single backbone of assignment, so that this single assignment serves as a common assessment of different modules. 181 full-time students participated in this scheme, and finished an integrated assignment which was common across two modules. Another 167 full-time students were recruited as a control group, and finished two separate assignments for the same two modules. Upon finishing the semester, a questionnaire was distributed to each student for gauging his or her subjective learning effectiveness and learning stress. Results revealed that a significantly stronger relationship between modules was perceived by students who participated in the integrated assignment scheme, when compared to the control group who did not participate in the scheme. The number of assignments, coupled with the learning stress, as perceived by students who

participated in the scheme were both significantly lower, when compared to that of the control group. It was concluded that the scheme was effective in enhancing students' awareness on the interconnection between academic modules, and at the same time, reducing the assignment workload so that students felt less stressful during their learning, results which are especially indicative for an outcome-based higher curriculum. Future investigations should seek to measure the learning effectiveness of students under the scheme by both subjective and objective means.

References :

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