



## TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS IMPLEMENTING OUTCOME-BASED APPROACH FOR TEACHING YOUNG LEARNERS

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### Abstract:

In recent years, the implementation of outcome-based approach has been much emphasized as an increasing effort to improve educational quality and institutional accountability. Relatively contrary to the traditional education, outcome-based approach has put much emphasis on learners and their learning process. Understanding teachers' beliefs about learning outcomes and outcome-based approach can help reinforce teaching practices. This small-scaled study investigated a group of 32 teachers of young learners about their perceptions of implementing outcome-based education at the Center for Foreign Languages in Can Tho City in Vietnam. Overall, the teachers indicated positive perceptions towards practices of using learning outcomes and presented typical challenges of implementing learning outcomes for teaching young learners. There were several major recommendations for teachers for effective implementation of outcome-based approach.

**Keywords:** challenges, learning outcomes, outcome-based approach, perceptions

### 1. Introduction

In recent decades, educational trends have shown a shift from the traditional teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach. This alternative model focuses on what the learners are expected to be able to do at the end of the course or program. Hence, this approach commonly referred to as an outcome-based approach. In contrast with traditional education, outcome-based approach puts much emphasis on the learning process in which specific and clearly defined outcomes are described to the learners so that they will be able to set their own expectations and means to achieve the desired outcomes. In outcome-based approach, learners are responsible for their own learning and the assessment of learning are based on the outcomes instead of the contents being taught. While a number of studies on outcome-based approach were undertaken in

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higher education contexts in many countries, it appears that few studies of this approach have been done with young learners in Vietnamese context. This study aims at exploring teachers' perceptions towards implementing outcome-based approach for teaching children at a center of foreign languages in Vietnam.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Learning outcomes**

In general context, learning outcomes are indicators of success of an academic course or program. Whether it is a short course or a degree program, the learning outcomes should be listed and written down before the start of the course to know and to check whether the course is designed and conducted perfectly. Based on the identified learning outcomes, teaching context, learning activities and assessment scheme have to be properly designed to successfully conduct and complete the course or program.

In the outcome literature, the term learning outcome is said to be anchored in the "objectives movement" at the beginning of the past century as well as in the theories on "mastery learning" and the works of Benjamin Bloom of the 1950s. The development of the concept of learning outcomes is described as a linear process, starting with the objectives movement, continuing through the mastery learning theories, before ending up in today's outcome-based education movement (King and Evans 1991; Spady and Marshall 1991; Brady 1997).

The concept of learning outcomes may be defined in a myriad of ways due to different perspectives on learning and various purposes for working with outcomes. A survey of the literature on learning outcomes comes up with several of similar definitions of the term. According to Jenkins and Unwin (2001), learning outcomes are statements of what is expected that the student will be able to do as a result of learning the activity, or defined by Donnelly and Fitzmaurice (2005), learning outcomes are statements of what the learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do at the end of a period of learning.

### **2.2. Outcome-based approach**

Traditionally, teaching is more teacher-centric and content-based where the planning of teaching is mostly concerned with the content and teaching methods. The teaching process focuses on transmitting knowledge and most importantly, learners are assessed by how well they have received knowledge. Outcome-based approach, on the other hand, is learner-centric and outcome-based in which the learning process is concerned with what the learners will know and be able to do; teaching process aims to devise teaching and learning activities that require learners to demonstrate how well they have achieved learning outcomes and the assessment is an ongoing process, emphasizing on outcomes. (Nakkeeran et al., 2018). In a general context, outcome-based approach offers many advantages. It emphasizes the accountability of the learning process. It encourages the teacher and the learner to share responsibility for learning and it can guide learner

assessment and course evaluation. But despite its typical advantages, outcomes-based approach probably has its issues. One of the problems is that curriculum designers and teachers tend to control product-orientated curricula, and can be constrained by outcomes, leading to the limited creativity in teaching (Villaluz, 2017). Regarding the outcomes, many opponents dislike them because they think the outcomes' standards maybe too easy, too hard, or wrongly conceived (Eldeep & Shatakumari, 2013).

### **2.3. Implementing outcome-based approach for teaching young learners**

Learning outcomes are a reflection of what children know or are able to do as a result of a learning activity. To help increase young learners' awareness of their own learning, explicitly-stated learning outcomes should be developed and shared with the learners so that learners clearly understand beforehand what they are going to learn from the lesson or the course. By achieving the specific learning outcomes, learners can demonstrate that they have successfully gained good performance. The learning outcomes for each class not only help the teachers to direct their teaching and learning process in the desired manner but also make other stakeholders such as the parents and the community to be responsible and alert towards their role for ensuring quality education (Mahajan & Singh, 2017).

- Learning outcomes give a clear idea of what and how much to teach and plan accordingly.
- Learning outcomes help teachers design their teaching material more effectively.

## **3. Material and methods**

### **3.1. Research context: CFL and its implementing outcome-based approach for teaching young learners**

The Center of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University (hereafter referred to as the Center or CFL) has provided varieties of fee-paid courses of foreign languages. There are two major programs of English at the Center: General English for adults and General English for children. Currently there are 39 children's classes of three levels from young kids, kids and teenagers. The children's classes meet two times per week, on Saturday and Sunday in the morning or afternoon. The class size is relatively small, ranging from 10 to 24 learners. Each course last 9 weeks.

Since 2019, the Center has embarked on a journey to review its approaches to teaching and learning by implementing outcome-based approach. With the aim to enhance learners' engagement in learning and increase accountability of the learning process, the Center has reviewed the exiting curriculum and coursebooks to select LOs for each level. The learning outcomes have been printed and distributed to each learner when registering a new course. The Center also reconstructed all kinds of tests from the mid-course to end-of-course so that learning outcomes can be linked to assessment on the basis that each outcome can be assessed. More importantly, teachers were trained to design and implement relevant teaching activities that will best lead learners to desired

attainment. In addition to training teachers with teaching methods, the Center has provided supplemental materials on the e-learning system so that learners can have more self-study activities to focus on expected learning outcomes.

### 3.2. Research design

The descriptive survey design was employed in this study, in which questionnaires were distributed to all current teachers of the children's classes at the Center. The survey method is appropriate as it entails the development of a questionnaire based on the literature review of learning outcomes.

### 3.3. The participants

The study group consists of a total of 32 teachers who were teaching classes of young learners. There are 27 female teachers and 5 male teachers as presented in Table 1. Most teachers are young in their career, and they are within the age range of 25 to 55 years. Sixteen teachers had less than 5 years of teaching experience and the other 16 teachers had over 5 years of experience.

**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Female	27	84.4%
Male	5	15.6%
Teaching experience		
Less than five years	16	50%
Five years or over	16	50%

### 3.4. Instrument

Teachers of the young learners' programs were invited to respond to an online survey. There are two sections in the questionnaire. Section 1 consists of eight closed-end questions about teachers' perceived importance of learning outcomes, and Section 2 with 2 open questions asking teachers to present typical challenges and suggestions for improving the implementation of learning outcomes in teaching young learners.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Results

All the participants completed the questionnaire, and the data were analyzed, using descriptive and thematic analysis.

#### 4.1.1. How much are you (teachers) concerned with the importance of learning outcomes in your teaching?

Overall, the teachers in this study had high level of awareness with the importance of learning outcomes. The overall mean score is 4.44 for the five items as shown in Table 2.

It is natural that the statement “learning outcomes help teachers plan a lesson effectively” had the highest mean score (M = 4.81) as lesson planning is a fundamental procedure in structuring individual lesson outcomes that are mutually supportive of the overall course outcomes (Suharti et al., 2021). The two statements “learning outcomes give a clear idea of what and how much to teach accordingly” and “learning outcomes help teachers design their teaching material more effectively” also had relatively high mean scores, indicating the participants’ perceived importance with learning outcomes in their teaching. It is slightly unexpected that the item related to assessment “learning outcomes work as a kind of evidences related to summative learning goals” had the lowest mean score with 4.13. It is possible that teachers in this study may perceive learning outcomes not only as a product but learning should be assessed during the process.

**Table 2:** Mean Scores of Importance of Learning Outcomes in Teaching (N = 32)

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Learning outcomes help teachers plan a lesson effectively.	4	5	4.81	.397
Learning outcomes give a clear idea of what and how much to teach accordingly.	3	5	4.53	.567
Learning outcomes help teachers design their teaching material more effectively.	3	5	4.50	.568
Learning outcomes help teachers select appropriate strategies for teaching.	3	5	4.25	.568
Learning outcomes work as a kind of evidences related to summative learning goals.	2	5	4.13	.793
<b>Overall mean</b>			<b>4.44</b>	

#### **4.1.2. To what extent do you think the learning outcomes are meaningful for learners on their learning?**

Overall, the mean scores of all items were relatively high with the average mean score is 4.49 as shown in Table 3. It is expected that the two statements “learning outcomes give a clear idea to the learners of what they are going to learn or achieve at the end of the class before the start of every class” and “learning outcomes highlight what exactly learners should know to achieve from that particular course” had the relatively high mean scores of 4.69 and 4.59, respectively. It is natural that the main purpose of learning outcomes is to help learners have clear lesson or course expectations. The statement “learning outcomes make learners study on their own and come to the class well-prepared” had the lowest mean score of 4.19. The reason for this can be that young learners are generally perceived as not being highly motivated for their own independent learning; however, this explanation needs further investigation.

**Table 3: Mean Scores of Importance of Learning Outcomes with Learners**

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Learning outcomes give a clear idea to the learners of what they are going to learn or achieve at the end of the class before the start of every class.	4	5	4.69	.471
Learning outcomes highlight what exactly learners should know to achieve from that particular course.	4	5	4.59	.499
Learning outcomes make learners study on their own and come to the class well-prepared.	3	5	4.19	.644
<b>Overall mean</b>			<b>4.49</b>	

#### 4.1.3. What are some challenges of implementing outcome-based approach for teaching young learners?

The participants were invited to present some typical challenges and limitations of implementing learning outcomes in their teaching. A number of teachers indicated mixed level of learners as the most serious challenge for effective teaching to achieve expected learning outcomes. Additionally, the level of difficulty of learning outcomes is another challenge for weaker learners. Some comments included:

*“The level learners are different; it’s hard for all the learners to succeed with expected learning outcomes.”*

*“The learners are too young to seriously think about importance of learning outcomes.”*

*“Large class with mixed levels is my biggest challenge to implement outcome-based approach.”*

*“Some types of questions in mid-course and end-of-course tests are not relevant for measuring learning outcomes”.*

This is also a common issue shared by several participants in implementing outcome-based approach.

*“Vocabulary questions are challenging for memorizing and completing.”*

*“Some parts of test questions are difficult to complete.”*

*“There are so many sentence structures in the test that learners hardly fulfil.”*

In regard with learning materials, several teachers mentioned this issue as a challenge when not all learners can access e-learning system for further practice with learning outcomes.

Some teachers in this study were also worried about implementing outcome-based approach when learners may choose their learning to cope with examination purposes, but not learn English for fun and for knowledge. Sharing this view, some teachers also indicated the pressure of learning that many parents may have for their children to achieve learning outcomes for prestige or awards.

#### **4.1.4. Would you suggest any effective ways of using learning outcomes to improve the quality of teaching and learning?**

Teachers in this study were also invited to suggest effective ways for improving the implementation of outcome-based approach. It is worth noting that a number of participants were satisfactory with the current strategies the Center has used to implement outcome-based approach. Several participants suggested that learning outcomes would be more effective when learners, especially their parents can be informed of learning outcomes before the start of the course. Additionally, teachers should discuss these expected learning outcomes with learners and guide the learners effectively to achieve good performance. Some of the common comments were as follows:

*“Learners should be informed of the criteria at the beginning of the course and reminded during their learning.”*

*“Parents should be informed about learning outcomes so that they can help their kids review and prepare the lessons at home.”*

Another practical suggestion with the test development is that tests should have open questions so that learners can be evaluated more comprehensively, not only by memorizing. Additionally, the assessment should be continuous so that learners are always best prepared for their learning.

To improve the effects of implementing outcome-based approach, some teachers also required the Center to apply the policy of “carrot and stick” as a motivational approach for learners to perform effectively.

## **4.2. Discussion**

Outcome-based approach is an educational trend and has gained increasing prominence in many parts of the world. From the results of the study, we can assume that the perceived importance of learning outcomes in teaching and learning is quite high. In line with existing literature of learning outcomes (Mahajan & Singh, 2017), the purpose of learning outcomes is to give a clear idea of what can be achieved for a lesson or a course. Based on the identified learning outcomes, teaching context, learning activities and assessment scheme have to be properly designed to successfully conduct and complete the course or program. The teachers in this study highlighted lesson planning around learning outcomes as the most important step to provide learners with an opportunity to

explore, build, and demonstrate their learning. This approach shifts the learning environment from one which is very teacher-centered to one that is very learner-centered. In this study, from the participants' perceptions, learning outcomes not only serve the purpose of directing the content and design of a lesson or a course, they also form the basis of assessment. The results are relatively in accordance with previous study (Lile & Bran, 2014), indicating that Effective assessments must be connected to the desired learning outcomes. In this manner, different methods of assessment should match to different kinds of learning outcomes. More importantly, assessment should be continuous and combines both summative and formative forms.

In regard to challenges of implementing learning outcomes, the study has uncovered the issue of mixed levels of learners as the key challenge of implementing outcome-based approach. The result is partially in line with previous research (Monks & Schmidt, 2011), reporting that class size has direct effect on learners' performance. As suggested in methodology literature, an effective approach to help learners with learning outcomes in heterogeneous, mixed-level classes is to undertake task-based language teaching in which teachers can begin with a needs analysis to determine the types of real-life tasks learners need to accomplish, and then classroom tasks are developed to meet the learners' language use needs (Abbott, 2018).

## **5. Recommendations**

The following are several major suggestions for optimal results of implementing outcome-based approach. Teachers should keep learners' learning as the priority. Using learning outcomes will provide information on what learners are expected to achieve after each class period or at the end of the course. The expected learning outcomes should always be included in course syllabi at the beginning of the course. In addition, teachers should be more flexible in teaching. Both teaching and learning methods can be restructured to improve learners' performance. Young children generally are less engaged in class because teachers often focus on theoretical part of a class. Brainstorming classes with fun projects can grab learners' engagement. More importantly, teachers should be able to assess their learners' learning potential. Assessment should link learners' performance to specific learning outcome in order to provide useful information to both learners and teachers about learning and teaching, respectively.

## **6. Conclusion**

Outcome-based approach has gained increasing attention in many parts of the world. In this study, teachers have positive perceptions toward implementing outcome-based approach for teaching young children. Despite some typical challenges such as dealing with mixed levels of learners, outcome-based approach is a valuable tool for improving educational quality and institutional accountability. When learning outcomes, learning

experiences, and assessment tasks are aligned, this outcome-based approach can enhance quality assurance and increase institutional accountability.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

### **About the Author**

Luu Nguyen Quoc Hung is an English lecturer at Can Tho University. He has been teaching English for 29 years, and currently a director of the Center for Foreign Languages, Can Tho University in Vietnam. He holds a BA in TESOL from Can Tho University, an MEd in Educational Leadership and Management from RMIT International University, Vietnam, and a PhD in Education from the University of Wollongong, Australia. His research interests focus on academic performance appraisal and quality assurance in higher education, social-cognitive theory in teaching and learning, and pedagogy of teaching English for young learners, and teaching English skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

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