

## ALTERNATIVE APPROACH FOR DESIGNING CURRICULA IN GENERAL DEGREE STUDY PROGRAMS: A LESSON FROM SRI LANKA

**Dr. Lal Mervin Dharmasiri**

Professor, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, [sisilel@yahoo.com](mailto:sisilel@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

Curriculum Development (CD) is an vital requirement for updating available or newly designed curricular and is an process of improving the curriculum. Several approaches has been used in developing a curricula in the field of education. Commonly used approaches Consist of analysis (i.e. situation, need analysis, task analysis), Design (i.e. objectives and design curricular), Selecting (i.e. chose of appropriate learning outcomes and teaching methods, chose of appropriate assessment method), Formation ( i.e. formation of the curriculum implementation and evaluating committee) and Review ( i.e. curriculum review committee) (CaDSFR). The designing part of the CaDSFR has been modified as an organism approach of this experiment.

The major objective of this study is to apply an alternative approach for designing of new curricular for the General Degree Study Programs (GDSP). In additions, an alternative model will develop for identifying and illustrating the organism approach.

The methodology that has been applied for the CD has five folds, i.e. (a) Selecting and appointing an Educationist and Subject Specialists for each subject streams of the faculty from outside the university and they were assigned for the task, (b) Conducting a workshop for Curriculum Planning, (c) Conducting mini-workshops at Department level for discussing bench mark and other issues related to CD, (d) Formulating a Common Framework for the CD and (e) Finalizing the CD. Stakeholders' views and consultation from outside the university have provided excellent feedback and support for the CD. The five folds strategies have been applied for the CD of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) of the University of Kelaniya in Sri Lanka in 2013/14. The FSS has nine Departments and been offering seventeen Degree programs including General Degrees, Special Degrees and Postgraduate Degrees like M.A., M.S.Sc., M.phil. and PhD. The Consist analysis of the CaDSFR strongly proven the urgency of revising the GDSP, because available curricular is older than a decade. Accordingly, the CaDSFER process has been applied for the CD. In particular, novel approach of five folds that applied for designing part of the curricular of the FSS and the process is near to completion. As a different program, the experiences CD process of the FSS may useful for the respective parties who involve with CD.

**Keywords:** Curriculum development, need analysis, organism approach.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to a find single and clear definition of 'curriculum'. In brief, learning content as defined by syllabi, those are translated into textbook/ s and other learning sources. One of broader definitions includes all desired learning experiences within the school environment including those not defined in the official curriculum (IIEP - UNESCO, 2009). A term of 'curriculum' should be taken to mean 'the organization of sequences of learning experiences in view of producing desired learning outcomes' (Tawil and Harley, 2004). They have further elaborated the curriculum as a 'legislative decrees, policy documents, curriculum frameworks, syllabi, textbooks and instructional materials'.

It is an vital requirement to revise the existing curricular from school level to university and other tertiary levels emphasized by several Government authorities during the last decades (Ministry of Education Sri Lanka, 1981; Sri Lanka Sessional paper, 1990). In addition, report of the Presidential Commission on Youth and many scholars also have already identified several shortcoming of the higher education sector in Sri Lanka. Lack of

institutional training, outdated curricula, lack of proficiency in English, lack of soft skills, inadequate IT knowledge and attitude of graduates towards overestimation of the quality of degree are some of major issues of the higher education sector in the country. Therefore, the existing curricular and teaching and learning methodology should be changed to avoid the weakness of the existing system and able to produce a competence and skillful graduates with new system from the Sri Lankan universities. The Ministry of Higher Education has been instructing to introduce Student' Centered Learning (SCL) as well as Outcome Based Education (OBE) system at all the universities in Sri Lanka. The SCL method is particularly appropriate for higher education sector (Whitehead, 1970) and the new methods that have been followed in many developing countries such as teaching students by peer students (Wood, 1978). The OBE is Methods of SCL that focus on empirically measuring student performance (the "outcome"). OBE contrasts with traditional education, which primarily focuses on the resources that are available to the student, which are called inputs.

Curriculum Development (CD) is an vital requirement for updating available or newly designed curricular and is an process of improving the curriculum. Several approaches have been used in developing curricula in the field of education. Commonly used approaches consist of analysis (i.e. situation, need analysis, task analysis), Design (i.e. objectives and design curricular), Selecting (i.e. chose of appropriate learning outcomes and teaching methods, chose of appropriate assessment method), Formation (i.e. formation of the curriculum implementation and evaluating committee) and Review (i.e. curriculum review committee) (CaDSFR). The designing part of the CaDSFR has been modified as an organism approach of this experiment.

The major objective of this study is to apply an alternative approach for designing of new curricular for the General Degree Study Programs (GDSP). In additions, an alternative model will develop for identifying and illustrating the organism approach.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

We have submitted a Development Proposal (DP) for enhancing the quality and relevance of the General Degree Study Programs (GDSP) to the QIG, Windows 1 & 2 of the HETC project under the World Bank in 2013. The proposal has been approved with some modifications. Accordingly, we have further developed a new mechanism for conducting the CD of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS). Before preparing the DP, we have done several analyses i.e. SWOT, Gap and need analyses.

SWOT and Gap analysis administered and have identified several gaps and weaknesses which are detrimental to the employability of present graduates. They are lack of institutional training, outdated curricula, lack of proficiency in English, lack of soft skills, inadequate IT knowledge and attitude of graduates towards overestimation of the quality of degree.

The Gap analysis showed us that the existing curricular had not catered to produce graduates to meet the needs of available job opportunities. Inadequacy of experience in interactive learning has weakened their competencies. Lack of institutional training acquired through internship also hindered the employability of graduate to a greater extend. These factors were further ascertained by the responses of external stakeholders who are the employers of our graduates.

The need analysis has proven that CD is of the FSS is essential and urgent task. Accordingly, we have formulated a new approach of five folds for conducting the CD process.

- (a) Selecting and appointing an Educationist and Subject Specialists for each subject streams of the faculty from outside the university and they were assigned for the task,
- (b) Conducting a workshop for Curriculum Planning,
- (c) Conducting mini-workshops at Department level for discussing bench mark and other issues related to CD,
- (d) Formulating a Common Framework for the CD and
- (e) Finalizing the CD. Stakeholders' views and consultation from outside the university have provided excellent feedback and support for the CD.

We have published advertisements for selecting an Overall Consultant (OC) and several other Subject Specialists (SS) per each subject that offer by each departments of the faculty on national newspapers and

university web site. Selection committee appointed by the faculty has selected suitable candidates for each post. The selected OC and SSs have signed an agreement with the university that they do the CD within the given framework and time framework.

The five folds strategies have been applied for the CD of the FSS of the University of Kelaniya (UOK) in Sri Lanka in 2013/14. The faculty has nine Departments and been offering seventeen Degree programs including General Degrees, Special Degrees and Postgraduate Degrees like M.A., M.S.Sc., M.phil. and PhD. The Consist analysis of the CaDSFR strongly proven the urgency of revising the GDSP, because available curricular is older than a decade. Accordingly, the CaDSFER process has been applied for the CD. In particular, novel approach of five folds that applied for designing part of the curricular of the FSS and the process is near to completion. As a different program, the experiences CD process of the FSS may useful for the respective parties who involve with CD.

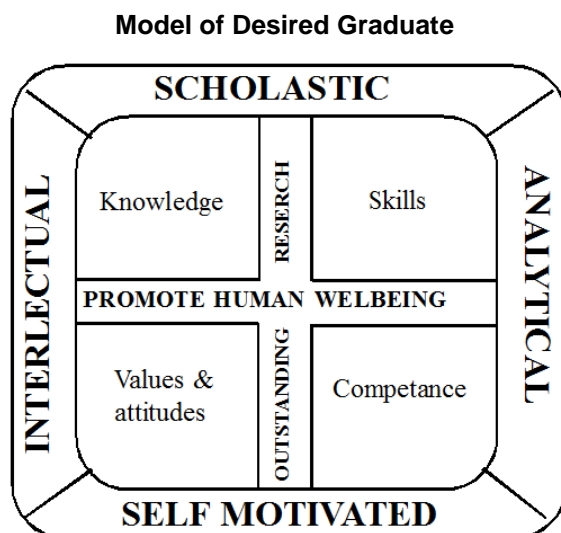
We have conducted several workshops under the second, third and fourth strategies of the CaDSFER. Workshop on Curriculum Planning (WCP), Workshop on Designing Curricular (WDC) and Student's Centered Learning; Outcome based Learning and Setting up a Common Framework for the GDSP were important segments of the CaDSFER. Finally, all the parties discussed the matters related to CD of the FSS and forwarded for approval of the higher bodies of the university.

It is an essential pre-request to prepare a 'Desired Graduate Profile' as a bench mark of the CaDSFER. The OC, SSs and other academics can further develop the profile with necessary modifications. The profile that we have developed for the CD of the faculty is as follows;

### 3.0 DESIRE GRADUATE PROFILE

We have focused on the GDSP of the UOK. We have applied an SWOT and Gap analysis to understand the reality. The major findings of the two analyses were the current graduate profile of the GDSP delays employment in the job market. To overcome the constraints, a desired graduate profile has been formulated. Figure 1 shows the desired performance of the graduates of the FSS at the UOK.

Figure; 1



According to the desired profile, the graduate would be able to acquire new knowledge in respective social sciences fields. To achieve this goal, student centered learning provides a novel approach particularly through interactive learning. Skills development helps undergraduates to use knowledge and practice according to the principles of study. The undergraduates must acquire a variety of skills as referred to by *NCIHE, (1997)*, as 'key skills', 'core skills', 'generic skills', 'personal skills' and 'employability skills' while *CVCP (1998)* tip-off skills as

'capabilities' and 'personal competencies'.

The communication skills including English knowledge may assimilate our graduates with the global community, leading them to be scholastic and intellectual persons. The competence in applying knowledge and skills, to solve issues in day to day life, and to meet the challenges of the age is a prime necessity of employable graduates, today. Changing the values and attitudes of the graduates would enable the promotion of human well-being. In particular, that would leads to establish an ethnic cohesion in the multi-ethnic community of the country.

When undergraduates can identify the values and norms of all aspect of life, they would become self-motivated. The desired graduate should have competence in producing outstanding research. It would help to create sustainable peace and sustainable development of the country.

### 3.0 CONCLUSION

Success of the curricular is depending on several factors. It should not only depend on major subjects but also other components. Giving weight for the major subjects were minimum of one third and maximum of two thirds of the total credits during the program/ degree (GDSP) period. Rest of credits can be obtained from other subjects designed for achieving different skills. Table 1: An open matrix for curriculum design, illustrates the vital component of designing curricular as they apply to the higher education sector in particular in the field of arts or liberal arts.

In conclusion, the alternative approach of the CaDSFR may be useful for developing a curricular at the higher education sector in particular, degree programs of the universities. The planners can be applied different strategies to fulfill the objectives of the CD. Guest lectures which are based on SCL and OBE may be useful when doing the curricular. Finally, the CD is not only an individual task, but also a team work of the academics.

Table 1.

**An Open Matrix for Curriculum Design**

Competence	Categories
Skills	Writing skills in in the medium of study Reading skills in a second language Communication skills in other national language
Creative skills	Music, dance, arts, photography, filming etc,
Knowledge and skills	Mathematics and Statistics Critical thinking Research methodology
Knowledge in Social sciences	History, Archaeological heritage and Society
Values and Spirituality	Ethics and values as taught in major religion Spirituality and meditation of success in life Conflict resolution and peace Social harmony
Knowledge in Natural sciences	Basic science Bio diversity Nutrition and health

Knowledge in culture	Cultural heritage Religious heritage Cultural values and norms
Appreciation of literature	Creative writing

Compiled by author, 2014

It can be concluded that Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) is one of the fundamental requirements in the curriculum design, planning, implementation and evaluation. Deciding the resource persons and the whole composition of the CDC is prior requirement. Though the senior most outstanding subject matter specialists are available, the leader the educational matter specialist mostly co-presumed by the leader itself and the group vice-versa has to play a both mediating and controlling role which brings quality results. Undergraduates are mostly inculcated to the world of work through soft skills while subject knowledge leads to an organizational fitness and social acceptance. Proficient Graduate Profile prepared for the FSS would eventually pave the way for the effective delivery both implicit and explicit implications. This can be considered as a paradigm shift not only for FSS, but for the Faculty of Humanities presumably the whole university system of Sri Lanka. Performances of the peer groups both horizontal and vertical, senior most vs. budding, perennial discussion, effective coordination, offer of lucrative incentives, identifying individual rapporteur from each department of studies, adoption of work ethic and norm system for the Faculty staff, effective time management in the very hectic work schedule in the FSS.

#### 4.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Vice Chancellor, Prof. Sunanda Madduma Bandara and former Vice Cahnccellor, Prof. Sarath Amunugama of the UOK have been giving guidance and instruction to success of the CD. The Dean of the FSS, Prof. Chandana Abhayarathne also played a key role in administering and scrutinizing different activities of the CD process. The OC, Prof. (Mrs.) Kalyani Perera and all other SSSs have contributed their knowledge, skills and experiences for developing the curricular of the FSS. All the Head of the Departments, Senior and junior staff members of the FSS also substantially supported the mission. It is appreciated that the valuable suggestions and different support have been made by Prof. U.A. Chandrasena, Prof. W.A. Weerasooriya and others. The whole process was being carried out with the financial support of the HETC project of the World Bank.

#### REFERENCES

Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals of The Universities of The United Kingdom (CVCP), (1998), Skills Development in Higher Education (London, CVCP).

International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), UNESCO, Guide Book for Planning in Emergencies and Reconstruction [Online: web] Accessed 02<sup>nd</sup> July, 2014, URL:  
[http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Cap\\_Dev\\_Technical\\_Assistance/pdf/Guidebook/Guidebook%20Chapters/GB\\_2009\\_4.1\\_final.pdf](http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Cap_Dev_Technical_Assistance/pdf/Guidebook/Guidebook%20Chapters/GB_2009_4.1_final.pdf)

National Committee of Inquiry in to Higher Education (NCIHE), 1997, Higher Education in the Learning Society (London, HMSO).

Tawil, S and Harley, A. (eds.) (2004) Education, Conflict and Social Cohesion (Studies in comparative education). Geneva. IBE-UNESCO.

Whitehead, A.N. (1976) The education of teachers in Rubinstein, D. and Stoneman, C. ed. Education for democracy, London.

Wood, G.R. (1978) Self instruction in universities: Account of an experiment. Bulletin of the Unesco Regional Office for Education in Asia and Oceania. 19. p.174-178.

Sessional Paper (1990) Report on Presidential Commission on Youths, Colombo.