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Pragmatic research pedagogy in times of disruption: Negotiated inquiry within an outcomes-based education framework

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Abstract

Higher education in the Philippines has been repeatedly disrupted by crises such as typhoons and other natural disasters. These events magnified structural inequities, particularly in students' access to electricity, internet, and stable digital tools. This paper examines how negotiated inquiry, framed within the principles of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), can sustain essential learning outcomes in research pedagogy under crisis conditions. Drawing from documented communications and practices in a research class, the study shows how pragmatic adjustments such as redefined course goals, essentialized assessments, flexible grading, provision of asynchronous materials, and learner-centered accommodations enabled continuity of learning. The study also highlights that sustaining these strategies requires institutional support through faculty development and learning infrastructure support for both teachers and learners. Findings suggest that even in contexts of disruption, outcomes can be achieved by focusing on core competencies rather than compliance, but long-term resilience depends on systemic investment in pedagogy and digital learning infrastructure.

Keywords: OBE, SDGS 4, 10, 16, negotiated inquiry, research pedagogy,

Introduction

Situating the study in a time of disruption

Disruptions caused by natural disasters exposed systemic inequities in higher education. Students experienced uneven access to electricity, internet, and other resources required for remote learning (Czerniewicz *et al.*, 2020) ^[4]. Conventional course requirements, designed for stable environments, became untenable and risked excluding already vulnerable learners. In the Philippine context, Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) provides the overarching framework for curriculum and assessment. OBE emphasizes clarity of intended learning outcomes, alignment of activities with these outcomes, and assessments that allow learners to demonstrate competencies (CHED, 2021) ^[3]. Under crisis conditions, however, the challenge for faculty is twofold: to remain faithful to OBE mandates while ensuring equity among students with unequal access (Macaranas & Bay, 2022) ^[8].

This paper explores one research course where faculty and students engaged in negotiated inquiry, leading to pragmatic adjustments in pedagogy. By focusing on essentials, redefining assessment, and making resources available asynchronously, the course preserved outcomes while responding to disruptions and inequities.

Pedagogical Anchors: Outcomes, Equity, and Flexibility

The Nature of Research and Pedagogy

Research education demands inquiry, critical thinking, and reflexivity. It requires students to develop competencies in formulating problems, engaging with theory, and designing methods (Leavy, 2020) ^[6]. Teaching research, therefore, cannot be reduced to compliance-driven tasks but must cultivate the skills that outcomes explicitly demand. Faculty must also be prepared to teach these competencies in digital and hybrid environments, a skill set that requires continuous professional development.

Outcomes-Based Education Principles

Outcomes-Based Education rests on three fundamental principles. The first is Intended Learning Outcomes, which underscores the importance of clarity about what students are

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expected to achieve by the end of a course or program. Clearly articulated outcomes provide both teachers and learners with a shared roadmap of competencies to be developed. The second principle is Alignment, which ensures that learning activities and assessments are deliberately structured to support the intended outcomes. This principle emphasizes coherence between what is taught, how it is taught, and how achievement is measured. Finally, Assessment Validity requires that the outputs or tasks assigned to students genuinely demonstrate their attainment of the intended competencies. Valid assessments move beyond rote compliance and instead provide evidence of meaningful learning, allowing educators to judge whether the targeted outcomes have truly been achieved.

OBE does not prescribe uniformity of delivery. In principle, it allows flexibility in pathways, provided essential competencies are evidenced (Spady, 2021) ^[11]. However, operationalizing flexibility under conditions of disruption requires faculty who are trained in adaptive instructional strategies and institutions that provide the technological and infrastructural support necessary for outcome-driven teaching.

Crisis-Responsive Pedagogy

Global scholarship on education in emergencies emphasizes flexibility, minimalism in requirements, and recognition of learners' varied contexts. Studies show that equity is better served when assessments are essentialized and pedagogy adapts to available resources (Bozkurt *et al.*, 2020; Bao, 2020) ^[2, 1]. Yet scholars also caution that equity cannot rest solely on individual instructors' efforts. UNESCO (2021) ^[12] underscores the importance of institutional responsibility in building resilient education systems through investment in infrastructure and capacity-building for faculty. Without adequate support, crisis pedagogy risks becoming uneven, dependent on the initiative of individual educators rather than a systemic safeguard for student learning.

Negotiated Inquiry as Method and Context

This study used a qualitative design. Data were drawn from: (1) faculty announcements and negotiations documented through Google Classroom, (2) student questions and concerns, (3) posted course materials, including guides on writing a review of related literature (RRL), paraphrasing ideas, and drafting introductions, which students could access asynchronously, and (4) adjustments to course goals, grading, and modality agreed upon during orientation. The analysis traced how course requirements were negotiated and reframed. The lens of OBE was applied, focusing on how intended outcomes were preserved, how tasks were aligned, and how assessment was adapted to crisis realities.

Adaptive Practices in a Research Class

- **Redefining Course Goals and Grading:** Negotiations led to a shift in course goals: from 'presentation of a research report' to 'submission of a research proposal'. The grading scheme was adjusted to 60% process writing and 40% final output. This realignment preserved the intended learning outcome developing research competence while making assessment achievable under constraints.
- **Essentializing Outcomes:** The final requirement was further reduced to a proposal matrix, representing the

essential research competencies. This minimalist approach reflected OBE principles by ensuring that students could demonstrate mastery of intended outcomes even when unable to comply with multiple submissions.

- **Asynchronous and Flexible Modalities:** Survey results revealed that not all students could attend synchronous classes. In response, asynchronous modalities were emphasized. Weekly Open Educational Resources (OERs) were posted, discussion boards enabled interaction, and lecture discussions were made optional with transcripts provided for those absent. Students also had the option of portfolio-based submissions, with bins open until December 1, 2020, to allow work at their own pace (Means & Neisler, 2021) ^[9].
- **Flexible Grading Options:** Students were given the choice of a Pass (P) grade or a numerical grade, the latter based on the matrix and any prior submissions. This flexibility emphasized learning over compliance and acknowledged that different students had different capacities to complete tasks during disruption.
- **Student Agency in Negotiated Inquiry:** The process of openly responding to student concerns about deadlines, grades, and access created a form of negotiated inquiry. Students had a voice in shaping the learning process, reinforcing their agency and co-responsibility for outcomes (Rapanta *et al.*, 2020) ^[10].

Reimagining Research Pedagogy during Crisis

OBE in Crisis: Preserving Essentials

The case demonstrates that even under conditions of disruption, the fundamental principles of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) remain viable if course design is carefully restructured. By redefining course goals from the presentation of a full research report to the preparation of a research proposal, the instructor ensured that the essential competencies problem identification, literature review, and methodological framing remained intact. Similarly, realigning the grading scheme emphasized process writing and proposal development rather than exhaustive documentation, thereby focusing student effort on tasks most aligned with intended outcomes. The reduction of requirements to a single outcomes-based task, such as the proposal matrix, illustrates how assessments can be streamlined without compromising rigor. Importantly, the asynchronous provision of review of related literature (RRL) guides and writing materials further safeguarded learning continuity. These resources allowed students to progress toward course outcomes even when synchronous participation was impossible due to intermittent connectivity. This approach shows that OBE's strength lies in its clarity of intended learning outcomes, which provides a stable anchor for course design even in volatile learning contexts.

Pragmatic Pedagogy: Learning over Compliance

A second insight is the shift from a compliance-driven model of teaching toward what may be called a pragmatic pedagogy. Rather than equating learning with the completion of numerous assignments, the instructor distilled requirements into essential tasks that directly demonstrated mastery of outcomes. This approach relieved students from the burden of meeting rigid deadlines under unstable

conditions while keeping academic standards intact. Learning continuity was prioritized through asynchronous posting of essential resources and flexible submission timelines, embodying what Hodges *et al.* (2020) ^[5] describe as “minimum viable pedagogy”. The notion of pragmatism here does not imply lowering standards but recalibrating them so that rigor is expressed through critical demonstration of competencies rather than volume of submissions. This stance challenges the traditional conflation of effort with learning, foregrounding instead the quality of engagement with core research practices.

Equity and Flexibility

The case also highlights how OBE, when implemented flexibly, can advance equity. Students faced vastly different material conditions, with some losing electricity for weeks while others struggled with unstable internet connections. By keeping the Google Classroom open beyond the semester, posting weekly Open Educational Resources (OERs), and enabling portfolio-based submissions, the pedagogy acknowledged these disparities rather than erasing them under a uniform standard. This practice echoes UNESCO’s (2021) ^[12] call to design education systems that are resilient and inclusive, ensuring that disruptions do not exacerbate inequalities. Equity in this sense required not the lowering of expectations but the adaptation of delivery so that all students could reasonably access the means to achieve outcomes. The combination of open-ended timelines, asynchronous learning materials, and individualized accommodations represents a concrete instantiation of equity-driven teaching in higher education.

Negotiated Inquiry as Practice

Finally, the process of negotiation itself served as a pedagogical act. Students were invited to voice their concerns on deadlines, grading, and course expectations, and these concerns directly shaped the reconfiguration of the syllabus. This dialogic process foregrounded student realities as valid determinants of instructional design, reinforcing their agency in co-creating the learning environment. Negotiated inquiry thus not only sustained outcomes but also modeled reflexivity, which Levy and Petrulis (2021) ^[7] identify as a central element of authentic research practice. In this way, pedagogy mirrored the very qualities expected in research: openness to evidence, responsiveness to context, and co-construction of knowledge. Negotiated inquiry positioned students not as passive recipients of crisis accommodations but as active participants in shaping a pragmatic, outcome-driven pedagogy.

Toward institutional resilience in teaching and learning

Disruptions challenge conventional teaching but also create opportunities to reimagine pedagogy. This study illustrates how negotiated inquiry, aligned with OBE, sustained research education in crisis. By redefining course goals, essentializing outcomes, and providing asynchronous and flexible modalities, the course preserved rigor and fairness while responding to inequities in access.

For institutions, the key lesson is that OBE’s focus on outcomes can be reconciled with pragmatic crisis responses. However, sustaining such practices requires deliberate institutional support. Faculty must be equipped through continuous professional development in crisis-responsive pedagogy, digital instruction, and inclusive assessment

strategies. At the same time, learning infrastructure support is indispensable. Stable learning management systems, reliable internet connectivity, access to devices, and well-designed digital repositories must be ensured for both faculty and students. Without these enabling conditions, negotiated inquiry risks being an isolated practice rather than a systemic response.

Framed within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this approach aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) by ensuring continuity of learning despite disruption, SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by addressing disparities in access, and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) through investment in digital learning systems. Furthermore, the call for institutional reform echoes SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), which highlight the role of strong, collaborative institutions in building resilient education systems.

Crisis-responsive OBE frameworks must therefore be institutionalized so that student learning remains protected not by rigid structures, but by adaptable, equitable, and outcome-driven strategies supported by trained faculty, resilient learning infrastructure, and policy environments that advance the SDGs.

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