

Teacher Training in Higher Education: The Weakest Link

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India boasts of a thriving higher education scenario – 35000 colleges, 682 universities, thousands of colleges of technical and professional courses and 20 million students. But when we talk about teacher training colleges for college and universities teachers, surprisingly there is none. If we can have thousands of colleges to train school teachers, dedicated training institutions and academies to train bureaucrats, sportspersons and other professionals, why can't we have training colleges and courses for training teachers who join as college or university teachers? Whereas teacher training and continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers is an integral part of higher education in most of Anglo-American universities, why are the Indian Universities sleeping over this crucial aspect in higher education. It is a pity that the full-fledged teacher training institutions like the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad and Regional Institutes of English are doing away with regular teacher training programmes and have started imparting General English language and literature courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels to stay afloat financially. This clearly speaks of a general apathy towards meaningful teacher training for college and university teachers, especially at the time when they join the profession.

In this paper I will look into the prevailing teacher training practices in higher education and establish the need for a structured teacher training course for college and university teachers.

Why do we need teacher training courses?

Most of us who join as teachers are thrown into the deepest end of the pool – the classroom, without any support or safety equipment. If we drown the system can eject us and if somehow we manage to swim and survive, we continue to teach. In this scenario we seek help from our old teachers and try to model our lessons on the teaching of our own teachers who influenced us by their teaching style, knowledge and attitude towards students. I think by and large we are impressed by the classroom performance of our old teachers and we try to imitate that performance in our own classes. Teachers often feel important while performing before a large group and they believe good performance (holding learners' attention) is good teaching. But performance alone cannot result in good

learning. We know that learning takes place when there is meaningful interaction between learners and teacher and plenty of corrective feedback is given keeping in mind learners' individual difficulties. All this cannot be accomplished through performance alone. A teacher needs to reach out to each learner and this is quite difficult to do in a large class through a standard lecture performance, however entertaining that may be! So a teacher needs to learn many more aspects of the complex teaching learning dynamics to have a high surrender value in the classroom.

A teacher is central to the system of Higher Education and the success of the structure rests on his /her motivation and abilities. The earlier conception that a good teacher learns on the job or improves by emulating senior colleagues is dated now. Teachers need to acquire skill-sets, for the different kinds of roles they have to play to be successful educators. Given the importance of the communication and knowledge revolution, they have to continuously update their knowledge and also need to handle and be aware of the different kinds of databases available. Teachers also require an orientation to pedagogics, the science of teaching, because teaching is about communicating and becoming an effective communicator is not easy. Education is also about imparting values and the notion of the preceptor, that is, teaching by precept is an essential aspect of the Indian ethos. What values do we accept and how effectively can we communicate them is an important topic for discussion. Educators also double up as mentors, and require a basic knowledge of counselling and psychology—all this has to be learnt. In short a teacher is a professional who requires training in the technologies of teaching and for this he needs a clear and useful training course where he can learn and hone his teaching learning skills.

Training opportunities for College and University teachers

It is surprising that we have never felt the need of any pre-service teacher training for college and university teachers in India. We assume that armed with a good MA degree and the UGC NET, a candidate will perform successfully as a teacher. It is difficult to understand though how a good subject knowledge, which is measured by an MA and UGC NET, can guarantee an effective teacher in the classroom. Other degrees like an M.Phil or a Ph.D are purely research degrees. They may help us become good researchers but there is no guarantee that a good researcher is a good teacher. I think this is one of the weakest

links in higher education in India which needs to be addressed immediately keeping in view the fast changing needs and aspirations of both teachers and learners.

In the name of in-service teacher training we have two training programmes for college and university teachers: the Orientation Courses (OC) and the Refreshers Courses (RC). It is mandatory for every teacher to attend at least one OC and two RCs in his teaching career to be eligible to get the next higher pay scales. Orientation programme i of 4 week duration with minimum of 24 working days and 144 contact hours (6 hours a day); a Refresher Course is of 3 week duration with minimum of 18 working days and 108 contact hours (6 hours a day)

Orientation Programmes

The Orientation programmes have been designed to the newly appointed teachers of colleges and universities who have less than six years teaching experience. The curricula for these programmes have been organised in four components as suggested by the UGC.

Component A : Awareness of linkages between society, environment, development and education

Component B : Philosophy of education, Indian education system and pedagogy

Component C : Resource awareness and knowledge generation

Component D : Management and personality development

While component 'A' aims at helping the teacher to realise the larger perspectives of education and the role of the teacher in a society, component 'B' is to impart basic skills that a teacher needs for effective classroom teaching. The component 'C' aims at helping the teachers to be self-sufficient in keeping themselves continuously abreast of new knowledge and techniques, processes, methods and source of knowledge. The component 'D' facilitates the teacher to facilitate with the organisation and the management of the college/university. It aims to make the teachers to understand the interlocking of the various sub system within the college/university and appreciate the role and functions of a teacher within the system and they may develop their own personality.

Refresher Courses

The Refresher Courses are subject-centric and they aim to develop teachers' insights into the knowledge and pedagogic aspects of their respective subject areas. These are meant for

teachers of colleges and Universities with more than five years of experience. These courses provide opportunities for in service teachers to keep abreast of the latest advances in subjects concerned. They also provide a forum for them to exchange their experiences with the peer group and to mutually interact with each other.

Some weaknesses of the prevalent OCs and RCs

1. In contrast to a B.Ed. programme which is usually for one full year, the duration of OCs and RCs is too short to deliver anything worthwhile. Participants don't get enough time to learn and practice new concepts and skills of teaching and learning.
2. Linking the OCs and RCs to promotion and higher pay scales has affected teachers' motivation rather negatively. Majority of teachers look forward to receiving the certificate of attendance that will make them eligible for next promotion.
3. The UGC has given broad curriculum guidelines for OCs and RCs so that universities can customise these broad guidelines to their local conditions and deliver an effective training programme. But the downside is that broad and loose structure of these courses allows the Academic Staff Colleges to take liberties to include anything under the sun thereby minimizing the integrity of the course.
4. Resource Persons who teach at these courses have only a faint idea of the curriculum of OCs and RCs. They normally deliver talks based on their area of specialization without bothering about the integrity and continuity of the course. The course thus does not progress logically and coherently and participants often don't have a clear idea where the course is heading.
5. The teaching-learning methodology at OCs and RCs is teacher and lecture centred, and not participative. As a result many participants cannot share their own insights and experiences with other participants.
6. The participant feedback mechanism practised not at the end of these courses is not reliable. It does not measure how a participant has become a better teacher than he was earlier at the end of the course. Although in their study Sharma et al. (2013) have measured the effectiveness of OCs and RCs conducted at a University and have found the participants' feedback satisfactory in most aspects, I think we need to have a larger sample and sound feedback mechanism to have a better understanding.

The way forward

It is heartening to know that Vice-chancellors of all universities have been asked to focus on strengthening and improving teachers' education in universities. In a letter sent on June 30, 2014 Ved Prakash, Chairman, University Grants Commission (UGC), listed several steps that include synchronising teachers' education courses with the regulatory provisions stated in the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), formulating revised modules for refresher and orientation training for teacher educators, and promoting and running integrated teacher education programmes (TEPs). Prakash commented that UGC has been actively involved in issues relating to strengthening of existing education programmes along with new courses in all universities. He added that the universities, who are receiving grants, have already been directed to include the proposal for establishment of education departments in their XIIth Five Year Plan proposals.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Central government has understood the need for teacher training and has allocated Rs 500 crore for 'Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya New Teachers Training Programme' to infuse new training tools and motivate teachers. It is imperative that we put our heads together to make some concrete proposals to the UGC to make a strong case for the Pre-service and in-service training programmes for the college and university teachers. To begin with some of the important proposals can be as follows:

1. The Government should set up teacher training institutes for college and university teachers which should offer pre-service training, at least for 6 months. This training should focus on such components as practice teaching, materials production, materials adaptation, personal skills and knowledge development, use of innovative teaching methodologies that incorporate the use of online learning and multimedia, a component on nation building and ethics and so on.
2. The duration of an in-service training course should at least be for a month with 8 hours work per day. The in-service training programmes should brush up teachers' knowledge and provide them with ample opportunities for practising their teaching skills with new technological tools and produce and adapt their own teaching materials to supplement and enrich their teaching. They should be issued a Certificate of Attendance with appropriate Grade so that they stay focussed on learning seriously.
3. We should also create an online training course that teachers should be able to access anytime, anywhere as per their needs and convenience. Universities should also create

websites and load them with appropriate resources. Such websites should also have discussion Forums where both teachers and students can have threaded discussions on important issues.

4. The Academic Staff Colleges need to play a key role in implementing in-service training programmes and they should minimally aim to achieve the following objectives:

- To set up a documentation-centre-cum-library for reference and source materials necessary so that teachers become adept in using electronic resources.
- To produce specially designed materials required for effective implementation of the courses.
- To organise, monitor and evaluate courses for teachers.
- To try to create a culture of learning & self-improvement among teachers so that this culture becomes an integral part of the educational system.
- To provide opportunities for teachers in service to exchange experience with their peers and to mutually learn from each other.
- To provide a forum for serving teachers to keep themselves abreast of the latest advances in various subjects.
- To provide opportunities to further widen their knowledge and to pursue research studies.
- To provide an introduction to new methods and innovations in higher education so that the participants can in turn develop their own innovative methods of instruction.

References

Sharma, R., Khurad, A. and Parasher, G. (2013) Evaluation of quality and effectiveness of orientation and refresher courses organized by Academic Staff College. *Techno LEARN*: 3 (2): 87-93.

UGC Chairman's Letter: See more at: <http://digitalllearning.eletsonline.com/2014/07/ugc-emphasises-on-teachers-training-courses/#sthash.UovKstp8.dpuf>

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