

Teachers' Training-A Grey Area in Higher Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory study was to determine current in-service training needs of university faculty of N.W.F.P in Pakistan. A survey/descriptive research methodology was used to conduct the study. The target population of the study consisted of all faculty members working in public sector universities of N.W.F.P. The study assessed teachers' priorities for National Teaching standards and their competence with thirty professional competencies using a self developed research instrument. The overall in-service training needs were analyzed and teaching standards were ranked using mean, standard deviation, t-test and ANOVA. The top four in-service training needs by university faculties included assessment skills, use of information technologies in educational setting, communication skills, and classroom management skills. The result of this study has practical implications for developing teachers' training programmes in Pakistan. The government and donor agencies programs should study how the top in-service areas can be addressed in training workshops. Further needs assessment studies need to be conducted across public universities in Pakistan in order to build a baseline of research data, which may be used by the policy makers before training workshops designed.

Keywords: Higher Education, Needs assessment, University faculty, Professional training, In-service training

1. Introduction

Higher education plays the role of leadership in a society. Higher Education incorporates new ideas in a society and plays the role of a change agent. It brings change in the life style of the people constituting that social group. It influences the economic condition of the people which results in the economic prosperity of that country. Higher education serves as foundation of the entire system of education. It provides direction to the prospective policy makers of the country (Government of Pakistan, 2005).

In Pakistan higher education is mostly imparted by a number of public and private universities. At tertiary level, the government of Pakistan is trying her best to impart quality education but quality of higher education cannot be achieved without quality teachers. Faculty is the heart and soul of the university, and without an active and well qualified faculty it will not be possible to have meaningful development in this sector. Faculty development cannot be viewed in isolation and must be considered together with the development of an environment conducive to academics, as well as research and development in the universities. Faculty development programmes must also address factors pertaining to retention of qualified faculty in the public sector higher education institutions. Since teacher is the nucleus of the whole educational system and the most important figure for initiating radical and effective changes in the learning process, all attempts have to be made to generate creative teachers who are qualitatively skilled and empowered through a continuous professional development process. The teaching staff as change agents, can bring about a national revolution through their united premeditated thinking, develop and execute novel and innovative system of education (<http://www.hec.gov.pk>).

The commonly known Dearing Report (1997) published by the National Committee of inquiry into Higher Education in UK clearly spelled out in one of its recommendation that: "We recommend that institutions of higher education begin immediately to develop or seek access to programmes for teacher training of their staff, if they don't have them". In our country, rigorous efforts have been made by the government and the donor community to investigate the causes of poor quality of education. No doubt quality of staff is of vital importance but there are other factors also that influence the effectiveness of a country's educational system such as adequate physical facilities; a relevant and interesting curriculum; a credible system for monitoring and assessing education outcomes are all important. However, one cannot deny the fact that well qualified and adequately trained teachers are the backbone of any education system. All attempts have to be made to generate creative teachers who are qualitatively skilled and empowered through a continuous professional development process to augment the standards of learning at higher level of education as well as contribute towards increasing productivity and economic growth of the country. Committed and well trained teachers can lift the nation to the zenith heights of economic prosperity. Such teachers could bring revolutionary changes in the society and could preserve the culture for coming generations (Ordonez and MacLean, 1997).

Teaching is a skill and like any other skill it requires training and practice. A person may acquire vast amounts of knowledge and information, but yet may be in dark about the techniques of transmitting it properly. Knowing something and letting it be known to others are not the same thing. Helping others to learn effectively is a performing art as well as a skill. Throughout the world a lot of research has been done in this area. New methods, techniques and innovations on teaching and learning are being discovered regularly. It is popularly believed that there is a positive correlation between the qualities and qualifications of the teacher and the achievements of the students. In order to enhance the qualities and qualifications of the teachers and also to make him/her more skillful in teaching, teacher education programs are offered. These days, the hottest issue in higher education may well be student learning. In marked contrast with the secondary sector, university teachers in higher education have traditionally come to their careers as teachers with little professional training. Our lack of professional training as educators about how learning occurs, how university students develop, and what the effects of the university experience are on that development, directly affects students' learning (www.podnetwork.org)

We have to admit the fact that the teaching profession has grown as a line of work that demands rigorous training and stamina. The picture of a teacher is painted as someone who is ethically dedicated to his work. He has not only endowed with a duty to teach others but requires acquisition of first hand knowledge to keep himself abreast of the modern innovations taking place in the field of education. He or she is first of all a learner, who is enthusiastic and prepared to get well informed about what current drift in education are. He or she learns by being thoughtful and is critical of his own professional competencies. He or she is occupied by research activities and is ready to accept new ideas and solutions when looking for answers for problems he or she encounters in the classroom. He or she is keen to take up new challenges as he or she believes that nothing could be impossible through sharing of ideas with his/her staff members. He or she initiates revolutionary steps for

the betterment of education of the country. To him or her new experiences are learning experiences contributing to his or her treasure of knowledge. All the above attributes could be inculcated through rigorous continuous training. For this purpose continuous professional development of teachers is of utmost importance (UNESCO Seminar Report, 1998).

There is a consensus amongst all stakeholders that the quality of teachers in the public sector is unsatisfactory. Poor quality of teacher in the system in large numbers is owed to the mutations in governance, an obsolete pre-service training structure and a less than adequate in service training regime. Presence of incompetence in such a huge quantity and permeation of malpractices in the profession have eroded the once exalted position enjoyed by teachers under the eastern cultural milieu. Teaching has become the employment of last resort of most educated young persons; especially males. One could not deny the fact that the root cause of our poor education system is imbedded in the poor quality of our teachers. Poor recruitment practices, bulk of untrained teachers, and lack of continuous professional development of teachers in higher education have added to the grievance of situation. Sporadic efforts have been made by HEC, to lessen the gravity this problem but it bore no fruit. Most of the teacher-training programs are working without a feasible policy guidelines. (Government of Pakistan, 1998).

The teacher education programs currently in vogue in most of the teacher training institutes are not of the quality to considerably enhance the level of knowledge and skills of teachers. The curriculum designed for these teachers training programs could not develop in teachers the necessary pedagogical skills, subject command, classroom management skills and assessment skills that would make these programs meaningful. The different government institutes offering teacher education needs complete overhaul. Due to lack of coordination and supervision, they follow their own programs and purposes. This has resulted in sub standard and poor teachers training programs. These institutions do not meet international standards at all in offering teacher education. These institutes prove to be white elephant, engulfing a considerable amount allocated for teachers training programmes. There is not unity of authority that could provide proper guidance and track to these institutions to increase their effectiveness, production and to keep an eye on their product quality. A number of researches and reports have already been carried out to investigate teacher professional development in Pakistan. Most of these reports have pointed out that teacher performance and quality is significantly affected by their educational qualification; employment on merit; effective teacher performance monitoring system; motivation, development of teacher skills and number of opportunities made available for teachers promotion in their teaching career (World Bank, 2006).

The government is aware of these missing links yet it has not taken any serious measures to streamline all teaching training programs. Presently it is realized that trained and professionally committed teacher are also essential at higher education level for quality education. Unfortunately in Pakistan pre-service training is pre-requisite only for those teachers who are recruited at elementary, secondary and higher secondary level. Some experts are opining that professional training is not necessary at higher education level. It does not affect the achievements of students. Results of a study, professional training and its impact on students' academic achievements, show that professional training has positive effects both at secondary/elementary level and at higher secondary/ higher education level as well (Ali, 1998).

2. Purposes and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to investigate the in-service training needs of the university teachers and to explore the essential competencies for the professional development of university teachers. More specifically, the following objectives guided this study:

- (1) To identify demographic characteristics of university faculty in N.W.F.P.
- (2) To identify the in-service training needs of universities faculty members
- (3) To identify and rank the teaching standards for university faculty development

3. Methodology

All practicing faculty members of public universities of N.W.F.P were the target population of the study. Out of these, twenty percent faculty members were randomly selected as sample (n = 220). The study was conducted in the five public sector universities of N.W.F.P. The strata kept in view were: departments of social sciences and Humanities, Male and Female.

The survey instrument was a self developed questionnaire which was administered and collected by visiting the respondents personally. Modern communication channels as e-mails and cellular phone were utilized to give reminders. A total of 197 respondents completed the instrument, resulting in a response rate of 90%. The

questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first part was made to obtain the data about demographic factors. In the second part fifteen teaching standards were listed and the faculty members were asked to rank these standards in their local perspective. The conceptual framework for these teaching standards originated from National Teaching Standards developed by the government of Pakistan. The third part was made to determine the expressed competency level of the university faculty through direct assessment model in order to assess their training needs. A list of competencies needed by university teachers was developed based on a review of literature. The final list consisted of 20 core competencies. These competencies were determined to be: content mastery, planning, classroom management, organization, assessment, leadership, professional standards and practice, master of instructional technology, instruction and communication skills.

The questions on the instrument were constructed with two Likert-type scales ranging from 1 to 5. The importance scale range was 1= strongly agree to 5= strongly disagree. The competence range was 1= very competent to 5= not competent. The instrument was validated by the panel of experts consisting of two Arid university IER faculty, and a director of Institute of Education and Research of Gomal university. For the purpose of reliability test retest technique was applied. The value of Cronbach' alpha reliability coefficient was 0.89 which is very good significance at 5% level.

4. Results and discussion

For statistical treatment of data, computer based software known as Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version.16.0 for windows was utilized. Statistical information was presented in the form of sums, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

The results based on the statistical findings of the study revealed that majority of the university faculty have not received adequate in-service training in teaching to university students. This study indicates for instant need of rigorous in-service training of university teachers in the areas of assessment skills, classroom management, communication skills, and use of instructional computer technologies including statistical packages.

5. Recommendations

- In marked contrast with the secondary education, university teachers traditionally come to their careers with no professional training or experience Hence it is proposed that induction training should be mandatory for the recruitment of university faculty members like other civil services.
- The huge accumulation of the untrained university faculty members must be minimized by establishing teachers training centers in each university.
- It is recommended that continuous professional development in-service training programmes of adequate duration should be launched for university teachers.
- Intensive in-service training programmes in the grey areas of classroom management skills, assessment skills, communication skills and information computer technologies including use of statistical packages should be launched instantly.
- Further needs assessment studies should be conducted across the country to explore in-service training needs of university teachers.

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Table 1. Demographic characteristics of university faculty in N.W.F.P.

Characteristics		No.	%age
Gender	Male	166	84
	Female	31	16
Duration of Training	No training received	130	66
	Less than one month training received	28	14.2
	1-2 months training received	19	9.6
	3-5 months training received	4	2
	6 or more than 6 months training received	16	8.1
Highest Degree	Ph. D	40	20.3
	M. Phil/MS	51	25.9
	M.A/M.Sc/B.S	106	53.8
Job status	Permanent	175	88.8
	Contract	14	7.1
	Deputation	4	2.0
	Visiting	4	2.0

As indicated in table 1, 166(84%) faculty members were male and 31(16%) faculty members were female. Duration of in-service training received reflects that 130 (66%) respondents have received no in-service training at all, 16 (8%) faculty members have received sufficient in-service training of 6 months or more than 6 months duration. Only 10 faculty members (20%) of the respondents have got Ph.D degree while a large number (106, 54%) of the respondents were master degree holders. Most of the respondents 175(89%) were employed on permanent basis. Only 14 (7%) faculty members were working on contract basis. Few faculty members were serving on deputation\visiting.

Table 2. Perceived competency level of the university faculty

Competency	N	M	SD
Use of information communication Technology	197	2.30	0.93
Communication Skills	197	1.79	0.59
Assessment skills	197	1.66	0.54
Classroom Management skills	197	1.52	0.66

Note. Scale: 1 = very competent; 5 = not competent

University teachers were asked to report their perceived competence in the given 15 teaching competencies. As indicated in Table 2, teachers identified above four training areas where supplemented training is needed.

Table 3. Ranking order of the National educational standards

Rank	Standards	M	SD
1	Teachers possess Subject command	1.74	0.81
2	Teachers have pedagogical skills	2.06	0.96
3	Teachers know how students learn and develop	2.08	0.96
4	Teachers ensure multidimensional development	2.23	1.03
5	Teachers communicate effectively	2.27	1.04
6	Teachers create conducive learning environment	2.32	1.05
7	Teachers know the use of modern ICT	2.35	1.07
8	Teachers regularly plan for effective learning	2.35	1.07
9	Teachers knowledge students' previous learning	2.37	1.12
10	Teachers assess regularly student progress	2.40	1.14
11	Teachers know students' individual differences	2.55	1.14
12	Teachers focus to maximize students learning	2.58	1.15
13	Teachers seek to develop personal scholarship	2.59	1.17
14	Teachers collaborate with other professionals	2.60	1.17
15	Teachers ensure community involvement	3.11	1.17

Note. Scale: 1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree

Table 3 indicates relevant importance and ranking of the fifteen National teaching standards by university faculty. University teachers were asked to rank the given teaching standards in their local perspective. It is inferred from the ranking list of teaching standards that most of the university faculty members use lecture method in their classrooms therefore, they ranked subject command at the top of the list. Pedagogical skills were seen as mere imparting subject matter through lecturing and were ranked second, inferring that environment in our classrooms are still teacher centered and active participation of students through activity based learning is ignored. Students' learning and development was at no four. Communication skills were listed at number five assigning relatively less importance, indicating that much emphasis was put on the delivery of content not the way how the content are presented. The knowledge of Information Communication technologies (ICT) was placed at number seven. It is concluded that the importance of the use of modern instructional technologies is not realized by the faculty members. Assessment skills were listed below at number ten. It is inferred that the most important teaching standard of assessment skill was not given much importance and considered a routine activity. The standard of teachers' collaboration with other professionals was placed near the bottom at number fourteen. It is inferred that most of the university faculty members seem to be self-centered and did not share their ideas with other professionals. At the bottom of the list was the standard of community involvement by the teachers. It is concluded that at higher education level community involvement did not play any role as the students are mature enough to decide about their future themselves.