Professional Development for Tertiary Level Teachers in India: A Time to Rethink and Change?

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ABSTRACT

The perception that entering teaching profession at tertiary level in India today does not require the prospective teachers to have any teacher training at all but only a research degree in the concerned subject is not wholly correct. There is provision for pre-service preparation - howsoever unsatisfactory it might be – for aspiring teachers. However, those who have PhD degree under the new rules can also join the profession. There is also provision for compulsory in-service professional development programs organised by bodies such as Centre for Professional Development in Higher Education (CPDHE), Delhi University, and similar other bodies in other parts of the country. These existing provisions have, no doubt, many drawbacks and challenges and hence urge us to look for an alternative model. This article proposes this alternative model and describes why and how this model is better than the model of CPDHE and of similar other bodies.

Key terms: *Teacher development, tertiary level, professional development, reflective approach, CPD, self-directed, collaborative learning*

Introduction

There is a popular perception even among some academics and educational administrators that entering teaching profession in higher education at the tertiary level does not require the prospective teachers today to have any teacher training but only a research degree in the concerned subject. This perception is, if we may say so, only partially true. We say 'partially true' because it does not portray in its right perspective the present scenario of recruitment of teachers in higher education in India, including teachers at tertiary level.

Present Scenario

1) Pre-service Preparation

Ever since University Grants Commission National Eligibility Test/State Level Eligibility Test (UGC NET/SLET) came into effect, prospective teachers need to qualify this test to be eligible to apply for a teaching position in higher education. Paper 1 of NET does include, among others, an element of, what is termed, 'aptitude for teaching', and this paper is compulsory for all candidates

intending to do teaching or research. Hence the above-mentioned perception is only 'partially true' because after some recent modifications, candidates who have obtained a Ph.D. degree under the revised rules are also eligible to apply for teaching jobs in higher educational institutions and hence Ph.D. research degree in their case entitles them to be eligible to apply for a teaching job in colleges/universities in India (UGC Notification, 2016). No doubt, there is a move to revamp higher education in India soon and as a first step there is a move to replace the UGC with a Higher Education Commission of India. UGC in the meantime has also appointed committees to suggest changes in NET in various subjects (*The Hindustan Times* dt. 15.11.17) but till their reports come in and are accepted and implemented and other changes start taking effect, this remains the present scenario of teachers' recruitment at tertiary level.

Our intention is not to emphasize or admit the effectiveness or equivalence of the provision of 'aptitude for teaching' as a pre-service teacher training course in NET paper 1, but only to point out its existence as a kind of pre-service component to gauge prospective candidates' aptitude for teaching for entering the teaching profession at tertiary level.

This component 'aptitude for teaching' in NET has many drawbacks and I have already commented on the UGC NET in my write up 'UGC 'NET': A Critique' (Sood, 2011). Some prominent ones are that this is not a formally taught teacher training course of any given duration but a self-study

component as part of candidates' preparation for the NET. Again, there is no defined descriptive syllabus nor is there any provision for practice teaching as is the case with usual pre-service teacher education and training courses for school teachers.

There seems to be inherent opposition to pre-service teacher training for college and university teachers in India as is evident from attempts made by some universities like Calicut, Kerala, Annamalai, and Baroda. These universities did start different kinds of teacher training courses for tertiary level teachers in the1970s but these courses had to be discontinued for lack of support either from governments or from society.

In view of this, one thing that goes in favour of this 'aptitude for teaching' in NET paper 1 is that it has survived for over a decade now without any manifest opposition to it. A somewhat positive aspect of this component in NET, whatever its shortcomings, can be that it can prove quite beneficial to some prospective teachers as it can inspire them to know more about this profession and thus prove to be an effective path to successful continuing learning - what we can term intrinsically-motivated, self-directed, self-accessed and reflective driven approach to learn to learn – somewhat like Eklavya model of self-learning and development which has not been seriously explored by the West or by us in India.

2) In-service Teacher Training

'Aptitude' testing is one of the methods of making preliminary selection of suitable

candidates for jobs and is quite common in fields such as in defence services in this country but in these cases, after the initial selection, the recruits are subjected to rigorous training. This is what lacks in the case of tertiary level teachers in our country. Once selected, they are pushed into classrooms to begin formal teaching. No doubt, these teachers after their appointment - in Delhi university at least - are required to compulsorily attend an orientation course of 4-week duration and a refresher course of 3-week duration if they intend to continue in job. In Delhi these courses are conducted by the Centre for Professional Development in Higher Education (CPDHE) set up by Delhi university like Academic Staff Colleges (ASCs) established by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in universities across the country. Besides these courses, short-term courses are also conducted by these bodies from time to time for these teachers.

We can learn some more details about the *what*, *why* and *how* of the activities of these bodies in carrying out the continuing professional development of teachers in higher education by having a glance at the official web site of Delhi university's CPDHE (particularly the links to 'Programme Schedule', and 'Course') available online for making application for various types of courses this centre conducts for teachers in higher education. It is argued that the earlier conception that a good teacher learns on the job or improves by emulating senior colleagues is outdated and hence the need for CPDHE. The goal of CPDHE, we are told,

is to achieve excellence in Higher Education. Higher Education today, it is pointed out, demands an altogether different approach as compared to the earlier times. The Centre ensures that while upgrading their competence and knowledge base in different fields of learning, the participants of its various courses and programmes develop an understanding of the various challenges academics have to face in the present globalized world.

Criticisms of this Model of CPD

What CPDHE does in Delhi for college and university teachers for their continuing professional development has been a common practice quite for some time in other parts of the country as well. Although this mode of continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers in higher education is popular yet it is not without criticism and is said to have many drawbacks and challenges.

It is apparent that this model follows the 'top-down' rather than 'bottom-up' process and hence does not meet the needs of teachers even if it meets the needs of the institution and the administrators. The teachers attending these programmes do not constitute a homogeneous group; they come from varied backgrounds in respect of institutions, education, experience, and so on and have varied needs. Any programme based on 'one size fits all' cannot be successful in meeting the needs of all of them. Moreover, since the teachers are coerced into attending these courses, there is lack of intrinsic motivation and their sole

aim is to complete the formality of having attended these courses to continue in the job or to get promotion.

Like the training model, this CPD is institutionally-organised and is resource-person-centred rather than teachers-centred. The model is often based on the notion that teachers are "empty" vessels who need to be filled in with valuable ideas by an outside "expert". Dadds (2014) is critical of the "delivery" models that view teachers as "empty vessels" who need external expertise.

Another major drawback of these programmes is the exclusion of the teachers in the preparation and execution of the course planned. The content and skills to be covered are often decided by the administrators and the institution sometimes in consultation with outside experts and resource persons. Teachers, we must understand, have unique needs and experiences and any program that tends to ignore their needs, ideas and experience at the advice of a perceived "superior" is bound to miss the mark. Contextual factors and insiders' views and experience are important and ignoring these in such courses leads to their failure.

There is also lack of coordination among outside experts invited as resource persons to deliver their talks at such programs. The short duration of the program also results in "shallow" coverage with little time left for any meaningful interaction.

One key feature of these courses is that they are often organised and carried out in de-contextualized settings - settings different from those of the actual classroom environment. Classroom settings and context vastly vary from those made available for carrying out these professional development courses. It is also seen that there are some equipment and facilities available at these training places which are not available to teachers in their institutions and actual classrooms. Consequently, teachers on many occasions fail to link their training to their context, hence they often experience challenges in classroom application (Kennedy, 2005; Hunzicker, 2011).

The Way Forward

The drawbacks of this and other such models – often labelled 'transmission' models (Kennedy, 2005) - have forced and also helped researchers and scholars look for alternative models for continuing development of teachers. The way forward lies in overcoming the drawbacks of such models.

Let us begin with understanding what 'teacher development' really means. Mann (2005:104) defines language teacher development and describes its nature by exploring distinctions between similar key terms and drawing together some core strands of teacher development. These key terms are teacher development, teacher training, teacher preparation, teacher education, professional development, continuing professional development, and staff development. He argues that teacher development is different in nature from all

these other terms and places self-development at the centre of a definition of teacher development.

Of particular concern to us here is the distinction between professional development (CPD) - a form of which we have described in the pages above - and teacher development. At an institutional level, Mann (2005) says, it is more common to use the term 'continuing professional development', or CPD. He continues that 'professional development is career orientated and has a narrower, more instrumental and utilitarian remit'. Teacher development, on the other hand, 'is more inclusive of personal and moral dimensions'. Teaching, it is said, is not a simple technical responsibility and has an inherent personal, ethical and moral dimension. Hansen (2001) and Buzzelli & Johnston (2002) explore this moral dimension to teaching. Another important distinction is that professional development is 'top-down' model while teacher development is initiated by an individual or a group of individuals and hence is 'bottom-up' process. Teacher development is 'independent of, though much better with, support from the organisation, school or system' (Underhill 1999). It is most often a voluntary activity, whereas CPD is much more of a requirement for all employees of a given organisation. Unlike CPD or training, teacher development is a continuing process of becoming and can never be finished.

Once it is apparent that our goal is 'teacher development', we need to understand 'what' of development – variety of knowledge and awareness that informs teachers' practice, where this knowledge comes from, and what relationship it has with teacher development. In case of language teachers, for example, knowledge and awareness about language and language-related fields has an important role to play in the development of language teacher knowledge base. This knowledge can be 'received' in teacher education and training programmes or, among other sources, through reading texts. But there is broad agreement that teachers' knowledge is not just transmitted knowledge only; it is much more than that and it is complex and multi-faceted in nature. This multi-faceted knowledge includes received, experiential, personal, local, and contextual knowledge. It is also argued that there is an enormous range of teachers' ways of knowing.

It is thus clear that all knowledge is not 'transmitted' knowledge; some knowledge is more personal and individual and is partly 'constructed' by the individuals themselves through engagement with experience, reflection on experience, and collaboration with others. It is important to understand and impart guidance on this 'process of construction of knowledge' through critical reflection so as to enable in-service teachers become independent on the road to self-directed development.

Reflection for Change and for Innovation and Development

Reflection and research are considered important for change, if any required for innovation and development. Teachers

must reflect on their classroom practice; they must reflect critically on what really goes on in their classrooms - for self-monitoring and self-evaluation. Classroom practice needs to be made explicit through reflection and for taking corrective action, if necessary. Self-reflective teachers are better able to respond to the changing needs of learners than those who do not do so. Classroom is the most suitable site that provides opportunities for experimentation, exploration, innovation and change if any required in the teaching practice in the light of reflection through experience. Lack of this real and authentic setting is, as we have said above, one of the main drawbacks of teacher training and professional development programmes conducted in de-contextualised settings.

There are a number of ways in which this practice can be encouraged and structured. Richard and Farrell (2005) provide a number of procedures for self-monitoring and self-evaluation and suggest various forms of lesson reports, checklists, and questionnaires. Keeping a diary or a journal is also a useful form for self-reflection.

The process of reflection can be structured, if one wants to do so, in three steps as suggested by Richards (2004). These are: recall of events happening in the classroom, recollection of the events, and reflection, review and response to the events. Technology – audio and video for example, - can be usefully employed for this purpose. For more convincing results, one can combine self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and learner evaluation.

Reflection through Collaboration

Roberts (1998) sees one of the main aims of teacher as an increased awareness and this is often made possible through collaboration. Collaborative and co-operative processes can help sustain individual reflection and development much better than struggling alone. Friendly and healthy competition including competing to improve on one's own past performance, are also useful for development. Collaboration is likely to lead teachers own the entire process rather than one that is thrust upon them (Taylor, 2010) as is done in orientation programmes, and thus acts as a motivating factor for them.

Advances in I.T. have made it easy to indulge in such collaborative efforts by teachers working in common contexts through sharing and caring sessions, interest groups, focus groups, talks and discussions, blogs, emails, what's hap groups, and other social sites. Professional bodies, local and regional conferences and on-line journals also play a useful role in encouraging critical reflection through collaboration and development. Hunzicker (2011:177) argued that "... effective professional development is anything that engages teachers in learning activities that are supportive, job-embedded, instructionally focused, collaborative, and ongoing".

Conclusion

We have argued that teacher development is a term distinct from professional development and 'transmission' models of teacher development programmes such as

those organised at present by CPDHE in Delhi university and at other places in the country by similar other bodies are not the right models for teacher development. Teacher training and education programmes must have provision for giving guidance to teachers in the '**process** of construction of knowledge and awareness' through engagement between 'received' knowledge and 'experiential' knowledge for self-directed, reflectively-driven, cooperative and collaborative programmes of various kinds for their continuing self-development.

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A Report on the Workshop on Perspectives in Business English Training

A one-day workshop on 'Perspectives in Business English Training' was conducted on 28 July, 2018, by Ethiraj College for Women, Chennai, in collaboration with English Language Teachers' Association of India (ELTAI) and ELTAI Business English Special Interest Group (BESIG). The purpose of the workshop was to facilitate understanding the best practices of trainers/teachers of Business English.

Dr V.M. Muralidharan, Chairman, Ethiraj College, spoke about the importance of English as a global language and about how knowing to communicate effectively will take students places. Dr. Mangayarkarasi, HoD of English, Ethiraj College, presented before the gathering the various programs that the department has started in the recent past.

Evan Frendo, Joint Co-ordinator, IATEFL BESIG, spoke on 'Minimising miscommunication at the work place. He emphasised the prominence of speaking English in the fields of Navy and Aviation. Intelligibility of a conversation lies in recognising the expression used in this context. He explained the difference between Comprehensibility and Interpretability. He said that misunderstanding arises when the communicators are unaware of the existing problem. During the course of the session, he expressed a clear distinction between EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ELF (English as a Lingua Franca). He said that conformity with Standard English is seen as a fairly relevant concept in the context of learning English as a Lingua Franca. He listed out various options before beginning a Business English class like, needs analysis, accommodation skills, active listening and inter-cultural awareness.

In the second part of the session, "Teaching the language of Negotiation", Mr Frendo discussed the challenges that a teacher of business English could face.

Mrs. Lalitha Murthy's brainstorming session gave the participants a clearer insight into what the Indian industry is looking for in its employees and how a course could be customised to tailor to the needs of the industry.

In the subsequent session by Mr. Adi Rajan, interaction was based on the usage of OneNote, an app that could be used to create a paperless Business English classroom. The teachers had a hands-on experience of using the app, while they were taught to share learner materials via the app.

In the closing session, Mr. Vivekananda PV, TCS, threw some light on the usage of technology in the classrooms. He highlighted the usage of certain apps like the Fresco talk/ Fresco Play, Idea Accent etc.

In essence, the workshop provided a high quality learning platform in the areas of career development, personal enrichment and professional development.

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