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Open Educational Resources and Massive Open Online Courses as a Model for Professional Development of Teachers

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The present day system of Higher Education is facing a number of challenges: globalisation, an aging society, growing competition between higher educational institutions both nationally and internationally, and rapid technological development. The technology has brought higher education to such heights in nowadays than any other field, which has promoted educational growth and innovation in all other domains of our life. The question here is whether the teachers of higher education in India are equipped with the growing demands of technology and other attributes of this multi-cultural society? The answer to this will be always a big No.

There have been a number of programs introduced by UGC for the professional development of higher education teachers in India but despite growing evidence for the benefits of development programmes for teachers in higher education, teaching is still viewed as an activity that anyone can do. Thus, not surprisingly, only a few European and American universities have made substantial investment into enhancing the teaching abilities of their academic staff. In other words, the preparation of university teachers remains largely unsystematic and ad hoc.

The degree programs offered nowadays through the university departments only develops and certifies competencies in research than teaching. It has been a clear fact that people who gain their masters or doctors excellently cannot teach/transfer what they have studied to others in a clear and contemplating manner and always make a feel that their knowledge is something which is within their domains and there is no need to share their knowledge to others. There has been exemption in some universities of the west that their academic staffs is qualified to teach to the expected level, but the requirement to gain a formal qualification in teaching for teachers of higher education is not widespread.

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The Profession of Teaching and Development of Teachers

Teacher's Professional development is about the on-going growth and support from the time teachers begin any initial preparation or teaching, provision needs to be made for on-going development of their subject matter knowledge; concrete skills to teach, observe, assess, and reflect; incentives; and career growth. There also needs to be linkages with other teachers and supervisors to help them solve problems and support each other through discussion, modelling and coaching, and involvement with other aspects of school and educational change.

Teacher development is a process, not an event. It involves change over time and is achieved in stages. The stages are related to teachers' experience gained in instructional and management practice over their career. The stages are also related to the degree of services and support a country's level of economic and political development allows it to provide. Strategies must begin at the teacher level and be aimed at helping each teacher facilitate change in the classroom. To help all students to learn in and for this changing environment, academics as university teachers need a better understanding of teaching and learning issues as well as to advance their pedagogic competences. Many current methods, such as widespread lecturing to students, relegate students to passivity, tend to focus narrowly on subject knowledge, and, thus, are inadequate. Instead, effective teaching needs to put student learning at the centre of the teaching process.

Through teaching, higher education plays an important role in disseminating and promoting the use of research. Many of the European countries such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Nordic and the Low Countries have already recognised the importance of classroom teaching for quality education. They have established teacher development programmes for academics and doctoral students, and professional associations to advance teaching and learning in higher education. Similar initiatives are taking place globally, with notable progress in the United States, Australia

and Canada. Contrary to these emerging global trends, the academics in India continue to rely on their own student experience when teaching. This reinforces subject and teacher-centred approaches that do not stimulate desired high-quality learning experiences or the kinds of outcomes required by the new global social and economic context.

In order to professionalise academics in our country as higher education teachers, we recommend that universities that strive for quality education offer educational development opportunities for their teachers. Excellent teachers are made, not born; they become excellent through investment in their teaching abilities. In the context of severe competitions in the higher education sector to make teachers to learn from trial and error is a waste of time, effort and university resources. Therefore, staff involved in teaching and supporting student learning should be qualified, supported and adequately resourced for that role. Well-designed educational development programmes lead to increased satisfaction of teachers and changes in attitudes, behaviours and teaching practice, as well as improved student ratings of instructors' teaching. Ultimately, such programmes aim to improve the quality of student learning and help to produce competent graduates.

Training of Higher Education Teachers in India

The serious defect in higher education in India is there is no proper mechanism to assess the teaching competency or professional expertise of the academics working in the area of higher education. The government through latest policies have announced some nod for refining the policies regarding teacher's professional development in higher education by giving more weightage to teaching domain than the research domain. Research is always very important, and it is a part and parcel of good teaching. But think of a condition where teachers are good enough to state the issues related to a particular strategy through their research but they cannot state ways or to perform in such a manner to overcome the issues highlighted. That is a condition generated nowadays in the area of higher education because we have given more importance to research side lining the importance of teaching.

What should be Our Move for Professional Development of Teachers of Higher Education?

The first step in this regard is to start with the students of higher education. As in developed countries we have to provide initial teacher training for postgraduate students by introducing postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma and Masters Programmes in teaching and learning in higher education, which can create a significant progress on this aspect. The teachers of higher education should be given for on-going professional development through accredited programmes in teaching and learning for academic staff.

The programs should not be like the present system of training and orientation given in academic staff colleges or HRDC's. The training courses should have both virtual and real experience by orienting teachers to share their expertise using Open Educational Resources and MOOC. The courses in HRDC should undergo strict renovation by giving importance to open access of knowledge and training through internet. As a part of innovation the HRDC's at present in our country include all these terms like OER, MOOC & MOODLE in their syllabus and give a theoretical description of them without knowing how these can be integrated in their teaching.

In addition, government should create incentives for academics to perform highly in teaching through the introduction of institutional award schemes for teaching excellence. Countries that are most advanced in terms of provision of educational development are those with a longer tradition of student-oriented policies, teacher development strategies and knowledge sharing culture throughout the globe. A country like India, as a result of the widely diverse academic cultures within the country, there has been no or uneven level of attention to teacher development. So our country with fastest growing economy can give more importance to Open Educational Resources (OER) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) for Training the teachers of Higher education for their professional excellence.

What is Open Educational Resources (OER)?

The definition of Open Educational Resources (OER) are freely accessible, openly licensed documents and media that are useful for teaching, learning, and assessing as well as for research purposes. It is the leading trend in Open and Distance Learning (ODL). They are freely accessible, openly licensed documents and media that are useful for the various aspect of education. Currently most often used is "digitised materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research".

Open Educational Resources (OER) are any resources available at little or no cost that can be used for teaching, learning, or research. The term can include textbooks, course readings, and other learning content; simulations, games, and other learning applications; syllabi, quizzes, and assessment tools; and virtually any other material that can be used for educational purposes. OER typically refers to electronic resources, including those in multimedia formats, and such materials are generally released under a Creative Commons or similar license that supports open or nearly open use of the content. The best place for the generation of OER's is colleges and universities, libraries, archival organizations, government agencies, commercial organizations such as publishers, or faculty or other individuals who develop educational resources they are willing to share.

What is Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)?

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) is a model for delivering learning content online to virtually any person—with no limit on attendance—who wants to take the course. Participants can be students enrolled at the institution hosting the MOOC or anyone with Internet access. The "open" students, who pay nothing to participate, can join in some or the entire course activities, which might include watching videos, posting on discussion boards and blogs, and commenting via social media platforms, though anything hosted by the institution's LMS would likely, are off-limits.

Although the curriculum for a MOOC might be identical to that of a standard course, learning activities are typically restructured to better match the dynamic of a large and fluid group of participants. Course activities could be scheduled or asynchronous, and a flexible structure is valuable because students can choose their level of participation and many will do so in a separate manner. A MOOC is typically hosted on easily accessible sites such as a wiki, blog, or a Google site. In addition, course interactions might take place in blogs, tweets, and other public, online venues. Public announcements regarding the course are generally made on blogs, academic websites, or professional organizations.

Connectivism and Connective Knowledge (CCK08) was the first MOOC, offered both as an open course and in the Certificate in Emerging Technologies for Learning (CETL) at the University of Manitoba. CETL was designed as a Masters-level certificate with three core and three elective courses. CCK08 was the initial core course in the programme. The course syllabus was translated into six different languages: Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Hungarian, Chinese and German(http://ltc.umanitoba.ca/wiki/Connectivism_2008). The course was first offered from September to November 2008, facilitated by Stephen Downes. A total of 24 for-credit students enrolled in the course. The course was then offered as an open online course, drawing over 2,200 additional participants.

Importance of OER & MOOC in Higher Education

Student Centred Teaching

The teaching methods in higher education courses are not student centric even though we give importance to seminars, assignments and other things in our class. Putting students at the centre of the learning process creates new requirements for academics. First, it demands that they use teaching approaches that they may not be familiar with. Second, academics are now mandated to design learning outcomes and assessment, give and respond to feedback, embed an increasing range of skills into the curriculum, maximise the opportunities associated with classroom diversity and consider ethical issues. It is not feasible to expect academics to carry out these teaching roles effectively without appropriate support in the form of training and development programmes. All of these demands necessitate awareness and understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of teaching and student learning. OER &MOOC can well integrate the knowledge generated according to teacher's requirements by providing learning experiences which are real, rich and relevant.

Knowledge Economy and Knowledge Societies

The universities are traditionally engaged in both education and research (and, more recently, the validation of research), they are in a good position to help make research-based knowledge benefit society at large. Collaboration between active researchers and students is one of the best channels for new scholarly knowledge to be spread, contested and advanced in the professional community. This can be easily done using the global and local repertories and repositories in open educational resources. Furthermore, learning from the most up-to-date scholarly knowledge and experience is a key ingredient in good teaching. Paradoxically, researchers are expected to introduce

the most complex research findings to students who have much less disciplinary knowledge, but in many settings teachers are not offered adequate support to develop such pedagogic competence.

Changing Platform of Education

Immense technological changes are taking place that should be exploited for the benefit of teaching and learning in higher education. There is abundant evidence that proper use of technology can enhance quality learning. At the same time, using these technologies in teaching would also ensure that students are familiarised with technological innovations that they will need in the rest of their lives. Some institutions already provide for online learning and offer appropriate professional development to their teachers. However, many teachers still lack awareness about and skills for using IT effectively for teaching. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers understand how to facilitate learning in a digital environment. Educational developers that specialise in technology enhanced learning, together with technology support staff, have proven to be valuable allies of teachers improving their courses.

Changing Conception of Education

The global concept of higher education is changing nowadays. It has an important role in shaping our future society. There are calls for a greater emphasis on the holistic development of students, where all aspects of their growth as individuals in society are addressed (Quinlan, 2011). Not only is economic growth linked with the potential for universities to embed employability skills and a range of other generic competencies into the curriculum, but cultural change also relies upon higher education. Free, democratic societies require citizens and leaders who will think and contribute critically – intellectually, scientifically and morally – to their communities.

Higher education is where such citizens and leaders are formed and habits are developed for a lifetime of continued learning and support for scientific knowledge. That is, learning in higher education is more than just acquiring facts. It also includes skills development, helping students to make sense and meaning of the real world, and interpreting and re-interpreting what we know and how we know it. Achieving these aims inevitably necessitates changes to curriculum design and teaching methods, including increased attention to the development of 'soft' or non-disciplinary skills. Again, academics need help if they are to become leaders of this change.

Educational resources developed in an open environment can be vetted and improved by a broad community of educators, resulting in materials that represent what the educational community sees as most valuable. By providing educators with new access to educational material, open resources have the potential to spur pedagogical innovation, introducing new alternatives for effective teaching. OER have the potential to expose students and instructors to the long tail of content, most of which never finds its way into widespread educational use. Moreover, learning resources that can be modified and reused promote collaboration and participation—two key elements of a Web 2.0 approach to teaching and learning.

The resources required to develop high-quality learning materials and activities for a full complement of courses can be prohibitive for many institutions and instructors. By distributing the costs over a larger number of users, OER brings a greater range of tools within reach of more users. OER can also lower the costs for students to obtain educational content. OER and online or hybrid learning are natural partners in efforts that take advantage of – and prompt - developments in educational technology that facilitate new media, new formats, and new means of distribution.

Professional Development for Teachers of Higher Education

The professional development of teachers beyond their initial degree/ training can serve a number of objectives (OECD, 1998), including:

- To update individuals' knowledge of a subject in light of recent advances in the area;
- To update individuals' skills, attitudes and approaches in light of the development of new teaching techniques and objectives, new circumstances and new educational research;
- To enable individuals to apply changes made to curricula or other aspects of teaching practice;
- To enable universities to develop and apply new strategies concerning the curriculum and other aspects of teaching methodologies;
- To exchange information and expertise among teachers and others within and outside the Universities,
- To help weaker teachers become more effective.

Summing up, technological developments and free knowledge resources like OER & MOOC open up new avenues and pose financial, technical and qualitative challenges to higher education. The role of e-learning is growing, in terms both of courses offered fully on line or as blended learning and of quality of students' learning outcomes, which seem to be as good, or even better, than in face-to-face teaching. In this context Open Educational Resources can be seen as a means to help people across the globe to acquire the competences, knowledge and skills needed to perform effectively in one's profession.

Conclusion

Most users of OER are educators willing to improve their teaching portfolio; the use of OER still requires integration into the curriculum. The teaching value of OER is therefore not automatically evident. There should be movement from the policy makers to encourage experienced educators who would have created several resources during their career to distribute them as OER, but these resources need to be wrapped in pedagogy. There is, however, no guarantee that use of OER produced in one context would be used elsewhere without repurposing. The inter-institutional collaboration would therefore enable young and inexperienced educators to contribute modifications/remixes to OER. Teachers of higher education are crucial to achieving international education goals. This target can be achieved with the help of integrating and applying OER in their professional development process.

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