

Practice of Higher Education Pedagogy in Bangladesh: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

The article aims to highlight the practice of higher education pedagogy in Bangladesh – its challenges and opportunities. Data were collected with the help of two sets of questionnaire – one for GTI faculties and another for Foundation Training participants residing abroad, through personal contact and e-mail, respectively. There are opportunities of pedagogy training is the proper application of Bloom's Taxonomy at the level of making questions for assessing students' academic performance, setting up of learning outcomes for preparing course syllabus and curriculum. Project cycle management module in the FT module makes a fresh faculty enabling them to write a proper research project for funding from internal and external sources, data analysis and research methodology FT module helps them build capacity to conduct a research following proper methodology, analyse data and write a good quality scientific article. The major challenges were – inadequate institutional and financial support for GTI training, lack of institutional physical facilities, UGC is not paying proper attention, difficult to address huge number of faculties all over the country. Moreover, during training session, participants used to become inattentive and show lack of interest. It may however, be concluded that, the concerned Education Ministry should come up with a decision to impose this Foundation Training mandatory for all fresh faculty member of the universities.

Keywords: *Higher Education Pedagogy, Graduate Training Institute, Practice.*

Introduction

Alongside teaching students, prime objective of higher educational institutions of any country is creating new knowledge through research and, with that knowledge, playing an effective role in the country's economic development (Monem and Mahmud 2010). Despite thousands of adverse conditions, higher educational institutions in Bangladesh have been doing that works. Though there are resource constraints, a deep attention has been put recently to higher education (HE) sector in Bangladesh. To that end, Bangladeshi policy makers are showing interests, so are the funding organizations- such as, World Bank (WB); it is one of those organizations

which is funding a huge sum of money to a project called Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP). This project is being supervised by the University Grants Commission (UGC). According to the sources of UGC, WB is going to fund this institution again in its 3rd phase of HEQEP. By these news and programs, it is clear that HE is being given much emphasis. If higher education is important and quality education is to be ensured, pedagogy in HE cannot be ignored. Yet it is not given as much emphasis as it deserves in Bangladesh (Ali, 2013, personal communication).

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One can understand the situation of Bangladesh easily. Here primary school teachers have separate institutions for their training. Similarly, secondary school teachers have institutions where pedagogical training is being provided and those who teach in colleges are also given training under Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) Education Cadre Service, which is conducted as foundation training by National Academy for Education Management (NAEM). But it is fact that those who teach in 45 public universities and 103 private universities (UGC, 2019) have only one institution. It is named as Graduate Training Institute (GTI), a training organ of Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh, where necessary grants are given to provide training from pedagogical point of view. If its infrastructure is compared with the number of HE Institutions in Bangladesh, it is inadequate, whereas, its expansion has not been emphasized. Two reasons identified by one professor are: (i) ego problem, faculties from one university generally do not want to go to another university; (ii) as there is no institutional binding, it is a common tendency among junior faculties that they do not want to take pedagogical training. However, the first one was denied by another professor of a public university while agreeing with the later one (Ali, 2013, personal communication). However, training is needed for those who are teaching in primary, secondary and higher secondary schools and colleges as well as for those who are teaching in universities

It is 48 years since Bangladesh was liberated, Higher education pedagogy along with institutional productivity of universities has not been addressed at the policy making level and incorporated with institutional goals. There is hardly a systematic knowledge and information regarding this; it has advanced far away from mere talking and chalking. Senior faculties are fulfilled with their wisdom since they have gathered knowledge through their experience. What about those who have just joined? Or, been working as midlevel faculties? These faculties start teaching without prior knowledge or know-how to teach. If these new faculties are given pedagogical training, they can do better than they are doing now. Though, lacking of knowledge in this regard is problem, knowledgeable persons may be consulted and there is a scope to work in this field. But the cultures of sharing 'teaching scholarship' inter or intra-campus has not been developed in Bangladesh. Recently, European Union has passed a law (Osborn, 2013) in which it is mandatory that professors will have to have a pedagogical training. As there is no such pressure, as there is limited expertise on this issue in Bangladesh, there is only one pedagogical institution in our country where university faculties are being provided with training (Ali, 2013, personal communication). This paper is an initiative to highlight the practice of higher education pedagogy in Bangladesh, its challenges and opportunities.

Methodology

As it was about exploring challenges and opportunities, understanding situation and answering questions, qualitative research method was chosen to conduct this study.

For data collection, two questionnaires comprising of open-ended questions were prepared, one for persons related to Graduate Training Institute (GTI) and

another for collecting data from outside Bangladesh. Persons of GTI were interviewed physically. Questionnaire for persons who are abroad were sent through e-mail. Eight modules that GTI used during training sessions were reviewed to gather idea about the course content of “Foundation Training for University Teachers”. Participant’s level of satisfaction was assessed through telephone and email conversation. Views that participants had expressed in the souvenirs published in the closing ceremonies were analyzed. Available literature from online sources was reviewed to conceptualize this research.

Graduate Training Institute and Higher Education Pedagogy in Bangladesh

Graduate Training Institute is located in Bangladesh Agricultural University Campus, Mymensingh, Bangladesh. It is the only institution which provides trainings for both academic and nonacademic staffs of the universities of the country. Since its inception in 1976, it has successfully trained up 10th batches of “Foundation Training for University Teachers.” by 2013. In association with the University Grants Commission, the only pedagogical training program arranged here is called “Foundation Training for University Teachers.” Duration of the course is now 33 days which was once 56 days (Ali, 2013, personal communication). According to the objectives of the program, after completion, teachers are able to achieve high quality teaching skill and become a role model; prepare and use teaching support materials and aids; apply different teaching and learning techniques for measuring the learning outcome; write research project proposal; acquire skill on writing, analyzing, preparing and reviewing scientific reports of international standard; maintain office records and documents appropriately; maintain accounts and carry

out financial transaction effectively; select appropriate research designs and perform appropriate statistical tests; analyze data using different computer-aided software; interpret research results and draw inference; prepare own web page, host and update it and drive car properly (Ali, 2013, personal communication).

The course is managed by a course director who is responsible for overall administration and management. Course coordinators ensure proper implementation of academic, extra-academic and administrative support of the course. Methodology includes lecture, group discussion, workshop, syndicate work, seminar, and extension lecture. Medium of instruction of this course are both Bengali and English. There are eight modules being (i) Teaching methods and techniques, (ii) Statistical analysis, (iii) Research Methods and Project Cycle Management, (iv) Scientific report writing, (v) Administration and office management, (vi) Web Page Design and Hosting, (vii) Bangladesh studies, Globalization, Health and Nutrition, (viii) Physical Exercise and Car driving.

Trainees are to face examination and evaluation comprising of written test and term paper, practicum sessions, syndicate/home exercise, physical training (PT) and games, car driving, attendance, cultural programme and overall behavior and manner. Students are provided with a daily schedule of activities. Each batch is formed with 25 members who are separated into 5 groups. Each group is named under attractive name of flowers/ rivers etc. Participants have to reside at the dormitory in the campus premise with strict discipline. Basically, trainees are given ideas of the development history of University, ancient universities, medieval histories. Goal and meaning of education in light of Bloom’s Taxonomy, role of a Professor, use of

question in teaching, forms of questions, methods of asking question, tactics of handling questions. At the same time, as far as theory is concerned, it introduces theories of learning, methods of teaching, lecture

method, question and answer method. Participants representing the universities in those courses have been enlisted in the following Table.

Table 1 The universities represented by the participants of Foundation Training are as follows:

Name of University	Number of participants in different Batches and duration										Total
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5 th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	
	10/04/07 to 24/05/07	31/01/08 to 26/03/08	19/04/08 to 13/06/08	14/02/09 to 09/04/09	10/05/09 to 02/07/09	20/03/10 to 15/05/10	07/05/11 to 20/06/11	07/01/12 to 20/02/12	12/05/13 to 10/06/13	25/08/13 to 26/09/13	
DU	-	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	4
RU	-	-	2	-	-	-	2	3	1	2	10
CU	-	-	2	-	-	2	-	2	1	2	9
JU	-	-	3	-	-	2	2	-	2	-	9
IU	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	3
KU	-	2	-	1	-	1	3	1	1	2	11
BOU	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
BSMRAU	-	1	1	2	2	-	-	1	2	1	10
HSTU	-	1	1	-	-	2	3	2	2	3	14
PSTU	-	7	3	3	-	2	-	1	2	-	18
SAU	-	-	4	2	1	-	3	2	1	1	14
NSTU	-	-	-	1	3	2	-	1	-	1	8
JnU	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
CVASU	-	1	2	-	1	-	-	-	2	2	8
SyAU	-	1	1	6	4	4	4	2	2	2	26
BAU	20	9	4	5	5	8	4	5	3	3	66
SUST	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
JKKNIU	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	2
MBSTU	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
PUST	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
JUST	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Total	20	25	25	21	19	25	23	21	20	25	224

DU: University of Dhaka, University of Rajshahi, University of Chittagong, Jahangirnagar University, Islami University, Khulna University, Bangladesh Open University, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University, Hazee Danesh Science and Technology University, Patuakhali Science and Technology University, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Noakhali Science and Technology University, Jagannath University, Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Science University, Sylhet Agricultural University, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Jatiyo Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Mowlana Bhasani Science and Technology University, Pabna University of Science & Technology, Jessore Science & Technology University

Higher Education Pedagogy: Some Overseas Experience

Globalization has created challenges, so has it brought opportunities. Sometimes technology may not be available in hand or within capacity; it may however be overcome with simple personal innovation. In a developing country like Bangladesh resource is always a problem. But how personal innovation can solve problems in higher educational setting and accommodate one soundly can be understood from the following experience of a person who is currently in the US in the capacity of a doctoral student and also as an instructor for undergrads has expressed his opinions (preferred anonymity) in the following way:.

USA

In the US, the instructional process starts with building rapports and informal relationships. However, the process could be little different for undergrad and grad students, but the core ethos are mostly similar. Since the undergrads are little less matured than the grads, faculty member would focus more on encouraging them with the facts as well as how they can link themselves with the issue. For the grads, who are hugely motivated, faculty member would just encourage them to “go-beyond” what they learn from class readings. Normally faculty member would encourage them to think critically and offer solutions about the issues. This is the style of pedagogy which is often noticed in the US.

Hong Kong and Australia

An Associate Professor who has a Master Degree from Hong Kong and now based in

Australia for his PhD degree has expressed his opinions (preferred anonymity) in the following way:

Hong Kong and Australia

Overall ideology is similar if one considers Hong Kong and Australia. It is amazing that academics create a barrier free space through both physically and psychologically by every infrastructural intervention and non physical intervention. Everybody is allowed to sit in any lecture sessions occurring within the university if s/he is enrolled. And the professors put equal interests to all. However, treatment is different; it differs from one level to another: undergraduate students are thought to be a lump of clay that can be molded to anything. Sometimes it is seen that students are studying Chemistry or Physics but are coming to Urban Planning subsequently. Doing undergraduate in something does not necessarily mean that he has to stick into that one for the whole life. Masters are of two kinds, taught masters and research masters. Taught Masters is like a professional specialization in a certain field which is accredited by different professional bodies. Courses are modified within two or three years each and monitored whether they serve the market orientation. A noted thing is that the best answer papers of the semester exams have to be sent to professional bodies if they are marked up to the market standard.

Unlike taught masters, research masters are actually the entry points for students who want to find themselves in research oriented fields including teaching. Students may be

selected independently or, sometimes, it is a good practice to pursue taught masters students who received higher marks in their research component, professors usually pursue them to come into research field. Here the set rules get evaporated and pupils are free to go any direction; however some hidden and clever controls applied to keep them in track.

PhD is considered as the core pedagogical activity here in a University. The entry level requirement of a University teacher is PhD. PhD program is kind of searching a researchers' own path where the faculty staffs and infrastructure can only facilitate an ideal environment to break the existing pedagogical boundary and create new knowledge. While undergraduate and taught Masters Levels are the business ventures for most universities, research programs are value laden. Universities heavily put subsidy in this sector with the help of the central government and relevant industries to attract quality researchers, at that time, if needed they go even beyond the state boundaries. Undergraduate students are kind of foreign exchange earning sources for host countries, while, the benefit from PhD students is the number of quality international papers. These published journal-papers are the most important indicator for the university ranking on which the government, industries and tuition payer students want to invest, being a win-win game for all.

Opportunities and Challenges

In or outside classrooms, for learning to be effective, students need to be stimulated to

generate their learning materials so as to engage themselves in active learning. The requirement to generate learning materials (e.g. a critical essay; a project report, a slide presentation) helps students to bring to bear critical and analytical mental faculties to the learning task. These generative learning activities can be surrounded within the broader context of appropriate pedagogical approaches such as collaborative learning, case-based learning, anchored instruction, goal-based and problem-based learning and so on. These issues have been addressed in the course curriculum of GTI but not elaborately. A duration ending on 33 days can hardly conceive of all pedagogical issues properly. The program emphasizes on Bloom's taxonomy, project cycle management, scientific report writing and office management. Higher education pedagogy seems a new phenomenon in Bangladesh and logistic support is inadequate for this field, hence no research has been conducted yet. The strength of professors who provide training at GTI is their teaching experiences basically; based on which, they try to make trainees acquainted with basic learning theories and classroom management. The challenges faced by GTI, as identified by the authors, are as follows:

Inadequate institutional and financial support:

Inadequate institutional and financial support from BAU; for this reason the institute cannot keep the classrooms, laboratories, dormitory and its vehicles fit for trainees' satisfaction level. Being located in a big campus, GTI often remains forgotten by BAU authority.

Bringing faculties from different institutions to GTI: Brining faculties from different places to GTI is the main challenge. As there is no institutional

pressure, faculties normally do not want to come to this remote area.

Lack of institute's physical facilities: At present GTI is using five rooms of Agricultural Extension Building of BAU for official use. The institute has a trainee dormitory consisting of 60 rooms along with its auditorium and canteen is within a walking distance. The rooms of the dormitories are not well furnished. Need to modernized room for each trainee. Both PC labs of GTI are old. However, the facilities are not up to the level state-of-the-art.

Professional advancement training for GTI faculty members:

Opportunities for professional advancement training for GTI faculty members in home and abroad are virtually absent.

UGC are not yet giving enough attention: There is no reward or compulsion in professional achievement, and for this

reason most faculties are reluctant for achieving professional excellence or working hard towards career development. Authorities of UGC are not yet giving enough attention or set any criteria for Foundation Training.

Huge number of faculties with one institutional backup: UGC Annual Report (2017) shows that currently, there are 4,738 Assistant Professors and 2,728 Lecturers in public universities while there are 1,311 Assistant Professors and 4,752 Lecturers in private universities. Since its inception, GTI has trained up only 224 faculties (Table1). Soon totally a new group of students will be coming at tertiary institutions whose orientation is of creative method. How these large numbers of faculties will be trained up immediately through this only institution is a question.

Discussion and Observations

Both as idea and practice, pedagogy in higher education is relatively a new phenomenon in Bangladesh. It was experimentally started at GTI in Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh with their own initiative and for their own faculties. After this training program had been started, it did not get attention from government or its wings like MOE and UGC as it deserved. Started with its own financial capacity in 2007, GTI received its first financial support from UGC in 2008.

As far as infrastructural expansion is concerned, GTI has been neglected; half of the ground floor of Agricultural Extension Building is being used as its offices. No research has been conducted till to date due for financial inability. Trainers working here share their experiences and introduce basic learning theories mainly. Faculties

who have received training are found grateful with things they learned and, most importantly, none has informed his or her dissatisfaction about their training session. From this, it can be inferred that this training is important and it can be expanded. Like GTI, other universities can take similar initiatives in their campus premises.

GTI has successfully trained up 224 persons but they have not been monitored ever. No initiative has been taken yet to conduct any research with regard to the impact of trainings that GTI provides, i.e. whether trained-faculties utilize the gathered knowledge while teaching in their respective academic settings. Consequently, a research initiative can be taken by GTI or others.

Conclusion

In Bangladesh, higher education pedagogy refers to only GTI where junior and midlevel faculties are trained up. In advanced countries, serious emphasis is given on pedagogy. Moreover, since things are getting changed so fast around us, HE sectors going to face new challenges ahead. In that, a vital one is market influence which will more tighten its grip to all sectors of our life. Consequently, universities will have to face more competition for their survival. In this

context, faculties should have to be more careful and technically sound about their teaching practices. Therefore, it is apparent that there are huge scopes for creative faculties related with universities to work in this field for pedagogical innovation to enhance quality teaching in HE sector. The earlier the government, policy makers and campus leaders take initiative to institutionalize HE pedagogy, the better for higher educational sectors of Bangladesh.

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