Repositioning the Role and Pedagogy of Teachers in Higher Education in the Context of Privatisation: The Case of Makerere University, Uganda

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Abstract： In the last ten years, Makerere University, Uganda's oldest premier public academic institution has experienced what has been variously referred to as a quiet revolution. With dwindling government funding that has been characteristic of most developing countries, and realizing that she was losing her human resource in the brain drain wave, Makerere University took a bold shift in 1993 by introducing a private students' scheme. The University convinced government for 5% privately sponsored intake. By 1996, the Faculties of Social Sciences, Arts, Education and Law were offering fully fledged Private Evening programmes while other academic units had substantially increased their private students' intake during the day government programme. To-date, almost all academic units in the university are running privately sponsored programmes. The quiet revolution has however not been without challenges. The expansion and refinancing of the university has meant that classes are not only larger but quite diversified in terms of student ability, motivation and cultural background. This has necessitated repositioning the role and pedagogy of the teacher in light of the changing demand for higher education and the changed student characteristics. In this article, findings from the university's professional development project intended to develop and support teachers in their role are presented. What is apparent is the central position of reflective practice if teachers in higher education are to embrace changed views of teaching and learning. The findings are relevant to teachers at all levels of education.

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed a drastic change in the way universities are structured and financed worldwide. Globally, majority of students seeking university education are self-financed. Governments are investing less and less in higher education, leading to emerging private sector-funded universities (Biggs 2003: 1). Like the trend seems to be, Makerere University, a national university in Uganda, has been running fully fledged privately sponsored programmes since 1996. While this development has widened university education opportunities to the populace, it has got pedagogical implications. Classes have enlarged, and the university has attracted a diverse student population with varied learning abilities, motivation and cultural background. While the brightest and most committed students are still admitted as it has been the case in the past, but alongside these are students with neither strong learning abilities nor strong academic backgrounds. This puts more demands on the university teacher in terms of teaching skills. As appropriately noted by Biggs (ibid., p2), the lecture

method, for example, seemed to be adequate at the time when students were highly selected. With a diverse student populace alternative instructional strategies need to be embraced if all learners are to gain equally from the knowledge and skills being mediated.

Using Professional Development to Enhance the University Teacher's Role and Pedagogy

Realising the drastic changes resulting from the self-sponsorship scheme, an effective teaching and learning policy is at the heart of Makerere University's draft quality assurance policy. To achieve this, and consistent with international trends, a professional development programme has been developed albeit as a pilot project in the faculties of law and science to build the capacity of staff. It is believed that promoting better teaching practices through professional development is part of the drive for quality and excellence (Nicoll and Harrison, 2003). The professional development component of the policy avers that teachers need to be supported to gain skills of maintaining and enhancing academic standards, pastoral care and social life of students (Quality Assurance Task Force, 2006: 21).

Centrality of Reflective Practice in Teacher Professional Development

School of Education working hand in hand with the university's quality assurance unit developed a training programme which not only focussed on the university teacher's teaching role, but also on other roles such as student support, curriculum development and course leadership.

One such training was a 5-day programme for the faculty of science (departments of Zoology and Chemistry).

To make the training meaningful in the professional lives of the science teachers, a reflective practice methodology was embraced. Schon (1983) has described reflective practice as the need for professionals including teachers to reflect when faced with new problems or difficulties for which they have not been specifically trained. Elliott (1991) and Kember and Kelly (1993) have equated reflective practice to action research and/or action learning respectively. The "learning" or "action" refers to the use of reflection to become a better teacher. In other words, reflective practice requires the practitioner to contemplate on his/her current practice with a view to making it better. Healey (2000) puts reflective practice/action research at the heart of teaching scholarship. She asserts, thus, "the scholarship of teaching involves engagement with research into teaching and learning, critical reflection of practice, and communication and dissemination about the practice of one's subject."

Guided by this methodology, the training programme started off with engaging the science faculty staff in three reflective tasks viz. What are my professional strengths? What are the areas in which I need improvement if my students are to learn better? What should the professional development enable me to do better?

Findings from the Reflective Exercise

Setting off the process of reflection on one's practice was not an easy job, as many colleagues felt it was much more comfortable assessing others than assessing oneself: "Let others be the judge". "My students know my strengths or weaknesses better than I do myself". Nevertheless, given "wait time" of at least two minutes before responding, all colleagues were able to contemplate on their practice in a way that enabled them to make value of the training at hand. The importance of "wait time" in teaching cannot be underscored. Evidence from research reveals that teachers normally pause for less than a second after asking a question before proceeding to ask another question or to answer their own question, if no answer is forthcoming (Rowe 1974). This type of practice encourages superficial dialogue and is only suitable for questions that call for memorised facts, that is, those that can be answered without thought (Black et al. 2002: 5). In cases where the wait time is increased to several seconds, its impact on the quality of students' responses and learning in general has been noticed. The importance of wait time was apparent even in the training of the adult learners in the project in question.

Science faculty were able to reflect and articulate their strengths thus:

I am able to make my students understand even difficult concepts using elementary examples.

I am audible and clear.

I am confident when I teach… Not timid.

I am sure I set very good examination questions.

I have got extensive research experience in my field.

I have been teaching for a long time and therefore experienced.

I am always willing to learn from colleagues.

I have good knowledge of the subject matter of my discipline… even the very difficult stuff.

My supervision of students is effective. They are all able to complete on time.

I am good at Planning for teaching i.e. scope and content.

I am able to complete the planned course content on time.

Even without enough materials I am able to improvise.

I make teaching interesting to the students. I am naturally an artist.

I relate with students very well.

Their weak areas that they felt needed strengthening included the following:

Lowering material to student level-putting a line between undergraduate and graduate level.

How to teach in a resource-constrained environment.

How to engage my students in the lesson.

How to start a course in a way that attracts students' interest

How to set exams.

Getting students to take their work seriously.

Even with the several strengths the science faculty felt they possessed, they expected the professional development training to help them become better teachers on return to their units in the following ways:

I expect to learn methods that can stimulate my students' interest and learning…

I expect to learn how to engage my students actively.

I expect to learn how to lower materials to student level.

I expect to learn how to promote quality learning in a large class of over 150 students

I expect to acquire knowledge on how to teach well using few materials

I expect to learn how to communicate best with my students

I expect to learn how to handle bright and average students

Supporting the Science Faculty to Make new Steps

Having documented and discussed the science faculty reflections on their strengths, weaknesses and expectations from the training, the programme was approached in more meaningful ways than would have been possible. Earlier the training had been structured into 8 broad themes, including:

1. Theories about learning and knowledge scholarship of teaching.
2. Preparations: Course planning and writing curriculum.
3. Learning Goals and Learning Outcomes.
4. Course Alignment.
5. Instructional Strategies.
6. Assessment and Evaluation: testing and examinations
7. Student support.
8. Being a course leader.

The staff reflections enabled us to desist from lecturing to them or merely transmitting new skills, to continuously allowing them to make sense of the new material in relation to their existing practice. In the end, it was up to them to isolate those skills that they would immediately take on to become better teachers. At the end of the training they were able to comment thus:

I know I will now be able to plan for my courses more effectively.

I have learnt how to state course objectives and their importance in course planning.

I have appreciated the importance of course alignment and I am now able to rethink my course outlines

I have learnt how to assess objectively

I have learnt interactive teaching and I will now be able to involve my students

I am now able to identify my weaknesses as I interact with my students

I have acquired skills of teaching large classes

I will now be able to improvise teaching materials.

Having embarked on the reflective practice, there was no looking back. The science faculty were also able to reflect on the gaps in the professional development training with a view to improving future similar programmes. Many of the comments related to issues that participants felt had not been sufficiently covered in the programme such as e-learning and construction of marking guides. There was also a concern that more time needed to be given to permit internalization of the concepts as well as the need for the university management to also participate in such workshops. Even with the self-reflection session, some participants felt the need for

carrying out a needs assessment prior to the training "to find out exactly what the workshop participants need in order to cater for their specific needs and make them more included". This underscores the importance of locating any professional development programme in the practitioners' praxis.

Conclusion: Way Forward for Future Teacher Professional Development

With the increasingly transforming structure and financing of higher education resulting into a diverse student population, there is no escaping the fact that universities need to invest in preparing their teachers for the change. In addition to teachers possessing a rich body of knowledge in their specialisations, they also need to possess knowledge of how the subjects are best learned and taught (Ramsden, 1992:2).

However, as universities embark or continue with projects of developing the capacity of their teachers, the model of professional development that is based on reflective practice appears to be a desirable approach. Exposing teachers to a whole new range of teaching techniques would be a futile attempt. But allowing them to reflect on their existing practice with a view of identifying gaps and deriving their own solutions albeit with some support from education experts is more meaningful. Allowing the science faculty in Makerere University to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses in their praxis enabled the education faculty to structure the professional development programme in a way that permitted their colleagues to start rethinking their teaching approaches immediately after the training. One week after the training, one of the participants reported via e-mail:

> ...I am trying to implement some of the things like getting students to discuss a topic in between the lecture but they seemed puzzled by this change in tactic. I guess they are already conditioned to a 1 hr monologue!! But will keep trying for greater involvement.

The science faculty have embarked on a life-long learning journey in which they appear to be ready to learn and improve their practice continuously. Indeed as Biggs (2003: 7) has noted: "Learning new techniques for teaching is like the fish that provides a meal today;

reflective practice is the net that provides meals for the rest of your life". What remains now is structuring the professional development project into action research in which the changes that the science faculty have made on to their practice are conscientiously monitored to gauge their success.

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Acknowledgements

要　　約

　ウガンダの最も古い公立大学であるマケレレ大学は，この10年静かな革命と引用される経験をしてきている．他の発展途上国においても特徴的な政府の財政支出削減と，頭脳流出による人的資源喪失を背景として，マケレレ大学は自費学生枠組の導入という大胆な転換を1993年に導入した．大学は政府に5％の民間からの収入を認めさせた．1996年までに，社会，芸術，教育そして法の各学部は夜間の自費学生プログラムを全面的に導入したのに対し，他の学部では昼間コースに多くの自費学生を入学させた．現在までほとんどの学部が自費学生プログラムを行っている．しかしこの静かな革命には課題もある．学生数の拡大と大学の財務向上により，教室での受講生が増加しただけでなく，能力・やる気・文化的背景に関する多様性が拡大した．高等教育への需要の変化と学生の特性変化に対応し，大学教員はその役割と教授法を見直す事が必要になってきている．本稿では大学教員の能力向上プロジェクトの実践からの発見を報告する．もし大学教員が教授と学習に関する変化を取り入れるべきなら，あきらかに振り返り活動が重要である．この発見はあらゆる学校の教員に対しあてはまる．

　　　　　　　　　（訳：教員教育国際協力センター）