Perceived Issues and Challenges to Professional Development of Faculty Members in Tertiary Academic Institutes of Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract: Professional development of faculty members is an emerging concept in developing countries. It has been embraced quickly in developed nations unlike developing and under developing nations. The major purpose of this paper is to explore various perceived issues and challenges to professional development of faculty members and to provide suggestions to improve such emerging problems. This paper provides suggestions and recommendations for the universities where professional development practices have not yet started or have been started but facing some problems. Author has explored various perceived issues and challenges highlighted by prior studies that have further served as basis to design structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions for this study. Four renowned universities of Punjab were selected from which sample of 108 respondents were chosen for data collection. Data has been analyzed by taking simple means and standard deviations through SPSS. The findings of this paper reveal that the issue that is most alarming and has got lowest mean score is granting rewards and incentives and level of satisfaction of faculty members to professional development programs. Author has provided various recommendations as to conduct proper need assessment before training, to properly plan quality training programs and take input of trainees as well, to increase grants and funds for training, to create positive working environment for teachers, to train the trainers, to provide financial and non financial benefits to trainees and to properly scheduling training programs. This study could be beneficial for policy makers, managers and administrators of universities who could device better policies and practices to promote quality teaching in institutes. [Anam siddiqui, Hassan Danial Aslam, Hafiz Muhammad Farhan, Mehrdad Jalalian. Perceived issues and challenges to professional development of faculty members in tertiary academic institutes of Punjab, Pakistan. Journal of American Science 2011;7(12):533-538]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). http://www.americanscience.org.

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1. Introduction

Higher education system of every country is like brain and blood for its nation. Well organized and well built higher education system is remarkably essential for development and growth of a society. Higher education of today is crossing from novel landscape and is facing exciting challenges as increasing national and international competition, increasing number of diversified students, hiking expectations of stakeholders, globalization, and revolution in information technology and changing teaching methodology. Teachers are the main players of academic institutes that offer major services of teaching and research to students. But now new concept of "Quality Teaching" is emerging in place of simple teaching. In this regard Higher Education Commission of Pakistan is now trying really hard to improve quality of teachers at university level and is trying to develop and train faculty members so to prepare them to meet accelerating challenges faced by education system. By efforts of government and Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan the

education system is progressing from last few years (Mian, n.d.). But the point of dismay is that still higher education is facing new challenges and problems as maintenance of quality, relevance and funding (Mian, n.d; Siddique et al, 2011). Such problems need to be fixed urgently and government, HEC, management and authorities of every academic institute, teachers and students all must try to lessen these problems.

For achieving success universities must try to create, manage and utilize knowledge in effective manner. World is now entering into era of knowledge-based economy and the responsibility of economic development falls largely on higher education system. In light of this according to Economic Survey (2009-10) Higher Education Commission (HEC) has introduced several development programs to improve the academic qualifications of university teachers. Various scholarship schemes have been launched for faculty members and students. MS leading to PhD programs and foreign scholarship for PhD have been launched

successfully that has added lot of PhDs teachers in Pakistan. Such schemes have produced about 300 PhDs teachers in Pakistan (Economic Survey, 2009-10; Siddique et al., 2011a). However the concept of faculty development is still an emerging concept but is gaining momentum throughout the world. To improve quality of teachers, professional development of faculty members in higher education system of Pakistan has become progressively more critical. To meet the rising standards of education and to meet mounting expectations of stakeholders, continuous professional development is important that will not only help in enhancing quality of teachers but also will increase quality of education. Similarly according to Kurz, Mueller, Gibbons and DiCataldo (1989) and Aslam (2011a) performance of faculty members can be improved through proper planed training. Therefore this research could be a great contribution in the field of professional development of faculty members in higher education system and quality education. As the major purpose of this paper is to explore various perceived issues and challenges to professional development of faculty members and to suggest some corrective measures and actions to solve such emerging and existing problems. This study could be beneficial for policy makers, managers and administrators of universities who could device better policies and practices to promote quality teaching in institutes.

2. Material and Methods

This study was conducted in four universities present in the province of Punjab representing universities of Pakistan. The four universities selected were Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan (BZU), Foundation for Advancement of Science and Technology (FAST), University of Lahore (UOL) and The Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB). Author had taken sample of 108 respondents that includes faculty members of these tertiary academic institutes. Author had selected respondents on convenient basis using convenient sampling. To increase reliability and validity of the results author had used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection as structured questionnaires and semi structured interviews were conducted. Each respondent was given questionnaire to fill in after that semi structured interviews were conducted to dig out causes and reasons of responses given. In order to measure the respondents' perceptions on identified issues and challenges from in-depth literature review respondents were asked to express their attitudes on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). The data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics using SPSS.

3. Results

The study explored views of 108 respondents who were serving as faculty members in the universities under study. Various issues and challenges are discussed in the table above and the corresponding values of mean and standard deviations are also mentioned. The respondents were asked to tell their views regarding what issues and challenges they perceived are present at academic institutes while imparting professional development activities. Our findings are summarized in table 1.

As it is shown in table1, the highest mean score is 3.7353 with standard deviation of .58692 that belongs to *impact of professional development activities on quality of education* delivered at institute. The average mean score of 3.37 with standard deviation of 1.012 belongs to *impact of professional development of faculty members on their job performance*. According to the findings, the average mean score of 3.33 with standard deviation of 1.119 belongs to *commitment of management to impart professional development of faculty members*. The other major findings of the study can be listed as below:

1. *Effectiveness of training module and content of training* has got average mean score of 3.28 with standard deviation of .922.
2. The average mean score of 3.2755 with standard deviation of .95821 belongs to *adequate duration and timing of training courses*.
3. The average mean score of 3.23 with standard deviation of 1.086 belongs to *trainers' competency*.
4. *Provision of facilities during training* has average mean score of 3.16 with standard deviation of 1.012.
5. Low mean score of 2.92 with standard deviation of .983 belongs to *perceived level of satisfaction of faculty members with professional development programs*.
6. The lowest mean score of 2.90 with standard deviation of 1.168 belongs to *granting with rewards and incentives*.

Table 1: Perceived Issues and Challenges to Professional Development of Faculty Members in Universities

Perceived Issues and Challenges	Mean	Std. Deviation
Impact of PD Activities on Quality of Education	3.7353	.58692
Impact of PD on Job Performance	3.37	1.012
Commitment of Management to Provide PD Activities to Faculty Members	3.33	1.119
Effectiveness of Modules and Content of Training	3.28	.922
Adequate Duration & Timing of Training Courses	3.2755	.95821
Trainers' Competency, Knowledge and Skill	3.23	1.086
Provision of Facilities during Training	3.16	1.012
Level of Satisfaction to PD activities	2.92	.983
Granted with Rewards and Incentives	2.90	1.168

4. Discussions

The analysis of the results presented in the table above show that the highest mean score belongs to the *impact of professional development activities on quality of education.* The reason behind this is that according to respondents there is significant impact of professional development programs on the quality of higher education. Respondents explained in their interviews that few professional development activities are highly effective in developing existing knowledge skills and expertise of faculty members and if faculty members impart that learned knowledge, skills and expertise in their classes and other services then the immediate beneficiary will be students. Respondents explained that as an under-developed country most of the faculty members serving at universities are not much qualified and skilled as compare to developed countries. Therefore it implies that there is need of well planed and organized professional development programs and teachers and administrators should be well aware of the importance of professional development programs being organized for the staff. If proper training is not carried out then training would be just a waste of money and time and neither training will enhance teachers' knowledge and skills nor students' learning will increase and overall quality of education delivered at institute will be affected negatively. This view substantiates with the findings of Dede, Ketelhut, Whitehouse, Breit, and McCloskey (2006) and Sarwar et al., (2010) that major purpose of professional development programs is to improve quality of education as to bring useful changes in teachers, improve classroom learning climate, and to achieve the intended outcome that is enhancing students' learning. Similarly Harvard Study Research

Project (2004) and Little (2004) have supported similar view that improvement in system's quality can be done through effective recruitment of staff, and through their training and development.

Our findings also show that faculty members perceived that professional development activities that they have received have not much positive impact on their performance. The reason behind it is lack of support from super ordinates and peers. Respondents revealed that learning through training is useless if it is not implemented on the job. If trainees apply, whatever they have learned, on the job then performance could be affected positively. But unsupportive and non-cooperative behavior of supervisors and peers could de-motivate an individual to transfer training effectively.

As we mentioned earlier in the finding of the research, the average mean score of 3.33 with standard deviation of 1.119 belongs to *commitment of management to impart professional development of faculty members* This shows that respondents perceived that their management is not well committed to provide training and development to faculty members. The reason behind this is mainly lack of funds. However Higher Education Commission is doing its utmost to professionally groom faculty members of universities and have started many short term and long term training programs. But still more is required to fill the gap. Due to lack of funds for training proper training programs are not organized to cater need of every faculty member. Moreover the respondents revealed that due to biasness and favoritism many development opportunities are delivered to those faculty members who are dear to administrators. There is great need of equality among the members.

In addition to this there is need of positive working environment where trainees can apply whatever they have learned through training. This finding substantiate with findings of Barnett (2002) & Rasheed et al., (2011).

Our findings about *effectiveness of training module and content of training* shows respondents perceived that training module and content is mostly not effective. The reason behind this is lack of proper need analysis before training. Respondents revealed that most of the training content is useless and is already known to them that do not add much in their knowledge. They explained that no proper need assessment of trainees is conducted before delivering training so that same content is delivered to most of the trainees without considering their individual differences. Many trainees don't have basic essential knowledge and awareness that is highly required for effective learning through training. This view is supported by National Staff Development Council (2001) which says that training content must be need oriented and useful for the participants. Similarly Sparks (1997) explained that the professional development programs must match with goals and standards of institute its practices and content must match to students' and teachers' learning objectives.

Looking at our findings about *adequate duration and timing of training courses* we can see that respondents perceived that most of the training courses are not properly scheduled. The reason behind this is lack of involvement of faculty members while planning training and extensive work load of teachers. Respondents revealed that management does not usually take their suggestion and input while planning and organizing training for them. Moreover they have short deadlines and heavy workloads due to which their participation and interest in training can be affected badly. Similarly McDiarmid (1995) has supported this view point that due to busy schedule and lot of academic and administrative work load on teachers they cannot find time, energy and effort to invest in professional development programs. Respondents further added that those programs that are scheduled during weekends and summer vocations affects negatively as well to their leisure and family time. This implies that management must also take teachers input while designing training for them and must consider their work load and family obligations as well.

Regarding to *trainers' competency* , the respondents perceived that trainers who deliver training are not much competent and knowledgeable. The reason is again lack of need assessment before conducting training. Respondents perceived trainers to be incompetent because he is mostly ignorant about individual differences of trainees. If the trainer is outsourced then he does not know about trainees' need and lack basic knowledge of institute. Moreover few trainers are well qualified and know what to deliver but do not know how to deliver it effectively to trainees. This implies that trainers must be trained properly before training the individuals so that they can impart learning in participants.

Our findings about *Provision of facilities during training* show that most of the respondents perceived that proper facilities are not provided to the trainees during training. The reason again is lack of funds for training. Respondents revealed that due to lack of facilities and resources their interest in attending training declines sharply. They argued while attending most of the training sessions they were not given proper lunches, dinners, traveling facilities, etc that steal away their interest from training.

Our findings regarding the *perceived level of satisfaction of faculty members with professional development programs* show that most of the respondents are not satisfied with level of professional development programs delivered to them. This is indeed an alarming issue. The reason behind is lack of commitment of management, lack of funds, poor planning and lack of need assessment before training. Respondents revealed that there is need of positive working environment where proper support should be provided to trainees to transfer training on the job. Funds should be made available to provide adequate facilities to training. There is need of quality training not just training. Such programs should be organized that can bring favorable benefits for management of universities, for increasing knowledge of faculty members and for enhancing learning of students otherwise training will be just waste of time and money. As this finding substantiate with Borko (2004) and Aslam (2011b) who have said that many professional development programs for faculty development are not of high quality that are just waste of time and money and are not relevant and effective to teachers training need.

Finally, as we mentioned earlier, the lowest mean score of 2.90 with standard deviation of 1.168 belongs to *granting with rewards and incentives.* This shows that most of the respondents are not granted with proper rewards and incentives after training. This is most threatening issue as it got the lowest mean score. The reason is poor performance evaluation system and lack of funds. Respondents revealed that their performance is not properly and continuously appraised due to which their good or bad performance after training is not judged and hence they are not granted with incentives, pay raises or with other benefits. Moreover lack of funds and resources is also another root cause of this problem.

Respondents revealed that if they will be rewarded with financial and non financial benefits after receiving training and applying that training on the job then their motivation to learn through training and transfer it on job will surely increase. This finding is supported by Betts (1998); Lawler & King (2003) and Rogers (1995) that various motivational factors are important to learn through professional development activities from which rewards and compensation is one.

In summary, Authors has dug out various emerging and existing perceived issues and challenges and their underlying reasons and causes that fell in the way of professional development of faculty members in universities of Punjab (Pakistan). The findings have revealed that the issue that is most threatening to faculty development is lack of rewards and incentives and lower level of satisfaction of teachers from existing training programs. However teachers strongly believe that if quality training programs are implemented then quality of education could be raised and better results could be achieved.

It is therefore highly recommended that management and administrators must properly plan training with consent of teachers. They must conduct need assessment before conducting training and must know why training is needed and what could be achieved through it. Government must join hands together with tertiary academic institutes to provide additional training facilities and programs and must help these institutes financially as well. Strong positive working environment is needed to work effectively therefore management should create such environment where teachers can freely share their knowledge and can transfer training on job as well with the support of others. Management must be unbiased and must provide equal growth opportunities to all teachers. Trainees must be selected for training on the basis of merit and prior performance. Proper rewards and financial or non-financial benefits should be given to trainees who successfully attend to training and transfer it on job. Trainers must be selected on the basis of qualification, experiences and training competencies. Training content must be made useful so that training should not just be waste of time and money. Moreover training programs must be scheduled properly with consent of trainees. The findings are consistent with many previous studies as discussed above. These suggestions can be helpful for policy makers, management and administrators of the universities who can device better training programs and can achieve fruitful results.

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