

Professional Development of English Language Teachers at the College Level in India

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Abstract: *In the global context of developing the 21st Century skills in students and teachers and in response to the immediate need for a national framework of professional development of teachers as elaborated in India's National Policy of Education (2020), this paper extends the proposal of a simple prototype tool for documenting and assessing professional progress of English teachers in the form of a five-point portfolio of evidence-based reflective accounts. It reviews the UK Professional Standards Framework (2011), Commonwealth Standards Framework (2014) and the UNESCO Standards Framework (2019). Based on inputs from these three, it recommends that a college teacher can develop a portfolio over an academic year or a semester with evidence-based short reflective accounts of his/her contributions in five areas of activity namely planning learning activities, supporting learning, developing new learning environments, post-assessment feedback to learners and linking students' learning to the teacher's own scheme of scholastic enquiry leading to his/her professional development.*

Keywords: EFL, ELT, English Language Skills, Professional Development, CSF, PSF, UGC, USF,

1. Introduction

This paper addresses the aspect of professional development of the English teachers at the college level in India and adjacent countries with similar professional situations where the main challenge seems to be developing a course of action where English teachers are equipped to develop a complex set of learning attributes in students commonly known as 21st century skills. Whereas the immediate context of the paper comes from the concept note of the conference (15th International and 51st Annual Conference of ELT@I) that there needs to be more professionalism among the English teachers, in its extended context, it is linked to the National Policy of Education (2020) which goes on record that there is an immediate need for a national framework to promote, understand and assess professionalism in teaching in general in India. Hence, the paper intends to prepare a pragmatic and simple tool for documenting and assessing professional development of English teachers at the college level. The proposed tool is a portfolio that a college teacher can develop over an academic year or a semester with evidence-based short reflective accounts of his/her contributions in five areas of activity related to student learning rather than delivery of teaching, namely, planning learning activities, supporting learning, developing new learning environments, feedback to learners and linking learning to the teacher's own scheme of scholastic enquiry leading to his/her professional development.

2. Objectives

The first objective of this paper is to explore the common minimum professional attributes of college teachers and certain specific professional attributes of English language teachers with respect to a vast body of work in the domain of 21st century skills of college teachers in the global perspective.

The second objective is to be informed by three internationally acclaimed frameworks of professional standards to understand their common denominators in order to draw input for an Indian context in need of professional standards in teaching.

The third objective is to critically examine the Indian scenario of recruitment, promotion and career move of college teachers in general and English language teachers in particular and accommodate certain facets

of professional standards through institutional and organizational procedures that initiate, attest and reward professional development of teachers which is not tightly linked with the cause of students' learning at present.

3. Approach

In order to realize the three objectives stated above, the paper critically examines three types of representative literature. It first seeks to establish the context of 21st Century skills of students which make professional development of teachers a mandatory agenda. Against that background, the paper reviews three professional frameworks namely the UK Professional Standards Framework (2011), the Commonwealth Standards Framework (2014) and the UNESCO Standards Framework (2019). Almost as an antithesis to the comprehensive understanding of the frameworks, the paper reviews the primary documents guiding recruitment, promotion and career move scenario of Indian college teachers and explores how far at these three stages the teacher's professional development is assessed or rewarded in terms of most of the common standards that are furnished in these three frameworks.

4. Findings/Results

4.1. 21st Century skills of English teachers

To present the context of the need for developing the 21st century skills among teachers, Cretu (2017) very clearly focuses on how factors such as rampant immigration, changing labour market, fast improvement in information technology and above all the economic practices of globalization are reshaping societies and are impacting education. The ever-changing life and work pattern in the 21st century demand a certain set of skills in students to prepare them for employment and life. These skills cannot be developed until the teachers teaching them are equipped with corresponding teaching skills which call for continuous teacher development.

For last one decade or so, a set of competencies familiar among academics as 21st Century skills are increasingly being paid attention to with the motto of improving the instructional quality of teaching which obviously include language teaching at the college level. According to Kim et.al (2019), the most significant challenge in this regard is the deficiency of context-specific understanding of teaching practices which should support the cause of professional development of teachers. In a contextualized way, they stress upon the need to assess the social quality of teaching practices. They examine three diverse contexts from Ghana (pre-school level), India (primary level) and Uganda (secondary level) and develop a 3-dimensional system consisting of teacher feedback, reflective practice and continuous improvement with the hope that these standards will contribute to the development of 21st Century teacher skills which will benefit the 21st-century learners.

While trying to motivate Columbian EFL teachers to incorporate intellectually challenging and significant alternatives of instructions that should lead students not only to learn the English language but also to work creatively with others, using various media and technological supports in order to use the language in complex perspectives (Fandino, 2013). His main argument is that it is the demand of the time that learning strategies, digital competences and career abilities are explicitly integrated and EFL classrooms should take the lead in this integration by providing students with attributes such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and self-direction. Hence, there is a need for professional development of EFL teachers to be suitable for students who are already in need of the 21st century skills.

4.2. Professional Standards Frameworks

The three professional standards frameworks that are being reviewed here are formulated to guide teachers to understand their professional roles and responsibilities better as facilitators of learning. Each one of them not only takes into account the relevance of expansion of knowledge base of the subject

matter or discipline that the teacher conceptually associates himself/herself with but also exposes to him/her the standards to help the teacher understand his/her immediate context better. This type of a generic approach is very useful in the educational set up of India where English language is taught in a diverse multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural system. Sometimes the local institutional variations are so wide that at a national level it is hard to insist upon compulsory standards based on any one framework. This section presents reviews of three leading frameworks to understand a ground of commonality to examine if the standards used in existing Indian system of professional monitoring of teachers are in line with them.

The Professional Standards Framework (PSF 2011) of UK consists of 5 areas of activity, 6 aspects of core knowledge and 4 professional values. The 5 areas of activity are (a) design and plan learning activities and/or programmes of study, (b) teach and/or support learning (c) assess and give feedback to learners (d) develop effective learning environments and approaches to student support and guidance (e) engage in continuing professional development in subjects/disciplines and their pedagogy, incorporating research, scholarship and the evaluation of professional practices. The 6 aspects of core knowledge are (a) the subject material, (b) appropriate methods for teaching, learning and assessing in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme, (c) how students learn, both generally and within their subject/disciplinary area(s), (d) the use and value of appropriate learning technologies, (e) methods for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching, and (f) the implications of quality assurance and quality enhancement for academic and professional practice with a particular focus on teaching. The third dimension in the framework is that of professional values which have four facets such as (a) respect individual learners and diverse learning communities, (b) promote participation in higher education and equality of opportunity for learners, (c) use evidence-informed approaches and the outcomes from research, scholarship and continuing professional development, and (d) acknowledge the wider context in which higher education operates recognizing the implications for professional practices.

The Commonwealth Standards Framework (CSF 2014), on the other hand, deliberates upon three similar dimensions known as professional knowledge, professional practice and professional commitment. Professional knowledge has 3 standards namely (a) content knowledge, (b) student knowledge and (c) knowledge of teaching and learning. Similarly, professional practice has 3 standards namely, (a) planning for learning, (b) creating a learning environment and (c) assessment and evaluation of learning. The third dimension has 6 standards namely (a) professional learning, (b) engagement, (c) leadership, (d) values, (e) relationships and (f) ethics.

The UNESCO Standards Framework (2019) is similar to CSF (2014) and it has 3 domains namely teaching knowledge and understanding, teaching practice and teaching relations.

The first domain has 3 standards which assume that the practising teachers know and understand (a) how students learn, and the particular learning, social, and development needs of their students, (b) The content and related methodologies of the subject matter or content being taught, (c) core research and analytical methods that apply in teaching, including with regard to student assessment.

The second domain has 4 standards that expect that the teachers' practice consistently demonstrates (a) planning and preparation to meet the learning objectives held for student, (b) an appropriate range of teaching activities that reflect and align with both the nature, of the subject content being taught, and the learning, support, and development needs of the students, (c) organization and facilitation of students' activities so that students are able to participate constructively, in a safe and cooperative manner, (d) Assessment and analysis of student learning that informs the further preparation for, and implementation of required teaching and learning activity.

The third dimension, teaching relations, has 3 standards, (a) cooperative and collaborative professional processes that contribute to collegial development, and support student learning and development, (b)

communications with parents, caregivers, and members of the community, as appropriate, to support the learning objectives of students, including formal and informal reporting, (c) continuous professional development to maintain currency of their professional knowledge and practice.

4.3. Reflection of Professional Standards in Recruitment, Promotion and Career Move:

In India, at the College level, the professional credentials of the teachers of English and all other subjects are assessed at the time of recruitment and during their in-service promotion. Interestingly, no prior professional knowledge or experience is required as long as one obtains a certificate of subject knowledge (a Master's Degree with a certain percentage of marks) and qualifies in an eligibility test which again is not based on professional knowledge, but subject knowledge. Even during in-service career advancement programmes, the norms insist primarily on external evidence of acquiring the advanced level of subject knowledge through research and scholarly activities. The areas of professional knowledge, its understanding cum application, its assessment and rewarding are still quite disorganized at the moment. Awareness about this anomaly is just round the corner.

4.3.1. Recruitment Norms and Professional Standards:

As per UGC (2018), the National Eligibility Test (NET), or an accredited test (State Level Eligibility Test SET/SLET) remains the minimum eligibility for appointment of Assistant Professor and equivalent positions wherever provided in these regulations. Further, SLET/SET shall be valid as the minimum eligibility for direct recruitment to Universities / Colleges / Institutions under the control of the respective state only. It also states that candidates, who have been awarded Ph.D. degree in accordance with the University Grants Commission (Minimum Standards and Procedure for Award of M. Phil./Ph.D. Degree) Regulation, 2009 or University Grants Commission (Minimum Standards and Procedure for Award of M. Phil./Ph.D. Degree) Regulation (2016) and their subsequent amendments from time to time as the case maybe, are exempted from the requirement of the minimum eligibility condition of NET/SLET/SET for recruitment and appointment of Assistant Professor or equivalent positions in Universities / Colleges / Institutions.

It also instructs further that, the award of degree to candidates registered for the M. Phil. / Ph.D. programme prior to July 11, 2009, shall be governed by the provisions of the then existing Ordinances / Bye-laws / Regulations of the Institutions awarding the degree. All such Ph.D. candidates shall be exempted from the requirement of NET/SLET/SET for recruitment and appointment of Assistant Professor or equivalent positions in Universities/Colleges / Institutions subject to the fulfillment of the following conditions:

(a) Ph.D. degree of the candidate awarded in regular mode only, (b) Evaluation of the Ph.D. thesis by at least two external examiners, (c) An open Ph.D. viva voce of the candidate had been conducted, (d) Candidate has published two research papers from his/her Ph.D. work out of which at least one must be in a refereed journal, (e) Candidate has made at least two presentations in conference/seminars, based on his/her Ph.D. work. (a) to (e) as above are to be certified by the Registrar/ Dean (Academic Affairs). In addition, NET/SLET/SET shall not be required for such disciplines for which NET/SLET/SET is not conducted. Last, but not the least, a minimum of 55% marks (or an equivalent grade in a point scale wherever grading system is followed) shall be required at the Master's level for direct recruitment of teachers at any level.

In this entire set of guidelines of recruitment of teachers, there is no mentioning of knowledge of teaching and learning, knowledge of pedagogy, knowledge of learning environments in their ethical, economic, social and psychological contexts, knowledge of learners and their needs and above all the knowledge of national priority of learner preparation towards 21st century skills. It probably presumes that one who qualifies as per the guidelines furnished above has knowledge of these domains by default. But,

hypothetically, it is highly possible that one who qualifies as per the norms of UGC (2018) has very little knowledge in these domains. The norms are set around disciplinary/subject knowledge as demonstrated through certain mostly quantitative standards that can be clerically ascertained, without rigorous qualitative assessment.

4.3.2. Promotional Path and Professional Standards:

To provide guidelines to conduct career development of Indian college teachers, UGC (2018: pp27-28) maintains that the Assessment of the performance of College and University teachers for Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) promotion is based on the following criteria:

(a) Teaching-Learning and Evaluation: Commitment to teaching based on observable indicators such as being regular to class, punctuality to class, remedial teaching and clarifying doubts within and outside the class hours, counseling and mentoring, additional teaching to support the college/university as and when the need arises, etc. Examination and evaluation activities like attending to examination supervision duties, question paper-setting for university/college examinations, participation in evaluation of examination answer scripts, conducting examinations for internal assessment as per schedule to be announced by the institution at the beginning of each Academic Session and returning and discussing the answers in the class. (b) Personal Development Related to Teaching and Research Activities: Attending orientation/refresher/methodology courses, development of e-contents organizing seminar/ conference/ workshop / presentation of papers and chairing of sessions/guiding and carrying out projects and publishing the research output in national and international journals etc. (c) Administrative Support and Participation in Students' Co-curricular and Extra-curricular Activities.

The Assessment Procedure has the following three steps which is applicable for CAS at all levels: (a) Step 1: The college/university teachers shall submit to college/university an annual self-appraisal report in a prescribed Performa. The report should be submitted at the end of every academic year, within the stipulated time. The teacher will provide documentary evidence for the claims made in the annual self-appraisal report, which is to be verified by the HOD/Teacher- in-charge etc. The submission should be through the Head of the Department (HOD)/teacher-in-charge. (b) Step: 2: After completion of the required years of experience for promotion under CAS and fulfillment of other requirements indicated below, the teacher shall submit an application for promotion under CAS. (c) Step 3: A CAS Promotion shall be granted as mentioned in the relevant clauses of these regulations.

4.3.3. Career Move and Professional Standards:

If an Indian college teacher holding the position of Assistant Professor (Selection Grade/Academic Level 12) intends to be promoted to the next level, as part of his/her professional growth and progress, to that of Associate Professor (Academic Level 13A), UGC (2018) sets the eligibility in the following way: (a) Selection Grade Assistant Professor who have completed three years of service in that grade, (b) Ph.D. degree in concerned subject/allied/relevant discipline, (c) any one of the following during last three years: completed one course / programme from among the categories of Refresher Courses/ Methodology Workshops/Syllabus Up-gradation Workshop/ Teaching-Learning-Evaluation Technology Programmes / Faculty Development Programmes of at least two weeks (ten days) duration (or completed two courses of at least one week (five days) duration in lieu of every single course/programme of at least two weeks (ten days) duration); or taken one e-certification; or contribution towards development of e-content in 4-quadrant(at least one quadrant) minimum of 10 modules of a course/contribution towards development of at least 10 modules of MOOCs course/ contribution towards conduct of a MOOCs course during the period of assessment. As per the CAS Promotion Criteria are concerned, a teacher shall be promoted if (a) the teacher gets 'satisfactory' or 'good' grade in the annual performance assessment reports of at least two of the last three years of the assessment period as prescribed (b) the promotion to the post of Associate Professor is recommended through selection committee constituted as per the regulations.

The inputs in this subsection (4.3) clearly show that in neither of the stages namely recruitment, promotion or career move it is overtly checked if a potential or practising teacher is suitable to develop the 21st Century skills among students. A qualitative comparison of subsections 4.2 and 4.3 would show that in Indian scenario a teacher is made accountable only for his/her growth through his/her research degree and published papers but not for the growth of the learners. Indian teachers of English as well as other subjects are deprived of a comprehensive professional perspective as the system rewards mainly individual achievement in research but not contribution to the institutions in initiatives to support learning. For example, a teacher dedicated to students' learning and development has no scope to be professionally rewarded until he/she earns a research degree or publishes a few papers which may be academically distant from his nature and depth of engagement with students' learning. This anomaly needs to be addressed at the earliest.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In view of the mismatch discussed in the previous section, this paper recommends the following:

- a. To examine professional awareness of teacher aspirants at the recruitment level, essay-type open-ended questions on professional aspects of English language and literature teaching should be included in the NET and SLET examinations. This may not be relevant for the JRF, which can still remain primarily content-based.
- b. For promotions from one grade (for example Assistant Professor) to another grade (for example Selection Grade Assistant Professor) within the same institution, a teacher should submit a portfolio of five yearly (not five-yearly) self-appraisal reports which should show his/her reflective accounts of original contributions to five areas of operations namely course planning, classroom teaching, assessment and feedback, scholarly activities and quality enhancement. Each area of operation should reflect updating of disciplinary knowledge benchmarked against national standards and reflection of professional values aligned with the institution's core values. The portfolio should go through a compulsory process of blind peer-review and then validated by a competent authority, such as a University as a permanent professional record.
- c. For career move, in the case of one teaching position in one institution to another (higher) teaching position in another institution, the same validated portfolio should be given equal weighting (if not more) along with research credentials such as the Ph.D. degree, number of publications and Scopus score etc.

The proposed portfolio should be aligned with the 'documentary evidence for the claims made in the annual self-appraisal report' insisted upon by the UGC (2018) mentioned in section 3.2. If the portfolio is peer-reviewed and anonymously graded by a competent authority, it can serve the purpose of Career Advancement Scheme mentioned in section 3.3. A college teacher obtaining a certificate of completion and attainment would then be free to make a career move to another institution which will make it convenient for his/her potential recruiters to make a decision. It should also be a tentative attempt to address the issue of developing a National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) mentioned in National Education Policy (2020: p 48). This paper extends the hypothesis for future researchers that the tentative five-point framework can guide English teachers to understand students' learning as part of their professional tasks as facilitators of learning and how it can contribute to the teacher's own professional progress. The proposed tool is meant to be a prototype which leaves scope for further customization at the institutional level by teachers of other subjects and contribute towards formulation of the NHEQF at a higher level.

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