Pedagogical Challenges Involved in Teaching in Diverse Classrooms in Private Higher Education Institutions in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: **Pedagogical teaching methods are currently being influenced all levels in education sector. When increasing diversity in classrooms and number of students, new ways of teaching would play a vital role in extending knowledge and learning. The purpose of this study was to identify key challenges in teaching methods use in private higher education institutions in Sri Lanka specially in diverse classrooms. Analyzed current teaching methods followed by lecturers and recommended new pedagogical teaching methods which can be use in higher educational institutions. Study randomly selected twenty-three respondents who are working as lecturers in private higher education institutions and collected data using an online questionnaire. Data collected was analyzed in ANOVA tests. Findings revealed that challenges faced by the lectures in diverse classrooms and what factors hinder their use of pedagogical teaching methods. Also, study has analyzed practical issues facing by private higher educational institutions when implementing new pedagogical techniques. Also, Lecturers with appropriate qualifications can act as autonomous lecturers.**

Keywords: **Diverse Classrooms, Flexible Learning, Learner-Centred, Teaching Methods, Teacher Autonomy.**

1. Introduction

Universities are playing an important role in higher education to prepare leaders for next generation. In Sri Lanka there are fifteen government universities which are approved under University Grants Commission Sri Lanka. Also, there are seventeen private higher education institutions which have degree awarding authority and recognized by University Grants Commission Sri Lanka. Other than that, there are nearly fifty private higher education institutions island wide to support for higher education industry to make graduates who cannot enter into the government universities due to limited entries.

All most all the universities and higher education institutions are practicing traditional teaching methods in Sri Lanka. But most of the teachers in government schools, and some of the lecturers in Universities have qualified with teaching qualifications (postgraduate diploma in education) and this will be a very good approach to learn new teaching methods and they might apply those methods to their classroom sessions. But there is a doubt of using these new approaches of teaching in classrooms in Sri Lanka.

This study is focused to identify Pedagogical challenges in private higher education institutions in Sri Lanka. Also, this study investigated what are the teaching methods followed by most of the lecturers in private sector and what factors are affecting to select best teaching method (s) in diverse classrooms. As educators we need to face for another challenge in diverse classrooms. Lecturers need to realize most of the classrooms are filled up with diverse range of ethnics, language, religious and racial. The democratization of knowledge and the expansion of access to higher education (HE) requires higher education ministries, universities and other private institutions to constantly review their pedagogical practices to ensure that they remain up to date with developments in teaching practice and technology, and provide the best possible guidance and support to their learners. HE institutions need to be ready to address the changes in the nature of work and associated competencies, and build deep relationships with industry (Ernst & Young, 2012).

2. Objectives of the study

1. Review the presently using teaching methods in private higher education institutions' faculty members in Sri Lanka.
2. To identify the challenges related to teaching in diverse classrooms in private higher education institutions in Sri Lanka.
3. To recommend new pedagogical methods for private higher education institutions in Sri Lanka.

3. Literature Review

A. Teaching Methods

Lecturing is thus a complex, exciting, challenging and interactive skill whose main aim is to create a learning situation in which knowledge is imparted and in which understanding and skills are developed. Lecturers should experiment on innovating teaching methods where required and these should be personalized to actively engage learners in to the lesson.

According to Adunola (2011) in order to make the teaching method effective, teachers should be conversant with various teaching strategies. A typical classroom environment with a presentation from the course teacher accompanied by a lecture does not promote learners to participate and does not build a

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required involvement level of the students. This typical environment only promotes a fraction of students who start thinking at their own and try to raise questions taking initiatives. Before the advent of technology in the teaching methods, the instructor is the transmitter and the learners are the receivers of the knowledge being transferred (Khurshid & Ansari, 2012). The students have a minimum role to play here and the just at the receiving end of the transmission (Orlich et al. 1998). Croker and Algina 1986 assert in their work the individual needs of the students that cannot be fulfilled with one standard teaching method as every student comes from different background and possess different questions about the things being taught and have a different focus towards the environment around him or her.

According to the experimental study done by Khurshid F & Ansari U (2012), they observed that innovative teaching methods are more result oriented than traditional classroom teaching.

B. Teaching Autonomy

Teaching autonomy reflects lecturers' ability to control, decide and change things regarding their teaching and their environment. According to Pearson & Moomaw (2006) it is the ability and freedom to choose learning goals, materials and activities, methods, plan the sequence of instruction, establish rules of behavior in class and make decisions during instruction, i.e. the ability to select and determine the 'what' and the how' in the context of teaching, or at least take part in such a decision-making process. Husband and Short (1994) also believe that autonomy provides teachers the capacity to regulate their daily schedules, teach as they like, have the liberty to make choices and create curriculum thoughts. Hong and Youngs (2014) found that in South Korea, the teachers did not welcome the idea of enhanced curricular autonomy. As such, the teachers preferred many restrictions on the curriculum even when the state agencies wanted to grant them autonomy. Aoki (2000) offers an explicit definition of teacher autonomy, suggesting that this involves the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one's own teaching. According to Richard Smith (2000), teacher autonomy refers to "the ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes for oneself as a teacher, in cooperation with others." Benson (2000) argues that teacher autonomy can be seen as "a right to freedom from control (or an ability to exercise this right) as well as actual freedom from control". By considering these factors this study has collected lecturer's qualifications and the way they have communicated with learners.

C. Teacher Training

In recent years, there have been discussions about the need to improve university teachers' pedagogical thinking and skills as well. As a consequence, training of university teachers has recently become a widespread trend in many countries (Postareff et al., 2007). Active learning stands in contrast to "standard" modes of instruction in which teachers do most of the talking and students are passive.

Lecturers who use active learning pause frequently during the period once every fifteen minutes or so to give students a few minutes to work with the information they're providing (Scott, 2005).

D. Learner Engagement

Student engagement has historically focused upon increasing achievement, positive behaviors, and a sense of belonging to help students remain in school. Over time, student engagement strategies were further developed and more broadly implemented as a way to manage classroom behaviors. More recently, student engagement has been built around the hopeful goal of enhancing all students' abilities to learn how to learn or to become lifelong learners in a knowledge-based society (Gilbert, 2007, p. 1).

4. Research methodology

Quantitative and qualitative research techniques were used in this study to collect data from a diverse group of respondents in different private institutions in Sri Lanka. Online questionnaire has sent to lecturers who are working in private higher education institutions. Purposeful sampling was used due to the limitations of physical, and human resources as well as time. There were forty-six questions available on the questionnaire and twenty-three faculty members have selected randomly from different agreements with private educational institutions.

Teaching methods selected as independent variable and challenges faced by teachers (teaching autonomy and communication methods), learner engagement were dependent variables.

5. Analysis and findings

A. Demographic Analysis

There were forty-six questions on the questionnaire and randomly selected 23 lecturers as respondents who are working with private higher education institutions in Colombo, Sri Lanka. 60.9% of respondents were female lecturers and 39.1% were male lecturers. Majority of the respondents (60.9%) are in age of 30-40 range. 21.7% are falls in 40-50 and remaining 17.4% are below 30s. Only 30.4% were qualified with a PhD qualification and remaining were 43.5%, 8.7% and 17.4% for MBA/MSc, Postgraduate diploma and Bachelors' degree respectively.

47.8% respondents are having more than 10 years of experience in lecturing. 17.4% have less than 5 years of experience. But according to these findings it is showed that more experienced and qualified lecturers are working with private higher education institutions and 56.5% are working as part time/visiting lecturers with these institutions. 34.8% working as full-time lecturers and 8.7% working as both full time and part time basis. Therefore, most of these lecturers are working as part time only. 60.8% respondents are spending time research on interesting topics related to their filed and they have

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published several articles as well. Also, this research has focused for the fields of business management, marketing, HRM and computer science.

When analysing age of these professionals, 60.9% between 30-40 age range, 21.7% between 40-50 age range and 17.4% are in below 30 of age. Therefore, this research can assume that the most of the private institutions are hiring/ working with matured professionals in various fields.

B. Educational Qualifications of Lecturers

In Sri Lanka it is not a must to have a teaching qualification to teach in higher education. Based on the undergraduate or/and postgraduate educational qualifications, institutions hired them to teach in various levels. The projects implemented by the government to improve teaching skills of government teachers have some weaknesses. Main weaknesses are to select the target group and effectiveness of these programs. Getting qualified with a teaching qualification will positively impact on the teaching process and will support to become an effective teacher. As an example, in planning stage of the teaching process and plan the delivery session effectively by identifying effective teaching methods. For this purpose, lecturer needs knowledge of teaching and pedagogical methods of teaching. With this argument this survey included a question related to the teaching qualification or checked whether the respondents have participated at least a training program in pedagogy. According to the results, only 17% has qualified with such a teaching qualification or participated for a training program. This percentage is very low since we have diverse classrooms in all the private higher education institutions. Having qualified faculties with pedagogic experience for institutions is very hard in this position and there is a doubt on their teaching styles, delivering methods and techniques used in the classroom.

C. Teaching Methods

Questions related to teaching methods use in the classroom has rated 87% as direct instructions which is a traditional teacher- centred method. Reasons behind to select direct instructions in the classroom are, due to time constraints of the module, due to number of students in the class, depending on the stream which they teach and delivering lectures to 1st year students in a degree programme thought that students needs to understand the concept of self-learning and therefore they are thinking that this is the best method of teaching. Apart from Direct instructions, lecturers also use other teaching methods for their delivery. 47.8% use Inquiry-based learning as the lecturer participated as the supporting role throughout the learning process rather than a sole authority figure. 43.5% using Kinesthetic Learning as this is linking with physical activities related to the module. Also 43.5% use Expeditionary Learning as it is related to project-based learning. Most of the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes included learner projects and as they need to provide a solution for a real-world scenario.

1) Barriers with Current Teaching Methods

In each method lecturers have advantages and disadvantages. As major barriers, lecturers have mentioned that language gap. Majority of the Sri Lankan government schools use native language (Sinhala) to develop curriculums and all the subjects except English language teach in native language. Only few schools where more facilities have and situated in urban cities have English medium stream. Therefore, when students are entering to follow higher education their main struggle is the medium they have to study. All the higher education institutions are following foreign degree programs and delivering those programs in English medium.

Another barrier is to promote pedagogical teaching methods to higher education programs high dependability of students with lecturer and lecture material. From primary to secondary education, teachers are not following teaching methods like active learning, flexible learning, just in time learning methods but using instructional methods. Therefore, learners are not trained to do their own researches and discover new ideas by engaging activities. And they are highly relying on teacher and teacher material.

Another issue was lack of individual attention on learners due to class size and time frame given to lecturers. Due to these reasons' learners are not encourage to discuss their issues or doubts related to the subject matter. But majority of lecturers are preferred to use flipped classroom method because students can read and do some work before delivering the lesson in the classroom and try out some assignment tasks. But some lecturers have commented that this method is not suitable for Sri Lankan students due to lack of learning resources in their houses. Since flipped classroom method followed pre-recorded lessons and students need to download or watch recoded lesson at home which is not very common method in Sri Lanka. Most of the lecturers are not following only one teaching method but they are using mix of these methods considering factors like class size, background of the students, nature of the module and expected outcome of the module.

D. Effective Dimensions of teaching in diverse classrooms

According to faculty's perception, 65% of respondents were selected "Strategies for actively engaging students in learning" as effective dimension of teaching in diverse classrooms. And 52% have responded "Understanding of diverse learning styles". Equally faculties responded to "Knowledge of students' social identities" and "Integrating diversity/multiple perspectives into coursework" as 39%. And 34% have selected "Awareness of issues of diversity".

E. Teaching Autonomy

Teacher autonomy is driven by a need for personal and professional improvement, so that an autonomous teacher may seek out opportunities over the course of his or her career to develop further. This study also examined the teacher autonomy among faculty members who are working in the private higher education institutions. According to the demographic

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characteristics analysed previously, majority of respondents are belonging to age group of 30-40 range and can be taken as active age bracket with a reasonable number of years to serve. According to the results of teaching experience in years, majority were having more than 10 years of experience in lecturing. From this result, it was evident that majority of the teachers are fairly experienced on their job to take professional decisions.

In order to measure the effect of demographic characteristics, with qualifications of faculty members ANOVA test has performed. According to ANOVA test only years of experience has a relationship with lecturers' qualification. Therefore, according to these results the study can assume in order to become autonomous lecturer; they could have a proper qualification as well as considerable years of lecturing experience.

F. Learner Engagement

Next pedagogical challenge facing by the lecturers in the class room is learner engagement to the lesson. 56% of the respondents are asking questions during the lesson or after the lesson. From this technique they felt that learners will actively listen to their lecture and give answers. 30% of lecturers are preferred to use classroom activities, role plays, tutorials and it will give more involvement to the lesson. According to recent findings a typical learning environment with a presentation from the lecturer accompanied by a lecture neither promotes learners' participation nor build the required level of reasoning among students. Students build a better understanding of the main concepts more effectively when they are engaged to solve problems during class activities.

G. Feedback to Students

Giving feedback students can be divided in to two categories, such as formative assessment and summative assessment. Formative assessment is to contribute to student learning through the provision of information about performance. Formative assessment can be formal or informal.

This study has focused how often a lecturer is giving feedback to learners during their teaching period. Also, this study tries to find out the relationship between the teaching method and the frequency of feedback to students. According to the results there is a positive correlation between flipped classroom, differentiated method and Expeditionary Learning with the frequency of feedback to learners.

6. Recommendations

According to the demographic characteristics, young lecturers are participating as visiting faculty in private higher education sector. With these results there is a doubt that whether these lecturers are using effective teaching methods in diverse class rooms. Having qualified faculties with pedagogic experience for institutions is very hard in this position and there is a doubt on their teaching styles, delivering methods and techniques used in the classroom. From this study can

recommend that higher education institutions need to focus on getting training programs for their faculty members or recruiting faculty members who has completed a teaching qualification.

Based on the collected data, majority were used teacher-centered. By introducing new pedagogical teaching methods can improve above issues in diverse class rooms. Recognition of the importance of these diversity dimensions by faculty may indicate awareness that classrooms are increasingly populated by diverse students who have different learning needs and require different pedagogical strategies for success. To overcome barriers in diverse classrooms, this study has given more focus on new pedagogical teaching strategies. One strategy is Active Learning. Active learning is engaging students in doing something besides listening to a lecture and taking notes to help them learn and apply course material. Learners may be involved in talking and listening to one another, or writing, reading and reflecting individually (Felder and Brent, 1997). Active learning is closely related to Constructivist approach. Active learning can be achieved through various other approaches such as learner-generated content, gamification and problem-based learning.

With these approaches there are advantages and disadvantages when it applies for a country like Sri Lanka especially in Asia region. Because with active learning, studies showed that the reduce the focus on content and increase the focus on learning. Doing this, learners can focus on evaluate information and how to find answers to real situations. And lecturers need to support on various learning activities to match learners' interests, skills and expertise. Then the work load of a lecturer will be increase and they need to revise the curriculum and spend time to analyse learners' levels and prepare activities rather trained learners to complete an assignment or practicing learners to write answers in an examination. But most of the private higher education institutions are offering programs from foreign universities and they have to follow the standards and instructions given by those universities and there are no or limited authority to change the curriculum by local experts.

Also, there are few institutions who are offering their own degrees and they might have a chance of changing their curriculum to cover above approaches. But there are some limitations when considering the competitors who are offering the same qualification and the duration of completing the program. Thinking of these factors they will not focus to amend their curriculum. But there is trend of these new teaching techniques in education filed and in future may be in another 10- 20 years later these approaches will be introduced.

Another approach is Flexible learning. With this new term called flexible learning, rethink about new ways of pedagogy approaches to develop flexibility of thinking and practical aspects. According to Ryan & Tilbury (2013) this approach considers the future landscape for higher education graduates, recognizing that as the world changes our pedagogies must also find new forms to help learners not just to react to current trends

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or to repeat dominant patterns of thinking but to be capable of responding constructively and pursuing alternatives.

In terms of the pedagogical design of emerging technological landscapes, one of the most crucial questions is the balance between activities designed beforehand (e.g., task design) and monitoring (e.g., by teacher) reactively during the learning process. However, researchers claim that current educational settings often do not produce the desired results in learner-centered settings (Alvarez, Guascj, & Espasa, 2009; Downes, 2010; Minocha, Schroeder, & Schneider, 2011).

Drexler (2010) and McLoughlin and Lee (2010) have also claimed that the easy availability of emerging learning technologies, such as social software, has caused challenges for teachers.

With related to learner engagement, only modules which has project based can be implement these methods. And most of the foreign curriculums and local curriculums are not updated to use most of the new pedagogical strategies. Therefore, it is highly recommended to transform curriculum to use new teaching strategies.

7. Conclusion

From this study there were number of pedagogical challenges have identified and discussed about solutions to minimize those challenges. Apart from pedagogical challenges, this study has focused on learner feedback, leaner engagement, teaching methods and teacher autonomy in private higher education institutions in Sri Lanka. Based on analysed results of this study, there are number of recommendations. One is getting the proper teaching qualifications by the lecturers in order to apply pedagogical teaching strategies. In order to qualify with such strategies institutes and government should consider implementing training programs to increase the knowledge of pedagogical strategies. Also, private institutions need to consider about re designing curriculums in order to get effective outcomes from learners with pedagogical strategies. As future research areas this study can be extend to analyze the use of instructional strategies in private higher education institutions.

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