

Pedagogical Challenges Among Fresh Instructors A Case of Mekele University

Abiyot Nega*

Introduction

Though our history of educating can take us back a century, there are still a lot of problems encountering the system. Throughout the life span of modern education in Ethiopia, enriching professionalism has never had a significant place. Due to lack of competence, we have been witnessing a decline in the quality of our education which in turn leads towards a failure to produce skilled manpower.

It would, perhaps, become a real tiresome task to try to discover and analyze the problems of our educational system; besides, it is not the aim of this short report to assess this vast issue. Rather the major objective of this paper is targeted towards analyzing the role of experience in the teaching and learning process. Moreover, it will try to address the existing problem of running the instructional process using teachers who do not have the actual exposure to teaching and those without any pedagogical background. Finally, the report tries to examine the impact of such practices on the teaching and learning process by taking the particular case of Mekele University.

Higher education has a very crucial role in the development of any country. As the major source of skilled manpower, higher education has a multi-faceted effect on any society. Be it politically, economically, culturally, psychologically, higher education is at the heart of any nation.

In spite of all these, institutions of higher education have their own failures and drawbacks. When we come to our particular case, where higher education is at its infancy, we observe several problems.

* Mekele University

Among the various challenges, shortage of professional instructors is the major one. According to available literature, the efficiency of any teaching and learning process is basically determined by the quality of the teacher himself. That means, having all the necessary knowledge of the subject matter doesn't signify that he/she will be the best teacher. Besides, every instructor must be equipped with pedagogical skills, which are of paramount importance in the teaching learning process.

However, what is happening in the colleges and universities is actually a tragic one. A teacher who views himself as the sole and real source of information, stands in front of his students, tries to force them to swallow what ever he has to say. The lecturer may not be able to smell the faint odors of inattention and loss of interest among his or her students.

All these realities are at the heart of the very nature of some of our higher institutions where we are supposed to produce fully functioning and healthy citizens. Our institutions are not strong enough to bear the responsibility to prepare their students for uncertain and complex world. Especially it is very difficult to claim that we are operating in the 21st century when we are expected to come up with a professional who can endure the abounding demand from the society.

We cannot just count on all those challenges and problems that our higher institutions are encountering at this very time. And this is the period when our colleges are dominated by dreary heat climate, loosing their paradise-collective enthusiasm to learn among their students. I think it is better to return to our own specific topic, the role of experience in teaching.

It is true that old does not mean gold or young does not always mean a failure. Though I do not want to focus on the so called old-age complex where the aged people (experienced) claim to be far better than the beginners, I can say that we still can have new comers to the field of teaching who are excellent, determined, and effective in their

instruction. On the other hand, we find a lot of fresh instructors who do not have any experience in teaching and pedagogy; going to classes with their own bulky notes so as to narrate every thing like a fiction - a big loss in the instructional process. In general, I will try to disclose some of the basic pedagogical miscalculations observed among such instructors as follows.

Teaching Strategy

The teaching mechanism used by such teachers reflects their understanding and view of teaching in general. Since most of the time they do not have any kind of idea about the role the instructor in the classroom situation, they want to be the sole mover-creator, feeder in the teaching learning process. They think that students should be passive recipients of their ideas, and expect them to memorize all those interesting and attractive jargons that they collect from different books. To make things simple, let us consider the problem that such individuals are facing with regard to their teaching strategies one by one.

Planning their instruction /lesson/

It is often observed that beginners devoted most of their time to have as much interesting ideas as possible by reading a lot of books. The problem of planning arises due to their overwhelming ambition to become popular so as to be considered as a knowledgeable person in the campus. In order to achieve this aim they will bring several books from their shelf and start to memorize every attractive expressions and difficult words. But to their dismay what happens in the classroom is something different owing to their failure to remember what they have routinely memorized; they get lost in the midst of their teaching; they would be unable to continue with their lesson in an organized, sensible, consistent manner. Sometimes, even if they succeed in expressing every memorized item they find it difficult to finish the lesson on time.

In short, there exists a great problem of completing what is written on the course outline. This may be due to their inability to plan their lessons.

Lesson Presentation Skills

As it has been said earlier there is a misunderstanding among beginners regarding the very nature of teaching. For this reason, they may follow "a faulty" teaching methodology. Most of the time, they use the lecture method to present their lesson. Of course, this enables them to assume the role of provider rather than facilitator which, in turn, satisfies their wish to be the number one source and reference. This, of course, doesn't mean that all fresh instructors do only follow this method.

In addition to this, the way they present the lesson doesn't facilitate independent learning; rather it makes students to be dependents, expecting everything from the teacher who may always bring them every ready made information.

Questioning Behavior

When we come to the point where we have to examine the way the teachers pose questions, we are more likely to observe many mistaken trends. Some fresh instructors feel that asking very challenging and difficult questions are ways of uncovering one's special talents. Due to this erroneous idea, they often ask students ambiguous and tough questions which tend to spoil the instructional process.

Others still have some problem in their tendency to ask questions to specific individuals. Sometimes, they find it abashing and embarrassing to ask good looking girls (if the instructor is a male one) since they think that such actions could have certain self-demeaning and abasing interpretation in the minds of the students. And still some of them are not confident enough to call upon non-volunteers; as the

result of this, they only ask those students who raise their hands and who may be at the front seats.

Another thing related to this is their behavior in dealing with certain challenging questions coming from their students. Since they think that failing to answer questions raised by students is a very shameful and tormenting experience, whenever they face questions that they can't answer, either they evade or threaten those who ask or the class in general. We find very few individuals who are honest enough to accept the questions genuinely and bring them up for discussion.

Affective Communication

Because they lack appropriate exposure to situations like the classroom, such teachers find it inexplicably hard to look at the faces of their students. Some of them, even during the actual process of instruction, could only face either the blackboard or the wall; still they can watch through the window. At this point, it is important to raise the idea that even the way we are brought up, our confidence, our determination to feel-at-ease decide how much an instructor can have an effective attending behavior. Imagine a very timid beginner with his shaking hands, anxious, emotionally aroused, afraid of any eye contact writing on and talking to the black board; and his students amazed and surprised, others whispering and laughing at him; can you consider such an exaggerated, but seemingly near to the reality, instructional situation. I don't think so.

What is surprising in this regard is the experience of some ex-fresh lecturers who used to watch only the head of their students for fear of losing their focus on their lesson if they made any eye contact.

Use of Language

It has been said that many of our lecturers are not as such proficient in their command of English. This is one of the reasons why most of our students follow the same way in their use of language. As a

matter of fact, what is important in the use of a language is to be able to communicate whatever things you want to share with your students. The worst thing in teaching happens when a teacher uses a language that cannot be grasped or understood by most of his/her students.

It is actually good to have nice pronunciation of the language (English). But an instructor must be flexible enough in using instructional medium because his basic aim is to share ideas and experiences; and if he is not communicating in the first place, then the teaching and learning process will become meaningless. However such individuals that are considered to be beginners have some kind of problem in this regard. That means they tend to use the English language without analyzing the nature of their students and the situation in general. Especially, those beginners coming from urban areas (in their origin) tend to use slangs and colloquialisms that usually confuse their students. Besides, most of them lack consistency in pronouncing words; sometimes they use American; at other times they use British.

Conclusions

In general we observe several problems facing fresh instructors in exercising their instruction starting from being shy, afraid of facing students in their interaction during the teaching and learning process up to their failure to use examinations as a way of showing their power in controlling the lives of their students. Actually all those bad practices have a detrimental impact upon the lives of the students.

Finally, what I would like to add is that every institution must initially let beginners to exercise and undertake tutorial classes that can enrich their experience and build their confidence. Besides, it is of paramount importance to expose them to some kind of pedagogical skills, such as to help them know about the various teaching methodologies, the skills in lesson planning, the ways of dealing with students, etc.