Chapter 6
The Role of Teacher Education in Developing Employability Skills in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the need to equip student teachers with the skills that will enable them to train and develop their learners for employability. However, given the broad understanding of employability, it is important to recognize that the quality of a university graduate is not just a reflection of the quality of the curriculum and its supporting academic environment. It reflects the demands of the industry as well as the competence of the regulating body (i.e. related government institutions) in shaping the characteristics of higher education graduates. It might be overly simplistic to say that universities are encouraged, if not pressured, to produce employable graduates. The higher education sector therefore needs to recognize and understand the context of employability for their graduates to ensure that their students can live up to the expectations from governments and employers.

INTRODUCTION

21st century learners lack appropriate skills and competencies that are linked to 21st skills and competencies required by prospective employers. Majority of university graduates, especially Student Teachers (ST), lack core skills including communication, creativity, leadership, organization, problem-solving and teamwork skills. This chapter highlights the critical need for universities and teacher educators in particular to devise effective and efficient ways of passing on soft skills to STs as an integral part of the Foundation of Education (FoE) courses (historical, philosophical, psychological, sociological, economic, comparative and administrative perspectives of education). Integrating core skills into the teaching of FoE courses will equip teacher trainees with essential competencies they need to be effective teachers.

The teachers will in turn pass on the same skills and competencies to their students at lower levels. Ultimately, this translates to the success of graduates in life and at the workplace.

Developing countries have in the past decade given considerable attention (albeit rhetorical) to the development of employability skills such as communication, creativity, leadership and organization, problem-solving and teamwork skills. This has been prompted in part by unrelenting calls by private sector, civil society and government employers on universities to produce competent and highly skilled work force that is labour market compliant. Successive governments are thus, grappling with how to produce graduates that are fully prepared for the workplace. Many stakeholders are pressing for change in focus of university teaching and learning towards preparing graduates for employment and lifelong learning in the face of fast-moving changes in the world of skills and knowledge.

The 21st century life and career skills focus on ability of individuals to work effectively with diverse teams, be open-minded to varying ideas and values, set and meet goals, manage projects effectively, being accountable for results, demonstrate ethical practices, and be responsible to both one's self and the larger community. The kinds of skills needed are the basic employability skills, and these include; attendance, timeliness, and work ethics; problem-solving skills; ability to collaborate; reading, writing, and communication skills.

Current research on 21st century skills and skill acquisition is focusing on social and cross-cultural interaction, developing and piloting programs and curriculum for students to develop leadership and responsibility skills, and the development of a body of research that can support the preliminary research that illustrates the impact of 21st century learning skills on student achievement and workforce development. Thus, if the standards for our school-aged students are going to be high, then our standards for our teachers must also be high—in terms of a deep introduction to their practice; in terms of the complex knowledge, skills, and dispositions they must understand and master; and in terms of their understanding of how contested much of educational practice is. Teacher education has been described as "long on classroom practice and analysis," but "short on philosophical and historical analysis" (Liston, Witcomb, & Borko, 2009, p. 108). However, a key challenge for teacher education is that young people find it hard to translate educational concepts into practice.

FOUNDATION OF EDUCATION

Foundation of Education (FoE) courses as the bedrock of teacher education and the teaching profession. These courses constitute the basic ways of thinking about schooling, the formal processes of education, focus on developing, understanding of the different perspectives of teaching as a profession and how these perspectives affect education. Many of the FoE courses offer historical, philosophical, psychological, sociological, economic, and administrative perspectives of education and how these perspectives influence our understanding, practice and appreciation of the education process in a country's context. This understanding and practice and appreciation enable STs to develop the ability to acquire knowledge, skills, values and dispositions as well as the ability to interpret all that within their educational contexts.

Traditional education models have often focused on learning identified content for sociology of education, philosophy of education, psychology of education etc. The same models then assess this content knowledge with quizzes, and tests at the end of a learning unit or course. However, desired outcomes in today's learning framework include learning traditional and contemporary content themes in combination with the interdisciplinary transferable skills themes. We therefore contend that the core FoE courses

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