



Reflective Teachers: A Probe Into 21st Century Skills Among Indian Trainee Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Global communities have been working in several directions to provide a meaningful pathway to develop the 'reflective teachers', a cadre of confident, effective, and efficient teachers for the 21st century's fast-changing globalized society who can teach effectively in diverse classrooms. For this to happen, the development of 21st-century skills among teachers needs to be focused right from the teacher preparation stage. This study sought to investigate the Indian trainee teachers' perception of these essential skills, to what extent these skills were integrated into teacher education programs, and challenges to their integration. The study followed a mixed approach comprising of both quantitative (e. g. descriptive survey) and qualitative (e.g., interview) research methods taking 500 trainee teachers from 50 teachers' training colleges using a stratified random sampling technique. Data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially. Findings revealed that few skills were partially integrated while others were poorly integrated, significant differences were found in the ingestion of these skills between trainees of private and government teacher training colleges, and thereby, hampering the aim of making teachers reflective. The study also noted the challenges in integrating these skills that will provide a valuable reference for teacher education curriculum planning and implementation with a view of providing a holistic educational experience among trainee teachers across countries.

KEYWORDS

21st Century Teaching Skills, India, Teacher Education, Trainee Teachers

INTRODUCTION

"If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow" said John Dewey (in Lands, 2011) implying that we must offer students authentic learning experiences that prepare them for the ever-evolving challenges that lie ahead and engage, equip, and ready them to lead into the 21st century. Our style and approach to teaching must emphasize the learning in the 21st century. To counter these changes a cadre of specially trained teachers is needed that seeks to promote the

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concept of teaching as a profession making professional development a must (UNESCO, 2003). A solace of this demand we get in the words of John Dewey as well when he said, “we do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience” (Mantell & Barnett, 2014). Here we get the concept of a reflective teacher who regularly dedicate time to evaluate their teaching practice, analyze their teaching, and consider how they might approach particular tasks or challenges in the future which is urgent for teaching in the 21st century classrooms since education in the 21st century is profoundly affected by changes in society: globalization, technology, labour market dynamics, immigration, etc (Cretu, 2017). The 21st century has brought its changes and challenges which demand that teachers be appropriately prepared, trained, and equipped with the right skills which will help them to deal with such challenges in their profession because, quality of teachers determines the quality of education that is linked with nation’s development (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The effect of globalization and other pressures and challenges such as the rapid technological advancements, changing patterns of work, the explosion in information access and use have brought in certain demands on education. These changes inspire to accommodate and assimilate the 21st century skills by the teachers since they are to in a different perspective now, learning could never happen the way it is happening these times (Stewart, 2014). Reflection over these skills with analysing and evaluating the degree the assimilation of these skills could be a good focus for research that is followed in this study.

REFLECTIVE TEACHER

Teachers should always keep engaged in finding new ways of teaching and avoid routine behaviour through reflective practices. Reflective practice was introduced in the late nineteenth century by Dewey which was followed by subsequent scholars like Schon, Kolb, and Gibbs (Rushton & Suter, 2012). Dewey (1993) argued, a reflective process starts with a perceived conflict in a context, continues with the interpretation of classroom activities, and ends in deciding to remove the problem. Reflective teaching is the method to deal with classroom barriers. In this process, teachers should not be passive in classroom situations rather they should have an active role as an innovator in the classroom (Dewey, 1993). Gore & Zeichner (1991) proposed that reflection is thinking about an action in the context comprised of two processes, self-observation and self-evaluation. Reflective teachers engage in a continuous cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation for knowing their reactions to classroom situations. Farrell (2008) said teachers can overcome doubts and fears to critically assess their practice and make a meaningful change. In reflective teaching, according to Cunningham (2001 as cited in Juhary, 2014, p.141), observing and refining teaching practices on an ongoing process is a vital goal. This goal can help teachers to recover their teaching, and adopt suitable strategies to teach in a particular situation. McKay (2007) has identified three factors contributing to reflective practice-teachers’ experiences, sufficient knowledge, and individual values. Joze Tajareh & Rashtchi (2019) said, to be reflective a teacher needs to be adequately skilled with the latest cohorts of every nuance in knowledge. Mann (2005) said the process of reflective teaching relates to the concept of development, education, and training. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) and the Partnership for the 21st century Skills believe new teacher candidates must be equipped with the 21st century knowledge and skills, and learn how to integrate them into their classroom practice for our nation to realize its goal of successfully meeting the challenges of this Century (AACTE, 2010). Changes in the demand for skills have profound implications for the competencies that teachers themselves need to acquire to effectively teach the 21st century skills to their students (OECD, 2012 cited as Andreas, 2012). Former USA President Bill Clinton (1998) stated in his ‘*Call for Action for American Education in the 21st century*’ that, every community should have a talented, reflective, and dedicated teacher in every classroom and consequently, the emphasis on massive training of teachers without integrating the much-required skills would, therefore, mean wastage of resources. Focus on making teachers reflective is at the centre of attention in any country across the globe lately bringing wide-ranging reforms of curriculum, instruction, and assessments with the intention of

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