

Empowerment of Teachers through Continuous Competence Ascendance: Perspectives of Senior Teachers

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Abstract

This paper tries to establish the fact that acquiring competency is not a one-time activity but an ongoing process in the life of teachers. They have to re-examine and reformulate the way they educate themselves and perform their job. They are struggling to keep abreast of the changes and requirements of their roles in view of the increasing academic expectations, advances in technology, new instructional strategies and delivery methods and a host of such issues. These challenges confirm the fact that the teachers have to strive for their competency ascendance as a lifelong process. The paper also presents the results of a study conducted with ten senior teachers on their views of competence ascendance.

Key words: Teacher empowerment; continuous competence ascendance

1. INTRODUCTION

Good teaching involves the head and the heart. To be a professional means a lifelong commitment to inquiry. Teachers must have access to a range of professional development opportunities that are targeted at their intellectual, emotional and professional needs as well as the organizational needs of the institution (Day 2005). The expertise acquisition hypothesis presumes that once an individual has reached world class knowledge and skill in a selected domain, he or she should be able to maintain consistently high levels of performance. That is, mastery provides a necessary and sufficient basis for the onset of achievement within the domain. Furthermore, continued practice and training should suffice for continued accomplishment. (Simonton 2003, quoted by Sternberg and Grigorenko). The Japanese concept **Kaizen** which means "improvement", or "change for the better" refers to philosophy or practices that focus upon continuous improvement of processes in manufacturing, engineering, and business management. Like the Kaizen concept teachers should strive for continuous competency improvement.

Hewett (2005) is of the view that a teacher's preparation must not stop with getting ready for his institution; it should continue until the last minute that he comes before learners as their teacher. Besides his daily preparation for his class work, he should continuously strive for higher professional performance. In a teacher's work there is no standing still, - not to go forward is to go back. According to him the preparation for higher professional rank is of a three-fold nature.

- i. The teacher should constantly push forward in the subjects he is called upon to teach.
- ii. He should select some area of knowledge like philosophy, literature, art, history, natural science, theology etc., not particularly connected with his classroom work, and become a diligent student in that area.
- iii. He ought to keep in touch with professional literature, books and periodicals, and by attending and taking part in professional meetings.

2. COMPETENCY ASCENDANCE OF A PROFESSOR: A CASE STUDY

Before the nature of the study undertaken is spelt out, a case study for the competence ascendance is presented below.

Dr.T.R. Neelakantan (aged 40), working as Professor in the School of Civil Engineering, SASTRA University, Thanjavur, India can be taken as a model for continuous professional development. He completed his M.E. in 1991 and Ph.D. in 1997. From 1999 to 2001 he acted as a Post Doctoral Fellow at the University of Kentucky, USA and later worked as Visiting Professor in the same university for two years from 2003 to 2005. He is guiding Ph.D. scholars and working on some funded research projects besides having many research papers published in reputed international journals.

Dr. Neelakantan bagged the Young Scientist Award of the AICTE, New Delhi for the year 2003.

3. THE STUDY

The study was conducted with 10 senior teachers of SASTRA University, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India, to investigate their perception on teacher competence ascendance. Their opinions were pooled and analyzed and based on the findings a paradigm was evolved on continuous competence ascendance.

3.1. METHODOLOGY

The interview guide with the following five broad areas of enquiry was used for this purpose: *the need for competence ascendance in teachers, areas of professional development, the formal and informal means of mastering new skills, the inter-relatedness between teacher professional development and the advancement of their institutions and the techniques adopted by them towards competence ascendance.* All the ten teachers are doctorates in the age group of 40 to 65 years and experience ranging from 15 to 37 years, working as professors in various Engineering disciplines at SASTRA University. The professors were contacted personally by the first author of the paper and they were briefed on the aim of the interview before the interview guide was handed over to them. Enough space was provided in the interview guide to enable them to write their responses, as the enquiry is open-ended.

3.2. ANALYSIS

The responses collected from all the 10 professors were grouped under some common categories for each area and analyzed.

Area – I: Your views on the need for competence ascendance in teachers.

The responses for the above area fall under the following categories:

1. Need and speed
2. Emotional intelligence like: commitment, attitude, involvement, dedication
3. Understanding the student and societal need
4. Training: In-service, Pre-service
5. Content: domain, pedagogical, superior intelligence
6. Skills set including HR skills
7. Mentoring
8. Leadership skills

All the 10 respondents have agreed that competence ascendance is necessary for teachers and that it must be acquired with speed. Almost eight teachers have stressed the need for content knowledge and superior intelligence. A maximum of seven teachers were of the opinion that the areas fall under emotional intelligence is essential. The areas 4 and 6 namely need for training and skill set received appreciation from three teachers each. Two respondents were of the view that a teacher must be in a mentor lineage and only one has opined that the teachers must have leadership skills.

Area – II: Professionalism is categorized in terms of the following: Commitment, Content knowledge, Content – specific/General pedagogical knowledge, Practice and Reflection.

i. Suggest your views on it.

While all the teachers accept that the all the above areas are necessary for professional development, three teachers felt that commitment and reflection are more important than other areas.

ii. Do you prescribe any other areas towards professional development?

Their responses fall under the following major categories:

1. Research
2. Feedback and Self assessment
3. Modern methods of teaching
4. Innovation
5. Perception
6. Future needs
7. Planning
8. Team teaching and Multidisciplinary approach

Six respondents view that a teacher's involvement in research, guidance, and innovation are important for professional development. This is in conformity with our national policy as well as the international academic trends. Three of the respondents view that getting true feedback and self-assessment is a must for a teacher's progress. Adopting modern methods of teaching with use of technology received attention by two of the respondents. Areas 4 to 8 namely Innovation and Team Teaching and Multi-disciplinary approach were suggested by one respondent each towards professional development.

Area - III. "Teacher professional development" goes beyond the meaning of "staff development" or "in-service training"; it includes both formal and informal means of helping teachers master new skills, widen their knowledge, develop an innovative insight into their pedagogy, their practice and their understanding of their own needs.

Your perception of the above view...

1. Indigenous approach to teaching
2. Use of latest resources like e-library
3. Moving to inter-disciplinary areas of specialization
4. Teacher – Guru transformation

For teacher professional development indigenous approach to teaching is recommended by two respondents. Two more have suggested that the use of latest resources like E-library will help the teachers in this regard. Another respondent touched upon a very relevant area for professional development i.e. moving to inter-disciplinary areas of specialization for example: One can move from Chemical Engineering to Bioengineering or Nanotechnology. One more respondent stressed on the Teacher as Guru (one who dispels darkness), who brings about transformation in the learner.

Area - IV. Inter-relatedness between teacher professional development and the advancement of their institutions.

Four respondents were of the view that the success of the institution largely depends on competence of its teachers. Two others have stated that the contacts the teacher establishes with the local area, industries, institutions and govt. agencies will largely help the growth of the institution.

Area - V. The activities you have been doing/the efforts you have been taking towards competence ascendance. (Your observations will help the researchers to evolve the ascendance paradigm).

Five respondents opined that they have been involving in continuous learning with the help of books, magazines, journals, attending workshops/seminars, undergoing in-service training programmes, by interacting with experts and by acquiring higher qualifications. Four others prescribed contact/collaboration/network with scientists, scientific and industrial organizations.

4. CONCLUSION

Thus when the responses of 'competence ascendance aspiring teachers' are taken together into consideration we identified that all have agreed on the plea for competence ascendance. However there is less of unanimity and more of divergence in the views as what constitutes competence ascendance. This reveals that the area remains undefined and demands a set of paradigm that can serve as a sign post for all interested in competence ascendance.

In the light of varied responses, the following key areas can be identified as a paradigm to be adopted by all.

1. Self-development to meet the requirement of the profession
2. Self-study and reflection
3. Training programmes
4. Research and Development and Innovation
5. Collaborative Learning approach with the help of peer/experts/mentors
6. Awareness of Institutional, National and International goals of education

5. REFERENCES

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