

Faculty Development: A Step towards Quality and Excellence

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Abstract

Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan was established in 2002 to restructure the higher education system. Faculty development was identified as a critical element which led to emergence of the Learning Innovation Division in 2003. The objective was to encourage and support faculty and staff teams in creating a high quality, relevant and efficient learning and teaching culture. This led to intensive faculty development activities and introduction of a certificate course in university teaching. This course is first of its kind in Pakistan with an objective to acquaint the faculty members with the basic concepts and recent trends in teaching and learning in higher education. The content addressed six important areas namely curriculum, teaching skills, assessment, research, professional development and information technology skills. A number of instruments were developed for the program evaluation. This study is an evaluation of the first two courses. The immediate analysis of the results showed that this intervention was well received and perceived to be of high relevance to the university teaching as well as there has been a positive improvement from one course to another which is encouraging for the organizers. The program is now replicated at fifteen faculty development centres across Pakistan. This information will be useful for institutions/departments developing similar programs especially in developing countries.

Key Words: *Evaluation, Faculty Development, Higher Education, Pakistan, Training Program*

Introduction

Higher Education in Pakistan is currently being restructured with inception of Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2002. Since its inception all the training activities of HEC were undertaken by the Curriculum and Training Section however it was felt that the number of higher education institutions is constantly increasing and so is the demand of equipping the faculty with the teaching skills. The Department of Learning Innovation was therefore established in July 2003 to introduce faculty development activities on a larger scale and to bring academic standards at par with international standards(Siddiqui, 2003).

Faculty Development is any program or activity that has as its goals, enhancement of individual skills and abilities, clarification of values and development of increased faculty motivation (Gaff,1975). Training and retraining of faculty enhance the level of their performance and enable the

faculty to cope with the challenges in teaching effectively and efficiently (Osunde and Omoruyi 2004). Generally speaking, there are three main areas identified for faculty development. These include first, personal development including personnel counselling, personal awareness and renewal activities. The second area focuses on professional development such as career counselling etc. while the third primarily involves instructional and course development (Braskamp 1980).

In August 2003, a grant of Rs.16 million was approved to introduce six residential certificate courses in university teaching each of three months duration. The program involved four months of intensive preparation. The planning activities required us to invite nominations, specify activities, identify resource persons, and arrange for space and equipment participants' travel, boarding and lodging facilities.

A comprehensive need analysis was undertaken to define the content of the program which was divided into six modules (Table 1.) Participation in all modules was mandatory for the award of certificate.

Table 1: Content of the Program

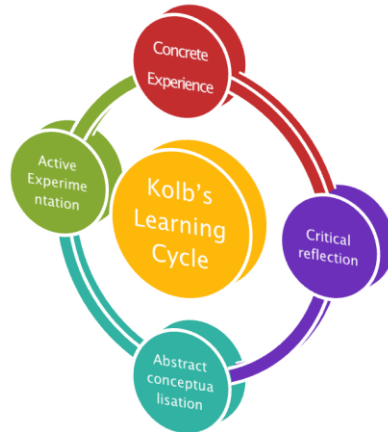
Modules
Planning the curriculum
Teaching skills
Educational Research
Assessment
Personal and Professional Development
Communication skills
Stress Management
Using Information and Communication Technology(ICT)

The first five modules run for ten days each while last module was spread over the full duration of course and activities were integrated within the content of the five other modules. There was a week break in between the course while various field trips were also organized during the course.

Kolb's experiential learning model (Fig:1) was adopted to deliver the course. This model suggests that there are four stages within adult learning cycle that follow from each other and learning cycle can begin at any of the four points (Smith, 2001). Based on Kolb's model the focus of the teaching strategies was on student centred learning through individual reflection, guided practice, facilitated demonstrations, study trips and individual work sessions.

Facilitators/ Resource persons were drawn from institutions all over Pakistan including both private and public sector. Assessment included individual and group assignments, self assessment exercises and participation in discussions and activities. All the assessment activities were formative rather than of summative nature in order to promote collaborative learning among participants.

Figure 1: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle



Evaluation of each course was an ongoing process and helped us in making changes as and when required using a responsive evaluation approach. Literature suggests that an educational evaluation is effective when it responds to concerns that exist in the minds of the various audiences participating in a program. Using this as a framework for we present the evaluation of first two programs and the changes that have been made to address issues raised by the participants of the program.

Methodology

A number of instruments were designed for the formative and summative evaluation of program. These include collection of both qualitative and quantitative data through end of each module, mid course as well as resource person's evaluation. For the analysis we used descriptive statistics and frequency charts. In addition focus group discussions were arranged at regular intervals to receive verbal feedback on various aspects of the course which are not presented in this study. In this study we are presenting an analysis of end of the course evaluation as well as an over all evaluation of facilitators.

Results

There were sixty participants who were enrolled for the two programs with thirty in each program. There were two drop outs, one female participant who became

sick within one week of the commencement of program and was advised bed rest. The other participant got selected for overseas scholarship program and has to leave the country half way through the course. A profile of all the respondents is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Profile of the Respondents	
	Number (%)
Respondents	58
Male	40 (58)
Female	18 (42)
Regional representation	
AJK	03 (05)
Baluchistan	14 (24)
ICT	06 (10)
NWFP	08 (14)
Punjab	11 (19)
Sindh	16 (28)
Age on last birthday	
35 yrs or less	48 (83)
36 – 45 yrs.	10 (17)
Experience in teaching in higher education	
5 yrs or less	49 (84)
more than 5 yrs but less than 15 yrs	09 (16)
Academic rank	
Lecturer	52 (90)
Assistant / Associate Professor	06 (10)

The information collected through end of the program evaluation by participants is presented in Figure 2 & 3. Figure 2 deals with the general impression about the course while Figure 3 gives an evaluation of different modules. The results demonstrate improvement in the delivery of second course when compared to the first course however the difference in mean scores were not statistically significant.

Figure 2: Perception about the program

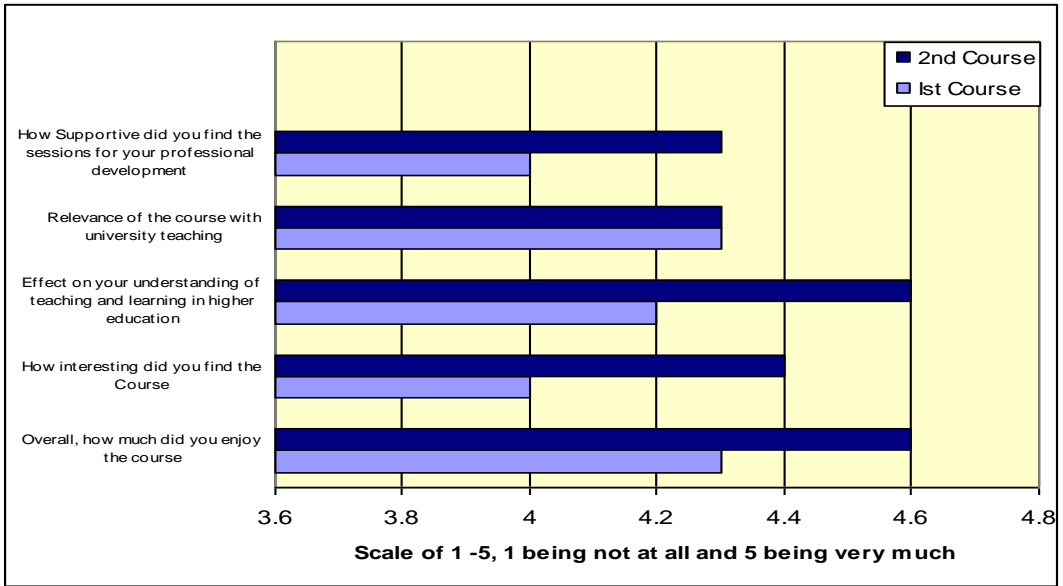
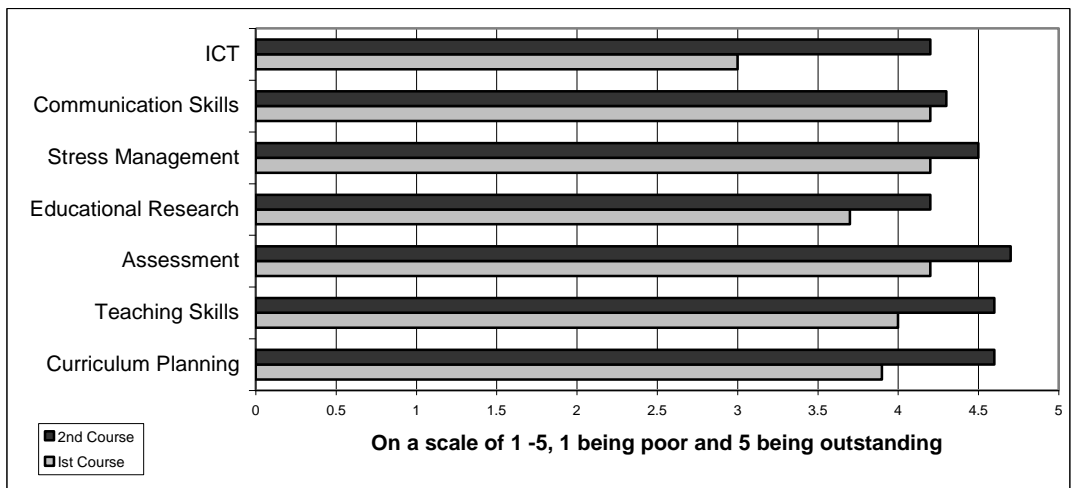


Figure 3: Evaluation of each module



Some of the open ended comments are presented in Table 3 and 4.

Table 3: What was good about course?

Course was well planned, organized and administered.
Great appreciation to the coordinator for her support and polite attitude.
It developed a lasting bond between university teachers with different educational & cultural background.
It is helpful in developing the mind & career.
Course is very much relevant.
Participants was treated with respect and were welcomed and farewell with great affection & respect.
Indirect learning by the interaction with different institutions.
It was covering new techniques and methodologies.
We were subjected to a very broad horizon of learning.
It gave us direction on how to facilitate students in a better way.
Friendly environment for learning.
Encouraged participation by all.
Excellent and very productive.
Realization about the attitude and behavior.
Computer Courses were very useful.
Very positive response and helping attitude of HEC specially DG, LI.
Every thing about the Course was good.
Learned to create patience in our self.
The contents of curriculum assessment, PC-1.
It was very thought provoking.
The learning process.

Table 4: What changes would you recommend?

Reduce the Course to two months.

Computer classes should be arranged in morning sessions.

Computer certificates may also be given to the participants.

There should be a break of 3 hours.

The presentation of each participant should be mandatory, made a video-film for that presenter & check, analyze him critically suggesting his short comings for improvement.

Study pack may be send earlier to make an early connection with course.

One permanent hall for sessions.

Proper management of study tours.

Transport for accommodation.

Those participated in the Course should be given 3 month foreign training exposure.

More stress on Communication skills.

Educational institutions trip should be organized.

There should be an examination at the end of the session.

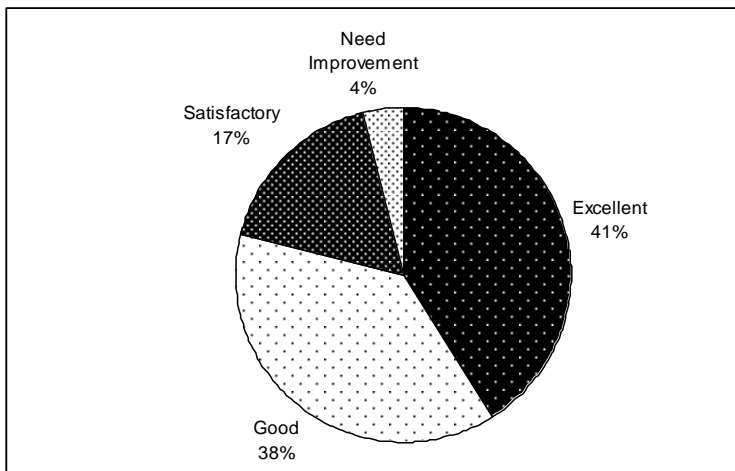
Rules and regulation should be strictly followed.

Daily three sessions of two hours.

Saturday should not be off.

Each facilitator was also evaluated by the participants at the end of their sessions. The feedback was anonymous. Fig.4 provides an assessment of the performance of facilitators. Only two out of the fifty facilitators used during the two programs were rated as the ones who “need improvement”.

Figure 4: Evaluation of the facilitators



Discussion

Evaluation of the effectiveness of any faculty development program is crucial to provide assessment of existing programs and to provide meaningful information for designing future programs (Ramalanjaona, 2003)

We used responsive evaluation framework to evaluate this program which is a rather iterative process of evaluation defining issues of importance to stake holders and describing strengths and weaknesses associated with those issues (Don, 1977). The information thus received was very useful to incorporate certain changes in the subsequent course. These include;

- a. Using content from the curriculum designed by International Computers Driving License Program for the second course which is the standard for computer literacy worldwide (ECDL, 2003).
- b. In the first course the module on assessment started at the end of module on teaching skills. It was later felt that both modules can be started simultaneously for example when large group teaching was discussed the assessment of large groups was introduced at the same time
- c. It was observed that the module on Research methodology could be split into two halves so in the first half the components and preparation of research proposal were discussed while second half focused on data analysis and was started after a week break. This gave participants enough time to prepare their instruments and even conduct a pilot study.
- d. From the second course onwards a summary of feedback received from the participants was shared with the facilitators so they are well aware of their strengths and areas for improvement. While in general the facilitators welcome the idea of feedback two facilitators found it very threatening and got upset with the whole idea. In subsequent courses we ensured that the facilitators know of the process beforehand and a copy of the feedback form was also shared with them.

In addition to formal curriculum, socializing with other trainees was also an important part of the training program. This is very important in our scenario where opportunities for interaction among faculty members across the country are limited. Since the participants belonged to institutions from urban as well as remote areas it encouraged a positive dialogue among them on what are the common as well as different issues within their environment and how can they support each other. This led to a positive impact and resulted in creating a strong

bond between participants which continues till date through communities of learning formed on internet.

About the negative experiences, accommodation was one issue that most of the male participants have mentioned in the first course. All the male participants in the second course were provided better accommodation facilities at a walking distance from the venue. For the female participants rooms were provided at guesthouse within HEC which though not very comfortable but was more convenient keeping in account accessibility to the training hall.

Another comment that all participants in both the courses mentioned was lack of a regular venue for sessions. At the time of the first two courses there was extensive renovation being done at HEC which also included lecture hall and auditorium and it was inevitable.

It was interesting to note that in the first course female participants had suggested that duration of the course should be reduced to two months. This was in contrary to the female participants of the second course. One explanation that may be provided is that the first group has participants who were all married and had family obligations while in the second group only one outstation female participant was married.

Conclusion

The effectiveness of any educational program is dependent on the educational skills as well as the subject expertise of the faculty members. It is therefore, now a worldwide practice that all new academic staff is required to participate in orientation courses for teaching and learning in higher education. A similar program has been introduced to enhance the competencies of the faculty in Pakistan and the immediate evaluation shows that the intervention has been perceived positively. It is clear that the Department of Learning Innovation has been successful in achieving one of its aims as far as the planning and implementation of the course was concerned. At the same time participants themselves have been able to form a network among them by creating communities of interest on web to support each other and share new information, which is a positive step towards further development. Many of the participants are now working as master trainers for initiating similar activities in their institutions. This has further resulted in publicizing the course which we experienced when nominations for third course were called. We received one hundred and twenty nominations against thirty five seats. The course is now replicated at fifteen faculty development centers across Pakistan through National Academy of Higher Education. There is now a need for strengthening

this network to facilitate more activities at regional levels for further professional development.

Limitation

There has been no evaluation to assess the impact of program on the participants' teaching, days, weeks or months after training.

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