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Implementation of teaching Skills & Strategies in the Schools: A study of graduates of a teacher education program

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Implementation of teaching Skills & Strategies in the Schools: A study of graduates of a teacher education program

Abstract

‘Teaching Skills’ and ‘Teaching Strategies’ are two core (professional) modules offered at the two colleges of education in Bhutan to develop pedagogical knowledge and skills of student teachers. However, a tracer study (in press) done by Samtse College of Education [SCE] revealed teacher graduates’ (1) confusion over the two concepts, ‘teaching skill’ and ‘teaching strategy’ and (2) the lack of confidence in integrating the two in their daily teaching activities. Therefore, this study was carried out to find out the graduates’ understanding of the concepts and implementation of ‘Teaching Skills’ and ‘Teaching Strategies’ in the classroom. Further, it was aimed to find lapses, inappropriateness and irrelevancies in the two professional modules in which pedagogical concepts and skills were taught. Survey questionnaire, interview and participant observation were used to gather data to find out the use of teaching skills and strategies in the schools. Teacher graduates, both male and female having working experience of three years and above, teaching in Middle Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools, were selected as the participants in the study. Samples were drawn from the different parts of the country covering seventeen Dzongkhags. The study revealed adequate understanding of the concepts of professional modules. However, teachers were found to be grappling with the extra responsibilities affecting their planning to integrate skills and strategies into their teaching.

Key words: Teaching skills, Teaching strategies, Microteaching

Introduction

Samtse College of Education [SCE] has grown from an institute with modest facilities having 41 student teachers as its strength in 1968 (the year of establishment) to the present stature with over one thousand doing various educational courses. The core areas of professional training that is provided since its inception has always been the enhancement of pedagogical skills and strategies. To develop these knowledge and skills, the college offers specific modules, ‘Teaching Skills’ and ‘Teaching Strategies’, in professional subjects as well as in subject methodologies in

the specialisation subjects. In addition, all the student teachers need to undergo intensive practice in microteaching sessions in the college followed by teaching practice in the schools. During microteaching which is “a form of instructional training where small groups of peers observe ...each other’s teaching” (Teaching Support Service, n.d, para 1) student teachers get opportunities to provide feedback for improvement of their ‘instructional abilities’. Additionally, during field teaching practice (done in the schools) which is six months for Bachelor of Education [B.Ed] and six weeks for Post Graduate Diploma in Education [PGDE], student teachers are required to put into practical classroom teaching of the theories of teaching skill and strategies they have learned while in the college with guidance from mentor teachers as well as visiting lecturers from the college. They are also required to do extensive reflections on their experiences in the daily lessons they teach.

Despite the above efforts, a general dissatisfaction is expressed amongst education officials, school principals and senior school teachers on the performance of the graduates once they are employed. A recent tracer study notes that “on the whole, the graduates are bit confused in the two modules (teaching strategies and teaching skills) and failed to integrate them in their teaching” (Tshering, Jose, Gyeltshen & Gyeltshen, in press, p.31). Hence, following purpose and research question was set to address the tracer study findings:

- to address the implementation of teaching strategies and skills in the classroom by the teacher graduates;

- to discover lapses in the delivery and modality of the professional modules offered at the Samtse College of Education.

Research Question: What are the factors that affect practice of teaching skills and strategies in schools?

Literature Review

Concept of ‘teaching skill’ and ‘teaching strategy’

Afflerbach, Pearson and Paris (1995, p.364) say the terms, skills and strategies are used inconsistently. Sometimes they are, “used as synonyms, and sometimes they are used to describe complementary relations (e.g. strategy support skills).” However, skills and strategies are two different concepts which often go together. According to Harris and Hodges (as cited in

Afflerbach et al. 1995,p.365), a “skill” is defined as, “an acquired ability to perform well; proficiency” and strategy is “a systematic plan consciously adapted”. As per Nursing Education, (n.d) teaching skills are a group or combination of a variety of ‘teaching acts’ used to ‘facilitate students learning’. On the other hand, teaching strategies concern concepts, principles and procedural-steps of a number of teaching methods, which could be applied in the teaching of varied subjects. According to Strasser, teaching strategy is a “ plan for a lesson which included structure, desired learner behaviour in terms of goals of instruction, an outline of tactics necessary to implement the strategy” (cited in Anil,n.d). Skills would help implement or execute in an efficient or effective manner of the segment of a lesson. Hence strategy requires skill for its implementation process. Marks, (cited in Hallam and Ireson , 1999, p. 84) mention that, “there is no clear dividing line between pedagogical knowledge for particular subjects and more general teaching strategies. Sometimes teachers, in planning their teaching, draw on knowledge of general teaching skills and apply them to the topic.” Therefore skills and strategies can be used together to support each other.

Challenges in the use ‘teaching skills’ and ‘teaching strategies’

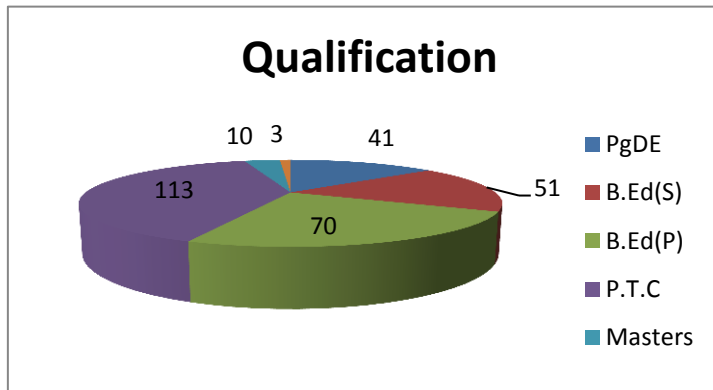
One of the findings of the Bhutanese tracer study was the difficulty of implementation of teaching skills and strategies owing to large class size. Further it also mentioned the heavy workload of the teachers which hindered them from planning and integrating skills and strategies in their teaching approaches. Hallam and Ireson (1999) have said that teachers face varieties of constraints such as class size, classroom environment, facilities, length of lesson and mixed ability.

The tracer study also highlighted the difficulties faced by graduates in making use of the strategies and skills in their teaching. Graduates made a general comment that “some of the teaching strategies and skills were challenging.” However, they did not specify which particular skills or strategies were challenging to them. Some of the graduates were also of the opinion that “teaching strategies were time-consuming and they affected syllabus completion.” The opinion of the graduates implied that they were not efficient in using skills and strategies. Perhaps as

Hallam and Ireson (1999, p. 83) said, “skills require considerable practice” they must have needed adequate practice.

Methodology

Since graduate teachers were spread across the country a cross sectional design was required. Structured questionnaires were used with a stratified sample of teachers spread across different regions. The data generated can be generalized (Cresswell, 2007). The random samples drawn from different strata of qualification will be representing the larger population.(Refer to the pie chart) Qualitative information was also required in order to delve into and refine teachers’ views of their use of skills and strategies. Semi-structured interviews and participant observation were also used. The data thus ensured triangulation and making an authentic result more likely though, the methodology has been quantitative dominant.



Research Sample

The sample for this study comprised SCE graduates with B. Ed (Primary and Secondary), PgDE and a few teachers with Master qualification currently teaching in various schools in the kingdom. Out of 670 survey questionnaire sent to over 67 schools 288 were returned. Out of 288 who participated across the nation in the survey, 151 were male teachers and 137 were female. Sampling technique was based on the idea of purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998). The age of the teachers ranges from 26 years and older. The maximum numbers of respondents were between the ages of 31-35 years which makes up a percentage of 27.4.

Research Tools

Three tool were used to authenticate the validity of collected data. The quantitative data was collected through survey questionnaires and qualitative through semi-structured. Participation observation was used to observe lived experience of the classroom practices of teaching skills and strategies in the schools.

Data analysis

The quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. The themes emerging from interviews and observations were identified and thematic analysis was done to establish perspectives of various views on practice of teaching skills and strategies.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Demographic detail

Teacher graduates of Samtse College who were twenty six years of age and older, currently working in schools spread over seventeen dzongkhags participated in the survey. The maximum numbers of respondents were between the age of thirty one and thirty five years (27.4%). As per the target of the research, teachers teaching in middle secondary schools and higher secondary schools were given the main focus in the data collection though teachers with Masters and PTC qualification also participated. The percentage of male and female's participation in the study was almost equal with 52.4% and 47.6% respectively.

Teaching load

Regarding the teaching 13.2 % of the teachers had more than 25 hours of teaching assigned per week. Only 0.7 % of the teachers interviewed were found to have teaching hours of less than five hours. This indicated that some schools were also facing shortage of teachers where teach more than the normal teaching hours which is twenty two (as per the standard teaching hours directive by Ministry of Education) Besides teaching, 48.5 % of the teachers were found to be shouldering three to four different administrative responsibilities. The tracer study also noted heavy workload of teacher in the school.

Concept of ‘teaching skill’ and ‘teaching strategy’

Through survey the percentage of teachers who revealed that they had adequate knowledge on teaching skill and strategy is 58. Only 4.9% of them said that they don’t have adequate knowledge. Refer to the table given below. . It appears that concept of skill and strategy is well perceived by teacher graduates. The interviews also revealed similar findings. It appeared that concept of skill and strategy is well perceived by teacher graduates.

I have adequate knowledge on teaching skill and strategy		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Disagree	14	4.9
	Neutral	67	23.3
	Agree	167	58.0
	Strongly Agree	40	13.9
	Total	288	100.0

Application of ‘teaching skills and ‘teaching strategies’

In terms of applying skills and strategies 61.1% from the survey agreed that they could use them confidently in their lessons. This could mean that teachers have adequate understanding of the concepts. Teachers also appreciated the way micro lessons were conducted at training college which helped them gain experience of using skills and strategies practically. The survey also revealed 54.2% of the teachers who even looked for new skills and strategies to make their teaching more effective. Thus it is indicated that skills and strategies are widely used by teachers.

Observation of ‘teaching skills’ and ‘teaching strategies’ in practice in schools

To get a glimpse of the use of teaching skills and strategies in practice in the schools, a total of seven schools located in southern and western part of the country were visited and classroom teachings observed. A total of twelve teachers both male and female teachers were observed practising various skills and strategies in their teaching. The teaching skills observed were: teaching of concepts and generalization and teaching of values and attitudes. The teaching

strategies observed were; inductive and deductive approaches, inquiry learning, questioning and lecture method.

It was observed that teachers used quite a number of skills and strategies in the class unconsciously. For instance, in one class a teacher used skills like concept and generalization, interaction variation and questioning. In the same lesson, the teacher also used strategies like lecture method, deductive, inductive and enquiry learning. However, upon asking the teachers what strategies they used, they were not able to name. It shows that teachers are using teaching strategies in their teaching though they are unconscious about them. The other generalisation that came about was the multiple usage of strategies in the class by teachers.

Integration of ‘teaching skill’ with ‘teaching strategy’

The percentage of teachers who said, they get enough time to incorporate teaching skills with teaching strategies into their lesson plan is 24.7. But 37.2 % of them said that they have no adequate time to incorporate teaching skills with teaching strategies in their lesson plans.

Time

Though teachers who felt the need of extra time for effective use of teaching skills and teaching strategies make 44.8%, yet 8.3% of the teachers expressed that they do not require extra time. A group of teachers who strongly agreed that their personal time is taken away in making effective lesson plan by incorporating teaching skills and teaching strategies made up a percentage of 35.4. However, 4.2% strongly disagreed with the same indicating that the time factor does not matter to them.

Curriculum

55.6% of the teachers agreed with the proposition that they feel comfortable applying teaching skills in the present curriculum which implied the relevance of teaching skills and teaching strategies in the handling the same. However, 106 out of 288 participants strongly agreed with the statement, ‘The content of the syllabus is too vast to apply teaching skills and teaching strategies.

College tutors' competency

51.7% of the teachers agreed with the proposition, 'tutors in the training college are competent to teach skills' and 50% of them agree with competency to teach strategies'. But 6.3% of them disagreed. It is also found that lecturers motivated student teachers to apply skills and strategies. While 44.4% of the teachers agreed with the statement, 'The tutors in the college apply teaching skills in their teaching', 56% of the respondents observe college tutors not exemplifying in the use of teaching skills.

Interpretation and Discussion

The two most important tools in teaching learning activity are the use of teaching skills and teaching strategies. Teaching skills provide skills applicable in all teaching-learning situations to effectively deliver concepts. Teaching strategy further deals with the concepts, principles and procedural-steps of a number of teaching methods which could be applied in the teaching of varied subjects

Concept of 'teaching skills' and 'teaching strategies'

58% of the teacher participants agreed that they have adequate knowledge on teaching skills. It indicates that the teachers had undergone their training adequately and learnt the concept well in the colleges. They must have had access to resources where they could learn on their own too.

75% of the teacher participants defined teaching skills as techniques or methods to teach. One participant said, "teaching skill is a method to deliver content knowledge to the students." A teacher from a middle secondary school explained teaching skill as, "a technique that a teacher applies to make the lesson more clear and understandable." Another one said, "teaching skill is a way or an approach to teach content in a meaningful way."

However, 4.9% of the participants said they did not have adequate knowledge. One said, "teaching skill is one of the ways to make students get clear methods like teaching strategy". This statement shows that one is confused with skill and strategy. Another said, "skill is something that we can teach with such procedures while teaching." A teacher also said, "teaching skill is imparting knowledge."

Two of the respondents expressed their opinions that ‘teaching skill’ and ‘teaching strategy’ are two aspects that always go together. One said “I don’t find difference in skill and strategy.” Marks (cited in Hallam and Ireson , 1999) mention, “there is no clear dividing line between pedagogical knowledge for particular subjects and more general teaching strategies. Sometimes teachers, in planning their teaching, draw on knowledge of general teaching skills and apply them to the topic.” (p. 84). Therefore skills and strategies complement each other.

However, with some of the respondents particularly with regard to teaching strategy, the respondents had different views. A respondent said that teaching strategy is a method to implement a skill. Another one said, “it is how to go about to make the skill more powerful.” The third respondent described the strategy as “a method or procedure of lesson presentation”. These kinds of responses reveal that the respondents view teaching strategy and teaching skill to be like two sides of the coin one complementing the other. One has said that teaching strategy is a broader form of skill. However, only two respondents had a similar view that teaching strategy is a plan of action. According to one of them, “it is a plan on how to teach a lesson”.

‘Teaching strategy’ in particular is a combination of instructional methods, learning activities, and materials that actively engage students. Teaching skill is specific part of teaching strategy. Teaching skill is like the branches when teaching strategy is the tree. In this line of thought, a teacher said, “Different skills put together make strategy.” Another respondent said, “Strategy is a broader concept and skills are incorporated in it.” Further, a teacher remarked, “strategy rule the skill.”

Application of ‘teaching skills’ and ‘teaching strategies’

The respondents revealed that they made use of teaching skills and teaching strategies to bring effective learning of the students. 54.2% of the respondents often looked for new skills and strategies to make learning effective. This group of teachers must be experienced teachers who

would like to try out new ways of teaching and learning. But 2.8% of the respondents said they did not look for new skills and strategies. The respondents may have complacency that the available skills and strategies are adequate for them and that they do not want to take risks.

75 percent of the participants expressed that they had applied skills and strategies in their teaching. The senior teachers in the school exhibited role modeling in the application of variety of skills and strategies. 38.5% of the participants reported that their senior colleagues were the driving force behind giving good guidance in the use of skills. 45.1% said that their senior colleagues guided them towards application of strategies in the classroom. Only 3.8% have not seen senior teachers using 'teaching skills' and 2.1% 'teaching strategies'. Therefore, senior teachers have been a motivating factor for implementation of skills and strategies. Also 33.3 % of the participants said that the senior teachers organized School Based In-service Programmes [SBIPs] on teaching skills and strategies.

Challenges of implementation of 'teaching skill and 'teaching strategy'

With regard to implementation of 'teaching skills' and 'teaching strategies', a teacher pointed that, "large number of students and congested space is posing great difficulty in organizing activity as a part of teaching strategy." The mixed ability of students is yet another factor that has been attributed towards hindering the application of either skill or strategy in the class. The other causes of the difficulties mentioned were large class size, time constraint and inadequate resources. Hallam and Ireson (1999) also found that teachers face varieties of constraints such as class size, classroom environment, facilities, length of lesson, mixed ability etc.

The respondents also revealed the requirement of extra time and effort for enabling implementation of skills and strategies. 35.4% respondents strongly agreed that their personal time is taken away in making effective lesson plan incorporating skills and strategies. The proposition holds true because some teachers are engaged the whole day teaching more than five periods. They do not get adequate free time in the school for planning. On the other hand, 4.2% strongly disagreed with the same. A teacher said, "if one has clear concept of skill and strategy,

one does not require extra time to use them in the lesson plans". Hence there are teachers who manage adequate time to incorporate skills and strategies into their lesson plans.

Competency of teachers in using ‘teaching skills’ and ‘teaching strategies’

The general view that has been gathered from the interviews shows that all participants are not competent in making use of teaching skill and teaching strategy though they have knowledge and ideas. The responses reveal that the problem is related to lack of practice. Teachers can enhance the use of skills and strategies through constant practice. The skills and strategies that are learned in the colleges have to be put into constant practice by teachers. In this regard Hallam and Ireson (1999, p. 76) have the view that, “High levels of expertise are acquired through the acquisition of extensive knowledge and much practice of relevant skills. During the practice the skills become automated.” This idea of practice as an essential aspect to enhance one’s use of effective teaching skill is also stressed by, Panayiotis, Leonidas and, Bert (2011, p.14) when they said “Teachers’ training and professional development are considered essential mechanisms for deepening teachers’ content knowledge and developing their teaching practices in order to teach to high standards.” The study further revealed that teachers learned from each other through mutual sharing of ideas. 163 respondents (56.6%) are found to be sharing the knowledge of skills and strategies they apply with their colleagues. The sharing of knowledge on skills and strategies indicate that teachers are learning from each other to improve upon their classroom teaching. This is a positive indication that teachers are helping each other for professional growth.

Tshering, Rinchen, Jose, Gyeltshen (in press) also highlight the difficulties faced by graduates in making use of the strategies and skills in their teaching. Graduates expressed their views that some of the teaching strategies and skills are challenging. However, they have not specified which skill and strategy they consider difficult. Most of the graduates are of the opinion that teaching strategies are time-consuming and they affect syllabus coverage. Their opinions give the message that the ability of the teachers is one factor upon which the application of teaching strategy depended. It also implied that teachers themselves were not efficient in using skills and strategies. Perhaps they needed more practice as Hallam and Ireson (1999) said, “While training

can prepare teachers for many aspects of classroom management, to develop expert skills requires considerable practice” (p. 83).

Integration of ‘teaching skill’ with ‘teaching strategy’

From the data, 37.2% of the teachers said that they have no adequate time to incorporate skills into strategies. A teacher said, “We are able to use both skills and strategies in our teaching learning process. We integrate both like basic questioning with advance questioning, activity based with giving instruction, presentation with use of language and questioning.” However, 24.7% of their friends said they get enough time to integrate skills. A teacher even said, “Since I joined the school I have been using only teaching skills and I had no touch with strategy.” The teacher further added saying, “the syllabus is vast and using strategies take long time to finish syllabus.” Another teacher said, “although skills and strategies are very much inherent in all sorts of teaching one rarely uses strategies as the curriculum is syllabus driven. The use of strategy takes a lot of time.” However, in reality a teacher is found to be using quite a number of strategies and skills together in a class (and that he or she is not conscious of the same.) In the classroom observation, a teacher was found to be using a range of strategies and skills. Following observations were made in a classroom: For instance, in one class a teacher used skills like concept and generalization, interaction variation and questioning. In the same lesson, the teacher also used strategies like lecture method, deductive, inductive and enquiry learning. Hence, it shows that integration of strategy and skill are done without conscious planning. This situation also appears to be happening due to the lack of exposure towards integrating skill and strategy. A teacher mentioned that integration of skills and strategies were not taught during their training in the college.

Microteaching

All teacher respondents expressed their view that microteaching that they did as part of their training was very useful. However, a teacher suggested that lecturer should be demonstrating the skill and strategy instead of presentation and explanation of the concept. A teacher also expressed that they did not get adequate practice of microteachings since they had to learn all the skills within a semester (which favoured one time practice for each skill). In retrospect of the

situations of Teaching Practice , one said , “... the trainees were taught various skills and strategies over the period of three years and the trainees had the room for improvement unlike the current practice of once in four years.”

Findings

The teacher participants have adequate understandings of the concepts of teaching skills and teaching strategies. The study has also revealed a wide application of teaching skills and teaching strategies in the schools. Senior teachers have contributed to helping new teachers by playing role model in terms of the use an application of teaching skills and teaching strategies. They have also motivated their fellow teachers towards implementing the skills and strategies in the teaching-learning process. Collaborative learning amongst the teachers too is existent in the schools, the study found. Teacher participants further associate students’ effective learning with the use of skills and strategies.

The study also found a numerous challenges faced by teachers when applying skills and strategies. Teachers are overburdened with teaching load and other additional responsibilities. This indicates that some schools are facing shortage of teachers where they have to teach more than the normal prescribed workload. Teachers were found shouldering responsibilities ranging from three to four besides teaching. This indicates that the teachers in the school are burdened with extra responsibilities. This directly affects teacher’s planning and teaching since some portion of the time is taken by the extra responsibilities that they have to shoulder.

Regarding the modality of the delivery of professional modules at the college, the participants expressed their satisfaction. Though microteaching has been found to be very useful, yet the participants expressed that the college tutors need to do more of modelling of the use of skill and strategies rather than making presentations using slides.

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