

Nurturing quality teaching in higher education

DR. SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

RIGHTLY or wrongly, teachers in higher education in Bangladesh seem to have an image problem. In my study of alumni perceptions (DS May 9, 2002), teacher quality ratings did not reflect the excellence the alumni might have expected. Such feedback, sporadic as they are, represents a defining moment that ought to ignite in the teachers a fighting spirit to take back lost ground collectively because the ratings were directed at the entire community. Of course it must be recognized that the same community is dotted with islands of excellence. But the ratings must be heeded. Either something is really wrong with the larger community of teachers, or there are enough bad apples that make the entire community seem not so stellar any more. Assuming that the ratings have some validity, it seems that the entire community needs to engage in serious introspection; and if such introspection finds conclusive evidence of an image gap, a way must be found out of the woods.

Why is this important? Let us first understand that teachers are at the heart of the higher education institutions (HEIs). Their quality defines the quality of the students and their institutions. However, it must also be understood that teacher quality is not a stand-alone phenomenon. Its lustre depends on its interactions with a host of other elements: a strong curriculum, opportunities to develop oneself, budgets for research and other resources to reinforce and expand one's learning, quality students, innovative and challenging colleagues, a visionary administration, top-class facilities and technology, a demanding but positive evaluation system, a fair compensation and reward system, and non-interference of political, bureaucratic, and other external and nuisance elements. Clearly, there are many factors that affect teacher quality. If these can be harnessed, they could provide teachers the opportunity to flourish and take back their glory days as individuals at the forefront of nation building by providing much needed creative and intellectual energy; and their excellence will not only leave a lasting impression on students but also contribute to a legacy of shared knowledge with potential impact far beyond the academic scene.

Teacher quality is especially vital to the academic environment because of its ability to either inspire students to new heights of attain-

ment through effective guidance or because it can turn students away in distaste because they never see the light as they trudge through the academic years in vain toil. It has often been the experience that when students are touched by the truly learned, they can be energized to accomplish the unimaginable. Conversely, when students encounter uncaring teachers who lack in ability or commitment to enable learning, and who fail to breathe new life and hope among the fresh and eager minds pursuing a dream, the experience can be numbing and devastating.

The question, therefore, is what is teacher quality and how can it be enhanced? According to the alumni, teacher quality is exemplified in their academic qualifications, teaching experience, communication skills, research productivity, caring attention to students, and ability to impart new knowledge. The second part of the question is the focus of this article. My experiences in academia suggest that, to enhance teacher quality, we need to focus on two elements -- processes and outcomes. The key elements of process involve, minimally, attention to teacher selection, teacher development, teacher evaluation, rewards and compensation, and cohorts of quality students. Outcomes refer to establishing standards against which the performance of teachers ought to be judged. Let me elaborate.

Teacher selection

The first stage of the process is teacher selection -- finding the right person for a specific job. Someone trained in Economics or Organizational Behaviour should not be used to teach Business Communication or Statistics. The qualifications of the candidates are central and any discrepancy in this domain is certain to attenuate the ability of the HEIs to deliver quality education. Consequently, allegations of recruitment of unqualified and under-qualified teachers who have found teaching positions through influence are issues against which the entire community must build a strong defence because such selections undermine the quality of the institutions and the image of the teachers. Favouritism, nepotism, political pressure, and related factors can lead to recruiting faculty members who are unfit and contribute little intellectually. Eventually the word also gets out with its demoralizing effects on the entire teaching community because of perceived injustices. To resist undue external and

internal pressures, it is vital for the selection process to be widely shared and dispersed among various committees to choose the best possible candidate through a well-publicized, transparent, and documented process. It may also be worthwhile to consider including various stakeholders in selecting the candidate to enhance the process. For example, asking the candidate to teach a class where students evaluate the teacher's communication skills, preparation, insights, and other relevant criteria, may be used as a key input in the teacher selection decision.

Teacher development

The adage in academia that few good teachers are born is perhaps very true; most must be developed. Hence, HEIs must envision a continuous quality improvement programme to ensure faculty development. This does not only mean enabling teachers to attain higher degrees since many have returned with such degrees. But can they teach? This is a perennial question

2. Teachers must also have the minimum tools and the right environment in which to teach effectively. I can recall how distracting and disturbing it was as a guest speaker when I was trying to communicate in an environment where neither the equipment worked, nor could I hear myself well because of the traffic outside! Advancements in technology must be incorporated where possible to enable teachers to "reach" students in creative ways. Technology awareness and training is an important component of creative teaching as is the quality of the classroom facilities.

3. Teachers must be exposed to different approaches of reaching (and not so much teaching) students that go beyond the traditional and oft-used lecture method. Thus they must be trained in the use of alternative pedagogical tools such as case-, situation analysis-, and research-based learning where appropriate. Guest speakers and experts can also be used occasionally to embellish key topics and

resources available for teachers to emulate.

In addition to developing teaching skills, some HEIs may want to promote faculty research as a core element of their vision. The environment that supports this important activity must be designed both by teachers and by administrators to establish a programme of research, sources of funding, technical support, and a community of researchers committed to addressing questions pertinent to the nation. Ongoing methodology training and enhancement must also be offered to help upgrade teachers in their pursuit of relevant and contemporary research strategies.

Teacher evaluations

Teacher development must be followed by a constructive system of evaluations that provide positive feedback to help teachers attain goals consistent with defined standards and a documented level of quality. Such evaluation must be conducted in phases, giving committed teachers the opportunity,

ing. Three additional evaluation procedures that may be adopted include exit surveys (from graduating students) and alumni and employer surveys (to assess the long term impact of teaching).

It is important to briefly consider the criteria for effective teaching. A significant body of literature exists in this area: Only one is presented here, and briefly, to engender dialogue; it involves Bloom's Taxonomy that suggests six categories that ought to be evaluated:

- ✓ Knowledge is about whether students remember course content either through recognition or recall.
- ✓ Comprehension represents students' ability to 1) translate material/knowledge from one form to another, 2) explain course material, and 3) predict effects of course materials.
- ✓ Application refers to students' ability to apply course content to real situations.
- ✓ Analysis represents students' ability to look at disparate aspects

Let us be clear that the wealth of the nation resides foremost in its people and educating them is a national priority. By improving the quality of teaching in the nation's HEIs, future generations infused with contemporary education would be better enabled to bring about needed changes elsewhere. The long-term rewards are almost certain to follow.

confronting administrators in academe worldwide. Development of teachers is imperative and requires a multifaceted approach. They must be supported by experts and mentors, provided the relevant resources, and guided by administrators in many ways. Among the key ingredients for teacher development, the following are important:

1. Teachers must learn how to design courses and incorporate relevant materials that reflect current thinking in the field. In this regard, departmental teams may assist with developing course materials, while collectively structuring and enhancing the curriculum. In fact, HEIs are often judged by their curriculum and teachers by their course contents. Those that are reluctant to change reflect a stagnancy of the institutions and a poverty of their intellectual bent. Inputs from stakeholders are also recommended because the curriculum would reflect their needs, thereby contributing to greater efficiencies at the national level in that many employers today find their employees soundly lacking and have to commit additional resources to retrain them.

issues.

4. Whenever possible, new teachers must be attached to mentors or master teachers to gain teaching experience and skills. Such mentors should occasionally sit in the classroom to constructively point out the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers being developed. Initially this process must be confidential to keep up the morale of new teachers and allow their development to take root.

5. Classroom activities and performance of teachers can occasionally be videotaped to allow them to self-examine their teaching style and delivery of content. By seeing oneself in action, teachers often find creative ways of circumventing problems.

6. If resources are available, provisions could be made to support the HEIs by creating an independent Instructional Development Programme (IDP) staffed by trained professionals for pedagogical improvement and teaching support. The government can play a meaningful role here by establishing such a unit for all HEIs to gain from. The IDP can serve as a resource centre to make a variety of teaching

time, and space to develop themselves. Since there are two major aspects of quality teachers -- teaching and research -- both must be evaluated where appropriate. A third element that may be included is community service. In the west, this concept of voluntarism is expected and encouraged, but given a low evaluation weight. Moreover, since effective teaching involves transforming students, their inputs should also be included in the evaluation of teaching. How and to what extent these are to be used is something that the HEIs must decide based on their circumstances.

What must be evaluated, the manner in which this should be done, and the frequency of such evaluation must also be decided after comprehensive discussion at department, institutional, and oversight levels to ensure that these evaluations become critical inputs to enhance and reward quality teaching. At the same time, a culture of peer evaluation must be introduced whereby senior or designated teachers are used periodically (at least once every year or two) to evaluate the quality of teaching

of the course and see the interrelations among the parts.

✓ Synthesis is their ability to recombine course contents to create new structures or patterns.

✓ Evaluation represents students' ability to use internal or external standards to assess the value of course content.

To prepare and develop high calibre students for responsible positions, as many levels of the hierarchy as possible must be evaluated to assess the quality of teachers and their ability to add value to the student body. However, I might add that there is no single set of criteria to evaluate teachers that is deemed "best." What is important is that departments and administrators should develop a context-relevant set of criteria to evaluate teaching. To the extent this set of standards is measurable, the better should be the quality of assessment.

Where applicable, research must also be evaluated because it is a vital enterprise devoted to the discovery of context-relevant knowledge. Much education in Bangladesh today is based on text and research borrowed from the west.

ern world. How relevant is this knowledge for Bangladesh?

What constitutes valuable research must, however, be established as is done in the well-known universities overseas. Some of them value "basic" research while others promote "applied" research.

What is appropriate for a particular HEI or a specific department is beyond the scope of this article. But it is important to recognize that if the HEIs wish international recognition, the quality of their research must be assessed against international standards. For example, it is alleged that HEIs in Bangladesh consider publications in newspapers as "research." While they may justifiably be so, such research is not peer evaluated or blind reviewed and their depth, merit, and contributions are open to question. A suggestion is to assess accepted practice at a benchmark HEI in another country that a local university wants to emulate; faculty research might be compared with those at the benchmark institution using a collaboration model, where the external HEIs may be persuaded to evaluate the research during the early stages of collaboration.

Quality students

In conclusion, I cannot help but emphasize that quality teaching is intrinsically intertwined with the quality of students in the classroom. This calls for effective backward linkages to strengthen secondary education. In particular, a tough, candid, and soul-searching evaluation is needed to understand why the "failure rate" is so high among SSC and HSC examinees. The issues discussed above might be used to account for the performance of secondary schools and must be addressed at this level too and most certainly tied to incentives. For example, the level of funding available to each school under the government programme must be tied to academic performance, provided the other necessary steps of teacher selection, development, evaluation, and rewards are also solidly in place.

Let us be clear that the wealth of the nation resides foremost in its people and educating them is a national priority. By improving the quality of teaching in the nation's HEIs, future generations infused with contemporary education would be better enabled to bring about needed changes elsewhere. The long-term rewards are almost certain to follow.

Syed Saad Andaleeb, PhD, is Editor, Journal of Bangladesh Studies and Professor and Programme Chair, Marketing, School of Business, Penn State Erie, USA

Rural development: Some optimistic indicators

DHIRAJ KUMAR NATH

BANGLADESH since its independence in 1971 has taken Rural Development as a distinct strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of the rural poor.

Bangladesh is a country of untraced natural resources, inequality of assets and income

distribution, low productivity in agriculture and industry with disproportionate rate of population growth. Moreover, natural calamities like flood, cyclone, and tidal bore take a heavy toll of lives and property every year in which the poor suffer most. Bangladesh adopted a few innovative approaches and interventions. The components programmes were from the very

beginning inter-dependent, multidimensional and mutually reinforcing in nature leading of government, non-government poverty reduction activities, rural maintenance programme, infrastructure development, structural adjustment etc.

A few areas of success stories and remarkable interventions that appeared as examples for replication need to be highlighted:

Comilla Approach to rural development: This is an approach developed by Bangladesh Rural Development Academy (BARD) in its "Social Laboratory Area" of Comilla as an outcome of search for innovation in rural development in a low income agrarian society with high density of population. Assumptions and hypotheses of the approach contain that villagers best understand their problems and capable of bringing changes if capital, training and technical inputs are provided. Village should be treated as a unit and recognized as the starting point for modernization. The salient features of Comilla model comprise of Rural Works Programme, Thana Irrigation Programme, Two tier co-operatives, a decentralized and coordinated "Rural Administration Systems". A few drawbacks of the Comilla approach were also identified, such as (a) co-operative dominated by big farmers giving no direct benefits to landless poor people; b) social development aspects neglected; c) Lack inter-agency co-ordination; d) real wages in rural areas not increasing and e) Comilla approach could not bring major changes in the rural structure of the government and land tenure system.

Micro-credit: Micro-credit as an effective tool for poverty reduction appeared as a clear vision of commitment to serve the poor. Micro-credit programme in Bangladesh has benefited the rural poor in different forms by increasing their income, reducing the risks and vulnerability of their livelihood and contributing to their social development. It is believed that the micro-credit system is dynamic and evolving one, which can adjust to the varied and changing needs of the poor. In Bangladesh, with the passage of time and experience, rural micro-credit and micro-credit for hardcore poor has now indicated new dimension for micro-credit for micro-enterprise. Micro-credit facilities have encouraged employment creation, made provision for income generating activities and developed an urge for qualitative improvement in the life style leading to social investments.

At the same time, it is said that the hard-core poor are getting little benefit from the existing micro-credit programmes; rather the people above the level are benefit-

aries. Whatever may be said about micro-credit, it is true, it has paid attention to a class of people previously ignored by the formal banking system. The question contains whether micro-credit promote the production of value added commodities for sale at home and abroad? Can micro-credit be the means of alleviating poverty? While analyzing micro-credit, it must be remembered that poverty is more than mere hardship and is affected by the social and psychological effects of having to live in poverty situation. Therefore, to reduce the poverty level one must first be able to change the conditions of poverty. Micro-credit institutions in Bangladesh have not been able to prove that their efforts have contributed to a significant reduction of poverty or increased economic growth. This means the present mode of loan repayment needs to be revised. The micro-credit finale in February 1997, attended by 2900 delegates from 137 countries ended with a commitment and declaration to enroll 100 million poor families in their programmes by the year 2005. Unfortunately, by this time, many donors begin to lose interest, as many perceived that micro-credit is not a panacea for poverty and most micro-credit clients are condemned to continue living in a state of poverty. At present, micro-credit NGOs contend that poverty is created through social processes. Therefore, fundamental goal of these NGOs is to help correct these social processes. There is a need to integrate BCC campaign, reproductive health care services, education and advocacy programme with micro-credit intervention to attain the sustainability.

Safe drinking water supply: Safe drinking water supply and adequate sanitation are indispensable for rural livelihood. Although around 90 per cent of the rural population of Bangladesh is covered under the water supply from hand tubewell, yet arsenic toxicity, highly toxic arsenic sludge disposal, lack of sanitary latrine and open defecation pose grave public hazard in rural life. Low cost deep tube well is considered as answer for sanitized rural villages for comfortable living. The Rural Development Academy, Bogra developed low cost deep tubewell technology in 1998, which surpassed the traditional DTWs in respect of sense that materials used are locally available, the drilling technique is normal and cost effective, power consumption is low and the total capital investment is minimal.

Although ground water extracted by DTW is most acceptable source of drinking and domestic water supplies, but hydrogeologic situations at many places where there are evidences of the presence of

iron, arsenic, manganese, etc which are detrimental to human health when exceed the tolerable limits often restrict it. Out of 64 districts, hand tubewells in 42 districts have so far been affected by arsenic contamination. About 23 million people have been reported to suffer from various complications due to arsenic pollution. RDA adopted an approach of installation of low cost DTW at relatively pollution free (particularly iron and arsenic) zone strata of the aquifer.

In places where application of above-mentioned approach is not possible, RDA developed an alternative approach with the technique of purifying groundwater through treatment plant. In the treatment process, the more important thing is the removal of pathogenic organism, iron and manganese compounds, suspended matters causing turbidity and toxic substances such as, arsenic causing serious health hazards. BRAC adopted this technology at Narayanganj and World Bank has concluded an agreement to share the findings for large-scale use of this technology in coming days.

Government and non-government organization collaboration: Different innovative approaches were adopted to ensure resource mobilization, employment generation, empowerment of women, sustainable community development which, in fact, manifested the continuous commitment of the government for rural development. Government's measure to promote NGOs with one stop service after the establishment of NGO Affairs Bureau directly under the supervision of the Prime Minister's Office is an initiative appreciated by development and collaborate with the programme implementation is unique in Bangladesh.

To ensure rural development and reduce poverty at least eleven ministries and divisions are working together with multifarious programmes. The programmes of the ministries divisions are being supplemented by those of the NGOs and almost in all areas both Government and NGOs are working in the spirit of public-private partnership. At present, around 3000 NGOs are registered with NGO Affairs Bureau, Social Welfare Directorate, Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Directorate of Women Affairs, who are working for rural development. Around 1558 NGOs registered with NGO Affairs Bureau are working on micro-credit with the assistance of development partners.

Programme impact: The cumulative effects of all these programmes and efforts, have led to noticeable progress of the country in many respects. Impressive suc-

cesses have been achieved in reducing human poverty. The rate of improvement in human development index in Bangladesh was found to be faster in South Asia. Equally, incidence of human poverty declined from 61.3 per cent in 1980-83 to 41.6 per cent in 1997. The growth rate of GDP has gone up from 3.94 in 1990-91 to 5.94 in 1999-2000. The literacy rate has increased to 64 per cent and the life expectancy at birth reached to 61 years. The country is almost self-sufficient in rice production. Rural areas are well connected with cities, municipalities and growth centres with different modes of transport. The people have chosen democracy as a way of life. All these indicators reflect remarkable achievements of Bangladesh rural development under a challenging environment. But, we are yet to go a long way to bring qualitative improvement in rural life and restrict migration of rural people to urban areas.

Dhiraj Kumar Nath is Secretary, Rural Development and Cooperatives Division, Ministry of LGRD and Cooperatives.