

Questioning Best Practices with an Innovative Pedagogical Design for Professional Development of Teacher Educators

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Abstract

Best practices in any field of study utilize methodologies that have been proven as reliably leading to desired outcomes, while adding an appreciable value to the experiences of various stakeholders and enhancing the quality of the process. The Master of Arts in Teacher Education-International (MATE-I) Programme of the Open University of Sri Lanka adopted an innovative pedagogical design, namely Scenario-based Learning (SBL) to promote best practices in the professional development of teacher educators.

SBL is a unique learning design, grounded in the principles of constructivist pedagogy. It is based on fundamental principles of meaningful learning which include established best practices in teaching and learning such as learning by doing, problem-solving, situated learning, scaffolding of learning and authentic assessment tasks. It also supports collaborative learning and critical reflection while students are supported with various resources including Information and Communication Technologies.

While use of an innovative pedagogical design in the MATE (I) programme is expected to lead to best practices, there are several concerns about how it might work in particular educational settings. These include barriers posed by limited English language competency

of students and their insufficient background knowledge which may obstruct active participation of learners. Facilitating interactive sessions is also a demanding and challenging task for the teacher. The expected changes in the roles of teachers and students may be difficult with both parties, who are more comfortable with conventional teacher-centered methods. Although the learners might find the programme more practical, their grounding in the theoretical foundations of the subject matter may be inadequate, if careful attention is not paid to this. The workload of SBL with continuous learning and assessment activities and online methods poses challenges to students. The outcomes of such an innovative programme may be quite rewarding, yet there is a possibility that it might not be received with enthusiasm by some at least in the early stages of its implementation. However, there is some hope that with the emerging trend in society towards more emphasis on general transferable skills rather than narrow academic specialization, the MATE (I) programme stands to make a significant contribution to the development of such skills in our learners.

Introduction

Best practices in any field of study would utilize methodologies or techniques that have been proven through experience and research, which would reliably lead to desired results or outcomes. These practices should also add an appreciable value to the experiences of various stakeholders involved, and enhance the quality of the process. Although descriptors for best practices can always be borrowed or adapted from other systems, contextualizing these ideas is essential (Prasad & Antony, 2004). However several constraints sometimes unforeseen may be encountered when a system adopts a particular practice.

Best practices in Higher Education, as identified by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council in India are, 'quality-enhancing academic/administrative/infrastructural strategies adopted by highly accredited institutions of higher learning in the present instance' (Francis & Madhukar, 2004, p.11). Innovative pedagogical designs in teaching-learning processes and associated assessment and evaluation schemes that are expected to lead to quality enhancement of these processes can be considered as