



Creating a Culture of Teaching Excellence

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EDITORIAL

Creating a Culture of Teaching Excellence

India's higher education has a story of remarkable expansion. Students from previously underrepresented regions and social groups now have access to universities, colleges, technical institutions and professional programs. This expansion is one of India's important achievements in the recent past. But access to education alone is not sufficient. The next challenge is quality. The real challenge is whether every student who enters higher education is helped to think clearly, become a lifelong learner, develop the ability to work collaboratively and gain the confidence to apply knowledge in real situations.

That challenge has become urgent because higher education itself is changing rapidly. The National Education Policy 2020 asks institutions to move towards critical thinking, creativity, multidisciplinary, ethics, communication, problem-solving, flexibility and lifelong learning. It emphasises pedagogy that is experiential, inquiry-driven, learner-centred and enjoyable. They require a different culture of teaching and learning.

The well-established teaching system in many institutions still rests on a familiar assumption. Most believe that if a teacher knows the subject, the teaching will take care of itself. That assumption was never fully correct. This assumption is even less adequate today. Students come from far more diverse backgrounds than they did earlier. With increased use of technology in learning, how students read, write and solve problems is changing. Artificial intelligence is beginning to challenge conventional assignments and examinations. In such a setting, subject expertise remains essential, but it is no longer sufficient. We need teachers who do not treat teaching just as routine delivery. They should treat it as a professional and scholarly practice that can be designed, studied and improved. Do we promote evidence-based teaching-learning practices? Do our higher education institutes (HEIs) support faculty development and education research? Do they have collaborative learning spaces for preparing future faculty?

The dilemma for Indian higher education is therefore clear. Teachers are expected to implement ambitious

reforms. But how many institutions provide them with sustained pedagogical support? New faculty often learn institutional procedures faster than they learn course design. They discuss assessment reform more often than they practice it. They collect student feedback, but it is not always used to redesign learning. As a result, improvements in teaching depend too much on individual motivation and too little on institutional design.

Teachers need continuous professional development. UGC, therefore, established 151 Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Centres (MMTTCs) in September 2023. The training program is very comprehensive. It covers NEP orientation, faculty induction, refresher courses, leadership, design and entrepreneurship, specific learning disabilities, mental health, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, STEM and science communication. Since the inception of MMTTCs, about 4.32 lakh teachers out of 15 lakh in HEIs have undergone training.

But national training cannot substitute for institutional academic culture. A teacher who is struggling with a large first-year class needs help within the institution. A teacher redesigning laboratory assessments needs to consult an experienced colleague. A college teacher teaching first-generation learners needs local strategies to build students' confidence. To introduce multidisciplinary programs, a university needs expertise in course design. Every HEI, therefore, must establish a permanent centre for learning and teaching to meet these needs, as periodic external training alone cannot suffice.

This is why the Parimal and Pramod Chaudhari Centre for Learning and Teaching (PPCCLT) at IIT Bombay is an important example. Global practice points in the same direction. Cornell's Centre for Teaching Innovation works with its teaching community to advance inclusive, evidence-based and student-centred learning. The University of Michigan's Centre for Research on Learning and Teaching promotes excellence, equity and innovation across all its schools and colleges. UCL's Arena Fellowship provides a structured professional pathway for staff who teach or lead education. These examples are evidence

that reputable universities take the pursuit of teaching excellence seriously.

A centre for learning and teaching in every Indian HEI should begin with faculty induction. New teachers need support in designing courses, writing learning outcomes, preparing assessments, mentoring students, using technology, dealing with academic integrity, and understanding student diversity. It should also help experienced faculty redesign courses. The aim should not be to impose one teaching method. The aim should be to help teachers choose methods that fit the discipline, students' level and learning goals.

Our higher education system must move away from rewarding memory over understanding. A centre for learning and teaching within a HEI should train its faculty to use concept questions, project-based assessments, oral presentations, case studies, live laboratory experiments, field reports and reflective writing when assessing students. It can help teachers use formative assessments so that students receive feedback before failure becomes final. This shift is central to NEP 2020 because it calls for conceptual understanding rather than rote learning and for assessment that supports learning.

Such centres are also necessary for inclusion. Our classrooms have a mix of urban and rural students, first-generation learners, non-English-medium students, and economically disadvantaged students. Students also come with varying levels of academic preparation. Institutionalising equity measures during admissions is just the beginning; they must persist within the classroom. Teachers need practical strategies for inclusive teaching, bilingual explanations where needed, accessible material, supportive feedback, mentoring, and early identification of learning difficulties. A centre can make inclusion a natural part of pedagogical practice.

There is also another dimension. Students do not learn merely because teachers present the content. They learn when teachers focus on practice and provide timely feedback, allowing students to monitor their understanding. Teachers can turn such experiences into usable classroom practices.

Universities must train teachers to use learning management systems, online resources, virtual laboratories and AI tools. Such tools can improve students' learning when teachers use them carefully. In the context of AI use in teaching, teachers must redesign assignments and examinations so that students demonstrate judgement, application, originality, and reflection. A centre can help faculty learn how to protect academic integrity while using technology tools in teaching without fear-driven rules.

Such centres should also support Indian-language resources, local case studies and integration of Indian knowledge systems where academically appropriate. The common principle should be evidence-based support for better learning, not a uniform template.

Just as IIT Bombay has done, large universities and institutions should establish a Centre for Learning and Teaching by collaborating with pedagogical experts, instructional designers, assessment specialists and educational technologists. Smaller colleges can begin with compact centres or cluster-based models. State universities can support affiliated colleges through hub-and-spoke arrangements. A centre for learning and teaching can work with departments and IQACs to generate real evidence of improvement.

India's higher education reform is in a decisive phase. For enhanced learning outcomes, our institutions should take teaching seriously and support teachers as professionals. A PPCCLT-like centre in every HEI would signal that teaching excellence is part of academic infrastructure. If NEP 2020 is to move fully from policy into classrooms, our HEIs must make excellent teaching systematic, evidence-based, inclusive and continuously improving.

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