

Professionalization of Teaching in Universities: A Compelling Case

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ABSTRACT Discourse in university often revolves around that teaching is common sense business and that anyone can teach. University lecturers as experts in their disciplines often feel they are able to teach and it is up to students to learn. It is against such discourse that calls for the professionalisation of teaching in universities continued to grow. This view is against the argument that despite being discipline specialists, academic staff need special training in teaching and learning to be effective teachers. In this paper the researchers interrogate the issue of professionalisation of teaching in universities. The meaning of professionalization of teaching and what it really entails are examined. The researchers discuss reasons why it is necessary for teaching to be professionalised in universities by centering on the main responsibilities of a university teacher which are curriculum organisation, teaching, assessment and dealing with of adult learners. The researchers further propose a model that could be utilised in the professionalization of teaching by way of deliberate teacher training programmes, short courses as well as research and publication in teaching and learning issues. Such approaches allow the imparting to university academic staff members knowledge, skills and values that ensure better facilitation of learning.

INTRODUCTION

In South African universities, academic staff members are hired on the strengths of their discipline expertise. This results in universities having what Dearn et al. (2003) observe in Australian universities, of academic staff members who are neither trained nor qualified to do what they mostly do which is to teach. What we have in universities are discipline experts who are hired and paid to teach when they are not trained and qualified to teach. Such a scenario results from the discourse in universities that anyone can teach for as long as they are discipline experts. Such discourse stems from uniformed opinions of what it really entails to teach. Teaching is a profession with professionals' standards and ethics and whoever dare to teach must be adequately prepared for the role by way of some professional training.

Universities are mandated to teach students and provide different kinds of degree pathways that result in lifelong learning for adult learners. There is need for teachers to be deeply grounded in pedagogy (the art of teaching and learning) and andragogy (the art of teaching adult learners). In pedagogy, teachers should have new understandings of human cognition and social-constructivist approaches to adult learning (Slavin 1996). These approaches place learning responsibility on learners by ensuring

that they are active participants in the learning process through case-based, collaborative learning in which they engage in problem solving and open dialogue (Hausfather 1996). One has to be initiated into the field of teaching in order to understand and appreciate the use of appropriate pedagogical and andragogical approaches.

The hiring of teaching staff on the basis of academic ability in universities is also an issue in the United Kingdom. The 2003 White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education' (Department for Education and Science 2003) proposed that all new university staff engaged in teaching be trained from 2006 and says:

At present, there are no nationally recognised professional standards for teachers in higher education; and many of those who teach have never received any training in how to do so. In order that teaching in higher education is treated seriously as a profession in its own right, and that teachers are given the skills they need, we expect that national professional standards will be agreed ... These standards, to be designed and agreed by the sector itself, would then describe competences required for all teaching staff.

Calls for the training of university teachers are made against the realisation that it is only through adequately equipped lecturers that teaching and learning can be enhanced.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This discussion of professionalisation of teaching in universities is underpinned by the

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Trait Model of Professionalism theory. The Trait model of professionalism theory argues that a profession has traits or features that distinguish it from other occupations. A profession is skills-based and this shows that there are certain skills expected of individuals described as belonging to a particular profession. If university teaching is professionalised it means the university teachers should possess skills related to teaching. A profession is also marked by training and education provided to the professionals and they are tested on competency and certified to be deemed professionals. University teachers, therefore, should have undergone some form of training and their competency tested and should be in possession of qualifications based on their competence in different teaching and learning aspects. A profession is also bound by a code of conduct and such a code guides the way professionals operate and relate to colleagues, clients and the public. University teachers should operate with a defined code of conduct that guides their teaching, assessment and relationship with students. The Trait model of professionalism theory really sets a tone on expectations from university teachers as professionals. This is contrary to the current scenario in universities in South Africa where teaching is not professionalised. This has resulted in a myriad of challenges ranging from poor teaching capabilities to misconduct in the dispensation of duty.

What is Professionalization of Teaching?

Komba and Nkumbi (2008) assert that there is agreement among scholars about the importance of the teacher and her/his competence in the teaching-learning process and this shows that whoever is hired to teach should be adequately prepared for their facilitation of learning role. Galabawa (2001) observes that the teacher is the heart of classroom instruction, which shows that the teacher should be aware of the different teaching approaches and have close understanding of content taught and the students. Rogan (2004) and Mosha (2004) state that the effectiveness of the teacher depends on her competence, academically and pedagogically. This alludes to the view that subject or discipline expertise should be matched with knowledge and expertise of how actual teaching and learning takes place.

In showing the importance of matching discipline expertise with pedagogical expertise in

a professional university teacher, Fernández (2013: 350) argues that;

All teachers are required to be graduates from higher education institutions; all teachers are required to have extensive subject knowledge, a good knowledge of pedagogy, the skills and competencies required to guide and support learners, and an understanding of the social and cultural dimension of education.

The above observation reflects that discipline expertise on its own is not enough to make one a competent university teacher. There is need for pedagogical skills, understanding of learners and the broader context of the higher education field.

Who is a Professional?

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) argue for the understanding of a professional as one who is fully competent in the execution of duties required of the profession. When talking of a professional university teacher we have to consider one who has a thorough understanding of what teaching and learning entails over and above disciplinary expertise. To this end, Fernandez (2013: 348) describes professionalization as professionalization as;

... a process that is articulated around the construction of a professional identity, professional competencies, access requirements, the associated training, the development of a professional career, and the processes of evaluation of professional performance.

Of importance in the above assertion is the realisation that professionalisation entails the development of professional competencies through training. The need to train university teachers becomes imperative in the realisation of professionalization of teaching. This comes in contrast to the discourse that teaching is a common sense business and anyone can teach. Joyce and Showers (2002: 3) state that "student achievement is the product of formal study by educators." This suggests need for formal training to be undergone by teachers.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2011) talks of professional standards in the assessment of teachers as professionals. These standards include the teacher's knowledge of students and how they learn, knowledge of content and how to teach it, planning for and implementing effective learning,

creating and maintaining supportive and safe learning environments, assessing, providing feedback and reports of student learning, engaging in professional learning as well as engaging professionally with colleagues, parents and the community. Assessment is therefore based on how the teacher performs in all the standards. It is clear that there are certain expectations from teachers, even at university level, in order to be judged as competent. This has to do with professional standards. Such standards are imparted to teachers through deliberate training programmes hence the importance of professionalising teaching at university level.

In training teachers to be professionals they are exposed to professional knowledge. Professional knowledge is a body of knowledge that that allows teachers to respond to the needs of their students within their educational contexts. Through professional knowledge teachers are knowledgeable of their students in terms of their diversity of backgrounds and how to relate to them appropriately. Teachers will be able to structure their lessons to meet the physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of their students. Professional knowledge also enables teachers to know the content of their subjects and the curriculum as well as structure, sequence and pace the content they teach. This ensures that content is taught meaningfully. Teachers are also able to select the most appropriate teaching approaches to maximise students' learning. The use of necessary teaching aids and Information and Communication Technology to contextualise and expand their students' modes and breadth of learning, is also informed by professional knowledge.

Professionalisation of teaching for university teachers should ensure the inculcation of sound principles and guidelines of professional practice. Danielson (1996) stipulates four domains that guide teaching responsibility and these are planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities. In actual professional practice, teachers should be aware of their core functions and how to go about them. Training of teachers has to emphasise the importance of planning and preparation as effective facilitation is a result of adequate preparation. Hativa et al. (2001) state that that good teaching is not only a question of having an excellent knowledge of one's subject but also involves adequate and thorough prior

preparation. Teachers should also be able to organise and manage the learning environment to enhance teaching and learning. Use of meaning teaching and learning approaches in line with latest philosophies of learning is also important. This will ensure that teachers in the university do not only rely on the lecture method but are able to use more student-centred approaches (Maphosa and Kalenga 2012). Professional teachers are able to operate effectively at all stages of the teaching and learning cycle, including planning for learning and assessment, developing learning programs, teaching, assessing, providing feedback on student learning and reporting to parents/guardians (Ramsden 2008).

Professional teachers are also able to engage in reflective practice in professional engagement. Reflective practice entails looking at what the teacher does in the classroom, thinking about why it is done that way, and thinking about how it works and could further improved. It is a process of self-observation and self-evaluation by collecting information on teaching and learning, analysing and evaluating the information and making informed decisions about teaching and learning. This alludes to scholarly teaching which ultimately results in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Fosnot (1989: xi) observes that:

An empowered teacher is a reflective decision maker who finds joy in learning and in investigating the teaching/learning process—one who views learning as construction and teaching as a facilitating process to enhance and enrich development.

It is clear from the above observation that not every teacher engages in reflective practice. Professionalisation of teaching in universities, therefore, assists in empowering teachers to professionally engage in teaching and learning issues, develop teaching philosophies and constantly evaluate the way they operate with the overall view of enhancing teaching and learning.

University teachers should also have a sound knowledge of andragogy, which is the teaching of adults. Knowles (1990) cited in Kearsley (2010) makes several assumptions about adult learners and these include that adult learners are often intrinsically motivated to learn, they learn better if they make connections of what they learn to real life situations and also find relevance in what they learn. Knowles (1990)

cited in Kearsley (2010) further observes that learning for adult learners is more effective through the use of group discussion, simulations and problem solving activities. Experiential learning built on the adult learners past experiences is essential. Adult learners also thrive in self-directed learning situations (Atherton 2011). Such andragogical principles are only understood and appreciated by way of training hence the importance to professionalise teaching in universities. This is in line with the view that “staff engaged in teaching should be qualified and competent to do so” (ENQA Guidelines 2005).

In summarising the importance of trained and qualified teachers, Chamber and McNaught (2007) state that teacher should be able to engage in teaching and curriculum design to meet the needs of the students, structure and sequence curriculum content to ensure meaningful learning. Teachers should also select appropriate learning methods that ensure students are actively involved in learning as opposed to being passive recipients in the learning process (Sockman and Sharma 2008). It is also the responsibility of teachers to motivate students to learn and to understand and psycho-social problems that may negatively affect their learning. Lessons should be delivered with flexible and consistent assessment procedures.

ARE DISCIPLINE EXPERTS NECESSARILY GOOD TEACHERS?

In the traditional teacher centred approaches good teachers are defined as being disciplinary experts, who deliver knowledge by lecturing (Rodriguez 2008). Expertise in a discipline is seen to necessarily make one a good teacher. It is the way the experts normally teach that shows that discipline expertise does not necessarily make one a good teacher. Henshaw and Kareva (2013: 2) note some of the teaching deficiencies exhibited by the discipline experts by stating that:

Students' needs, interests and ways of understanding and learning were less important. It was their duty to attend lectures and study and if they could not understand, that was their problem and the result of their attitude or educational background.

It is clear that discipline experts with no training in teaching are normally concerned

with imparting content to students without full realisation of the most appropriate ways of delivery and facilitation modes as well understanding of students. Such are glaring shortcomings showing that discipline experts are not necessarily good teachers. Hartley et al. (2005), for example, state that in successful teaching entails creating and managing the learning environment and making use of appropriate learning activities to enhance learning, communicating effectively, motivating learners and understanding ways of learning. This shows that teaching is not a layman activity and one has to be properly trained to plan and implement effective teaching activities. Joyce and Showers (2002) observe that both teacher training and continuous professional development for teachers should be based on curricular and instructional strategies that have a high probability of affecting student learning.

The reason why discipline experts without expertise in teaching may have challenges in teaching is failure to match discipline expertise with pedagogical expertise. The absence of pedagogical and curriculum expertise shows that delivery is not informed by theory or research hence problems in adapting the curriculum to suite students' needs, use of appropriate teaching and assessment techniques. The ability to monitor students' work and to provide constructive feedback to students as well appropriately redirecting teaching are important attributes that teachers without exposure to teaching and learning courses may lack. Such teachers will also lack a scholarly approach to teaching. Scholarly teaching focuses on student learning and is grounded in sources and resources appropriate to the field. Scholarly teaching also ensures the teacher will work as a reflective practitioner (Brookfield 1998).

The Teacher's Knowledge and Expertise in Teaching and Learning Theories and Methods

Professionalisation of teaching makes exposes university teachers to different teaching approaches in line with the different teaching philosophies. This ensures that the teachers apply appropriate teaching techniques at all times. It is important for the lecturers to realize that the students are not the same and that they differ in many respects. For example students don't

all operate the same way, they are stimulated by different sources, styles, and that their previous knowledge and context are keys to their learning performance (Knowles 1990). University teachers should therefore apply techniques depending on the learning preferences of students. Boone (2010) talks of learners with visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learning preferences suggesting that the teacher should facilitate learning in a way that appeals to the diversity in students' learning preferences. Such abilities and expertise is developed and sharpened through deliberate training programmes.

University teachers should be aware of what really constitutes real learning. Metcalfe (1997) argues that real learning is characterised by students' active participation in the learning process. Instances in which students are passive listeners in lecture rooms do not result in effective learning. Metcalfe (1997) further observes that students learn best by doing hence the need to promote student centred approach in which students construct knowledge through gathering and synthesizing information and integrating it with the general skills of inquiry, communication, critical thinking, problem solving and so on (Huba and Freed 2000). The teacher's role becomes that of a facilitator. Once university teachers undergo professional training in teaching they become better prepared to understand learning and appreciate their role in facilitating learning. Hussain (2004) acknowledges the importance of adequate teacher training in enhancing student attainment. Similarly, in a study to ascertain the effects of teacher training on student attainment, Bressoux (1996) found a positive correlation buttressing the significance of teacher training.

Hussain (2004) also notes that training of teachers enhances teacher attitude towards teaching. Attitude towards teaching is very important as a teacher with a positive attitude makes concerted efforts to ensure that effective learning takes place. This is contrary to a teacher who may not care whether or not learning actually takes place as they teach. Larson and Silverman (2000) note that teachers should be caring and committed to assist students. Without the right attitude even a good teacher may not be very useful to students. Training in teaching assists teacher to understand the very essence of teaching as a life-changing endeavour built on strong ethical convictions. This will make teachers relate better with students.

The professionalisation of teaching arms teachers with skills and expertise to facilitate learning in ways that make them desist from using teacher centred approaches in which knowledge is transmitted from teacher to students and students passively receive information (Huba and Freed 2000). In line with social constructivist theories of learning teacher centred approaches are not given pre-eminence anymore. Teachers need understanding of latest theories and philosophies in teaching and learning for better practice. Powell and Kalina (2009: 242) state that:

Teachers need to understand these theories, as well as, know how to incorporate constructivist teaching methods, strategies, tools and practices to develop an effective learning environment.

The need for teachers' utilisation of current thoughts and practices in teaching and learning cannot be overemphasised. Training assists teachers to develop such competencies. Cochran-Smith (2004) stresses the need to produce teachers who make decisions informed by theory and research.

Importance of Teachers' Awareness of Assessment Principles

The professionalization of teaching enables university teachers to understand the role of assessment in teaching and learning and to apply appropriate assessment techniques. The issue of assessment in higher education is complex and may be impacted by a number of individual and organisational issues. Assessment serves different purposes and should be an integral part of the teaching and learning process (Ndebele and Maphosa 2013). Assessment can be used by lecturers to inform instruction (Smith et al. 2006). Assessment should not be seen as separate from teaching and learning. It should be viewed as part of the teaching and learning. Both assessment for learning (formative assessment) and assessment of learning (summative assessment) should be clarified on how it is conducted. The most important consideration is for the teaching and learning agenda to show a clear link between learning outcomes, teaching approaches and assessment practices. This is what Biggs (2003) defines as 'constructive alignment'.

In considering best practices in assessment we need to understand that teaching is complex

and accordingly assessment needs to be sophisticated to capture that complexity. At the core of the professional activity of teaching are processes of making judgements, interpreting information, and planning and implementing actions to promote the learning of students who vary greatly both in terms of their readiness to learn at school, and the support available to them from families and the community (Knowles 1990). The complex and situated nature of teaching increases the need to consider carefully how to design assessment practices that can capture such complexity in different schooling contexts. It is through deliberate training that university teachers are able to apply appropriate assessment practices in different learning contexts.

Harlen (2005: 207) states that assessment is an integral component of learning and teaching. It refers to all processes employed by academic staff to make judgments about the achievement of students in units of study and over a course of study. These processes include making decisions about what is relevant evidence for a particular purpose, how to collect and interpret the evidence and how to communicate it to intended users. Harlen (2005) further states that assessment processes include devising assessment tasks and aligning these tasks to learning outcomes as well as judging students' achievement on those assessment tasks and providing feedback to students. Biggs (2003) asserts that buttresses the importance of linking assessment processes to learning outcomes. It is only when university teachers are exposed to training on assessment that they would utilise the best assessment practices. University teachers should also uphold principles of fairness, validity, reliability and practicability in assessment (South African Qualifications Authority 2001).

Why Should Lecturers be Aware of Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Learning

Teachers should also be trained in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in teaching and learning. ICTs are considered a basic requirement of the knowledge society for which universities now prepare their students (Burbles and Callister 2000). ICTs add value to education, improve teaching and learning and also encourage innovation as well as

contribute to transformation (Department of Education 2003). University learning environment should reflect life in the outer world. ICTs have to be used in university learning environments because there is increasing evidence that the ways in which students and teachers use ICT at school are influenced by out-of school cultures of use (Kent and Facer 2004).

It is therefore significant that university teachers are adequately prepared to use ICTs in teaching and learning. Warschauer (2002) argues that ICTs have no intrinsic benefits in themselves, but are most usefully understood as interwoven in practices which exist in specific contexts and for particular purposes. ICTs should therefore be useful in enhancing teaching and learning and university teachers should be on the fore of embracing ICTs in teaching and learning.

The use of ICTs are also used in line with teaching and learning approaches that draw from socio-cultural theories of learning (Wertsch et al. 2003). The socio-cultural theory claims that all human action is mediated by tools. In the teaching and learning environment computers and other mobile devices as well as social network platforms are the tools that should be utilised to enhance and revolutionise teaching and learning. Olakulehin (2007) emphasises that the pedagogic application of ICT involves effective learning with the aid of computers and other information technologies as learning aids, which play complementary roles in the classroom, rather than supplementing the teacher. Thijs et al. (2001) also argues that technology use creates a learner-centred environment.

Socio-cultural theory also emphasises the fact that students actively construct knowledge drawing on what they already know and believe (Vygotsky 1978). Through embracing ICTs in teaching and learning, teachers will be drawing on what students are already familiar with in terms of computers, mobile technological communication devices such as smartphones and tablets as well as social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Teaching and learning should be centred on what students are interested in. This will capture students' attention and enhance learning. Irwin et al. (2013) state Facebook is a popular platform that should be used to facilitate learning activities at university. Irwin et al. (2013) further talk of blended learning and observe that:

Blended learning, integrating a variety of media to deliver teaching material to students is increasingly prevalent in university education. Blended learning is often associated with the use of web tools such as email, lecture recordings, blogs, discussion boards, and a dedicated university learning management system.

The issue of blended learning should how different forms of media can be harnessed to enhance teaching and learning. Use of dedicated learning management systems provide the much needed e-learning which ensures learning takes place without the constraints of time and space. However, for all this to be meaningfully implemented university teachers have to be properly trained hence the importance of professionalising teaching in the university.

University Teachers and Knowledge of Andragogy

Universities receive students from diverse backgrounds and different age groups including adult learners. Lecturers have responsibility to encourage and nature the process of adult learning. The assumption is that a lecturer has certain knowledge and understanding about the teaching of adult learners and helps them to discover their needs to know. Knowles (1990) defines andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn. This includes active, relevant, problem-based, learning contracts, reflection and all these are relevant to all forms of learning and student centred teaching (Brown 2004). Being aware of learning needs of different learners can assist to provide equal opportunities for all. There is need for lecturers to be aware of the different categories of adult learners in a classroom.

In order to assist university teachers Knowles (1990) cited in Brown (2004 : 40-41) indicates guiding principles about how adults learn and this includes develop a learning contract with the learners, establish an effective climate, encourage learners to diagnose their learning needs, encourage learners to develop their learning objectives, involve learners in planning methods and content, support in carrying out their learning plans and encourage learners to reflect critically on their own learning. Furthermore Haines (2004) cited in Brown (2004) argues that these principles provide a rationale for the use of portfolios, personal development

plans, problem based learning and self-directed learning.

The reason why lecturers should be aware of the learning needs of adults' learners is that teaching adults learners requires lecturers to understand that adults have special needs and requirements as learners. Knowles (1990) cited in Lieb (1991: 1) identified that adults are autonomous and self-directed learners. This implies that they need to be given the freedom to take charge of their own studies. University teachers should, therefore, actively involve students and play a facilitatory role. All this is possible through training hence the importance of professionalising teaching.

CONCLUSION

A compelling case has been raised on the importance of professionalization of teaching in universities. The discourse that possession of a high qualification in a discipline makes one a good teacher is contested against the professional demands that teaching entails. It is clear from the discussion that teaching and learning is not common sense business. Discipline expertise by university academics does not necessarily translate into teaching expertise. Teaching and learning is a field with its own theories, principles and discourse. There is, therefore, need for university academics to be adequately prepared for the teaching of the disciplines in line with appropriate philosophies and methodologies of teaching. Deliberate efforts to professionalise teaching will go a long way in ensuring that teaching is improved and student attainment enhanced.

RECOMMENDATIONS

University teachers should be adequately prepared for their roles in teaching and the by being trained through short and long courses in teaching in the university. A model in Figure 1 is proposed.

The most important move towards professionalization is for university teachers to undergo formal teacher training programmes such as post graduate certificate or diploma programmes in higher education or in education. Such training exposes trainees to different courses on pedagogy, andragogy curriculum development, materials development, assessment

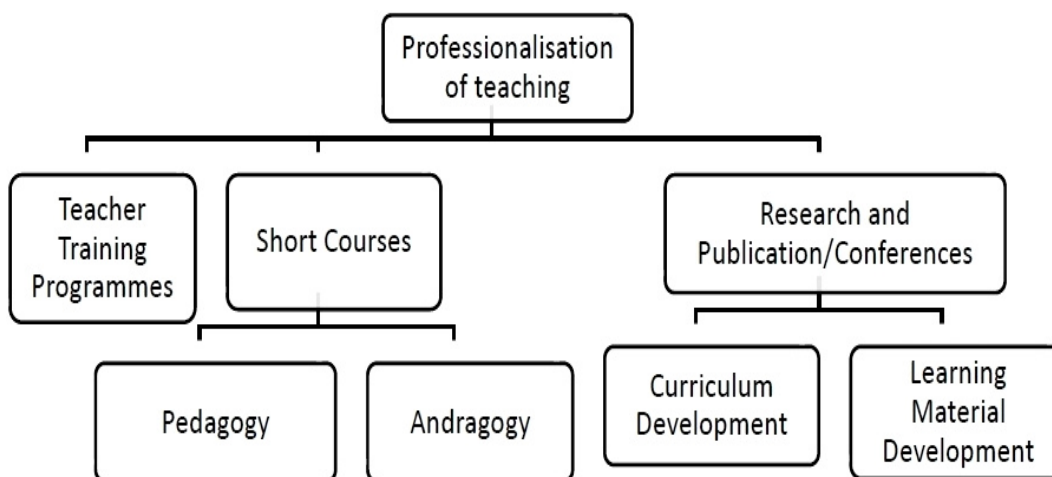


Fig. 1. Proposed professionalising of teaching model

among others. This develops that trainee to have a sound understanding and appreciation of teaching and learning and this better positions the university teacher for the multiple professional roles in teaching. Short courses in teaching and learning and related issues should be offered regularly by teaching and learning centres in universities. Such courses are important in preparing university teachers for their teaching roles. The researchers hasten to say that short courses on teaching and learning are stop-gap measures and the ultimate goal in the professionalization of teaching in the university is the attainment of a teaching qualification. Research and publication in teaching and learning issues, which is scholarship of teaching and learning, is a way of enhancing professionalization of teaching as academics research and share research findings through publications and conference presentation.

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