Relevance of Faculty Development Programmes in Meeting Contemporary Requirements of Higher Education Sector

Dr. Suman Dhawan
Lecturer (Sel. Grade) & Dy. Director
Department of Training & Technical Education
Govt of NCT of Delhi, Pitampura, Delhi

ABSTRACT: Faculty development programs (FDPs) have emerged as a strategic intervention in the scenario of higher learning in India. In fact, FDPs and their nexus with career advancement would be less meaningful in the absence of their continued relevance to the academic requirements of the faculty. This study is aimed at re-examining faculty development programs in the framework of their 'relevance' to the challenges in the arena of higher learning. In the research, the authors carried out an in-depth analysis of the alignment of FDPs with the needs of the faculty in the domain of teaching, research, the use of technologies, professional growth, and the need for national development. For the paper, the authors used empirical data obtained from Orientation and Refresher programmes conducted by the Academic Staff Colleges in Delhi. In the concluding part of the paper, the authors propose suggestions that can improve the relevance of FDPs in the changing scenario of higher education in the country.

KEYWORDS Faculty Development Programmes, Relevance, Orientation Programmes, Refresher Courses, Higher Education, Professional Needs

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of higher education is largely related to how higher educational faculty respond to changing academic, social, and technological realities. In the context of India, national education policies and commission reports have long emphasized the importance of teachers as agents of change. But in a changing knowledge society, the basic question is not so much whether facilities for higher educational faculty development are there or not, but how relevant that development is to the real and emerging needs of the teacher.

Faculty Development Programmes have been conceived as tools that bridge the gap between subject expertise and professional competence. However, over time, these have become an essential requirement in career progression, leading to a question of whether their participation is relevant or autonomous in nature. In this context, the current study is an attempt to view FDPs in terms of their relevance framework with regard to the academic needs of higher education institutions.

2. FACULTY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN INDIA

The Academic Staff Orientation Scheme was launched by the University Grants Commission in 1987 to address the absence of formal pedagogical training for higher education teachers. Orientation programmes were designed to support newly appointed faculty, while refresher courses aimed to update in-service teachers with recent developments in their disciplines and teaching practices.

From the perspective of relevance, FDPs are expected to:

- Address discipline-specific and interdisciplinary knowledge needs
- Respond to contemporary pedagogical and learner-centred approaches
- Support research capability and academic productivity
- Integrate technology meaningfully into teaching and knowledge management
- Develop professional values, leadership, and managerial competencies
- Sensitize faculty to national and societal development concerns

As FDP participation became linked to the Career Advancement Scheme (CAS), the relevance of programme content to faculty needs assumed even greater importance. A programme may be well-structured, yet fail to add value if it does not resonate with participants' academic realities.

3. Review of Literature

Hares (1994) stated, "The main objective of staff development should be to help teachers master the new educational approaches. High level technicians in three fields – information technology, audio-visual techniques and computers – should be hired to help teachers handle the newly

available educational materials. As well, professionals trained in education and psychology should instruct academic staff in teaching methods. In fact, this is essential as junior staff members are recruited directly…….and have neither pedagogical training nor previous teaching experience."

He has further demonstrated that "There has been great development in the area of educational technology. Let us remember how, in less than a generation, the slide rule has been replaced by the electronic calculator – which, itself, has been replaced by the personal computer. Similarly, the mechanical typewriter was replaced by an electrical model and has now been rendered obsolete by the word processor with its laser printer. Audio-visual technologies, such as television, film and radio which had been perfected as forms of mass media are being used in numerous educational settings."

Kearney (1994) has concluded that staff development, as a fundamental element of institutional quality, must be part of an integrated approach which encompasses all types of training necessary for enhanced effectiveness and efficiency. Staff development helps assure the contribution of higher education to capacity building and thereby to the human and social development processes. Since some faculty were not able to cope with the sudden changes in techniques and materials, many professors were very poorly acquainted with the potential of educational technology."

Bain (2004) found in his fifteen-year study that the strongest, most effective college educators were learners who were "constantly trying to improve their own efforts to foster students' development"

Nordkvelle (2006) has concluded that the challenges following the path to a professional development of academics in the direction of improved teaching for the benefit of students is an important development for the future of higher education.

Matteson et al. (2013) found professional development to be important in the continuous growth and success of both beginning and in-service teachers, ensuring that there is a continuum of effective teaching strategies, integration of technological innovations, new curriculum resources, and access to the most recent research on student learning.

The desire for further professional learning, influenced by their professional context among teacher educators, as per Czerniawski et al (2017) "relates to their current beliefs concerning 'best practice' in teacher education, the academic skills required to further their professional careers and knowledge of the curriculum associated with their fields of expertise."

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

i. To identify the relevance of the Faculty Development Programmes conducted by Academic Staff Colleges in Delhi, as perceived by the participating faculty members.

ii. To identify areas in which FDPs are perceived as highly relevant, moderately relevant, or less relevant to professional needs.

iii. To suggest measures for improving the relevance of FDPs based on the feedback from faculty.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 The research was based upon a descriptive and analytical research design. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire that was administered to faculty members who had completed the orientation and refresher programmes. The questionnaire, built upon the Likert scale, focused upon the relevant aspects, such as the applicability, relevance to professional roles, and appropriateness in context, that pertained to the content.

5.2 A total number of 450 questionnaires were distributed, with valid responses being analyzed for 302 participants in this research study. For the reliability test, the tool demonstrated high internal reliability using the Cronbach α coefficient test. The value for the coefficient or α in this research study is .96 for the total participants (N=302), the first part of the research study for the tool's relevance, and .84 for the second part for the tool's improvement measures.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The structured questionnaire sought to capture participants' perceptions about the suitability and relevance of the FDPs they attended in relation to job requirements, attainment of global

standards in higher education, maintenance of competitive standards among government, private and international institutions, contribution to quality assurance in Indian higher education, and achievement of national development goals through higher education.

The key research question explored in this section was whether FDPs organized by the Academic Staff Colleges in the NCT of Delhi were deemed proper and relevant by the responding faculty. In order to test the statistical significance of the perceived relevance at 95 per cent confidence, a right-tailed z-test was conducted by taking the test value as three, which is the neutral position of the Likert scale. Following hypotheses were framed to examine the relevance of FDPs across five dimensions:

H1: Faculty Development Programmes are relevant to the job requirements of higher education faculty members.

H2: Faculty Development Programmes are relevant to attaining global standards in higher education.

H3: Faculty Development Programmes are relevant to maintaining competitive standards among government, private, and international institutions.

H4: Faculty Development Programmes are relevant to quality assurance in Indian higher education.

H5: Faculty Development Programmes are relevant to achieving the goal of national development through higher education.

The null hypothesis assumed that the mean perception score would be less than or equal to three ($H0: \mu \leq 3$), while the alternative hypothesis assumed a mean score greater than three ($H1: \mu > 3$).

The results of the one-sample z-test indicate that all five dimensions recorded z-values significantly higher than the critical value of 1.64 at the 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected for all dimensions.

Table 1 presents the results of the one-sample z-test for the relevance of Faculty Development Programmes.

Table 1: One-Sample Z-Test for Relevance of Faculty Development Programmes (Test Value = 3)

Dimension	z-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Hypothesis Status
Relevance to Job	21.012	301	.000	1.166	Supported (H1)
Relevance to Attain Global Standards in H.E.	12.829	301	.000	.742	Supported (H2)
Relevance to Maintain Competitiveness	7.190	301	.000	.480	Supported (H3)
Relevance to Quality Assurance	11.015	301	.000	.672	Supported (H4)
Relevance to National Development through H.E.	9.736	301	.000	.603	Supported (H5)

These findings clearly establish that, as per the perception of higher education faculty members, Faculty Development Programmes conducted by Academic Staff Colleges are relevant to their professional roles and broader systemic objectives.

More specifically, the FDPs were considered more relevant with regard to the job demands of the faculty members, as explicitly indicated through the findings with a high z-value and significant mean difference. The programs were also considered relevant in regard to the achievement of global standards in higher learning, maintaining competitiveness with different categories of

institutions, quality assurance, and national development through the application of higher learning.

To further understand the degree of relevance, mean scores were used to categorize each dimension of FDP relevance.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and categorization of relevance.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Categorization of Relevance of FDPs

Dimension	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Level of Relevance**
Relevance to Job	4.17	.964	Highly Relevant
Relevance to Attain Global Standards in H.E.	3.74	1.005	Relevant
Relevance to Maintain Competitiveness	3.67	1.061	Relevant
Relevance to Quality Assurance	3.60	1.076	Relevant
Relevance to National Development through H.E.	3.48	1.161	Relevant

The results obtained in Table 2 clearly reflect that FDPs are highly relevant to the existing requirements of the job in higher education faculty members. In addition, all the other aspects lie in the 'relevant' category, which implies that FDPs are assessed with a positive perspective in terms of institutional, national, and global needs. Although none of the aspects lie in the 'moderately relevant' or 'not relevant' category, lower scoring results in terms of global needs and national development also reflect some areas to be further strengthened in FDPs.

The fact that all the dimensions fail to fall under the moderately relevant and not relevant categories indicates that FDPs still hold a value for the faculty members. However, the variation in the mean scores also indicates that though FDPs find immediate application for the job-related

requirements, the context with respect to the benchmark with the wider system or the world might also need to be developed further.

8. SUGGESTIONS FOR ENHANCING RELEVANCE

Based on the feedback submitted by the participants, the following recommendations have been identified to improve the relevance of FDPs:

- Conducting systematic needs assessment prior to programme design
- Incorporating participants' feedback in curriculum planning
- Ensuring discipline-specific and level-appropriate content
- Strengthening the alignment of FDPs with global academic standards
- Fostering industry-academia interrelation to facilitate contextual learning
- Linking FDP Themes with Quality Assurance and National Development Goals more explicitly

These measures highlight the significance of integrating FDPs with immediate professional needs as well as long-term higher education goals.

9. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study reveal the fact that the Faculty Development Programmes conducted by the Academic Staff Colleges prove to be relevant to faculty members in higher education with regards to their specific job requirements. In addition to this, the data reveals the fact that FDPs are relevant to macro-level objectives, including global competitiveness, quality assurance, and national development. The relevance would continue to exist in a highly changing environment with a continuous need to improve both FDPs and relevance.

REFERENCES

Bain, K. (2004). *What the best college teachers do*. Harvard University Press.

Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika, 16*(3), 297–334. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02310555

Czerniawski, G., Guberman, A., & MacPhail, A. (2017). The professional developmental needs of higher education-based teacher educators: An international comparative needs analysis. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 40*(1), 127–140. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2016.1246528

Government of India. (1949). *Report of the University Education Commission (1948–49)* (Vol. 1). Ministry of Education.

Government of India. (1986). *National Policy on Education, 1986*. Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Government of India. (1992). *Programme of action: National Policy on Education*. Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Government of India. (2010). *University Grants Commission regulations on minimum qualifications for appointment of teachers and other academic staff in universities and colleges and measures for the maintenance of standards in higher education*. Author.

Hares, H. E. (1994). Higher education staff development for the 21st century. In *Higher education staff development: Directions for the twenty-first century*. UNESCO.

Kearney, M. L. (1994). Higher education staff development for the 21st century. In *Higher education staff development: Directions for the twenty-first century*. UNESCO.

Malhotra, N. K., & Dash, S. (2009). *Marketing research: An applied orientation* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.

Matteson, S., Zientek, L. R. W., & Ozel, S. (2013). Identifying what in-service teachers want in professional development experiences. *Teacher Education and Practice, 26*(3), 569–590.

National Assessment and Accreditation Council. (2012). *Report of the NAAC review committee on academic staff colleges*. NAAC.

Nordkvelle, Y. T. (2006). Professional development of higher education teachers: Can distance education make a difference? *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 7*(1), Article 8.

University Grants Commission. (1987). *Academic staff orientation scheme*. UGC.