

Innovations in Nepali College Classrooms: The Experiences of a Helmet Teacher

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Nepal is undergoing rapid changes in political, social, cultural and economic dimensions. There are ongoing concerns and discussions on the ways to bring essential changes to make Nepali society more prosperous, inclusive to different ideologies and perspectives so that people from all walks of lives realize that they are better off.

Stakeholders and general public in the country think that Nepalese university system needs a complete “overhaul” because it has not been able to deliver the kind of education required by the changing need of national and international markets. They complain about universities and colleges being in “tatters.” Teachers being “Helmet Teacher” which means they are not committed to their profession. All of these “allegations” might be somewhat true but there are quite a few teachers who are doing their bit to improve the system quietly rather than talking in the so called “seminars,” “workshops” “expert opinions” and so on. In fact, there are so many innovations going in Nepalese college classrooms which are introduced and used by some teachers without much of the “noise” which can be used by more and more teachers and university system as a whole so that there is “real” improvement in the higher education system of the country.

Also, universities in the country are coming forward with various types of courses which are believed to develop human resource required for the nation building. The new courses are not only becoming popular among the students and their parents but also supplying the necessary skills to the growing and changing job market in the country as well as to the global market, although in very limited numbers.

Not only teachers are trying to contribute in whatsoever ways they can universities and colleges are also adopting pedagogies unheard of in the past in Nepalese higher education. Teaching methodologies which have been proved effective in developing necessary skills and competencies among students have been introduced in Nepalese higher studies. Some of these methods are case studies, project assignment, internships and seminars. These methodologies have been slowly entering into the main stream of pedagogies adopted by teachers in modern Nepalese higher studies which was until recently largely dependent upon one side lectures from the teacher with notes in their hands trying to explain everything so that students would be able to pass their final examinations with higher marks.

As discussed above, things are not same in class rooms of higher education in Nepal. Though teachers still depend to a large extent in the traditional method of “giving” lectures because many of them teach in multiple colleges with the same notes in their hands, there are quite a few of those so called “Helmet Teachers” who are using various tools to facilitate students learn in

different ways so that they not only would pass their exams but also develop different skills required by the job market. The following section would deal with some of them.

Case studies

Case studies are “true stories” about the businesses and the issues and challenges faced by them. It also depicts the ways managers tackled and dealt with those issues and challenges. The case study gives students an opportunity to understand the real life issues of the business. The cases not only gives the opportunity to understand but also to analyze the underlying dimensions of the issues and challenges. It also provides students to come up with the solutions to the given challenges. This provides them an opportunity to “think” and “act” like a manager though they would not be implementing the solutions they provide at the end of the case analysis.

Internships

Internship provides students to go to the real business organization for few weeks during that period they would be exposed to the “reality” of business world which they might find lot different from what they have been studying in the class room. The main purpose of this method of learning is to put them into the real world in which they would be assigned under a manager who would guide and mentor them into various aspects of the business they are working in. this gives students to learn all the dimensions of a business and they would be able to use some of the skills learned during the time in future when they become managers. The students are also supposed write an “Internship report” at the end of the time so that they would be reflecting on their entire learning during those few weeks.

Project and thesis works

This is another academic endeavor students undergo in Nepalese colleges. Teachers ask them to select a subject matter or they give some issues to be studied. Then students are supposed to conduct some research in the given topic by following certain “research methodology.” Then they have to write a project report or a thesis to present their findings. For this purpose they are also supported by a supervisor. These research reports or thesis are also usually evaluated by an external expert who was not involved as a supervisor. In addition to this they are also required to give a presentation in front of some members of the research committee or other students.

Seminars

Seminars on contemporary issues is another pedagogical tool used by teachers in colleges. Few current issues are either given by the teacher or students are encouraged to search on their own. After finalization of the topics students are required to search for relevant readings, usually articles in renowned journals. Then they either individually or in a group present the main idea presented in the article. Some students are required to make comments on the ideas and issues presented. Finally, the teacher wraps up the session by providing some inputs so as to facilitate the learning from the article, presentation and discussions.

Article reviews

This is one of the new practices introduced in the higher education in Nepal. Students are either given by the teacher or they are supposed to find articles on given issues. Then students are asked to review the article and come with a write up in which they have to express their understanding of the ideas and issues raised in it. The articles will usually be research based published in national and international journals or magazines. This gives students an opportunity to find research based articles on emerging issues in their area of studies.

Video clips

Nowadays finding video clips on contemporary issues is quite easy because of YouTube. Hence, we use some of them as and when it becomes relevant to show it in the classroom. This not only makes the class interesting because students are exposed to renowned business people as well as professors and other experts in the given issue but also learn something new directly from the expert rather than learning the same thing from a teacher.

Movies

Showing movies in the classroom is also one of the emerging trends in colleges of Nepal. Teachers find any movie which would be relevant to the concepts and issues they are trying to discuss. The teacher watches movie with students in the classroom and relates the situations to the concepts in the course. For example, I use Hindi movie “Chak De India” while teaching “Organizational Behavior” in my classroom. The movie depicts various concepts of the course in many situations. So I show the movie and stop in between to discuss the situation by relating them into the concepts discussed in the course. Then I ask them to come of with a write up in which they are supposed discuss about the learning from the movie and how they relate to the concepts.

News reading sessions

Since students are required to be updated with the contemporary national and global affairs I also urge them to involve in the news reading sessions. Students are asked to bring clipping from any media and read them to other students in the classroom. This usually takes few minutes of the class time in every or alternative classes in which students are exposed to important affairs. This I introduced in my classes especially after finding that many of the students even in MBA level do not show any interest in contemporary affairs despite availability of several sources of information from traditional and new media.

Online

Some of the colleges affiliated to the foreign universities are also using the online studies and evaluation. In this, there will be one teacher in the university which works as a lead professor. A local teacher is appointed by the concerned college for the same subject. The local teacher is responsible for running the classes and some part of student evaluation. The lead professor from the university provides all the reading material, test banks, case notes and other essential support to the local teacher. However, local teacher is also allowed to devise some additional ways to facilitate the learning. A part of the evaluation is done online in which some discussion questions related to the topic and issue from the course is posted by the lead professor and students are

required to put their ideas and comments on the issue. The lead professor evaluates students based on those comments and also give some feedback. The local teacher, on the other hand, evaluates case studies posted on line. In this way, both lead and local professors are involved in the leaning process.

Final examination through case studies

In one of the colleges affiliated to a foreign university conducts its final evaluation of students though case studies only. The students are given a case and they are required to analyze it based on the concepts discussed during the course. By doing this they are given an opportunity to relate the concept they studied with a real life situation. Students don't require to sit in an examination hall for this. Rather they can take the case to their homes and submit in a given deadline. The evaluation is done by a local teacher and the lead professor in the university has the final authority to make necessary changes, if required.

Reflection notes/learning journals

This is comparatively new method of evaluation about the learning in the classroom. The students are either given lectures in certain topics by the teacher or they are supposed to analyze the case in the classroom situations and develop the understanding of the topic or issue. Later, they are supposed to write a reflection note/learning journal in which they are required to summarize the concepts discussed during the class and also reflect on the learning from the lecture or discussion. I have made few changes in one of my classes. I select some of the topics and issues to be discussed during the course. Then ask the students for find related journal articles in the given topic. Then students are required to make presentations based on the article. This will be done by a small group (usually four in a group). Another small group of students are asked to make comments on the presentation by the first group. Then the teacher facilitates the learning by adding some ideas and answering questions raised during the presentation and discussion. Later, all the students (including those presenting and commenting) are required to write a reflection notes including all the ideas and discussions. This is marked by the teacher and is a major part of internal evaluation of students. This method of learning is introduced in some of the colleges by the author himself and only one college has the system of using this method as a part of learning in some courses as far as I know.

Above mentioned methods of learning and evaluation are some of the new ways that have been used in Nepalese colleges. Though some of them are not very unique many others are recently introduced by colleges and universities. Also I have highlighted some of the method of learning and evaluation introduced by me.

These methods of teaching are used by teachers in Nepalese colleges teaching in the same university systems despite issues and problems and students are also showing growing interest on these methodologies. Though many of these methods are new to them because most of their previous studies were completed under "lecture and final exams" mode still they are slowly becoming used to this type of learning process. It can be stated that students are responding positively to these new pedagogies because they also have now realized the importance of proactive process of learning in which students are encouraged to involve more on their own

learning process and the teacher plays more of a facilitator's role. So I can further state that these methods are slowly becoming "main stream" without much of resistance from students.

Since these methods of teaching are new to majority of the teachers working in the university system only few of them are using the methods and others still have to adopt these. So there might be a question why some teachers are adopting and using these methods more widely and others are not. The answer probably lies in the individual commitment to the profession i.e. those few teachers who are using these methods are doing mostly due to their commitment to teaching and they want to really contribute positively to their students' learning process. In this process, these teachers are also growing as teacher which makes them more satisfied with the profession. Another answer might be changing system of the colleges, especially affiliated to foreign universities, to put high priorities on the new methods of teaching and student evaluation which naturally demands teachers to be innovative.

Suggestive methods of learning for future

I also have few more suggestions for the future learning and evaluation which have not been used in Nepalese business education as far as I know. Some of the suggestions are as follows.

Book review

I suggest that students should be encouraged to read books on various subject. The subject I think, should not be limited to "business and management" disciplines rather they should be from varied subject so that business students would be exposed the diverse world and develop deeper understanding of social, political, economic, art, culture and others. This makes students related to the important dimension of life rather than to only talk about "making money" through business.

Discussions on movies

Students should also be encouraged to watch various types of movies (or they would anyway be doing as entertainment). However, they would be asked to discuss the issues raised in some selected movies in the classroom. This helps business students to develop deeper connect to the reality of lives. This is hoped to develop the students as a complete human being rather than only a "business manager."

Discussion on drama, art, culture

My suggestion is that business students should also be encouraged to watch drama, visit art exhibitions, attend other cultural activities so as to develop understanding of the society they are living. I find that majority of the students do not show any interest in such kind of things because they have the view that this kind of things are "not very important" for business students rather they are for students of "Humanities and Social Sciences" to learn and discuss. I think this world view among the majority of business students have created a "disconnect" with the society and we are hearing about lots of "scandals" in the business world as well as business people not at all

concerned about what role they should be playing in the development of a modern, cultured and diverse society.

Guest lectures by people from “non-business world

It is becoming common practice in Nepalese business schools to invite successful business people, entrepreneurs, managers and leaders to share their experiences with students so that they would be able to learn something from these successful people. However, there is almost no practice in these colleges to invite people from other disciplines to give “guest lecture.” If they are invited to talk on the diverse issues they are doing that would once again help business students to develop deeper understanding of the issues that matters the most to life other than “business and economics.”

I have highlighted some of the emerging practices in Nepalese universities and colleges to facilitate learning in different ways rather than limiting to the traditional methods of teaching, learning and evaluations. If these practices are made more “main stream” in Nepalese universities and colleges the learning would be more fruitful for the changing needs of the society. For this to happen, commitment from all the stakeholders is necessary. However, the main idea of this write up was to highlight how can a teacher who is termed by a somewhat derogatory “Helmet Teacher” make the difference rather than everybody talking about what “should,” “would” and “need” to be done to improve the higher education in Nepal.

A last cautionary note that I have to add at the end of this write up is that all of the ideas presented here are based on my experiences of teaching business management for nearly a quarter of a century and I do not claim that other field of studies have not adopted some or all of these pedagogical methods in Nepal.