

A Study of Refresher Courses conducted by Academic Staff Colleges with special reference to Rajasthan



Education

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ABSTRACT

A teacher play pivotal role in upliftment of a nation but despite of such a significant contribution in development of nation, few steps are taken for proper training of teachers of higher education in India. UGC has established Academic Staff Colleges (ASC) at various places in India to cater the need of proper training of higher education teachers. ASCs organize refresher courses to upgrade the knowledge and teaching skills of in-service university/college teachers of their respective catchment area. But how far these ASCs have achieved their proclaimed objectives is a big question for discussion. Present study is an attempt to reveal the perception of participant teachers towards Refresher Courses organized by ASCs particularly in Rajasthan.

Introduction

The academic staff college is a UGC sponsored separate entity enjoying functional autonomy for continuous training and up gradation of faculties in college and universities. ASCs were launched in 1987 by the Prof. Yash Pal Committee in accordance with Rajiv Gandhi's New Education Policy. At present 66 ASCs are working in India for the betterment of Indian Higher Education System out of which three are in Rajasthan:

Academic Staff College-University of Rajasthan, Jaipur
Academic Staff College - M.D.S. University, Ajmer
Academic Staff College- Jai Narain Vyas University Jodhpur

Knowledge explosion in every field and changed industry needs has led teachers to the need of continuously updating their knowledge and teaching pedagogy. Refresher courses provide a platform for in-service teachers to create awareness about latest advances in the field, to be familiar with technological advances and to learn from fellow participants. Duration of refresher course is of three weeks, with minimum of 18 working days and 108 contact hours (six hours a day) excluding Sundays. The newly appointed teachers have to attend the orientation courses up to 8 years of continuous services, then after a gap of one year such teachers may attend Refresher Course.

The eligibility for attending Refresher Course for teachers who have not attended earlier orientation course has been reduced to 2 years from 5 years. However, the gap in two successive Refresher Courses should normally be 2 years and may be relaxed if adequate number of participants is not available or it is essential for the teachers to fulfill eligibility condition for his career advancement. Lecturers working in the Universities /Colleges included in list of Colleges under Section 2(f) of the UGC Act, even though they may not yet be fit under 12-B of UGC Act, may be invited to participate in the Refresher Courses. Teachers of Colleges which do not yet come within purview of Section 2(f), but have been affiliated to University for at least 5 years will be permitted to participate in Refresher Courses. The temporary/ contract teachers who have been teaching for at least two academic sessions in an institution who has been affiliated to a university (for at least two years) are allowed to participate in refresher courses.

Objective of the study:

UGC has no formal set up for evaluation of the activities of ASCs, however UGC form an expert committee for evaluation at the end of every plan period but no set procedures are defined for the committee. Therefore the objective of the study is:

To analyze the perception of participants towards refresher courses conducted by ASCs in Rajasthan.

Research Methodology:

Sampling Method- The research will comprise the views of university/ college teachers (participants) who have been attended the refresher courses. Judgment (Non probability) sampling has been used to select sampling units (respondents) from sampling frame.

Participant respondents were selected such that they represent various streams (Arts, Commerce, Science, Mass Communication etc). Sample includes participants having varied teaching experience and from different cities of Rajasthan in order to get different viewpoints about the subject under investigation.

Also the approach of selecting participant respondents was such that sample represent almost equal number although it was tough to categories participant respondents by the Academic Staff College where they have attended these courses because one participant has attended these courses at more than one center.

Sample Size - Total number of 107 respondents have given their opinion about refresher courses conducted by ASCs in Rajasthan

Data Collection Instrument- A self structured questionnaire was used for the purpose of data collection. It contains 14 items (statements) and adopts a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from "1: Strongly Disagree", "2: Disagree", "3: Neutral", "4: Agree", "5: Strongly Agree". To check the reliability and adaptability of data collection instruments (Questionnaire) a pilot study was conducted prior to main study. On the basis of data collected in pilot study cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.70 proving that the instrument is reliable for further study.

Statistical Tools Used- Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test, Factor Analysis and Cluster Analysis were used in the study.

Significance of the study- This study will help ASCs in conducting refresher courses in such a way that participant would attend these courses with a positive and better perception. Thus participants will have much more interest in attending these courses.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Factor Analysis- Refresher Course

Test	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.694
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square
	df
	Sig.
	91
	.000

Table: 2 Rotated Component Matrix- Refresher				
	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Updating knowledge	.495	.453	-.395	-.053
Effective teaching	.671	-.093	.308	-.139
Solve subject problem	.692	.120	.428	-.031
Break monotony	.042	.690	.114	.307
Fulfill mandatory requirement	.167	.053	.636	.378
Intensive subject knowledge	.191	.497	.313	-.338
Curriculum based	.163	.175	.779	.038
Recent Developments in the field	.114	.766	.312	-.118
Platform to share knowledge	.443	.349	.560	-.223
Should be need based	.142	-.033	.212	.757
Enrich teaching by incorporating knowledge gained	.727	.153	.021	-.025
Should be mandatory	.141	.776	-.048	.085
Give only the known fact	-.196	.139	-.071	.810
Develop innovative method of teaching	.808	.236	.109	.166

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

On the basis of factor analysis four components (factors) were extracted from Refresher Programme Index. These four factors are responsible for 63.31% variation in overall perception about refresher courses conducted by ASCs in Rajasthan.

First Component (factor) can be titled as **Efficient Delivery of Subject** which includes five items. First element of this component underlies the importance of refresher programs in updating the knowledge of University/ College teachers. Second element of this component represents improvement in communication skills of participants which results into effective teaching. Third item for this component is the assistance given to the participants in solving their subject related problems. It can serve as a platform to rectify or improve the weaker part of the subject. Fourth item for the component focuses on enriched teaching by incorporating the knowledge gained by refresher courses in classroom teaching. Fifth item for the component is development of innovative method of teaching the subject to make lectures more interesting and creative so that students can learn more with ease. The factor "Efficient Delivery of Subject" is responsible for 19.53% variability in total scores.

Second component (factor) extracted from Refresher Programme Index is **Enriched Subject Knowledge** consisting four items. The factor "Enriched Subject Knowledge" explains 17.09% variation in total scores. First item in this component is the intensive subject knowledge given to the participants in refresher courses. It talks about in-depth knowledge delivered to the participants. Second component represents that Refresher Programme are helpful in breaking the monotony which arises due to regular teaching and hectic schedule. It serves as a change and energizes participants to perform better after returning back from these courses. Third item in this component is about knowledge of recent developments in the field. Participants are more interested in learning about the advancement in their respective fields. Fourth item suggests that these courses should remain mandatory for all so that participants are updated and refreshed at regular interval and private college/university teachers also get benefited from these courses.

Third Component (factor) represents **Knowledge Sharing** dimension of refresher courses. First element of this component talks about the necessity of these courses as these courses ful-

fill the mandatory requirement for career advancement. Many participants attend these courses just because these are mandatory. Second element of the component suggests that refresher courses should be curriculum based. These courses should cover the syllabus and there should be a perfect outline of the topics to be taught in these courses. Third element of the component indicate the significance of refresher courses in a way that these courses provide an opportunity for group learning and knowledge exchange for the teachers coming from various corners of the region. It asks about the opportunity provided to the participants for peer group learning. The factor "Knowledge sharing" contributes 14.514% deviation in total scores.

Component (factor) fourth represents **Scope for Improvement** and talks about the two dimensions in which Refresher Courses can be improved. First item under this component suggest that these courses should be need based that is while selecting participants for refresher courses criterion should be need based rather than time. Second item of this component reveals that many of times refresher courses give already known facts and information to the participants which may reduce interest of participants in these courses. 12.17% variance in total scores is accounted by this factor titled as "Scope for Improvement".

Cluster Analysis

For the purpose of analyzing perception of participants towards orientation and refresher courses cluster analysis has been used.

Cluster	Number of Cases	Percentage
1	28.000	26.16%
2	43.000	40.18%
3	36.000	33.64%
Valid		107.000
Missing		.000

	Cluster		
	1	2	3
Updating knowledge	4	4	4
Effective teaching	4	4	3
Solve subject problem	4	4	2
Break monotony	4	3	3
Fulfill mandatory requirement	4	3	2
Intensive subject knowledge	4	4	3
Curriculum based	4	4	2
Recent Developments in the field	4	4	3
Platform to share knowledge	4	4	3
Should be need based	4	2	3
Enrich teaching by incorporating knowledge gained	4	4	3
Should be mandatory	4	4	4
Give only the known fact	4	2	4
Develop innovative method of teaching	4	4	3

Respondents are grouped into 3 clusters on the basis of changes in coefficient in Wards' Method (hierarchical clustering) using K-Means clustering method.

First cluster consists of 26.16% of total participant respondents and can be titled as **"Conformists"** because they agreed with every parameter and feel that refresher courses help in almost every dimension equally. They revealed that refresher courses break the monotony which arises due to regular lectures and fixed daily routine. It brings change and therefore reenergizes participants. They also argued that refresher courses are important because these courses fulfill the mandatory requirement for career advancement. They believe that refresher courses acquaint participants with knowledge of recent developments in their field. These participants suggest that refresher programs should be need based means these programmes should be held

for those, who actually feel the need rather than selecting participants on periodic basis. Scores for this cluster show that refresher courses help participants in developing their own way of teaching and promote innovative methods of teaching.

Second Cluster is a group of those participants who attend these courses with zeal and passion, so they can be titled as “**Enthusiasts**”. Such participants are 40.18% of total respondents. They claim that refresher courses expose participants to the art of better communication and effective teaching. Participants feel that refresher courses have improved their communication skills and as a result effectiveness of teaching has been improved. They agreed that refresher courses acquaint participants with intensive subject knowledge and it adds a lot of value to them if they attend these courses. Participants can also find solution to any subject related problem in refresher course. They can discuss subject related problems with knowledgeable experts and colleagues as refresher courses provide them a platform to share knowledge. This group of participants believes that refresher courses have enriched their teaching because they have incorporated the knowledge gained from refresher courses in their real life teaching. They also suggest that refresher courses should be curriculum based. Curriculum can guide resource person for their lectures and participants can also get prepared for the topics in advance.

33.64% participants fall under **third cluster**. These participants will be called “**Confused**” because they are not clear about their own opinion for refresher courses. On one hand, these participants agree that refresher courses update knowledge of university and college lectures and it should be mandatory for all to get benefited from these courses while on another hand they feel that these courses merely deliver already known facts and figure and it is a pure repetition of what they already know. On all other parameters, scores are neutral or negative which disclose that there is a huge scope for improvement as a significant portion of participants (33.64% participants) is not satisfied with the quality, pattern and management of refresher courses in Rajasthan.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions-

A well informed and well acquainted teacher can make difference in lives of hundreds of students. In this sequence the study revealed perception of participants toward orientation and refresher courses organized by ASCs in Rajasthan. After a careful and thorough analysis of data collected following conclusions have been drawn in the study-

Analyses of participants’ perception about refresher courses revealed that majority of the participants are really happy with the quality of refresher courses (almost 67%) on the contrary

almost 33% of the participants are confused about the utility of these courses. Participants were divided into three categories on the basis of their opinion about refresher courses- First category represents (26.16%) conformist participants due to their positive response for almost all the statements. Second category of participants consists of 40.18% of total participants and these participants are very much enthusiastic for attending refresher courses. These participants are excited and see refresher courses as an opportunity to learn. Third category represents confused participants and such participants are 33.64% of the total. These participants don’t have any clear opinion about refresher courses; therefore they are titled as confused.

Almost all the participants consider refresher courses as significantly helpful in updating knowledge of in service teachers and think that these courses should be meant mandatory for all, so that every faculty will get benefited regardless of their sector: Private/ Govt./ University.

Majority of participants feel that refresher programmes provide exposure to the art of better communication and effective teaching, provide intense subject knowledge. Refresher courses help participant teachers in developing innovative methods of teaching and play an important role in making them better teachers. They believe that their teaching have been enriched by incorporating knowledge gained in refresher courses into their classroom teaching. They suggest that refresher courses should help them in acquiring knowledge about recent developments in their respective fields and these courses are beneficial in solving subject related problems and provide a platform to share knowledge and learn from other participants also.

Participants criticized refresher courses on the parameters such as many times refresher courses deliver mere known facts and information to the participants. Often refresher courses are sheer repetition of what they already know. They feel that these courses should be curriculum based. Participants will be more contented if refresher courses are organized on need basis rather than periodic basis. Some of the participants are having a belief that refresher courses just fulfill mandatory requirement for career advancement. Few participants considered refresher courses as interesting and agreed that these courses break monotony which arises due to regular lectures in colleges/universities.

So, it can be said that Academic staff colleges of Rajasthan are performing reasonably good in terms of refresher courses as a whole but the analysis also revealed few areas in which improvements can be done in order to make refresher courses more useful for participant teachers.

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