Academic Meandering Through the Oceans: Learning from Different Masters

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Abstract:
The education systems in India and Europe differ significantly in terms of structure, focus, and delivery. The education system in India places a strong emphasis on academic achievement and performance in standardised tests. Students are expected to perform well in subjects such as mathematics, science, and languages, which are considered to be important for success in higher education and future careers. In Europe, while academic achievement is essential, there is also a focus on vocational training and technical education. Many countries have vital vocational education and training systems that provide students with practical skills and work experience. In this comparative analysis, we will examine some key differences between the education systems in these two regions. This article examines education practices in the UK and India to understand the distinctions between the two systems. The study uses auto-ethnography to explore the two education systems in the UK and India.

Keywords: *Pedagogy, Education Systems, Autoethnography, Discipline and Control*

I. Introduction

Education shapes human beings, and by looking at the education systems, one can fairly understand the aspiration of the subjected society. Various societies have evolved with different aspirations; therefore, pedagogical practices vary (Altekar 1934). Similarly, one could also find common contours across the pedagogical systems. For example, education was not available to all in pre-modern times. Commonalities and differences in pedagogical practices could be read as the marker of societies.

Similarly, academic journeys could also be reflected upon as the actual voyage to understand the evolution of differential socius. We have studied in India and the UK, and interestingly the pedagogical practices are very different. This study uses auto-ethnography, a qualitative research method that involves the self-reflection and analysis of the researcher's personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and social identities to understand more significant cultural phenomena. In autoethnography, the researcher typically writes a first-person narrative that examines their own experiences in relation to broader cultural, social, or political issues (Klevan and Grant 2022; Castillo-Montoya et al. 2022). Autoethnography aims to produce a rich and nuanced understanding of the researcher's experiences and shed light on the cultural and social contexts that shape those experiences. Autoethnography can be particularly useful for exploring marginalised or underrepresented perspectives, as it allows the researcher to voice their own experiences and challenge dominant cultural narratives.

II. A Broad Synopsis of the Education System in India and the UK

The Indian Experience:

Indian pedagogical system follows a 10+2 pattern at the school level, where a student needs to invest almost fourteen- fifteen years in school. Central Board of School Education (CBSE) is the primary body to look after the curriculum and various State Boards of Education.

The Indian model of pedagogy is a strange mix of both traditional ways of teaching, on the one hand, and the influence of modern pedagogical practices, on the other (Alexender 2001). Teaching is still considered a noble profession, and therefore the teacher is respected as a 'knowledgeable' individual. This idea offers a position of authority to the teacher. This position of authority sometimes reflects in the general discourse of teaching, where a teacher becomes the synonym of knowledge and power position (Foucault 1977; Margolis 2004). In such an environment, it is sometimes challenging to harness the young brains, which are brimming with ideas and questions. Young minds are often indirectly dissuaded from asking questions. The creativity and curiosity of

young minds are apparently not suitably entertained in the wake of completing the prescribed syllabi (Verma et al. 2002).

The effect of high population density is most visible in the classrooms where the teacher and taught ratio is alarmingly high. On the contrary, teachers have constantly been pressured to complete the syllabi in a time frame, and they are usually burdened with too many administrative and extra-co-curricular tasks (Dyer 1996). These challenges are multiplied by the lack of infrastructure in general.

Higher education in India is apparently better in comparison to school education as the availability of seats in colleges and universities is limited, and admissions are highly competitive. Most of the courses offer three years Graduate degree. However, Medical Sciences and Engineering Sciences offer four years Bachelor's program. In universities, teaching practices are a little different from schools. Lectures are the usual teaching mode, followed by semester or annual examinations and assignments. At the university level, teachers engage critically with their pedagogical practices and encourage critical thinking at the Postgraduate level. But such practices are rarely visible at the undergraduate level. There is hardly any emphasis on research aptitude at the undergraduate level (Derzee and Sen 1999).

The UK Experience:

The education system in Europe is more diverse and varies from country to country. However, most countries have a similar structure where students complete primary education followed by secondary education. After completing secondary education, students can pursue vocational training, technical education, or higher education at universities. The education system in Europe places a greater emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving, and independent learning. Students are encouraged to explore their interests and actively participate in their education. The opportunities of studying in the UK gave us a different perspective to compare the two pedagogical systems.

Usually, UK university teachers use seminars and lectures to address the pupils. Usually, essential reading lists and handouts were uploaded on the 'moddle', a university portal. Generally, teachers lectured around the designated theme, followed by a group discussion. However, in the seminar mode of teaching, teachers divide the class into four groups of three to four members each and ask one group to present the readings and the other two to start a discussion. After this exercise, the teacher elaborated on the delicate nuances and theoretical concerns critically. We were assessed on the basis of assignments and a dissertation of twenty thousand words. Assignments were marked along with detailed feedback, followed by a meeting with one of the assessors.

The *modus operandi* for teaching is slightly different, especially at the doctoral level. Most of the time, it is more focused on workshops, presentations and discussions than just lecturing. The chief concern at the PhD level is introducing the researchers to varied methodological and research techniques. The faculty and the research environment are cordial.

III. Teaching and Research: Walking on a Tight Rope

Teachers face the arduous challenge of striking a balance between research and teaching. Research and teaching are complementary, but these two pursuits sometimes lie at logger's heads (Gupta and Gupta 2012). Therefore, it is crucial to strike a balance by inculcating research values into teaching, as no teaching is complete without research and vice-versa. However, the major challenge is linking these two essential learning parts. Nicholas (2001) has suggested developing similar designs of academic learning through research-oriented teaching of the material and pedagogical practices. This means that through the process of teaching, one could engage with the research by involving students; it will enable linkages between research and teaching for the teachers, on the one hand, and will promote research aptitude in the students, gradually, on the other. Learning what major challenges hinder the link between teaching and research is vital. By addressing the obstacles, one could start understanding the process of learning better and would be able to connect research to teaching (Stenhouse 1983). Teaching is a mixed bag of opportunities and challenges, especially in higher education. On the one hand, it offers the chance to engage with the best of the brains, but on the other, it continuously challenges the teacher to strive for excellence.

Teaching in India:

The role of a teacher is the most challenging, especially in a developing nation like India. The first challenge is engaging with students' scores in class, as the teacher-taught ratio is alarmingly high, especially at the undergraduate level. Usually, a teacher caters to more than sixty students at the undergraduate level. Engaging with such a large number of students in a lecture is a Herculean task.

Designing a Lecture in India:

The major task is to design a lecture with keeping an eye on the pupils' interest. The preparation for the lecture starts with collecting the relevant material in accordance with the prescribed syllabi and the expectation of

the students. We usually prepared cue cards to focus on the important themes along with a handout which we used to distribute at the beginning of the lecture. We used a whiteboard to elaborate on the key themes and debates, which were also figured out in the handout. Occasionally we also used audio-video aid to engage with the students and asked them to watch relevant videos around the lecture, which were enumerated in the handouts. The critical concern of the lecture was two fold-firstly, to elaborate on the existing literature set and introduce pertinent questions for the discussions to ascertain deeper learning and encourage critical thinking among the students. The use of e-teaching, which engages with the usage of audio-video and the internet for teaching, has reached a new height during the pandemic. Teachers across the universities are using soft skills for teaching.

Delivering a Lecture in India:
A lecture of fifty-five minutes is divided into three major parts. The first twenty-five to thirty minutes was kept for lecturing on a decided topic, the second fifteen-twenty minutes for the discussion, and the last ten minutes for the question-and-answer session. Unfortunately, 'smart' classrooms are rare and not easily available for every lecture, and therefore teachers are primarily dependent on the whiteboard and the handouts. However, the situation is improving in the post-pandemic period, and many colleges are employing smart classrooms to enhance the learning experience.

We supplied the reading list beforehand and divided our lectures thematically. The first half of the lecture covered the general introduction and nuances of the topic. The second part dealt with the debates and theoretical concerns, followed by a discussion based on the supplied reading list and handouts. We usually divided students into a group of eight to ten and randomly asked a group to start the discussion and the rest of the students to participate, one at a time. Engaging effectively with a theme usually took at least five to six lectures. We also used visual aids, especially documentaries, videos and films, to better engage with the topic. We are social scientists, and at times such visual aids enabled us to overcome the monotony of the lecture mode of teaching.

The classroom lectures were followed by weekly tutorials where we met a group of students (8-10) regularly to address their academic and extra-academic issues. We took the initiative to introduce them to research and to think critically about the existing debates on a theme of their choice. We also encouraged individual students to choose any area or theme of their interest to write a 'short dissertation' of eight thousand works as an internal project.

Assessment:
The final assessment of the students at the undergraduate level is based on a combination of internal and external evaluations. In the internal assessment, the pupils are assessed on their performance in the in-house assignments and attendance, followed by the end-semester examination, which is centrally at the university level. The internal component contributes to twenty-five per cent, and the end-semester examination decides the rest.

We offer detailed feedback on the in-house assignments and projects, highlighting the positives and areas of potential improvement. A personal interaction with the student followed this feedback. However, the possibility of feedback is absent in the external assessment. We had suggested the university introduce a feedback mechanism for external evaluation as well, and we hope it will be introduced soon.

Presenting a Teaching Session in the UK:
Our academic journey, which we instead called 'academic meandering', framed the core of our educational experience and henceforth of one of our presentations. We presented a comparative analysis of education systems in India and the U.K. Both these systems had evolved in different times and spaces but also shared a common past. The presentation addressed the evolution of education systems in India as an idea and a system. The Indian education system has witnessed various socio-political influences, and therefore it has evolved as a combination of different ideas (Basham and Rizvi 1956).

The focus of the presentation was on the 'Modern Period', where Indian education systems interacted with the English education system. The presentation addressed various influences in Ancient (1500s B.C-1210s A.D), Medieval (1210s AD- 1760s), Modern (1760s -1940s), and Postcolonial (1940s onwards) times, in brief. Various education plans from 1935 onwards and their influences in Postcolonial times have been discussed in a nutshell. Similarly, contemporary pedagogical practices in India and UK were compared through my academic journey 'across the oceans', as we have been a part of both education systems.

Designing a Teaching Session in the UK:
We used Bloom's taxonomy to prepare the lecture and slides. Bloom's taxonomy was one of the best analyses of the learning strategy. It denotes the gradual process of learning, which starts from understanding the subject matter and gaining knowledge, on the one hand, and culminates into intellectual pursuits of synthesising, creating, and disseminating knowledge, on the other (Anderson 2005). The gradual path of learning has been

paved through thoughtful learning stages, enabling the learner to understand the nuances of learning as a process (Forehand 2010).

We are social scientists and utilise our knowledge and understanding of history, Indian culture and communication studies to draw upon the development of education systems, especially in India. We applied learning experiences and information to bring out the connections between socio-political changes and the education system in India across the periods. We used graphics and visuals through PowerPoint to elaborate further on the topic. Similarly, the historical development of the education system in India has been comparatively analysed with the education and pedagogical practices in the UK. The comparison brought us to locate the challenges in the Indian education system, which we decided to address by incorporating a better approach to teaching in India. The differences between the two systems were synthesised to further develop a comprehensive approach towards learning which will combine various global practices.

Delivering a Teaching Session in the UK:
We used PowerPoint to elaborate on the aforesaid issues. We presented around 14 slides with clear titles and information and used interactive imagery to enhance the engagement. There were about 15-20 fellow students, and we used the lecture technique to deliver the presentation. We kept the body language steady and comfortable with limited hand movements and eye contact with the audience. The classroom was arranged in a cabaret style, enabling a clearer view of the presenter and facilitating better interaction between the presenter and the attendees. The presentation was in an audible tone, along with voice modulations at the important parts of the lecture.

Feedback and Analysis:
As a presenter, we tried to entail too much information, making our slides heavy in content, and managing time was a challenge. It was also reflected in the feedback. Similarly, we stressed more about the historical evolution of the education system in India, which some of my peer reviewers found less interesting. We got positive feedback on the presentation skills and knowledge of the subject. Similarly, we have been complimented on the tonality and the confidence.

We have immensely benefited from the peer review as it has enabled me to locate my strengths and weaknesses as well. It was advised to practice beforehand for time management, and discussions with the co-teachers were suggested for balancing the content.

Learning:
Our exposure to various teaching styles, especially Kolb's learning cycle, Bloom's taxonomy, and Phil Race's 'ripple effect', have provided newer insights into the teaching techniques. I have used Bloom's taxonomy during the preparation of my lecture. I am very much influenced by Phil Race's (2001) 'ripple-effect' model, which engages with the flux of teaching. This model addresses the complex process of learning, which is all but indeed not singular and unidirectional. The wanting/ needing, doing, feedback, and digesting model engages with the multidirectional process of learning, which is undoubtedly not simple (Race 2014). The metaphor of 'ripples' is aptly used to describe the learning process, which has both inward and outward flows, on the one hand, and superficial and deep impacts. 'Wanting' can be enhanced through direct engagement with the students, while 'feedback' further motivates the learners. Similarly, 'doing' frames the core of the learning process through the well-designed learning material. 'Digesting' is the most important part of the learning process as it ensures the culmination of learning and its synthesis into practice (Race 1994).

Similarly, the Kolb model and insights into teaching larger groups have certainly enhanced my abilities to better engage with larger groups. Kolb's insights into the process of learning by discovering and doing are important lessons to make the task of learning more interesting (Stice 1987).

We have also learnt about various methods of better engaging with large and small groups of the audience, which will benefit me in the near future. Techniques like Fishbowl, Circular Interviewing Poster Display, etc., are very useful in ensuring better and deeper learning in comparison to surface learning. We have also learnt about much important software and audio-visual aids like Prezi, Pecha Kucha, etc., which will undoubtedly enhance my presentation skills.

IV.   Discussion
Our academic journey spans from a small town in India to the cities of the United Kingdom, and we have observed both commonalities and differences in the education systems. Teaching in higher education institutions is always challenging and requires much information, skills, and patience. However, the nature of the challenges might have been different in different places. In India, infrastructural bottlenecks pose the primary challenge, whereas, in the UK, decreasing enrollment rates and diversity in higher education are more critical issues to be addressed. However, at both places, the primary concern is to strike a balance between teaching and research at all levels. It seems that most academics strive to frame a balance, but it is certainly difficult to manage both. At

the school level teaching tend to become the priority of and research becomes the challenge and at the University level academic engages more with research.

It has been observed that the Indian education system is relatively more susceptible to power dynamics, where teachers and taught engage in a hierarchical power equation. The classroom architecture emanates the hierarchy by placing the teacher on a higher podium. The raised podium contributes to the authority of the teacher. On the other hand, the "raised podium" architecture hinders a fine rapport between the teacher and the student. The teacher has been deemed as the fountainhead of knowledge rather than a co-learner. This is only one example of the pedagogical system in higher education in India, which is relatively more hierarchical. At the school level, education is thickly enmeshed in the strict designs of "discipline" Discipline instead of creative freedom forms the core of education systems at many educational institutes at primary and secondary levels. However, in the UK, such dynamics of power is relatively less visible; teachers engage more as a facilitator and friend.

We are fortunate enough to experience both the systems of education in Indian and UK We will inculcate best of both the systems. Indian pedagogical system suffers from the infrastructural bottlenecks and hierarchical approach to teaching. We will engage as a facilitator and friend with the student to promote learning and creativity as a teacher. Similarly, We will focus more motivating students for the free and creative thing rather than discipline them. The teacher should be a facilitator in the dissemination of knowledge and free thinking for the betterment of the society. The learning process should not be a disciplining agency of the state, which could only be avoided by inculcating free thinking creativity among the learners. We would employ various models especially Kolb's, Bloom's Taxonomy and Phil Race's learning model to enable better learning and pedagogical practices.

The experience across the continents and education systems enabled us to engage with the global pedagogical perspective and the praxis. The theoretical insights in various regions of pedagogy and their possible application have enhanced our skills and knowledge about teaching. It also has introduced us to inventing newer ways of engaging with the audience through the help of a variety of software and audio-video tools. At the beginning of our courses, we lamented the infrastructural bottlenecks and challenges in India. However, after this course, we proposed to be a change' a' a teacher in changing the system back home after completing studies at a UK university. We proposed to inculcate global values of pedagogy in our teaching style to bring the desired change in the system in India

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