Will replacing PhD professors with practitioners work?

What is the issue?

The recent decision of University Grants Commission (UGC) to do away with the mandatory PhD qualification to teach in Central Universities (CUs) comes with lot of challenges

What are the directions issued by UGC for recruitment of faculties in CUs?

- **History -** In 2018, the Centre brought in the UGC (Minimum Qualifications for Appointment of Teachers and Other Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for the Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education) Regulation.
- The regulation required that all candidates for the assistant professor position must have a doctoral degree.
- It gave a three year period for the transition, saying the mandatory requirement would be introduced from July 1, 2021 for the 2021-22 academic year.
- **Change in decision -** However recently UGC has announced that it will do away with the mandatory PhD qualification to teach in Central Universities (CUs).
- The Centre has amended UGC regulations to delay the mandatory requirement of a PhD to July 2023.
- Entry-level position like Assistant Professors could be filled by Master's degree holders who had qualified through the National Eligibility Test.
- Also Industry experts and professional practitioners from different fields with domain expertise will be recruited by creating special positions of Professor and Associate Professor of Practice.

Why did UGC come up with this decision?

- The decision has been taken to addresses a shortage of qualified faculty in CUs.
- More than 10,000 teaching positions lying vacant in CUs as of December 2021.
- Also New Education Policy (NEP) emphasises better collaboration with industries.

What will be the outcomes of this decision?

- Practitioners bring knowledge and deep expertise relevant to a specific contexts and applications.
- However non-PhDs are not trained to conduct original research, they reproduce what others have create.
- The current fast-changing business and technological environment may confine them to limited shelf-life experiences that may quickly become outdated.
- This would result in students getting knowledge that may be of great value but in a limited context.
- Therefore, only contractual teaching positions would make sense for practitioners.

What value do good PhDs bring to teaching?

- Fundamentally they are researchers.
- They create new knowledge through long and deep investigations of relevant issues using academic rigour.
- Besides imparting cutting-edge knowledge they train and equip students with skills to face real-life challenges.
- A good PhD teacher would focus on the relevant theories and show how they are applied in practice in various contexts to equip students to face current and future challenges.
- This forms the foundation of any application or solution in the real world.

What needs to be done?

- A workable and sustainable solution to this situation is to have a mix of practitioners and traditional academicians, as many business schools in India and abroad have.
- They hire a limited number of practitioners as clinical and adjunct faculty on contract for a limited time to fulfil specific teaching needs.
- The responsibilities and evaluation of both these categories of faculty are also different.

Reference

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