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Perceptions of Faculty of English about the Role of Teacher Education in Pakistan to Promote the Culture of Collaborative Research Projects: A Reflective Study

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Abstract: *The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of a public sector university faculty about the role of teacher education to endorse the culture of collaborative research projects between researchers and practitioners to create small communities. The findings show that policymakers, researchers and practitioners should have shared concerns about the context to create a dialogue about the existing educational problems in Pakistan. The problem solving and inquiry-driven mechanism should be developed to identify key problems of an education system. The need is to develop the standards that should provide the parameters for curricula, assessment and teacher education to achieve the global objectives. However, these standards would emerge through interactive and collective discourse.*

Key Words: Collaborative Research Projects, Teacher Education, Policy, Curriculum, Assessment

Introduction

The purpose of the study is to perceive that teacher education in Pakistan can perform an effective role to develop the research community for the implementation of collaborative research projects in Pakistan. It is pertinent to work with mutual collaboration to overcome existing challenges with regards to the current teaching and learning situation in Pakistan. The emphasis of the project is to use the potential of teacher

education for the transformation of the education system, which will be implemented through the development of innovative curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. The teacher education programs will explore to bring sustainability through the utilization of existing resources and cultivate their capacity to be skilled communicators for translation of ideas into practice.

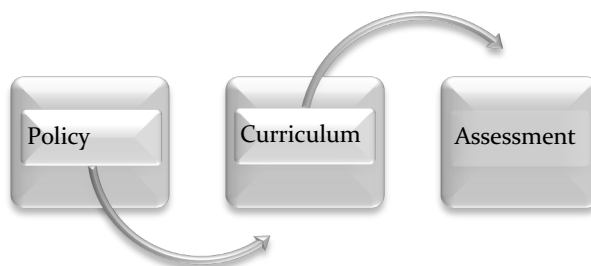


Figure 1: Teacher Education Model (Designed by Authors)

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Pakistani teachers confront tensions generated by the competing demands of learners' requirements, contextual constraints, syllabus specifications and their own theories of best practice (Irfan, 2017). Barber (2013) also observes that in Pakistan, there are many habits and norms which are detrimental to progress.

"Take absence, for example 20 per cent or more teacher absence had become the norm. A discretionary allowance of up to 25 days off a year (in addition to holidays) to cover weddings, funerals and other family concerns had become an entitlement. The teachers who did turn up were largely dependent on the textbooks, and the textbooks themselves were out of date. Teachers' own mastery of the subject matter was often lacking, and their pedagogical skill very limited, generally confined to the most basic rote learning with no attempt to ensure the whole class was engaged. To be fair to the teachers, some of the classes were very large, and the classrooms themselves singularly ill-equipped. Moreover, such training as was available to teachers was at training centres distant from the school and tended to involve the teachers themselves being lectured – it was information-giving rather than skill-building".

Therefore, collaborative research between universities and teacher education institutions is the need of the hour to counteract the existing challenges.

Literature Review

The formation of education policies in Pakistan, being a complex and plural society, had been unwieldy, unscientific and irrational (Ball, 2006). Above all, policies create circumstances in which options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed (Hamilton and Hillier, 2007). The policies are considered political in character because they serve the interests of particular political parties (Ramanathan and Morgan, 2007). Tollefson (2006) expresses his view that education policies serve the interests of dominant groups in maintaining their power and prestige while marginalizing, excluding, and even exploiting minority groups. Further, there is a reciprocal relationship between political changes and changes in language policies. It is essential to translate policy into practice, but it may not be effectively implemented for a variety of reasons. The policy is also rarely accessible to practitioners

working in classrooms and communities, and the underlying ideological motivations of policies tend to be implicit. Teachers themselves often believe that they have little power to affect policy and do not view themselves as implementers of macro-level policies (Kaplan, 2009).

Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012) believe that the policy is formulated at the level of government, but practitioners responsible for implementation often have access to the implications of policy only through the curriculum and textbooks. They believe that effective teachers adjust practices that are handed down to them through policy and curriculum to serve the needs of their students. Other teachers who may not have appropriate expertise, training, time or resources, might reject and ignore the policies and materials altogether. Therefore, experts and policymakers often jump to the conclusion:

"The local teachers or their students are lazy or non-receptive, instead of reflecting on the nature of the material or the policymaking processes. If teachers are not aware of the policy goals, they will create their own goals within the classroom, which are aimed at increasing student success in examinations. Moreover, education policy is hinged on religious, cultural, social and political circumstances. Thus, at the backdrop of these challenges, the national education policy decides curriculum, methodology and assessment".

Irfan (2018) Discusses

"An effective curriculum should especially be concerned about needs analysis, situational analysis and intended learning outcomes of the students. It should be designed and implemented in such a way that it develops students' ability for academic rationalism, critical thinking and cultural pluralism. However, the views of various writers suggest that the above-mentioned aspects are not kept in sight for the curriculum development in higher education in Pakistan".

The education policy goals are transmitted through curriculum and textbooks. As teachers are not involved in the process of policymaking, so in order to accommodate deficiencies in the curriculum, they create their own goals in the classroom.

[Siddiqui \(2007, p.50\)](#) observes, “the majority of the teachers believe that the curriculum is handed down to them so that they cannot bring any change. Moreover, the language of the curriculum is increasingly complex and specialized that it transcends pupils’ comprehension and does not necessarily prepare them for classroom conversation”.

[Mansoor \(2002\)](#) also points out, “Pakistani education system makes the textbooks tend to occupy the central place, and the teacher is bound to teach the textbooks because the questions in the examinations are set from those textbooks”. Therefore, although the trained teachers would like to be creative, they have “little room for innovation in the presence of existing curriculum and syllabus” ([Siddiqui, 2007, p.51](#)).

[Mahboob \(2009\)](#) discusses that focus of the national curriculum in Pakistan is to promote a national culture that is strongly integrated with religious and ideological content. The culture of dominant groups is being promoted, and little attention is given to minorities and other competing global cultures. [Irfan \(2018\)](#) believes that the main objective of curriculum planners and developers should be the endorsement of cultural pluralism for the preservation of cultural diversity in the country.

Assessment is an essential element of an education system with a potent influence on students and teachers alike. The examinations in Pakistan cause dissatisfaction as they fail to measure students’ actual competence ([Irfan, 2020](#)). [Siddiqui \(2007, p.189\)](#) believes:

“in Pakistan, assessment system excludes creativity and critical thinking out of its legitimate boundaries because the assessment system encourages rote learning and the examination requires the students to reproduce what they have learnt by heart”.

This critical situation is reinforced by national education policies. It is stated, “we are caught in a vicious circle; the cycle begins at a badly constructed syllabi and ends at a rag bag system called examination” (National Education Policy (1992, p.69). National Education Policy (2009, p.38) puts in, “the public examinations in Pakistan are invalid and unreliable as they encourage cramming’. In Pakistan, it is seen that assessment has a direct relationship with teaching in the classroom”.

It is observed that assessment and textbooks overlap as “teachers use only textbook questions to assess students’ learning and for assigning homework” ([MehrunNisa, 2009, p.26](#)). It is implied that examinations in Pakistan do not put into practice reflective, critical and interactive competencies in the classroom.

Hence, it justifiably argued:

“Twenty provincial boards in Pakistan encourage poor learning and teaching methods where rote learnt answers from prescribed textbooks or guidebooks are rewarded and creative and independent thinking penalized” ([Mansoor, 2005, p.32](#)).

It is observed that teacher education is the most important pillar of any education system as it can bring transformation through the effective implementation of innovative strategies ([Watson and Taylor, 1998](#)). Teacher education persistently evolves teachers’ professional growth, reflection and self-awareness for sustainability over time in a community of practice. The professional development of teachers subsequently leads to outstanding learning outcomes on the part of students ([Nicholls, 2001](#)).

[Hussain \(2009, p.110\)](#) expresses her views that teachers in Pakistan should receive regular institutionalized training, but only sporadic training opportunities are available for them. Moreover, these trainings lack in quality. However, education policies consider teacher education programs pertinent for teachers’ professional development but are not adequately responsive to the demands of the fast-paced requirements of teachers. This point is noteworthy in education Policy (1998-2010), “to provide the increased opportunity of in-service training to the working teachers preferably at least ‘once in five years’”. Further, article 7.1.6 of the National Education Policy 1998-2010 (Government of Pakistan, 1998) identifies the required qualifications of teacher trainers:

“The staff of the teacher training institutions belongs to the education service. There is no special cadre of teacher educators. Any serving teacher or lecturer with a Master’s degree, with or without professional qualifications, can be appointed as a teacher educator, although preference will be given to those who hold a Master’s degree in Education”.

Research Methodology

The research is qualitative and exploratory. The researchers designed a focus group interview to collect the data from a large scale multidisciplinary public sector university of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. The questions of focus group interviews were divided into two parts. The part 1 questions were constructed around participants' names, age, gender, designation, teaching experience and qualification. Part 2 had questions about participants' understanding of teacher education and the role of teacher education to promote the culture of collaborative research projects.

The researchers selected the Department of English for the collection of data. The sample size of the focus group interview was n=6. 3 male and 3 female faculty members participated in the focus group interview. 3 MPhil Linguistics and 3 PhD Linguistics faculty members filled in the consent form before the recording of a focus group interview. Their names have been maintained confidential with pseudonyms P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and P6. The recorded focus group discussion was carefully transcribed and coded.

Research Findings and Discussion

Interestingly, P1 believes, *“the relationship between research and practise is needed for developing collaborative research opportunities so to work in a community to undertake the inquiry. This is possible through teacher education in a university. The role of teacher educators/university teachers is very important. However, in order to develop such inquiry in a community, there should be feasible conditions for collaborative and positive attitudes towards learning in teachers”*. P1 further reports that teachers in Pakistan are under pressure; therefore, there should be:

- *Need to create learning communities*
- *The government’s mission should be continuing education*
- *Collaborative opportunities between universities and teachers in the classroom*
- *Indulging into long-term partnerships*
- *Focus on creating a difference*

It is interpreted that there is certainly an interrelationship between researchers and practitioners for exploring the collaborative research opportunities to undertake the inquiry. The university teachers and educators should have

positive attitudes toward inquiry-based research collaborations. The role of policymakers is to produce collaborative research opportunities for universities and classroom practitioners to create 21st-century learning communities with a specific focus on continuing education.

The university teacher P2 perceives, *“practitioners have a lot of knowledge to be shared. The focus should be on the creation of better standards, continuous learning and community partnerships. This might happen with the break down in smaller communities”*. According to participant P2, *“the knowledge varies from one situation to another situation. The knowledge should be translated to create interest. This is very complex because the contexts are different. The community is built up through language and understanding for inquiry that needs the utilization of particular skills for understanding the context”*.

It is surmised that practitioners have a lot of knowledge to be shared with researchers to build up community partnerships. Pakistan has a complex context as it is a multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual country. It is necessary to utilize specific skills to understand the context for taking up the inquiry.

P3 reflects, *“the problem for researchers is to succeed through writing papers and using specialist language. The audience in research is other researchers. The research is not rewarded on account of the lack of criteria and grant opportunities. The researchers should work alongside practitioners, but it is difficult because they don’t have time or money. The universities should employ research associates who can work with identified teachers/practitioners on research projects. This is how the partnership between schools and universities can be developed. Financial support can be obtained from HEC and other funding agencies. The junior researchers will attend workshops, learn to use techniques and collect literature. It is necessary to listen more to practitioners”*.

There are many challenges embedded with collaborative research projects such as writing research papers, specialized language, grant opportunities, collection of literature and learning to use research-oriented techniques.

P4 expresses his view, *“the context is different; therefore, more sophisticated methods should be used to have an impact. The mixed-method*

approach is desirable, like in health research or medical education research. The quantitative research keeps focusing only on average, not on individual cases”.

It is conjectured that collaborative research projects need the use of thoughtful research methods that would create an impact on the community. The use of mixed methods might produce desirable outcomes.

P5 believes, “it is necessary to understand how professionals learn. The teachers are underestimated, not considered intellectuals. The role of teacher educators is to develop professional learning. There should be a strong relationship between undergraduate studies to the profession. Public universities are serving the public, but they are less funded as compared to private universities. The universities need support and encouragement to undertake initiatives”.

It is interpreted that public universities are in need of professional development and funds to take initiatives. Teacher education can be helpful to train the policymakers, curriculum developers and testers so that collaborative research projects can be implemented.

Finally, P6 speaks out his opinion, “the key thing is context, creation of small communities and researchers and practitioners coming together as units to work on collaborative projects. Both researchers and practitioners should have equal interests in serving. The problem solving and inquiry-driven mechanism should be developed to identify key problems. The policymakers, researchers and practitioners should have shared concerns to create a dialogue about the existing problems”.

It is perceived those policymakers, researchers and practitioners should have a close

understanding to identify the key issues to work on collaborative projects using inquiry-based and problem-solving approaches.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is concluded that teacher education spins about curriculum, assessment and policy. The role of teacher education in Pakistan is to understand the diverse context for creating small communities of researchers and teachers so as to work on collaborative research projects. The policymakers, practitioners and researchers should share the same interests and concerns to create a dialogue to explore solutions for existing dilemmas.

The research recommends that realistic steps are required to improve the existing education system with a special focus on fostering 21st-century teaching and learning skills.

- The need is to develop the standards that should provide the guideline for curricula, assessment and teacher education to achieve global objectives. However, these standards would emerge through interactive and collective discourse.
- Teachers being the crucial role players, should demonstrate appropriate knowledge and skills and receive training for optimal performance.
- The teacher certification that includes teachers’ knowledge, attributes, and professionalism should be mandatory for all hired teachers.
- More importantly, investment in the capacity building of the existing pool of teachers is imperative to improve the quality of instruction being offered.
- The life skills education that can develop global citizenship skills should be included in school and university curricula.

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