

Exploring the Practices of Government Secondary School Teachers about National Professional Standards for Teacher

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Abstract

For enhancing the quality of teachers, the Government of Pakistan introduced the National Professional Standards for Teachers in 2009. The study was qualitative in nature. A case study design was adopted to conduct the research. A purposive criterion sampling technique was used to select the sample. A semi-structured interview and observation checklist was developed by the researcher. The instruments were validated and improved in the light of experts' opinions. Research ethics were observed during the study and before the data collection. Themes were generated and interpreted which were relevant to the research questions of the study. The findings of the study indicate that public sector teachers have command of the subject matter knowledge, but lesson planning and proper assessment are missing. It is being recommended that awareness about the National Professional Standards must be created among public sector teachers and teachers should be made bound for planning their instructions according to standards.

Key Words:

Case Study, Teacher Standards, Professional Standards, Classroom Practices, Teaching

Introduction

Education is the key factor and the integral variable which pronounces about the status of a nation or country as developed or progressive in the world. Education offers us a profound understanding of how to enhance or improve a nation on academic and intellectual grounds. What's more, the educator is the founding stone whom the entire process of education counts upon and he, along with the other managing academicians, is solely responsible for the entire process of nation-building in the true sense of meaning (Minhas, 2012).

The ever-increasing interest of the educational world has expected to be geared up for the professional development of teachers. The idea of engaging teachers has been changed throughout the world, and an entirely new concept has been introduced for presenting teacher assessment and accreditation, framework to evaluate the individual and expert skills of the educators. The last two decades have produced numerous research studies that link teacher effectiveness to student learning and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

Professional standards generally identify commitment to student learning, development of professional knowledge and practice, ongoing professional learning and collaborative learning and relationships as key features. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clear that the impact of teacher's quality education could be observed upon student's learning for the years to come, even if not having direct contact with an individual teacher (Mendro, 1998). For this reason, drastic measures have been taken up to guarantee optimum quality in educating and learning.

The issue here is that "standards and quality form the cornerstone of many national education policy developments around the world today, raising questions about the role of professional standards for teaching within these systems" (Tuinamuana, 2011, p. 72). This is the case in Pakistan, where professional teacher standards were implemented in 2009. However, there are obviously several controversies embedded in the development and use of professional standards raising uncertainty whether professional standards can achieve the quality of education they promise and at what cost to the teachers and the students (Tuinamuana, 2011). The standards of professional knowledge, skills and dispositions, as stated by UNESCO (2008), are designed to define competencies, skills and attributes deemed to be essential for teachers, guide the detailed development of pre-and in-service programs of teacher education; establish policies, procedures and systems for accrediting teacher education

programs and institutions offering them, assure public about the quality of their educators and educational outputs and outcomes (as cited in Shakir, 2012) Messo (2010) states, in Pakistan a project under the title “Strengthening Teacher Education in Pakistan (STEP)” was launched in Pakistan on October 12, 2005. The main objective of the project was to enhance the government’s capacity to assure quality teacher education by improving policy framework, coordination and standard-setting One of the important activities of this project was to develop national standards for teacher accreditation and certification and to develop strategies for improving the status of teachers and the teaching profession.

The Ministry of Education, with the cooperation of UNESCO and the financial support of USAID, developed National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPSTs) in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Teachers are potentially the single most influential factor in achieving the aspiration of a learned society. Moreover, it is the teacher who holds the key to students’ growing or diminishing self-esteem, intellectual curiosity and sense of achievement. It is the kinds and quality of the education, training and professional development opportunities and the cultures in which teachers’ work that influence their ability to help students to enjoy positive educational changes. The significant impact of teacher education on student performance has been established through quite a few studies. The well prepared and certified teachers are better rated and more successful at performance of students than teachers without this preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Thrupp (2006) thinks that the public and professional appeal of teaching standards may be politically exploited and may serve as a way of controlling teachers. He argues that specified professional standards have a much greater capacity to “control and contain teachers” (p. 3). Basically, standards control what and how teachers teach. This control is accomplished “by intensifying their workload resulting in few improvements in teaching quality as teachers could fabricate evidence in order to jump through hoops to meet requirements” (Mcdaid, 2010, p. 782). Sachs (2003) termed the use of standards as a “government-imposed regulatory framework” (p. 185) over the teaching profession. Professional standards control teachers by emphasizing the perspective of the standard creators over those of the teacher. Zuzovsky and Lipman (2006) concluded that “the value of standards is not questioned. What is questioned is their imposition as controlling devices” (p. 48). According to Kleinhenz and Ingvarson (2004), there is a real concern that teachers may not see the value of standards that might lead to disconnectedness because the standards are seen as top-down and bureaucratically conceived. The bureaucracy creates additional work, and it is often the case that teachers become “overburdened with guidelines and standards to which they must measure and provide evidence of their accomplishments within their profession rather than engage in the business of education” (Mcdaid, 2010, p. 780). Furthermore, these control standardized teaching practices instead of building teachers’ knowledge that can be adapted and applied to different subjects, the social context, the community or the individual needs of children (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Sachs (2005) argues that standards remove “professional autonomy, engagement and expertise away from teachers, reduce the diversity of practice and opinion and promote ‘safe’ practice” (pp. 3-4).

Quality education at all levels is the most desired goal of the education system of all countries. The key factors influencing the quality of education is the quality of faculty, curriculum standards, technological infrastructure available, research environment, accreditation regime and the administrative policies and procedures implemented in institutions of learning. It is critical to monitor and regulate the growth of substandard institutions of learning (Akram & Zepeda, 2015). In the changing world of knowledge and skills it seems that professional standards may help to smooth the activities of any profession to get the optimal outcomes within a limited time and cost frame. In teaching profession teachers and teaching are the main elements of system through which the objective of quality can be achieved. In Pakistan there is need to develop professional standards for teaching in schools and other levels for attaining and maintaining the quality. In future the dream of quality acquisition will not be fulfilled without going through the bridge of professional standards (Michael & Tasneem, 2014).

National Professional Standard for Teachers in Pakistan

Pakistan is a developing country of the world. If Pakistan has an aim to become the developed country of the world, then Pakistan has to reshape its educational system. Pakistan should design such a system of education from kindergarten to postgraduate level that has a productive disposition. Quality teaching practices and quality educational system is not possible without the hardworking and quality teachers from kindergarten to matriculation. The teachers should have multi characteristics so that they can motivate students to quality learning and teaching. Quality learning can only be possible if the teachers are true professional and they are ready to deliver at any level.

Cruikshank (2008) states that the basic purpose of standards is to constitute the ‘critical knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to perform a specific role effectively. He explains the primary components of performance

rather providing a comprehensive list of responsibilities. Furthermore, he serves to specify what performance or behaviors an institution is particularly looking for. He describes what teachers need to know and do to provide relevant and valuable learning experiences for learners and groups of individuals. The extent to which professional standards have been met can be accessed via performance indicators set by the authorities. Government of Pakistan has taken an initiative to improve the quality of education through improving the quality of teacher education. It is made an important pillar of the National Education Policy, 2010. Quality assurance requires professional standards of teacher education and an effective mechanism of accreditation of teacher education institutions and programs.

The Policy and Planning Wing, Ministry of Education in collaboration with the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is implementing strengthening teacher education in Pakistan (STEP) with the financial support of the United State Agency for International Development (USAID) under STEP. Professional standards for teachers have been developed in consultation with stakeholder in all provinces. Although, the professional standards are aimed for primary level beginning teachers, these standards can be adapted and used for secondary level teachers and teacher educators. The standards of professional knowledge, skills and dispositions are designed to: define competencies, skills an attribute deemed to be essential for teachers, guide the detailed development of pre and in-service programs of teacher education; establish policies, procedures and systems for accrediting teacher education programs and institution offering them, assure public about the quality of their educators and educational outputs and outcomes (UNESCO, 2008, as cited in Shakir, 2012).

Methodology

The research was qualitative in nature. Case study design was employed to explore the phenomenon in-depth. Single instrumental case study design was employed to study this

problem. In single instrumental case study design, the researcher focuses on an issue or concern and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue (Creswell, 2007).

Semi structured interview and observations were conducted with the participants of the study. The instrument was developed by the researcher after reviewing the related literature and identifying key themes and consulting these with the supervisor regarding rigor procedure of qualitative research, rigorous data analysis techniques of qualitative research, strength and weakness of qualitative research and possible measures to initiate qualitative research. The face and the content validity of the instrument were validated through expert's opinion. The instruments were improved in the light of their valuable comments.

A formal consent form was prepared and distributed among the teachers to observe the research ethics of the study before the data collection. Teachers' consent was also taken to

participate in the study, interview recordings and its confidentiality (Hadjistavropoulos & Smythe, 2001; Roberts, 2013; Roberts, 2015). The researcher personally visited every teacher and explained the purpose of the study then, the researcher requested for interview. All the teachers were interviewed in their offices one by one. The interview was started after getting the agreement from the teachers. Cell phone was used for recording the interview. Researcher started the pre-structured questions from the teachers as per schedule of the interview. The probing questions were also asked during the interview whenever needed. The first interview was completed in 40 minutes. Second interview was completed in 30 minutes. Thus, average time for the interviews was 30 minutes.

- The researcher only observes the classes of those participants who participated in the interview.
- The researcher analyzed the interview data manually because it was small scale research.
- The interview data was transcribed and different codes were identified for emergent themes.
- These themes were identified in relation to teachers' focus on qualitative research.

Government School for boys is located in an urban area (metropolitan city of Lahore) with a population 11.13 million (2017) in the Central Punjab. Total school strength is 1500 out of which approximately 600 students were enrolled in the School's Secondary Section. Total number of teaching staff is 71 out of which more than half of the teaching staff has been employed to teach in the Secondary School Section. A male head-teacher aged around 55 was smoothly and tactically managing the administrative affairs of the entire staff. The researcher also found that he had been at the school for the last one year transferred as district education officer (DEO) from Gujranwala. He has an extensive experience 28 years as DEO and head master in different districts of Punjab. The researcher also had a meeting with the vice-principal, a middle-aged, serious-looking man with polite manners, whose experience also spanned over 24 years and was deputed as senior teacher and vice-principal at various districts of Punjab. It was also obvious that the principal got training from DSD regarding NPST promotion link training from grade 17 to 18 grade.

Results and discussion

The first standard for professional development was to evaluate the “*subject matter knowledge*” of secondary school teachers. Results of the study show that more than 70% of the secondary school teachers from all case studies (around 20 teachers) did not know about the national curriculum framework while a very few teachers were found having updated their subject knowledge in accordance with the three instruments included in each standard prescribed by NPSTs. This appears to support the views of Safia (2005) that majority of the heads opined that most of the secondary school teachers needed a comprehensive training session in order to have a desirable command over the content they had to teach. During classroom observation when teachers were asked the reasons why they did not update their subject knowledge; 90% (around 30 teachers) of the teachers from all the sampled schools held their current workload to be the key factor behind their outdated knowledge about subject matter. As almost all of them argued that as a teacher, every teacher has to perform various duties in the school during their academic sessions e.g., election duty, population census duty, polio and many other frequently visits of District Education Office. But it was also observed by the researcher that all the participants showed great readiness to update their knowledge if they would be provided training as such. The results of the study further indicated that less than half of the secondary school teachers knew how to relate subject knowledge with other discipline and were using different examples from other subjects. So, the results reveal that most of the teachers have partial understanding about their subject knowledge, usually they teach without updating their knowledge. After meticulous observation, the researcher concluded that the female teachers in both the sampled schools were quite active and energetic about using various examples from practical fields of life in order to enhance understanding and learning of their students. Furthermore, these female teachers also explained the topics from other perspectives to foster a culture of diverse range of learning among the students.

Human growth and development were considered second standard for professional development of teachers. Data revealed that majority of the teachers teaching at secondary schools were not as competent as they were deemed to be. They had slight knowledge on how to construct student’s knowledge. Another most important element of human growth and development was assumed understanding of individual differences. According to Hinchliff, (2009) An indispensable role played by the knowledge of individual difference is the way of how and what we learn and apply our acquired knowledge accordingly. During the result filtering process, it was found that 24 out of 32 teachers were not well-versed in their understanding about individual difference of students, diverse style of learning and using motivational strategies. It was also revealed that 20 out of 32 teachers were drastically found poor in appreciating multiple ways of getting knowledge while a negligible number of teachers were found who were appreciating the multiple ways of getting knowledge. The further results of study showed that more than half of the secondary school teachers almost never committed to develop lifelong skills e.g. critical thinking, self-confidence, problem solving creative thinking and increased subject matter competency among the students. The performance of teachers was not up to the mark during the classroom observation.

Islamic Values and Social Life Skills is the third standard in line with the NPSTs. After carefully handling and observing the stakeholders (teachers, head teachers and EDOs) in this regard, it was found that the results sprouting out from this standard were quite undesirable like those of the first two standards. According to the results of the studies, it was concluded that 25 out of 32 teachers were not competent enough to exercise their knowledge of Islamic values and social life skills both in and out of the classroom activities. This situation was further supported by Safia (2005) as most of the secondary school teachers did not know how to promote Islamic values among the students. Though the researcher probed deeply into knowing their practices regarding it but she found that only a fraction of the teachers (4 or 5 out of 32 teachers) were imbibing the moral values in their students by demonstrating the practical examples of our Holy Prophet (SAWW). Their knowledge about ethical values and its impacts was also inadequate. Data also revealed that majority (90%) of secondary school teachers had very limited knowledge on how to promote ethical and social values among the students hence a very few teachers knew the importance of peace in the society. This lack of knowledge resulted in their poor understanding about the Holy Quran and the Islamic values such as tolerance, cooperation, celebration of diversity, equality, justice, fairness, etc. which could help them attain peace, progress and prosperity in various domains of the society. It was also observed that more than half of the teachers almost never solved conflicts through Islamic teaching.

Standard-4 *instructional planning and strategies*, play instrumental role that concentrates on showing you how to make good decisions about what to plan and how to teach effectively. During classroom observations, use of different methods and techniques remains an issue that indicates the significant impact on teaching and learning process. The analysis of the study indicated that majority of the teachers (25 out of 32 teachers) had no awareness about the learning objectives of our national curriculum that is why they were found irresponsible and inapt in attaining curriculum objectives while Safia (2005)an emerging scholar in the modern educational research field of Pakistan, refutes this viewpoint in her study as she holds that “fairly a large number of teachers are well-acquainted

with the main aims and objectives of the content to be taught in the classes” whereas Siddiqui, another young scholar (2010), in his study, had different viewpoint as he says that most of teachers had no adequate knowledge about the chief motives of our national curriculum. In the meanwhile, (Anderson, 1991), opines that competent and efficient teachers not only attain those goals formulated by themselves but they also pursue those goals set by others for them (Anderson, 1991). Further data revealed that most of teachers showed poor performance while applying a variety of instructional approaches (scarce knowledge about instructional approaches), out of school activities, various classroom management techniques, value the pedagogy of collaboration, developing problem solving skills among students, team work and cooperative learning. Siddiqui (2010) and Safia (2005) seemed to agree with the results that majority of the teachers failed to employ effective teaching methods. They are professionally trained but are not using proper methodologies. Most of the secondary school teachers demonstrated poor performance in using different methods and strategies for effective learning and were categorized as emerging teachers.

Assessing students’ learning achievement is an important factor in teaching and learning process which is considered as fifth standard (assessment) for teacher’s professional development. In this study, it is found that a little more than half of the secondary school teachers knew various methods of assessment and how to improve student’s learning through assessment but did not know how to practice it effectively in the classroom. Reliability and validity of test was considered major concern during classroom observation, they were found very weak in test constructions. The reason is very obvious that they were not properly trained in the area of measurement and evaluation; therefore, their competency in test development was reported to be very weak. The course on measurement and evaluation be enriched and made compulsory in all teacher-training programmes. All the teachers have the task of keeping records and making reports, of recording absences and tardiness. This situation was further supported by Stonge (2006) that a great number of school teachers consider maintaining and preparing students’ academic record a burdensome and tiresome activity.

Recommendations

The present case study based on National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan explored the professional competencies of secondary school teachers. It was found that most of the secondary teachers during observation were found weak in all almost all standards however teachers were found very much weak in (a) human growth and development (b) instructional planning and strategies. The study recommended that administration should make a comprehensive plan for the awareness, training and monitoring of school teachers in the light of National Professional Standards for teachers. Electronic & Print Media may be used for providing awareness to people about National Professional Standards for teachers. Workshops, refresher courses, conferences and Seminars be conducted on regular basis to create awareness among the teachers about Standards. Findings also show that teachers lack in variety of teaching strategies and assessment techniques, so it is recommended that pre and in-service training should be strengthened

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