

Pedagogic Practices and Perspectives in Teaching Competencies and Standards: Possibilities in Professional Parameters

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Abstract

The investigation was performed to assess professional teachers' teaching competencies of teacher educators for professional standards in Pakistan. The core competencies evaluated were professional knowledge, instructional planning and strategies, assessment, use of ICT, and learning environment. (Adegbile & Adeyemi (2008). The study took place in the context of Balochistan Province. The study participants were teacher educators and prospective teachers from various degree awarding institutions of in Quetta. A mixed method approach was used for the study. The study found out that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female and married and unmarried teacher educators regarding understanding and practices of the professional standards. Similarly, no significant different was found between the mean score of the educators based on age, degree, institution, trainings attended, and experience. However, there was significant difference in the mean

score of prospective teachers (students) regarding the competency levels of their teachers. Additionally, the qualitative analysis revealed the educators have only working knowledge on the professional standards and some of the standards are being used in their teachings only covertly.

Key words: Teacher, Competencies, Standards, Teacher Educator, Prospective Teacher

1. Introduction

Teacher lies at the heart of all educational activities. This assertion gives teachers a central part in bringing around educational change and development. However, the current face of affairs, regarding teachers' competencies in playing their due role, seems contrary to the desired. Although the authorities have been feeling the extra-ordinary role of teachers, their response has been meager and half-hearted. The objective approach brought them to create professional standards for teachers, urging them to capacitate themselves so they can interact with students in a prepared manner. These professional standards necessitated teachers to enhance their teaching competencies holistically – by having expertise in pedagogy, knowledge of the subject matter, assessment techniques, skills in instructional planning and strategies, communication and ICT skills, and creating conducive learning environment for students.

Competence is an all-encompassing term, covering a cluster of knowledge, skills, and attitude, observed in a real performance context. As regard to teaching competencies, the requirements become more intense. How to bring teaching profession to a level that contribute to the holistic growth of students seems a challenging scenario. Setting professional standards for teachers in Pakistan is an episode to respond to the challenge at hand.

This study focused to evaluate the current competency understanding and practices of teacher educators in Balochistan province. Though there are no separate professional standards for teacher educators, the professional standards set for teachers are deemed to fulfill the need in some ways. It is generally assumed that teacher educators working in teacher training institutes understand teaching competencies and professional standards for teachers because they are enshrined with task to

prepare future teachers. Therefore, it has to be made sure through organized investigation the way they understand, portray, and demonstrate the required teaching competencies. The same exercise must be done with the prospective teachers to ensure they are prepared for classroom practices. Furthermore, as students at teacher education institutions, how do these prospective teachers view and visualize the competencies of teacher educators.

There has been an array of research studies focusing to investigate what types of competencies really educators need. At the initial level, these competencies have been classed and bifurcated into hard and soft ones. (Agarwal 2006). According to Akber et.al (2013), the analytical and organizational competencies are considered as hard competencies whereas creativity, interpersonal, and behavioral skills are soft competencies. The soft and hard competencies both are indeed essential for effective work performance. Soft competencies, in fact, control and determine dispositions of observable behavior and performance. However, this concept of classification is often criticized claiming differentiation between hard and soft competencies is always difficult to understand and establish conceptual and practical significance (Anangisy, 2010). Despite the criticisms, the scheme of classification of competencies into soft and hard skills is still popular and in practice. These competencies are often theoretical, conceptual, and observable. (Anugerahwati & Saukah 2010).

1.1 Teaching Competencies and Characteristics

What separates effective teachers from ineffective ones, and how can this information be used to support better teaching? We can now begin to build a profile of exemplary classroom instruction derived from effectiveness research (Wenglinsky, 2002; Hattie, 2009).

An examination of the research on education practices that make a difference shows that four classes of competencies yield the greatest results.

1. Instructional delivery
2. Classroom management
3. Formative assessment
4. Personal competencies (soft skills)

Further, the research indicates that these competencies can be used to organize numerous specific skills and knowledge available for building effective teacher development. Following are the characteristics of the competencies,

- A competency consists of one or more skills whose mastery would enable the attainment of the competency.
- A competency is linked to all three of the domains under which performance can be assessed: knowledge, skills and attitude.
- Possessing a performance dimension, competencies are observable and demonstrable.
- Since competencies are observable, they are also measurable.

Archer & Hughes (2011). Therefore, every society for its education system has been framing policies and setting standards for teachers as professional education educators to contribute in the change processes.

The first perspective can be associated with the skills-based approach in the UK or the US, which has often been criticised. Scholars question the rationale for standards, focused on individual teachers' performance, rather than on holistic professional development (Arokiadoss 2005); in the US, the so-called 'standard stampede' would thus drain life from education, through an inordinate and excessive preoccupation with technical standards (Bhargava, & Pathy, 2011).). In the UK, experts point out that standards seem to have been recruited to underline content and marginalise matters linked with values, attitudes and personal qualities (Bhargava & Pathy, 2011).

1.2 National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan

A professional standard describes what knowledge and skills are expected from teacher to accomplish a stipulated task (Jaimini, 2014). In 2009, the Policy and Planning Wing Ministry of Education (MoE) in collaboration with the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) developed ten national professional standards for Pakistani teachers. These standards were set on different parameters to achieve specific expectations. Each standard is divided into three parts – knowledge, skills and attitude. Teacher needs to have sound subject based

pedagogical knowledge and its effective delivery, (Sheeja & Annaraja, 2011) for effective practice in multicultural environment. Thus, cultural responsiveness becomes imperative for teachers and teacher educators to create conducive learning environment. Teachers need to think critically about their attitude and practices in order to obtain best possible results. In the presence of the agreed upon set of professional standards, the educators can track their performance and enhance their teaching skills. Some of the professional standards framed for teachers in Pakistan are discussed as follows:

Subject Matter Knowledge: This standard requires understanding of national framework for curriculum, in depth knowledge of basic and new emerging concepts, domains, theories and its relationship with other subjects, history of a subject and latest trends at national and international level. The disposition includes helping students to develop self-confidence, subject matter competencies, use of appropriate tools for inquiry and its application from practical life.

Instructional Planning and Strategies: This standard includes the capabilities of planning instruction, formulation of objectives, selection of appropriate resources and material, strategies based on student's prior knowledge, need and development, out of school activities and classroom management. The disposition includes development of critical thinking, problem solving, team work and pedagogy of care. Performance and skills include interdisciplinary learning experiences, formal and informal method of assessment and lesson planning.

Assessment: This standard includes multiple learning strategies, type of assessment, measurement theories, and results of assessment to evaluate teaching learning process. Disposition demands constructive feedback, fair objective assessment and reporting of the student performance. Skills include use of teacher made test, continual internal evaluation, formal and informal assessment and self-assessment activities.

Learning Environment: This standard includes respectable, safe and supportive learning classroom environment that promote positive relation, interdependence, behavior and commitment to learn. It also describes democratic values and ethical climate of learning in the school as a whole. Skills include management of classroom and time, decision making and maintenance of competitive behavior.

Effective Use of Information and Communication Technologies: This standard focus on knowledge of different communication techniques (written, verbal and nonverbal), use of computer programs for instruction, classroom activities, research and evaluation. Deposition includes appreciation of cultural dimension of communication, responsive and thoughtful listening. Activities for performance are clear communication, reading and writing in local, Urdu and English, questioning techniques to stimulate students thinking, accurate reporting of facts, beliefs and opinion, development of portfolios, assignment, test items and assessment through computer.

In a crux, teacher educators' current level of competencies needs to be gauged in response to the professional standards set forth. There is lack of evidence whether the teachers and teacher educators keep abreast with the required teaching competencies and professional standards. Do they practice some of the levels of competencies they deem supportive? Do they need improvement in the set standards? These are some of the queries that need to be investigated. (Chawla, 2011).

2. Literature Review

An evolved type of competence introduced was given in occupational competency movement which was more elaborated than the traditional key points and characteristics of skills knowledge and qualities. The settling of competencies into several groups and types depending on their similarities and some authentic reasoning is known as classification of competencies. This division increases the practical and theoretical comprehension and importance of these competencies. (Koksal, 2013).

There is a number of ways through which competencies can be classified. Two possible ways to divide them in sections is to classify them

on the basis of their previous theories and numerical data. Researchers gave many links that might exist in competencies apart from the core differences. Those links can be antagonistic, compensatory, alternative, complimentary and interactive in nature. (Das & Kaur 2014).

Main standards on which competencies are classified is the base theories, logical proves and reasoning. Certain reasons and ways for the classification of competencies are found in the literature. Most abundantly used classification types are further discussed. (Dagiene, 2013).

In perspective of the author competencies related to interpersonal level, creative level and behavior are initial competencies whereas competencies relative to organizational and analytical level are crucial competencies. Both initial and crucial competencies are equally important for the effective professional performance. Initial competencies manipulate and regulate the shifting of obvious behavior in certain situations. (Koksal, 2013).

First difference given between entry level and professional competencies was in 1982. According to him “entry-level” competencies were the basic and fundamental competencies which were rendered as the minimum level of requirement whereas the “professional competencies” were known as the mandatory skills and knowledge and whole competencies that discriminate among normal and exceptional performers. This division as “Entry-level and Professional classification” faced criticism from Woodruffe (2003, 1993) who argued that it is the issue of degree instead of category that can inclined from one end to other and vice versa.

Most favorite of all times division is the Hierarchy-based Classification, which is organized and designed on the base of three levels of management, highly favorable for managers. Apart from the basic hierarchal division certain researchers and scholars are also interested in the categorization of these levels in generic form. Further in this context, gave the generic based management competencies that were called as “Supra Competencies”.

The second competence aspect deals with the subject specific and functional job knowledge that is mandatory for functional objectives. It can

also be comprehended as skills and theoretical knowledge mainly targeting trainings in education related institutions. In nutshell the technical skills consist on knowledge and education of processes, methodological knowledge and certain technique structured and designed precisely to carry out special tasks and activities in addition to the ability of using machines and tools to complete those tasks.

Nevertheless, the scope and application competencies according to the nature of the task specification which is defined as “a level to which competencies are related to for the execution of broader or narrow range of tasks varying from low to high task specificity.” The second category is “generic management competencies” that includes the competencies of jobs related to management and are required in all sorts of managerial official jobs, irrespective of industry, function of job, hierarchy and nature of the business. These can also be related as a non-industry and non-firm specific competences which includes skills & knowledge with respect to all the managers for all kind of jobs and the industry they work in.

According to studies, the ability of resolving problems of an individual depends on his effective ability that includes analytical capacity, creativity, systematic thinking and cognitive thinking. Experts define process of thinking as “a systematic manipulation of information, building of concepts and way of searching for reasons and solving the problems so cognitive thinking skills set the framework for solving work-based issues.

Meta-competencies are relatively more related to one’s particular personality traits and characteristics in a way that such cognitive abilities are basically determined wholly by the family traits that are inherited and the further brought-up. This last competencies’ class can be comprehended as underlying personality characteristics & traits of managers that are the content of psychology. This class is distinct from rest of the classes in this context that all these are core traits, values & motives, intents & images of managers. Such individual attributes describe one’s specific personality. These personality traits as underlying values also explain how individual behaves or reacts on given situation. Therefore, it is a significant variable in the determination of human demeanor. These traits are hard to count objectively.

These individually personal traits or motivational traits include one's achievement orientation, ambitiousness, confidence, honesty and integrity with assertiveness and patience. These traits describe the way a manager reacts or behaves in a situation and how he approaches and view a certain issue. So, these personality and individual variables have significant implications and effects on a manager's skills, behavior and ultimately his performance.

In nutshell, these traits are one of the stable parts of one's personality and competency required for the significantly better performance in job and also influences the capabilities and behaviors of managers in different areas as well. Competence in this category portrays the constant traits that cannot be changed easily. Also, this cannot be developed or learned formally. Therefore, very significant attention must be given in testing of all these traits while recruiting, making workplace decisions and promotions.

Specific set of abilities and knowledge that makes a teacher successful are the teacher competencies. To improve the abilities of pupil, diverse and broad range of qualities are required from the teachers especially in difficult situations where certain types of decisions are taken daily. Some of the jobs require the ability of precise judgement and the practice of competencies including the domain of teaching. We all have seen the super power of a teacher to transform the whole life and personality of a student. Also there is an obvious relationship of teaching and the accomplishments of students. Many researchers have worked on this hypothesis and proved it to be true. They also gave the conclusion that among a number of factors affecting a child's performance teachers are most influential.

Now we can also form a profile of ideal classrooms through our researches on certain questions including; what are the main differences in perfect teachers and imperfect one? And how the acknowledgement of these differences can be used to develop better teaching skills? Experimentations done under a research work on educational ways that are effective gave these types of competencies that produce the best outcomes.

The expected outcomes of better learning are given by many researches from the teachers using explanatory techniques and strategies.

Effective learning is the result of versatile setting, when the teacher welcomes more questions and open instructions are given instead of the block pet content related instructions and pace is used.

Following are the clear benchmarks of ideal methods for teachers (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Knight, 2012).

1. Instructor/ teacher decide the instructions domain.
2. Teacher draws the success rate borders.
3. Instructor/Teacher guides the students about the guideline apart from the lesson.
4. A proper model of successive use of skills and knowledge is shown to students for better understanding.
5. Pre-evaluation of students' ability to learn by the teacher.
6. In problematic situations specific remedies to acquire skills and knowledges provided by teacher.
7. A proper conclusion of the lesson is given by the teacher.

One of the major aspects in the analysis of the students' learning is the evaluation methods. This factor is even more important than the subject content and other standards of education. Evaluation is not merely for giving and marking students for grades and giving them degrees but also they are super essential for the determined focus of students and to instigate the study drive in them.

Six core functions of evaluation are given by Gibbs (2003):

- Attentiveness and time of student.
- Proper learning activities for students
- The proper and effective feedback on time for students' self-analysis.
- The impression of equality and discipline on students.
- Assessment through grading.
- The idea of broader horizon of knowledge encompassing both the course and subject materials apart from course.

In last few years some benchmark standards of education systems are introduced in United Kingdom. One of them implemented in Scotland is the "Chartered teacher Programme". It also includes the professional scheme marked on the standards of designed standard for higher education

teachers for the selection of Associates (seniors) in the Academy of Higher Education.

Such strategies are attainable and go smoothly with the state policies for the development of education system and by pressuring the people for better performance. Though these evaluation processes are to strengthen the professionals but they sometimes take it as external stimuli for their probing and analysis. This is the very reason that they are sensitive about these standards and systems.

The issue with these is that apart from the development and betterment they also cause some fragmentation. It is being discussed that the clash and conflict arising on the fundamentals of teaching standards are based on the mixed sentiments regarding the concept. Mostly between the two categories of layman and professionals who see the concept regarding results and betterment respectively in regard to the contradiction in the particular circumstances.

In this perception the professional standards of teaching are considered helpful and prolific for the diverse education so they also become a benchmark for the quality of teaching and teacher's capabilities. If designed precisely the standards must have the core aim of focusing on the students' learning, scale of teaching competence, analysis methods, collective evaluation and profound performance.

These standards can prove to be a useful tool for the betterment of quality, professionalism and trainings. But there must be defined lined between the cruxes of generic standards and specified ones. When defined distinctively the generic standards deal with the common perceptions whereas the specified or operationalized ones are linked with the judgmental ability. Some arguments also describe that:

- The core control is developed by these standards over the session of training or practice, which makes the authenticity of the profession stronger.
- The expectations on the shoulders on teachers developed by these standards to go in accordance with the set rules makes the classroom activity as unique and creative which is suitable to some but not all.

- For the evaluation, accountability and analysis of teachers' performance standards and competencies provide the enormous fundamentals and scales along with the tools for further learning.
- The evaluation methods and system formed under these standards and competencies flourishes the learning process of teachers as well only if they let them assist the team in their personal inquiries (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

The critiques on the system of these standards relate to the conflict that these standards should focus basically on the neutralized learning of teachers, rendering their own perspectives as well. But this perception can lead to a common and not-so-strong bond between teachers and students regarding their performance and results, also neglecting the base content issues.

Some other critiques debate that:

- These standards are producing robotic fragmented results on teacher's part and are demolishing the uniqueness of personalities.
- They stress more on the numerical behaviors and results instead of the individual qualities & pressure controlling abilities.
- Gives more weightage to the perspectives of those who made the standards and not of the distinctive teachers' perceptions on things.
- Neglect the mutual behavior of teaching competencies.
- According to the instrumentalist approach these standards lead to the situation where teachers' abilities work and methods are defragmented and redesigned to make them just the basic instructors and assessment taker.

The standards system is explained as a redesigning of the old perceptions and rules of teaching along with the researches' results and better performance. These also give birth to the risk of anti-professionalism attitude and deconstruction of roles of teachers. The results from the apprehensive research on teachers have illuminated the world with the idea of reviving the knowledge of one's self as a teacher according to the latest need for context.. This in the long run is expected to negatively affect the

teachers' response towards the needs of students. So some staunch objections are seen in regards to the setting of these standards as the benchmark for the assessment of teachers' performance.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Research design refers to as the plan or proposal to conduct research. It involves the interaction of philosophy, strategies of inquiry, and specific method. The philosophical ideas in research always need to be identified because they influence the practices of a researcher. These philosophical ideas are termed as world view, paradigms; epistemologies' and ontology or broadly conceived research methodologies by different researchers.

The philosophical paradigm behind the current study "Assessing the teaching competencies of teacher educators with special reference to national professional standards for teachers in Baluchistan" was pragmatic. The nature of this study was exploratory as well as descriptive. The combinations of qualitative and quantitative techniques were applied in whole research study commonly known as mixed method approach. The rationale behind taking the mixed method approach is to use the best opportunity to achieve the purpose of the study and address the planned research questions.

Mixed methods research is one of the three paradigms of social research where the other two paradigms – qualitative and quantitative are put together to increase trust in the results of the research. Mixed method approach offers methodological pluralism. It is an eclectic approach that makes it superior research in comparison to single method research. It combines methodological choices of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide more rigor to the research endeavor. To produce the desirable results, both the approaches within mixed methods approach should have an equal status and they should interact with each other. We can infer here that both qualitative and quantitative approaches should have equal representation and power towards balanced and reliable results. All the three approaches support in advancing social justice agenda,

particularly mixed methods approach. Mixed methods approach provides a platform to undertake social research studies that expand the horizons of social justice.

3.2 Strategy

The study was carried out using mixed method as a research approach. A structured survey questionnaire was developed to meet the purpose. The questionnaire was developed based on a five-point Likert scale. The survey was administered to illicit the required data from the study participants. Five out of ten professional standards were selected for analysis to gauge teaching competencies of the educators. These standards included: subject matter knowledge, instructional planning and strategies, assessment, effective communication and use of ICT and learning environment. Semi structure interview of teacher educators was conducted in order to address the proposed research questions.

3.3 Population

The population of the study consisted of those teacher educators who were teaching the course of Associate Degree in Education (ADE) at teacher training institutions in Balochistan. Additionally, students enrolled in the ADE program were also part of the study population.

3.4 Sampling Techniques

Only those teacher educators and students were the sample of this research study who was involved in ADE program of studies at 16 elementary colleges and 6 universities across Balochistan. For the purpose of sampling the researcher applied multistage sampling techniques. Initially stratified sampling technique was used in order to select sample institutions. Total 8 teacher training institutions and three universities from two different strata were selected on the basis of equal wattage. In the following stage, 20 students from each sampled institution (N = 220) were sampled applying simple random sampling technique. Whereas, 55 teacher educators were also sampled based on the technique of simple random sampling. Finally, 10 teacher educators were selected from the same

sample (one from each institute) were selected through convenient sampling technique. These teachers were the part of survey and interview.

3.5 Research Instrument

A survey form was developed and administered to describe the demographic information of the study participants. Based on the analysis of the national professional standards, a survey questionnaire was developed to gauge expected difficulties of the participants. This survey was prepared to analyze teaching competencies of the educators. The survey questionnaire was used to collect the general opinion of teacher educators and students about teaching competencies based on national standards. The survey questionnaire was divided into two parts; first part was based on demographic profile. The second part of questionnaire was designed to identify five different competencies based on national professional standards.

3.6 Semi-Structure Interview Protocol

A semi structured interview protocol was designed to answer research question no. 3 and 4. The semi-structured interview protocol was developed as a mean of obtaining information. In interviews the instructors asked about to identify five different competencies based on national professional standards. Interviews were conducted according to the availability of the director, deputy directors, assistant director and principals of Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority.

4. Discussion

This study has enormous implications for policy actors, educationists, education managers, teachers, and teacher educators. Based on the findings, it can be inferred that teacher education in in Pakistan needs a profound policy. The absence of teacher education policy poses challenges to the direction of teacher education program. However, the policy was not stipulated for teacher education. The broader education policy theoretically outlined new courses and curriculum for teacher

education in Pakistan. In the post-18th amendment scenario, there should be an all-encompassing teacher education policy that could respond context-specific. The new policy should be in line with Cultural fabric and dimensions of the province so that it could be translated into practice. Earlier, most of the policies used to driven by top-down approaches which created unbridgeable gulf between policy and practice.

The study implies to the current states of professional standards for teachers in Pakistan. The participants suggested that the standards are already time-barred. Therefore, these standards need to be revised, improved and contextualized as per the orientation of the latest theories of the field. Another finding recommends that there should be separate standards for teacher educators and teacher education programs. The current standards are formed in consideration to the needs of teachers. Therefore, new Standards for teacher educators should be framed. Policy of teacher education. There was a mixture of opinions among the participants in the matter of more autonomy to teachers and teacher educators. Some of the educators suggested more autonomy and empowerment of teachers. Others supported the idea of benchmarking competencies of teachers and setting standard for both teacher and teacher educators based recent research. This study provides directions for future research in the field. The study highlights that research needs to be carried out in both Pre-service and In-service teacher education. The research will explore context-specific issues so that the programs and policies are in line with the contextual realities of the province.

This study further suggests studies to be initiated pertaining to reforms in teacher education in Balochistan. This could be replicated in other provinces of Pakistan. Thus, broadening the scope of the research endeavor on a national scale. Furthermore, this study focused only five of the professional standards for teachers in Pakistan. More studies need to be done capturing the remaining standards.

Additionally, research needs to be launched to analyze the needs of Balochistan province in consideration to indigenous realities and set new standards for teacher education. Another area research project could be the revision and improvement in the current standards for teachers in Pakistan as these standards have already lost currency. Another area for research in

Pakistan may be on induction programs for teachers. There is no induction program currently underway on induction of teachers after recruitment. This notion could be advanced with more research on teacher certification and licensing.

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