Prospective Teachers’ Perspective Regarding a New Teachers’ Development Program in Two of the Government Colleges of Education in Gilgit-Baltistan

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Abstract

In order to address the gaps of traditional teachers' development programs, the government of Pakistan, with the financial support of United States’ Aids for International Development, (USAID) launched a new teachers’ preparation program called Advance Diploma in Education. While collecting data, this study particularly sought the opinions of those prospective teachers who had completed their programs. Therefore, the study focused on matters such as the availability of teaching positions, pay scales, the curriculum of the ADE program, teaching approaches and availability of instructional resources. It was noted that there was recognition among the students and instructors about the productivity and the usefulness of the new ADE program. Additionally, there was an acknowledgment that a new generation of teachers is being produced through the ADE program that will really change the dynamics of classrooms in Pakistan. However, it seemed that a number of issues, such as limited employment opportunities for ADE graduates, lack of coherent recruitment policies, and the continuation of the traditional program, were some of the primary concerns of both the students and instructors.

1. Introduction

There is an expectation from the teaching force that they must have the ability to give its students the tools to work with others, the skills to problem solve, a sense of responsibility, and a passion for nation building. Therefore, teachers’ preparation and development have always remained a major focus of empirical research around the world.
for bringing improvements in the teaching and learning the culture of schools. A good number of such research also emerged from Pakistan and other less-developing nations, which has highlighted a number of issues regarding the productivity of traditional teacher preparation programs. Issues such as the length, content, and teaching practices of traditional teachers’ programs (PTC, CT, B.Ed.) are some of the areas that have been the main topics of researchers’ concerns (USAID, 2006a). Therefore, the teachers and the teaching profession are responsible for not nurturing the desired capacities in students, as well as for the low quality of education in less-developing countries (Perry, Chapman, & Snydar, 1995).

An international donor states the following about the quality and standard of pre- and in-service teachers’ preparation programs in Pakistan: “The teacher education programs …are not of the calibre to significantly raise the level of knowledge and skills of teachers to have any measurable impact on the students’ learning” (USAID, 2006b). In order to address the previously mentioned weaknesses of traditional teachers’ development programs, the government of Pakistan, with the financial support of the United States’ Aids for International Development (USAID) launched a new teachers’ preparation program called Advance Diploma in Education (ADE). The program was simultaneously launched in four provinces of Pakistan, including the Gilgit-Baltistan region, through those institutions which offer teachers’ education programs.

**Objectives of the Study:**

In order to improve teachers’ education in Pakistan, the USAID-funded project has defined three broad objectives: 1) improve the system and policies that support teachers, teacher educators, and educational managers; 2) support the Higher Education Commission and Ministry of Education institutes in developing and implementing programs for the new pre-service teacher education degree; and 3) develop a plan for implementing the new curricula for new and existing teachers. Although each broad objective has two specific objectives, the study only focused on the first objective, which has the following two specific objectives: 1) develop plans and policies for teacher development and 2) develop plans for implementing the new curricula for new and existing teachers. Therefore, the
study focused on matters such as availability of teaching jobs, financial incentives, the curriculum of the ADE program, and the content knowledge of instructors. Moreover, the study examined what measures have been taken officially to develop uniform policies across the nation for the entry requirements of the teaching force after the launching of the new teachers’ preparation program.

2. METHODOLOGY

It has been reported that a very small number of qualitative studies have investigated issues pertaining to teaching and learning practices in Pakistan: “Where there is research, it is mostly quantitative and is not used effectively for evidence-based policy making…research has rarely built in feedback loops to inform practice” (USAID, 2006c). Therefore, qualitative methods used to collect data for this study and some of the data collection tools consisted of focus groups and informal discussions with the students, observations of teaching practices, and review of the curriculum of the ADE program. The study not only integrated the perspectives of those students who were enrolled in teacher colleges at the time of data collection but also sought the opinion of students who had earned ADE degrees. In addition to students, the opinions of ten instructors from two colleges were also integrated into this study. Both the focus group discussions and formal interviews were recorded and the duration of these activities were 40-45 minutes. Through a convenience sampling strategy, two colleges of education were selected for the study; since the launching of the ADE program, both the CT and PTC programs have been phased out from the two teacher education colleges.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers recognized that the students’ academic achievements, whether situated in developed or developing countries, are largely contingent upon the teachers’ preparation programs that cover a host of factors, such as length of the training program, instructors’ verbal fluency and subject matter knowledge, availability of instructional materials, and instructors’ know-how in using available instructional materials (Craig, Kraft, & Plessis, 1988). Therefore, many countries around the world have designed their
teachers’ preparation programs to especially address the previously mentioned elements. However, a good number of countries, particularly those in developing countries, are still struggling with the challenges of developing quality teachers’ preparation programs. Pakistan is one of the developing countries where the standard and quality of traditional teachers’ preparation is questionable. “The paramount issue facing education planners in Pakistan today is how to recruit, train, deploy, and improve the quality of teachers in primary and secondary schools” (Hoodbhoy, 1988).

This situation has serious implication for the overall quality of education, particularly the public educational system of Pakistan, which caters to the educational needs of 75% of school going children, because it has been reported that the poor performance of teachers in schools is attributed to the gaps in pre- and in-service teacher preparation program (USAID, 2006a). These circumstances led the researchers to use the terms under-educated, under-trained, and undervalued to define the teaching profession in Pakistan (Elliot & Rizvi, 2005). It has been pointed out that limited pre- and in-service programs are the major causes of not achieving the desired goals in the education sector, especially in the rural areas of Pakistan (UNESCO, 2003). The following quotation explains some of the shortcomings of teachers’ preparation programs in Pakistan, “The curriculum of these programs fails to develop in teachers the required pedagogical skills, subject knowledge, classroom delivery and questioning skills that would make these courses/programs worthwhile” (USAID, 2006b). Over the years, Pakistan has launched many interventions to bring improvement in the teachers’ education programs; however, research suggests these programs were only confined to the building of infrastructure rather than focusing on quality issues. It has been pointed out that the productivity of traditional teachers’ preparation programs, such as PTC, CT, and B.Ed., became questionable due to such gaps as teacher-centered lecture methods, the brief duration of teachers’ preparation programs, and the absence of monitoring the quality of teacher development programs (Kizilbash, 1988).

It has been reported that in comparison to other countries, the duration of traditional teachers’ programs in Pakistan is brief (UNESCO, 2003). This is especially true
in the rural areas, where there are acute shortages of teachers, particularly female teachers; individuals with high school degrees (10 years of schooling) are often offered a teaching job. Researchers pointed out that the content knowledge, as well as the teaching skills of teachers, can have a positive influence on students’ academic and personal behavior (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991). However, it has been noted that very limited attention has been paid to properly address the previously mentioned traits or tendencies among the students while teaching different subjects in Pakistani classrooms. For instance, while elaborating on the role of teachers’ education in the development of moral values of Pakistani students, Alliani (2011) stated that the courses offered through these programs only make an individual fit for the teaching positions at the primary and middle level, without contributing to the character building of students. It is recognized that the role of teachers is crucial in nurturing the said tendencies. “The importance of the role of the teacher as an agent of change, promoting understanding and tolerance, has never been so more obvious than today” (Delors, Mufti, & Amagi, 1996).

Limited financial resources have been attributed as one of the factors in offering productive and innovative pre- and in-service programs for teachers in Pakistan, “Pakistan is the only country in South Asia where public expenditure on education as a proportion of GNP has gone down since 1990” (Haq & Haq, 1998). A very small number of in-service programs are available for educators in Pakistan; however, the productivity and contribution of these programs are questionable, according to the research. For instance, Khan (2002) and Warwick and Reimers (1995) pointed out that educators do not entertain these in-service opportunities as a way of learning; instead, they attend these sessions in a holiday mood and as an opportunity to earn some financial benefits. Another issue which makes these interventions less effective is the absence of a follow-up mechanism (Sullivan, 2002). However, the success of these programs is largely dependent upon a system of accountability and a follow-up mechanism (Brennen, 2001). Moreover, there is no such mechanism that could assess the training needs of school teachers according to their subjects and required skills; generally, the nature of the relationship between the
teachers and principals plays an important role in the selection of teachers for a particular workshop or training (Khan, 2010).

**Major Findings of the Study:**

One of the characteristics of the ADE program is that the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has endorsed the new ADE program with the declaration that in future ADE, not the traditional programs (PTC, CT, B.Ed), will be the only requirement to enter into the teaching profession. Unlike PTC and CT programs, which have a one year duration, students can only be eligible to earn the ADE degree when they complete the 67 credit hours within a two year period (in four semesters). Under the new program, prospective teachers are offered a variety of professional, compulsory and content courses with the aim that they will develop a clear understanding about interactive strategies, reflective practices, practice-oriented teaching approaches, information technology, and content knowledge.

There was recognition among the students and instructors regarding the productivity and the usefulness of the new ADE program. The instructors were explicit in highlighting the merits of the ADE program, as one of the instructors mentioned, “There is an acknowledgment among the people that a new generation of teachers is being produced through the ADE program that would really change the dynamics of classrooms in Pakistan.” While comparing the ADE program with the traditional PTC and CT programs, the students acknowledged that the content/curricula of the ADE program contain greater depth and knowledge. Students were of the opinion that the teaching practices of the new program are more innovative than the programs of a university that offers distance education in Pakistan. “If you compare the students of the two programs, I am very positive that the students of ADE will demonstrate a greater understanding of the teaching and learning processes as compared to their counterpart”.

One of the features of the new program is that the students’ and instructors’ learning takes place simultaneously. For instance, at the inception of a new semester, teachers are provided with the training/workshops in their respective subjects. A curriculum expert, national or international, helps the instructors develop a curriculum.
according to the needs of the students and society. The curriculum they develop provides a brief description of the course, learning outcomes, learning and teaching approaches, distribution of weekly topics, grading policies, and sample assignments; it also includes a list of suggested reference books/web links. During these sessions, opportunities are also provided to the instructors to learn new approaches to teaching, usage of modern technology, and the development of curricula.

The instructors acknowledged that under the ADE program, the instructors are empowered and the central role of the teacher has been recognized, as one of the instructors stated the following: “The program has given a new status to the instructors; it has recognized the central role of teachers in the teaching and learning processes. Teachers now have a role in curriculum development, a process that was once the sole responsibility of the National Curriculum Wing and Provincial Textbook Boards.” Another important element of the new program is a practicum, where the prospective teachers are provided with the opportunities to experience a real classroom situation. Students pointed out that developing portfolio can be seen as an attempt to develop a link between theory and practices. It was noticed during the review of some of the portfolios that students would integrate a variety of activities in their portfolios, such as teaching approaches, classroom management, and other related activities. Regarding the productivity of portfolios, students mentioned that this process has multiple benefits because it not only helps them to revisit the content knowledge of various classroom practices, but it also helps them to reflect on their own learning.

There was a consensus among the students that the ADE program contains all the ingredients needed for preparing a modern teaching force capable of adopting student-centered and practice-oriented approaches. However, it was noticed that students had some reservations about the skills of their instructors regarding the implementation of the curricula. Particularly, they were concerned about the limited proficiency of their teachers in the English language and their limited skills in the application of modern technology [computer and internet] in teaching and learning processes. It was noted that, except for the Urdu and Islamic studies courses, all other courses were in English, which was a
challenging situation for some teachers. One of the instructors stated the following about the limitations of the English language, “I am teaching the subject of [ ] for the last 34 years, but now I am feeling that I have not enough capabilities to understand the literature provided in the English language.” During the observation of an English class, it was noted that the instructor used Urdu as a medium for teaching despite the fact that the instructor had a very good understanding of the content and methodology of the said course. Additionally, the course description was explicit regarding the use of English as a medium for teaching while teaching English subjects. Some of the instructors agreed that although it was expected for them to enrich their curriculum through downloading resources from the internet, a lack of internet skills limited their efforts in this regard, as one of the instructors stated, “I know students are neither happy nor satisfied with my teaching practices…we were not provided with the prescribed books [unit-wise] due to the understanding that we would download the required material from the internet, but I don’t have the internet and computer skills to search the required material.”

Both the current and graduating students pointed out that a number of program-related ambiguities made them uncertain about their future plans. It was also felt that a sense of disappointment among the ADE graduates was quite explicit, as one of the students who had earned his ADE stated the following: “I had secured admission in a technology related discipline in one of the universities in Islamabad when the provincial government launched new ADE program …. I left that university and pursued the new program because at that time it looked very attractive….now I have realized it was a mistake”. They (students) had multiple arguments against the ADE program, which they believed could discourage potential students from pursuing the new program. One of their primary concerns was that despite the fact it has been officially declared that the candidate with a CT will not be entertained for a teaching position, candidates with CT degrees are still being considered for teaching positions in the region. One of the ADE graduates stated the following: “Recently the provincial government filled 500 teaching positions, we had this expectation that candidates with ADE degree would be preferred for this position compared to candidates with a traditional qualification such as CT, but it did not happen…”
a very small number of ADE graduates have been adjusted against these teaching positions”. They added that there are gaps in the recruitment policies which give equal weight to ADE and CT candidates.

While comparing the ADE and CT programs, one of the instructors mentioned, “Since the one-year CT program is not rigorous, students score good grades in this program, … the good grades increase the chances of employment because recruitment policies in Pakistan consider the high grades of applicants while offering jobs.” Students also mentioned that when the new ADE program was launched, it was promised that candidates with an ADE degree would not only be offered jobs upon the completion of their programs, but they would also be given good pay scales. The said arguments were also endorsed by their instructors, who said that at the time of the new program’s launch, they were sent to far-flung areas to convince students to pursue the ADE program that would ensure good pay scales and benefits. The ADE graduates asserted that it is ironic that a huge investment was made to introduce a state of the art program, but due to gaps in the recruitment policies and lack of clear directions, the productivity of the new program and its future has become questionable, as one of the students stated, “Do you know where are the ADE graduates after the completion of their ADE degree… they are working as head constable and constables in police department… others are working in places where the nature of their jobs is not compatible with their ADE qualification”.

The ADE graduates stated that they knocked on every door, from the HEC to their local government, but their concerns were not addressed. They pointed out that the people at the decision-making level lack in-depth knowledge and information about educational issues; therefore, these issues are not resolved. One of the students pointed out that under normal circumstances, one cannot take the private examinations of those academic programs that are considered professional degrees, such as medicine, engineering, etc; the student then questioned why candidates are allowed to take CT exams privately since these are also considered to be professional degrees. He suggested that the government should develop clear policies; otherwise, the new program might not be able to achieve its objectives.
One of the implications of this situation was that when the students realized that ADE degree was not helpful in securing employment, they started pursuing other disciplines, such as an MA in English, Behavioural Sciences, International Relations, etc. One of the instructors reflected on this situation, “…It is ironic that after making such a huge investment, the program is not achieving its goals… the program is primarily launched for developing teachers, but students are pursuing other disciplines and other careers…it seems that the government institutions apparently have not done adequate preparation before launching the new program”. Students pointed out that the general public has little awareness of the ADE program: “We are having difficulty convincing employers that the ADE degree is recognized by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan… potential teachers will be only encouraged to pursue the ADE program when the government ensures the availability of jobs and offers the BPS [16] compatible with their degrees.” ADE graduates further stated that at the time of inception of the new program, some of their instructors warned them that ADE has no future. One of the students stated, “One of my teachers told me that ADE has no future; therefore, he suggested I should do a one-year B.Ed. the program as well in order to secure a job.”

4. Discussion and Analysis

The launching of the ADE program was a timely initiative, since there is recognition, especially in the context of the developing world, that quality rather than quantity should be the focus of educational reforms and interventions, to address both the social and economic issues of these countries. Unlike the developed nations where certain factors have a strong influence on the students’ success, researchers attributed the better academic achievements of students in the less developing nations to the availability of a highly skilled teaching force in schools (Davies & Harber, 1997). Therefore, redesigning and redefining the teachers’ preparation program needs to be considered as one of the important determinants of the quality of education in Pakistan. Creating a new teachers’ development program is not an isolated effort; instead, as the study noted, designing a new program is a holistic process that involves multiple processes, such as the provision of
adequate physical and human resources, updated instructional resources, devising policies, and developing a consensus on reform initiatives.

Evidence from developed and developing countries suggests that countries are continuously wrestling with the issues of teachers’ preparation and recruitment (Tan, 2015). Therefore, one can assume that problems, issues, and challenges discussed in this research are not exceptions, especially, in a country like Pakistan, where multiple education systems follow different policies regarding recruitment, curriculum, evaluations, etc. However, based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that extensive research is required to explore the various dimensions of the new ADE program, with the sole objective of refining the program and using the outcomes of research for evidence-based policymaking. The positive aspect of the launching of the new program is that there is a recognition among the stakeholders that traditional teachers’ preparation programs are no longer compatible with the requirements of 21st-century classrooms, where practice and reflection-based teaching approaches are considered as the essence of teaching and learning the culture.

As noted in the study, the donor ensured the timely provision of all the resources required for the teachers’ preparation program, such as instructional resources, technology, training, and orientation of the ADE program. Even at the official level, the HEC endorsed and recognized the new ADE program with the commitment that after the launching of the new program, the traditional programs, such as PTC/CT, will be discontinued; as a result, a good number of the institutions stopped offering traditional programs. Both the students and instructors mentioned that their initial reaction to the new program was very positive, even though some of their instructors were busy spreading a propaganda campaign, saying that the new program would be discontinued the wrapping up of the project. Likewise, there were gaps in the skills of teachers regarding their proficiency in the English language and computer/internet skills; however, it was a good beginning in the sense that a foundation was provided to address the quality issues in Pakistani schools with the financial support of USAID.
However, based on the findings of this study, it seems that a number of issues neutralize the effect of this good beginning. It is very much clear that people in the developing countries like Pakistan join the teaching profession not for the sake of altruistic or intrinsic motivation, but rather for extrinsic factors, such as job security and salary, which are the essential elements of becoming teachers (Ramzan, Iqbal, & Khan, 2013) (Chivore, 1998). Although promises made with the ADE students during the initial years of the inception of the ADE program, such as the new program would increase employment opportunities for them, such promises did not materialize as reported by the students. The ADE graduates mentioned that neither they were given good pay scales keeping in mind the rigorous nature of the ADE program, nor were they entertained on a priority basis when the provincial government hired 500 teachers in the region.

One of the implications of this situation is that it generates a negative message that the ADE program may not help them to secure employment. Therefore, they started looking for employment in other fields, such as police and other departments, as the students noted. It is ironic that, after making huge investments in these students and preparing them for teaching positions, they are not being properly utilized. The donor fulfilled his responsibility by providing a very strong base and a roadmap that could address the issues of the quality of education in Pakistan. Although at the governmental level the importance and need for a new program were recognized, clear and coherent policies regarding the induction of the new graduates were not properly addressed or were given little attention. Another issue, as the students highlighted, was that both the ADE graduates and the candidates with the CT degree were given equal weight, despite the fact that CT has already been phased out from this region. A review of the advertisement appeared in the national dailies was the evidence of the said phenomenon, which conveyed the message that candidates with ADE and CTE degrees would be equally entertained.

While discussing the conditions necessary for the success of any educational reforms, researchers have identified a number of elements needed, such as building coalitions, making teaching a career of choice (Morrison, 2015), ensuring ownership consensus among stakeholders, (Maroun, Samman, & Moujaes, 2008), developing the
substance of policies on research (George, 1987), and making a clear road map of implementation of reforms initiatives. It seems that a number of the aforementioned factors were not properly addressed when one analyzed the role of implementing agencies and the problems faced by the students. Furthermore, one can assume that after the launching of new programs and the wrapping up of the donors involvements, either limited or no work on the part of the government has been done to track whether or not the schools are benefitting from a new pool of teachers, or what needs to be done for the recruitment of ADE graduates through proper policy making.

As mentioned earlier, a new teachers’ development program is in place; now is the time to get the benefit of a new program. The very first step in this regard is to educate the policy and the decision-making entities about the importance and utility of the new program. Just like the initial years of the launching of the ADE program, a mass campaign was initiated through electronic and mass media, concerted efforts are required to convince the provincial governments to extend the due importance to ADE programs through clear policy-making and reviewing recruitment policies. Since the CT program has already been phased out, practices such as giving equal weight to ADE and CT graduates should not be repeated in the future. Likewise, it should be recognized that teaching-related programs are professional degrees, just like medicine and engineering, and providing students with the opportunities to take the private exams of these disciplines should be altered through policymaking.

The question arises - who would educate the policymakers to review their policies? In western countries, especially in the USA, there are research organizations besides higher education institutions that help their government to devise policies. However, in our context, such a mechanism is still in the infancy stage; a culture needs to be introduced that could ensure that whatever research that is focusing on the various dimensions of teachers’ education must be used for policymaking. In this regard, the education faculty within universities can play an important role, by providing a forum for the policymakers and stakeholders to engage in a discourse regarding uniform policies pertaining to teachers’ recruitment across the nation. Teachers’ induction and recruitment remained a major
component of not only extensive research in the developed countries but also played an important role in establishing structures for the newly qualified teachers (Breaux & Wong, 2003). However, very limited attention has been paid to this aspect of teachers’ development in Pakistan. Although the National Accreditation Council for Teachers Education (NACTE) has been established to determine the quality and standards of teachers’ education in Pakistan, which is an appreciable beginning, NACTE may also be given a mandate for devising procedures/policies for the induction and recruitment of newly qualified ADE teachers at the national level.

REFERENCES


