

Cultural Scripts Resist Reforms in Teacher Education

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Abstract

As a part of a huge intervention in teacher education programs in Pakistan the author had a firsthand experience of how the "habits of mind" hinder in changing the practices and cultures of teachers and institutions respectively. It has been a part of traditional teaching in Pakistan that only one text book is followed by teachers and students as the only source of knowledge. This not only provides limited knowledge but also inculcates the habit of rote memorization and reproduction of text in exams. No critical thinking and critical pedagogy is adopted. It was tried in the Pre-STEP initiative by USAID and HEC to change this culture at the teacher education institutions. New course guides were developed to initiate research based teaching and learning. The researcher talked to the teacher educators at six institutions twice with a gap of six months to see how they adopted the new culture and what stopped them to change their practices. This paper highlights and identifies what aspects of sociology of teaching stop teacher educators in Pakistan from adopting innovative modes of teaching.

Keywords: Sociology of teaching, Cultural Script, Teacher Education, Practices, Reform

1. Introduction

Until 1998 the teacher education programs being offered at various institutions of teacher education included PTC – Primary Teaching Certificate and CT –Certificate of Teaching, the basic qualifications which were pre-requisite to become an elementary schoolteacher and B.Ed was the pre-requisite for becoming a secondary schoolteacher. None of these programs was of more than one year duration. A major challenge faced by the planners was the political influence in teacher recruitment and placement which had resulted in a huge difference between demand and supply in various regions of the country as per subject specialization and level of qualification (Kizilbash, 1998). Within the teacher education institutions there were issues like lack of facilities, irrelevant content of teacher education textbooks and no set procedure of appointment of teacher educators. With all these conditions these institutions were producing approximately 40,000 teacher education graduates of different levels annually (Kizilbash, 1998, Muhammad, 2000). Due to a ban on appointments in government jobs the number of unemployed graduated teachers was increasing. For those who had been inducted in teaching in-service teacher education was almost non-existing.

The document of National Education Policy 1998-2010 provided situational analysis of teaching and teacher education during the last decade of twentieth century. It begins with the statement “The quality of education is directly related to the quality of instruction in the classrooms. The teacher is considered the most crucial factor in implementing all education reforms at the grass root level” (p.47). One whole chapter of policy further elaborates the issues and challenges of teacher education programs and status of the teaching profession in Pakistan. It is important to understand that the issues and challenges faced by the policy makers ten years ago are still prevailing in more or less the same intensity. The first issue addressed is that teaching is a last-choice profession and it results in the further two challenges which are lower commitment levels, and lower motivation levels towards the profession.

The National Education Policy 1998-2010, keeping in view all these issues and challenges gave clear-cut recommendations as well as detailed implementation strategies to achieve the objectives were given in the document. Major initiatives in teacher education based upon the policy provisions of National Education Policy 1998 include the establishment of Provincial/Regional Institutes of Teacher Education in each province. These bodies mainly worked for the in-service teacher training for the first time in country. In collaboration with various international donor agencies in-service trainings were conducted at large scale around the country. Many but not all Government Colleges of Elementary Teachers were facilitated to improve quality of instruction in pre-service teacher education programs.

Keeping in view rapid developments on both domestic and international fronts, the Federal Ministry of Education realized that a new articulation of the educational priorities and future of Pakistan was needed in light of the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All agenda. National Education Policy 2009 includes a chapter titled as “Raising the Quality of Education”. The chapter begins with referring to the National Education Assessment System Report (2007) to address the low quality of Pakistan’s education. It is further stated in the introductory paragraph of this chapter that, “improving quality requires action in the areas of teacher quality, curriculum and pedagogy, textbooks, assessment approaches, and in learning environment and facilities”(p 42). For the first time a policy had a complete chapter addressing quality issues in education. It is also significant to note that the first section of this chapter is “*Improving Teacher Quality*” which is building upon the same

assumption as in the previous policy. The initial paragraph indicates that the policy makers believe teachers to be the major source of bringing quality into education. This belief is widely maintained and accepted by the educators.

Besides the policy documents and national surveys it was reported again and again by individual researchers and in World Bank, UNESCO and USAID reports that all programs and courses of teacher education in Pakistan mostly focus on providing prospective teachers “a handful of recipes for good teaching” handing over a “fixed and static model of teaching” to the novice teachers, and giving them a limited “self-image of being a tiny screw in the big machine of education” (Siddiqui, 2010, Bashir ud Din, Bana & Afridi, 2012). Moreover there have never been common criteria established for “good teaching” or to assess the quality of teaching at various levels (Siddiqui, 2010).

2. New TE Curriculum Reform 2010

The year 2009 marked a serious initiative in teacher education in Pakistan. On the one hand, the Policy and Planning Wing under the Federal Ministry of Education announced the new National Education Policy in August 2009 after a long review and revision process; on the other hand, the Ministry, with the cooperation of UNESCO and the financial support of USAID, developed National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan. These standards frame a vision of the qualifications Pakistan expects of its teachers. “These standards are part of a larger reform effort and developed in close coordination with the National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE) through the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and USAID's STEP program (Strengthening Teacher Education in Pakistan)” (USAID, 2009). In the same year a new project named Pre-Service Teacher Education in Pakistan (PreSTEP) was launched with funding from USAID. One of the major goals of this project is to improve teacher education practices and policies in Pakistan.

PreSTEP's primary objective is to help the Government of Pakistan develop, introduce, and implement effective curricula for a new four-year Bachelors' degree in education and a two-year associate degree in education. To achieve that goal, PreSTEP also helps provincial governments create systems, policies and standards that ensure the effective execution of these degree programs. (PreSTEP, 2009)

Under this project, faculties of education from various universities of Pakistan and USA worked together and a new curriculum for teacher education programs was developed. It is important to understand the administrative structure to know the institutional role in the implementation. PreSTEP's head office is in Islamabad and then there are provincial PreSTEP offices as well. All the planning and monitoring is mainly controlled through the head office. Partner universities are in close collaboration for developing course materials and implementation. Colleges of education are affiliated with the partner universities. Implementation is monitored and supervised by the PreSTEP team and university faculties.

Initial curriculum document that was prepared in 2010 is available at the website of HEC. It is evident that HEC has placed it as a recommended basic program outline for all teacher education institutions. The document provides program and course outlines for Associate Degree in Education (ADE), B.Ed Honors and M.Ed. Associate Degree in Education is the first half of B.Ed. Honors. There is a difference in how it is offered at colleges of education and at the universities. At the colleges of education initially only ADE is offered. After two years of coursework the student teachers can go and join schools to begin their teaching career at elementary schools. This initial degree -ADE is offered only at Colleges of Education and Government Colleges of Elementary Teachers (GCETs). B.Ed honors is a four year undergraduate program which is offered at Universities. Initially the 2-3 year program ADE was launched in eight GCETs around the country in September 2010. In the same semester B.Ed. Honors was also launched in six partner universities. Later it was made obligatory for all colleges to offer ADE and all universities to offer four year B.Ed.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Sociology of Teaching.

According to Britzman (1986) teacher's personal history interacts with common myths of our culture to maintain current teaching practices. Student teachers feel that universities or teacher education programs provide theory, method and skills while schools contain classroom, curriculum & students and once a new teacher is in the classroom the situation is described as *time of getting one's feet wet* and as *sink or swim* situation. Some very interesting features of sociology of teaching include teachers' interaction within existing power struggles, fragmented curriculum and hierarchical order. Some of the recurring cultural myths are also interacting and affecting teachers' practices such as everything depends upon the teacher, teacher is expert and teacher is self-made.

3.2 Activity Theory

Knowledge, according to activity theorists is generated through activities, According to theorists learning is a process of *appropriating*, i.e. teachers adopt tools and practices for their own purposes. Tools can be conceptual

as well as physical (Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Martin, & Place, 2000). Teachers in a classroom do not apply the tools just as they have learned through their teacher education programs. They apply various sets of tools as per the level of achievement of objectives, they keep adopting new combinations. This is the process of appropriation, which in the end creates new knowledge for the teachers to apply in practice.

3.3 Affordances

Gibson (1977, 2000) had described affordances in terms of physical characteristics of an object and its perception in various ambiances by the animals and human beings, while Baerentsen and Trettvik (2000) elaborated the concept and applied activity approach to affordance. The later seems to work more explicitly in the classroom environment, as a teacher perceives the affordances in the context of teaching learning environment and with reference to the goal oriented activities. The teachers bring into the classroom their own life experiences with them and once they begin to practice teaching their tacit knowledge, habits of mind, affordances, cultural scripts and myths all work along with the learned teaching techniques and theories. Even the learned techniques and tools are also modified and re-shaped with the passage of time through the process of appropriation. If an analysis of advantages or disadvantages is to be made about the teachers' previous knowledge of teaching or accidentally learning, it can differ from person to person, situation to situation. It cannot be generalized that the cultural script of teaching is bad, if it supports learning then there is no harm in following the cultural script and similarly if a habit of mind is helping to achieve student learning outcomes then it is not necessarily to be avoided.

3.4 Tacit Knowledge

Polanyi (1966) is that knowledge which cannot be put into words. Tacit Knowledge is the kind of knowledge that we possess through our learning experiences but we are un-aware of the learning of this knowledge and we cannot explain it verbally. In Polanyi's words *we can know more than we can tell*. In certain situations our actions reflect what we know.

3.5 Habits of Mind

Pattern recognition is one of the cognitive processes that allow us to understand how an individual deals with a variety of new situations faced in everyday life. In new situations we tend to rely upon pattern recognition and habits of mind to adjust ourselves with the new environment and to move on. According to Margolis (1987) "subjectively patterns are of two contrasting sorts- sometimes they seem to concern context and sometimes they seem to concern action". We can learn to recognize these patterns and develop these habits of mind through experience in the form of accidental learning.

4. This Study

The larger goal of this study was to investigate how a centralized curriculum of teacher education is implemented at institutional levels in various regions of Pakistan. The researcher was interested in knowing how some individuals involved in the curriculum-implementation process perceive and practice this reform. The new TE curriculum reform, introduced in Pakistan since 2010, was applied to four-year, undergraduate teacher education programs at universities and also at colleges of education and government colleges of elementary teachers. The researcher was intending to review the enacted curriculum at the institutional level using "interpretive policy analysis" (Yanow, 2000) approach. A major research question was how a national policy gets reshaped at institutional levels. One of the sub-questions were what makes teacher educators adopt reform strategies and what stops them? Data analysis began with open coding of the interviews, developing clusters of "repeated ideas", and then identifying emerging "patterns" to develop themes (Yanow, 2000, Corbin & Strauss, 2008, Saldana, 2010). This paper is based only upon a part of the larger dataset. Interviews and classroom observations in two colleges of education and two universities, in Punjab and Sindh are analyzed using the lens of sociology of teaching.

5. Findings n discussion

As mentioned by Kennedy (2005, cited by Kennedy 2008)

The task teachers set out for them-selves is not the one reformers set for teachers. Teachers do not begin the day thinking about fascinating new ways to approach particular substantive ideas. Instead, they begin by thinking about how to get two dozen restless youngsters to cooperate on a set of activities that will be roughly educative but not so engaging that students will become overly excited.

Following were the major findings of the study with reference to the reform ideals and actual practice of teacher educators in classroom.

1. There is no text book. The curriculum booklets and course guides are made available to teacher educators, but not to student teachers. These materials are also available online. These booklets only

provide weekly break-up of the course and sample lessons with suggested methods, teaching strategies and activities to be included. Optional ways of teaching the lessons with a list of recommended readings, reference books and websites are given. The idea is that teachers and students may become researchers and curriculum developers for their own learning and collect and share materials through using the internet and library resources. However, interviews and field visits identified the fact that internet and library resources are not available at all institutions. Where they are available the teacher educators at the first instance mentioned they made their own student readers using these resources but during second data collection visit each one of them was still using the same materials collected once. This shows that the text books were not provided but the culture of text book following could not be diminished just like that. Academic culture in colleges of education has been to follow the guidelines of universities and district education offices only. Such cultural scripts have been so strong that changing academic culture cannot be assumed such a simple goal to achieve.

2. English is the medium of instruction in the new curriculum reform. Except Islamiyat and Urdu or some regional language courses, all other courses are in English. The suggested books and web materials are also in English. There are two core courses of Functional English and two more courses in the second year for teaching literacy skills and teaching of English. Teachers are supposed to demand that students talk and present in English only. At this time teachers themselves are trying to improve their English language skills. In the universities as well as colleges of education, teacher educators informed that all teacher educators come from a background in which English was never a compulsion and many of the students also come from such background that they cannot understand English at all. They usually communicate in regional languages and cannot understand materials and instruction in a foreign or second language. Thus most of the teachers use Urdu or local language. Only the teachers of English and Communication Skills are trying their level best to communicate in English. Language is not simply a skill rather it is a pure example of cultural script and habit development.
3. The curriculum reform claims to bring a shift in the classroom practices from lecture-based teaching to interactive, collaborative, and student-centered teaching; and passive learning to active and independent learning with the help of in- and out-of-class activities, cooperative learning strategies like pair-and-share and group work. Individual assignments are made an essential element for independent learning. This is an unfamiliar approach to pedagogy. When interviews were conducted with practicing teacher educators at universities and colleges of education before and after observing their classrooms it was clear that very short professional development interventions were made to introduce new strategies and pedagogy, therefore many of them were finding it ultimately difficult to adopt these strategies. One of the participants mentioned that teacher educators are stopped to do what they are good at i.e. lecturing and they are unable to adopt new strategies so now they are in a very confusing state. Teacher educators were found to be using the teachers' guides but these books were not affordances rather were becoming a challenge to meet. Their effort was aimed to follow the instruction instead of understanding the constructivist approach and utilizing it. They were mostly using jargons within conversations but were unable to practice the new techniques given in them.
4. New assessment techniques are introduced under the reform along with the introduction of semester system as a replacement of annual system. Now teachers are supposed to assess students on the bases of their classroom performance, assignments, presentations, practical work and there will be midterm and final exams at the end of each semester. Portfolios and reflection journals are also introduced for the first time. Same as in the case of new pedagogical skills teachers were not found ready to adopt new assessment processes. Most of the participants at colleges of education mentioned that assessment is mainly in the hands of external bodies which are universities. The college teachers were trying to use new assessment techniques only to a limited level and could not go beyond that because final examination is still administered in a traditional mode, i.e. paper pencil tests comprising of subjective and objective type questions
5. Practice teaching has been distributed in four slots over the program of four years at the end of the third, fourth, seventh and eighth semesters. These are supervised practice teaching sessions in which for the first time ever in Pakistan a model of cooperative teachers at the schools is being adopted. These cooperative teachers and heads of the schools where student teachers go for practice teaching also get to attend some briefings and a few days of training. At the end of first two years the participants of the study reported that once the student-teachers go to schools for practice teaching they do not find the environment supportive at all for the kind of teaching they are being prepared for. The physical infrastructures, classroom size and number of students as well as head-teachers and colleagues also become a reason for them to unlearn many of the new teaching techniques and skills.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

It seems that under the new reform the problem occurs when cultural scripts and habits of mind hinder the teaching-learning process or achievement of classroom objectives. e.g. the teachers in colleges of education were finding it really difficult when they were told to transform traditional classrooms into interactive classrooms and active learning; because their cultural scripts are formatted as the teacher speaks and students listen only. They have the pattern recognition of a classroom setting where every student is facing the teacher and they just listen to what teacher says and note down what is written on blackboard or dictated to them. They begin each lesson the same way and conduct the whole lesson as scripted using their pattern recognitions. Such cultural scripts and habits of mind do not let them think of any innovative classroom activities and they were trying their level best to relate to the theoretical perspectives of education psychology or pedagogical skills but were found to still following what they were already familiar with.

Tacit knowledge and affordances could also be used effectively if the teacher educators were given some input for that during teacher refresher programs, under the reform. Process of appropriation similarly could have also been very useful if the teachers were able to apply suitable set of tools in various situations. But it all needed to be addressed within the professional development interventions at some point so that the teacher educators avoid to experiment in classroom rather they may decide rationally which tools and techniques to be used when and where. Tacit knowledge and affordances are not witnessed here to work effectively, rather they are hindering reform ideals. Process of appropriation in this case is witnessed to be working as filtering and making teacher educators go back to old practices. One of the teacher educators in Sindh was showing me her old three dimensional models that she and her old students had made. She said this always was the best activity for student teachers. She shared her unrest about the fact that new reform is only stressing more n more use of technology and pressurizing them to adopt English as medium of instruction while local modes and materials of instructions could have been much more useful.

Hence even to enable teachers to apply the accidental learning in a useful manner and to re-structure their habits of mind and review the cultural scripts, there is a need of intentional/imposed learning in the form of Professional Development courses specifically under such transformational reforms. Teacher educators during this study mentioned again and again how they were afraid of not being able to understand the reform ideals and how they were already witnessing fading out of new tools and techniques adopted by some of them under the current circumstances. It is hoped that this intervention that involved many practitioners, planner and organizations may not end up just as one time injection with no follow-up remedies. One time interventions usually do not seem to have long term effect especially in the case of longer history of prevalence of problems. To change a culture we need to rebuild the culture that takes time and consistent effort so that new habits of mind may be constructed.

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