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Existing Teaching (Grade XI & XII) as Perceived by Learners at Public Sector Higher Secondary Schools and Colleges

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Abstract

In Sindh, there is a different criterion for appointing teachers at public sector higher secondary schools and colleges (grade 11 & 12) regarding the professional prerequisites. Normally, the higher secondary school teachers known as 'subject specialists' require masters in both relevant subject and professional degree i.e. M. Ed. for appointment; whereas, the college lecturers require only masters in relevant subject for appointment. The present phenomenological study aimed to find out similarities and differences between professional teaching skills and teachers' overall attitudes at both levels from learners' perspective in District Hyderabad (Sindh). It involved purposive sampling of 30 students (15 for each category) with almost equal number of boys and girls. The data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to understand the phenomenon as perceived by the respondents. They were analyzed descriptively using appropriate themes. The findings from the respondents revealed that both the subject specialists with masters in professional degrees and college lecturers with no such professional degree equally lacked in their professional teaching skills and content knowledge at the two levels; they were found less competitive even with centuries' old lecture method.

Keywords: Perceptions, Teaching, Higher Secondary Schools, Colleges, Professional Teaching

Introduction

In past, the formal education revolved around the teacher. Teacher was considered as the centre of education. Corporal punishment, verbal scolding, strict discipline in terms of maintaining death silence within a classroom, one way lectures were the hall marks of teacher centered education. However, teaching and learning through discourse or dialogue was introduced by Socrates and Plato for 2500 years in the history (Khalid, 1974). Yet our existing system of education in present era of

global village and knowledge explosion, does not support active participation of learners through discourse (dialogues or discussion), and two way questioning in classroom teaching-learning situations. So, in this regard, in no way we could claim improvement within our existing system of education.

The teachers' professional graduation degree B. Ed and M. Ed. trains them to teach and guide their learners according to their psychological needs. The teachers know that there is no single intelligence. Multiple Intelligence theory of Howard Gardener tells us about variety of intelligences. Gardner's initial eight intelligences are known by the acronym BILLNISM—bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, linguistic, logical-mathematical, naturalistic, intrapersonal, visual-spatial, and musical intelligences (Gardner, 1999, pp- 41-43). The people/ learners excelling in one of them could be called body-smart, people-smart, language-smart, logic-smart, nature-smart, self-smart, and music-smart. According to Gardner, the existing system of education focus only two intelligences that is language and mathematical intelligence; however, other intelligences are untouched or unknown to common teachers (Gardner, 1999). The same is simply true for our present educational system. Even before Gardener, America's prominent behaviorist and psychologist B. F. Skinner was deeply concerned about the inefficiency of traditional teaching methods (Passer, Michael, and Smith, Ronald, 2001, p-253).

Also there is no single best method to teach different curricula or even throughout a curriculum. Teaching of languages needs different language skill strategies and activities than that of science subjects (AIOU Islamabad; English compulsory, 1989).

In our context the masters in both academic and professional degrees i.e. M. A. or M. Sc in relevant subject with M. Ed is the minimum requirement for appointment of subject specialists at higher secondary schools level; whereas, masters' degree i.e. M. A. or M. Sc in relevant discipline is required for appointment of college lecturers. They do not require a professional degree B. Ed or M. Ed. at college level. However; our existing teaching learning process is not appreciated at international, national, and local level. The teachers' professional degrees carry multiple tags in terms of teaching practice within classroom situations. The professional teaching skills like proper motivation, presentation, and evaluation of the concepts taught according to the lesson plans, we hardly can observe in our public sector educational institutions. The teacher centered education prevails and dominates in our educational system at all levels within public sector (Bhutto, 2011).

while analyzing our existing teaching within public sector at schools level, the researchers (Bhutto, 2011) point out that it is too behind to incorporate proper constructivists' approach and to enrich teaching learning process with learner-centered education because the lecture method which is criticized even at tertiary level prevails in one or the other way in its poorest form throughout our schools and colleges. Physical punishment, verbal scolding, use of "cane" are the typical hall marks of our existing teaching at these levels. Teachers hardly appreciate students' good learning behavior. Students' active involvement in academic and textual learning always carries multiple tags in our existing teaching learning situations.

The review of related literature shows that clear understanding of educational and learners psychology; proper adjustment of teaching methods and techniques according to the institutional and learners' needs, learning laws and theories; lesson planning and organization of individual and group activities; effects of heredity and environment; and learners' motivation and aptitude makes the teachers professionally capable to teach effectively. And it can be done through professional training of the teachers.

The sad situation, as generally assumed and perceived, demanded a revolution for the teachers' professional development. Fresh studies are needed to evaluate the teaching as a profession at the above two levels. In this context the researcher assumed that there would be a clear cut differences between the teachers of public sector higher secondary schools (subject specialists with Masters in relevant subject and M. Ed degree) and colleges (lecturers with only Masters degree in relevant subject) with regard to their professional teaching skills, and overall attitude towards education and learners respectively.

Therefore, all above grounds accounted for studying the phenomenon qualitatively to deeply understand it and to find out qualitative differences between teachers' professional skills and attitudes towards learners and teaching-learning situations at public sector higher secondary schools and college in District Hyderabad (Sindh). Present study aims to find out differences in professional teaching skills and teachers' attitudes towards education and learners through learners' perceptions and perspective at public sector higher secondary schools and colleges of District Hyderabad, Sindh.

Research Questions

- How do learners perceive their existing teaching learning process at public sector higher secondary schools (grade xi & xii) of District Hyderabad?
- How do learners perceive their existing teaching learning process at public sector colleges (grade xi & xii) of District Hyderabad?
- What is the difference between the professionally trained subject specialists and lecturers with no professional degree i.e. B. Ed or M. Ed. with regard to their professional teaching skills, and overall attitudes towards teaching learning situations and learners at public sector higher secondary schools and colleges of District Hyderabad?
- Are the teaching learning situations and the teachers' attitudes learner-friendly at public sector higher secondary schools and colleges, in district Hyderabad?

Methodology

The researcher used phenomenology within qualitative approach to thoroughly understand the problem in hand from learners' perspective.

Population and Sample

All public sector students (boys and girls) of district Hyderabad in grade XI and XII comprised total population of the study.

The purposive sample involved 30 students of grade xi and xii across District Hyderabad for both categories i.e. public sector higher secondary schools and colleges. Out of 30 students, 15 respondents were selected for each of the two levels. Classifying further the 15 respondents of each category, 5 were selected for indepth interviews including 3 boys and 2 girls; and 10 students other than those interviewed (including 5 boys and 5 girls) were selected for focus group discussion for each category.

Data Collection

In-depth interviews and focus-group-discussions of the students were used to collect the data and to deeply understand the subjective reality about the phenomenon in hand. They also served cross-triangulation of the data.

Data Analysis

The appropriate themes were drawn out of descriptive data and were analyzed in their context through discussion.

Findings and Discussion

The in-depth interviews and focus group discussions made the researcher able to understand the problem according to students' points of view; their findings are discussed here under following general themes:

Teachers' Professional Skills

The professional trained higher secondary school teachers or subject specialists used the local teaching method which was, as revealed by all the respondents, most commonly used in our public sector schools throughout Sindh. It could neither be called as a book or a lecture method nor could it come under any standard method. The teachers only dictated verbally or wrote the questions and their answers on the black board. 'Rough' and 'Fair' note-books were found common in the District Hyderabad. The students were to copy the dictated or written material on black boards on their 'rough' note-books in their classes. While doing so their hand-writing became 'rough' as they had to make hurry to follow their teachers; and then they had to rewrite all the matter fairly in good hand on their 'fair-note-books' at home. The teachers used that practice and teaching method for all courses of studies regardless of any consideration to modify it according to the professional needs of the course or learners. That practice was used by most teachers, however, there were a few teachers, perceived as the best ones by the respondents, almost in all schools, who after doing all that explained the topics using lecture method and allowing two way questions.

On the other hand, the college teachers (Lecturers) were found divided in using above local teaching method. Almost half of the lecturers used one way lecture method with little or no allowance of questions as revealed by the students; whereas, others either dictated the content (notes) only or explained using one way lecture method afterwards. They also were reported to using the same method of teaching for all courses of studies.

Lesson Planning

In higher secondary schools hardly any teachers were reported to have used lesson planning because they dictated or wrote the answers of the questions that obviously does not require too much pains and any lesson planning. The same situation was reported prevailing in college education. No single teacher used formal pattern of teaching involving three major steps—motivation or introduction of new topic; its presentation according to proper teaching method and activities; and its evaluation. However, a few good teachers as perceived by the respondents were reported to have used evaluative questions during and after the teaching.

Regarding lesson-planning, the findings revealed that college teachers are not different from the school teachers. They followed no lesson planning.

Use of Audio Visual Aids

The professionally trained higher secondary school teachers or subject specialists were reported to have normally used universal audio visual aids available i.e. blackboards and chalks. It however more or less points out teachers' unstable financial conditions besides other weaknesses.

But when enquired deeply, students revealed that there were many related equipment and charts available in science laboratories, yet they (teachers) did not bother to open the almirahs (cupboard) of science labs for months and even years. The practical component of science related subjects was not taught through experiments and demonstrations, but made students to maintaining written work mostly. The same situation existed for school-libraries' books and sports equipment.

In college education, the lecturers too relied mostly on universal available aids: blackboard and chalks; however, colleges were reported to outfit with provision of adequate and better concerned equipment. But, utilization of other available audio visual aids like available charts, models, and apparatus during teaching learning process was reported not up to mark. Findings revealed that most lecturers were not capable of utilizing the equipment through experimentation and demonstration. It clearly indicates their academic and professional weaknesses. Most college students blamed that the consumable and usable items of the laboratories, libraries, sports, and other equipment mostly expired or went out of order but never used.

Teachers' Content Knowledge

In focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, the school students revealed that most teachers' simply lacked in content knowledge because mostly did not allow any questions from students' side. They used strict discipline, and maintained 'death-silence' in their classes to hide their inefficiency about content knowledge and professional skills before the class. Students in focus group discussions talked in length and said that most teachers were not capable of solving the question paper during the Board's annual examination, therefore students' parents or relatives had to hire the expert teachers from other areas to solve it, so that the same could be sent to the examinee-candidate for copying down on the answer book in the examination hall. It points out to the worst use of unfair means in exam. This situation on one hand indicates teachers' poor content knowledge and the illegal and unfair cheating process prevailing in our examination system on other hand.

On the above aspect college students revealed the same situation i.e. strict discipline, disapproving frequent questioning from students' side, and use of unfair means prevailing in the Board's examination system at college level. Students were quite unsatisfied with their teachers' content knowledge. Moreover, due to English as a medium of instruction at that level, students believed that teachers lacked in English language which worsened their conceptual teaching and learning. Cheating, impersonation (replacement of original candidate with other), getting out-side help, hiring services of expert teachers to solve the question-papers were reported at the same extent as prevailing at school level.

Teachers' Attitudes towards Learners

The students of higher secondary schools were of the opinion that their teachers' over all attitudes towards them were not fair and friendly as they considered themselves of secondary importance. Teachers were all in all in their educational system. There were no rights of students, but the teachers did what they wanted. Even, students revealed that teachers punished learners on asking questions for clarification. Often they, as stated by the respondents, verbally scolded and even punished students. The 'cane' was the permanent feature in all classrooms. Verbal scolding was common. It is important to note here that this worst behavior was of those teachers who had their graduation and masters degrees in professional teaching—B. Ed. / M.Ed.

Regarding the lecturers' overall attitudes towards their students it was shocking to note here that they (lecturers) had the same attitudes that of school teachers. They (mostly) disliked questions asked by the students in one or the other way. They mostly ignored students' positive learning behavior, and reacted when their students exhibited negative learning behaviors. The punishment existed at that level; however, differed in form. Most of them used verbal scolding and negative body language so that students might not disturb them with any questions or discussion during classroom teaching. They avoided corporal punishment, mostly.

Teachers' Attitudes towards Teaching Learning Situation

The respondents revealed that mostly school teachers and subject specialists declined to take classes, and spent their time in chat with their colleagues and other high school teachers. They (most of the teachers) normally were reported to have no interest with their teaching profession. They hardly discussed about teaching methods and techniques, existing curricula, and the concerned problems and challenges.

Similarly, the majority of college teachers were reported to have same attitudes. They spend their time in chat with their colleagues in their colleges.

Conclusion

On the basis of findings, the researcher concludes that the professionally trained public sector higher secondary school teachers or subject specialists of District Hyderabad, Sindh, were not different from the public sector college lecturers regarding their professional and academic skills. Though the formers had professional degrees i.e. B. Ed. and M. Ed, yet, the findings revealed that their professional skills, performance, and overall attitudes were simply not better than that of college lecturers.

The teachers of both levels simply lacked in using better teaching methods and techniques, learning activities, audio-visual-aids, available resources, and commitment with their profession. Their attitudes towards learners and the learning situations were reported not to be learner-friendly as most subject specialists scolded learners for asking questions and even punish the learners sometimes; however, most college lecturers verbally scolded the learners.

It clearly indicates the failure of professional-teaching courses and degrees which the trained higher secondary school teachers or subject specialists possessed; however, the poor content knowledge, commitment, professional skills, attitudes of teachers, and prevailing unfair means throughout the education system at both levels i.e. public sector higher secondary schools and colleges of District Hyderabad indicate the failure of teaching as a profession and of administration and management at both levels.

Limitations of the Study

- The present study falls under qualitative paradigm; the researchers tried to deeply understand the subjective reality as perceived by the students, therefore the findings could not be fully generalized and applied on to whole target population. For this purpose a mixed study using stratified random sampling and administering properly designed questionnaires is suggested for further study.
- Additionally, more stakeholders could be used for triangulation and reliability of the data.

Suggestions

- The professional development courses and degrees are not effective; the findings more or less inferred that existing teachers despite the fact that they possess masters in professional teaching i.e. M. Ed. did not reflect any teaching professionalism and commitment. The management of concerned degrees awarding institutes, and general administration should incorporate effective check and balance system during B. Ed. and M. Ed. because in one or the other way ineffectiveness of teachers whether they are trained or untrained puts tag on them.
- The examination and evaluation system of these professional degrees and courses needs substantial changes so that their degrees could present due worth and merit but not the status of paper-degrees.

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