

Effect of Reformed Teaching Practicum on Professional Development of B.Ed (Hons) Prospective Teachers

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Abstract

The current study is to explore the effect of reformed teaching practicum on the professional development of prospective teachers in terms of their pedagogical beliefs and skills. The major research question was, 'do the pedagogical beliefs and skills of prospective teachers change through following the guidelines of reformed teaching practicum given by USAID, teacher education project?' For the purpose, 28 students of B.Ed (Hons) at University of Gujrat were selected as sample of the study. Three tools i.e. a 'Teachers' belief inventory', classroom observation and an interview protocol were administered to collect the data. It is concluded that visiting the schools by prospective teachers their beliefs about overall environment, discipline and behavior of the teachers in the school was slightly changed positively. In the same way regular triad meetings, weekly conferences, daily meeting with cooperative teachers, and supervised classroom teaching have a strong effect on the pedagogical beliefs and skills of the prospective teachers. It is recommended that the school administration may be more legally bound to facilitate the prospective teachers for completion of teaching practicum to make it more quality oriented component of teacher education.

Key words: teaching practicum, pedagogical beliefs & skills, prospective teacher.

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Introduction

A school performs a significant function of providing learning experiences to guide students from ignorance to the light through knowledge. The key factor who plays an important role in school to bring about this transformation among students is teacher. The same has been confirmed in a study by NCTE, (1998), that “teacher is the most important element in any educational program”. The stated contribution of teachers shows that teachers’ preparation can enhance their role in teaching learning process at educational institutions.

MacKinnon, and Scarff-Seatter, (1997), are in view that the quality of a nation depends upon the quality of education which is providing, and is also directly depends upon a critical factor- the quality of the teacher. However, we can say that teacher education is based on the theory that the teachers are always made, not born. Since teaching is considered a science and an art, the teachers need to acquire not only knowledge, but also the pedagogical skills. It is one of the areas of education system that needs action for improving the quality of education in Pakistan (National Education Policy, 2009).

For vigorous and vibrant teacher education and training programs in global perspective, teacher education institutions must design programs that would help prospective teachers to understand deeply the theories of teaching and learning particularly in their social and cultural contexts. Thus to ensure the competency, they may be able to apply these learning theories in complex classroom situation for catering the diverse learning needs of students. This signifies that the teacher education institutes must venture out further and further and engage even more closely with schools in a mutual transformation plan with all the struggles involved. Significantly, the teacher education and training institutions must engage in for educating the policy makers and the general public about the knowledge and pedagogical skills considered necessary in school context and betterment of the students (Fullan, 1993).

It is apparently said that in imparting professional education for training of a teacher, practice teaching and related theoretical studies play a central part. It is the effectiveness of teacher education and field learning (teaching practicum) through which a teacher can observe teaching and learning in real classroom context. Furthermore, a prospective teacher by practicing teaching, managing classroom learning, assessing children’s learning and ensuring feedback, developing capacities associated with educational theories and applying concepts in substantial teaching

learning situation, learning to work with colleagues, reflecting on his/her own professional practices, can be converted in to a professional teacher.

By realizing the goal of preparing effective teachers, different theories of teacher education have been emerged in teacher training program throughout the world. One of such approach is the introduction of teaching practicum which is an effective part of teacher preparation (Glickman and Bey, 1990; Haigh and Tuck, 2000; Hill and Brodin, 2004).It provides a foundation for future professional development of teachers and has been a site where student-teachers can practice the skill of teaching in real school situation (Kennedy, 2006). This experience of teaching practicum has a power to significantly shape the student- teacher perception of teaching and learning (Gustafson & Rowell, 1995).

Currently in Pakistan there are 184 teacher training institutes (AEPAM, 2011) which all have more focus on theoretical curriculum rather than practical and greater emphasis is laid down on transmitting the theoretical knowledge. For making the curriculum skill-oriented the teaching practicum is an inevitable and a joint responsibility of the triad, i.e., teacher educators (TEs), cooperating teachers (CTs) and prospective teachers (PTs). (Farrell, 2008; HEC, 2010). According to Goh and Matthews (2011) it needs to be reconsidered in order to prepare student teachers more effectively for the complexities and demands of beginning teaching. It also serves as an essential part of almost all teacher education programs as underlined by Koc (2012).

The existing teaching practicum for almost all programs of teacher education in Pakistan is traditional which is supposed to be ineffective. PTC, CT and B.Ed, the most frequent teacher training programs are fail to produce skilled and professional teachers at school level in Pakistan due to not focusing on teaching practicum properly. Therefore, the USAID Teacher Education Project which is a five-year program that chains Pakistan's efforts to progress the quality of basic education through better-prepared teachers laid emphasis on this component of teacher education program to enhance the skill and professionalism among future teachers and give a comprehensive program of reformed teaching practicum. To check how effect the teaching practicum, the beliefs and skills of the prospective teachers, this research study was conducted.

Purpose of the Study

The study is to explore the effect of reformed teaching practicum on the professional development of teachers in terms of pedagogical beliefs and skills.

Following research questions are to be addressed.

- a) To what extent the change in pedagogical beliefs come through practicum experiences among B.Ed (Hons) prospective teachers?
- b) To what extent the changes in pedagogical skills come through practicum experiences among B.Ed (Hons) prospective teachers?
- c) What are the factor involved behind these changes in beliefs and skills of prospective teachers?

The current study was situated within this milieu of global, regional and local reform of teacher training. In Pakistan, the need has emerged for increased research that could help educators better understand the challenges and opportunities in learning to teach in the local educational context. So the present study was situated in a microcosm of the broader context and explored the effect of reformed teaching practicum on the beliefs and skills of elementary teachers. Following National Education Policy 2009, the NCRC (2010) has introduced extended and competency-based teacher education program i.e. B. Ed. (Hons.) focusing on the needs of the school such as training for student-centered teaching methods, cross-curricular competencies and an on-site component. Prospective teachers, therefore, as a clinical model, required to be provided opportunity for having comprehensive interaction with students, school and teacher educators during practicum.

Literature Review

It is generally agreed by proponents in the field of teacher training, that teacher trainee's beliefs about teaching, learning, and schooling are deep-rooted in their life experiences. In this regard, Richardson (1996) identified three forms of experiences that are thought to persuade the expansion of beliefs about teaching: personal experience, experience with schooling and instruction, and experience with formal knowledge.

Personal experience is thought to include aspects of life that go into the construction of a worldview; beliefs about self in relation to others; understandings of the association between schooling and society; and other forms of individual, ancestral, and enlightening understandings, gender, geographic location, and religious background, racial and socioeconomic milieu may all affect an individual's beliefs that may also affect learning to teach and teaching.

Experience with schooling and instruction is often linked to Lortie's (1975), argument of the practicum experience that prospective teachers with innate belief about the concept and nature of teaching of their own learning experiences as students. This concurs with Nespor's (1987), notion of episodic memory which argues that critical episodes in an individual's school life can help to shape one's beliefs about teaching and learning.

Experience with formal knowledge, according to Richardson (1996), refers to perspectives which have been approved on within a group of scholars as valuable and applicable. Two types of formal knowledge are of particular interest in learning to teach: the knowledge of subject matter or school subjects and formal pedagogical knowledge. Knowledge of subject matter, in combination with understandings of how students learn the subject matter, forms what is called pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). Experience with pedagogical knowledge usually begins in pre-service teacher education programs and relates to the practice of teaching.

It has been established that some beliefs are more influential than others to individuals. "The more important the belief is, the more difficult it is to change" (Rokeach, 1968, p.3). It is also understood that if a fundamental belief is distorted, other beliefs within one's belief system are affected. It has also been reported that "beliefs that are closely related to one's ego-sense of self-are more important than any others" (Rokeach, 1968, p. 4).

The analysis of teacher's beliefs and classroom practice has been studied in different ways over the years. Fang (1996) and Richardson (1996), in their review of the literature, have identified notable shifts that have taken place in the study of teacher's beliefs and practice. They noted that early research on teacher's beliefs had often conceptualized the relationship between beliefs and practice as a simple, linear-causal one. Such research typically sought to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between beliefs and classroom behavior, and to formulate predictive indicators of teacher effectiveness. Common trends in such studies were the use of quantitative methods of data collection with instruments such as multiple choice tests, inventories and structured questionnaires to determine teacher's beliefs.

Recent studies suggest that the relationship between beliefs and actions is interactive and dynamic in nature. Beliefs are thought to drive actions; and experiences may lead to changes in and/or addition to beliefs (Sheen & Neill, 2005; Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson & Fry, 2004). Thompson (1992) posits that the research strongly suggests that the relationship between beliefs and practice is dialectic, not a simple cause-and-effect relationship. He further argued that future

studies, particularly those having to do with effecting change, should seek to elucidate the dialectic between teachers beliefs and practice, rather than try to determine whether and how changes in beliefs result in changes in practice.

Although it is generally suggested that the beliefs of teacher trainees are likely to influence their practice in the classroom, there is little research that seeks to elucidate specific aspects of this notion. A number of studies and analyses of research in the area (Beswick, 2006; Borg, 2003; Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher & James, 2002) have commented on the gaps in the research and suggestions have been offered for future research. These suggestions include: (a) the use of approaches that could facilitate in-depth analyses and interpretations of teacher trainee's beliefs and classroom actions; (b) classroom observation of teacher trainees in field-based settings, whereby teacher trainee's beliefs and practices could be examined in actual classroom contexts; and (c) the study of teacher trainees in the first years after the completion of their training. In summary, this inquiry sought to fill the void in the considerate the concept of the relationship (if any) between teacher trainee's beliefs and classroom practice. It did not assume a causal relationship between teacher trainee's beliefs about training and learning and their performance in the classroom. It also acknowledged that diverse contributory factors, other than beliefs, might influence the classroom practice of teacher trainees. The study was designed so that any other emerging factors could be considered in the context in which they arose. The main research question formulated to guide the study was: What is primary teacher trainee's stated beliefs about teaching and learning, and what is the nature of the relationship (if any) between these beliefs and their practice in the classroom?

An extensive review of the literature on the beliefs of entering teacher candidates done by Brookhart and Freeman revealed certain patterns in the research designs. These writers noted that there were few longitudinal studies that observed the same students through their teacher training. The review identified a number of major shortcomings in the research, one of which was an overemphasis on survey methodology. The vast majority of the studies considered in the review used a survey questionnaire or paper-and-pencil instrument.

Brookhart and Freeman argued that the over-emphasis placed on survey methodology is problematic for studies of teacher trainee's beliefs about teaching. They questioned whether survey items could capture the essence of what an entering teacher candidate really thinks about teaching and how he/she thinks students learn. Richardson (1996) identified a number of approaches that can be used to explore the beliefs of teacher trainees more fully. Specifically, they stressed the need for: (a)

more in-depth studies of teacher trainee's beliefs, and recommended the use of qualitative methodologies and case studies as these have the potential to lead to deeper insights into the beliefs held by teacher trainees during the course of teacher training; and (b) in-depth explorations of the relationship between the beliefs and classroom actions of the teacher trainees.

Beliefs about schools, teachers, teaching and learning are thought to play a pivotal role in what trainees learn in teacher training programs and what they transfer to their practice in the classroom. So, it is critical that we pay closer attention to the beliefs of teacher trainees. Beliefs about teaching and learning are of particular interest to researchers because of the impact they seem to have on what trainees learn in teacher training programs and what they transfer to their classroom practice later on (Borg, 2003; Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000).

The study was designed to assess the pedagogical beliefs and skills of prospective teachers with factors that are considered in the context through which they both developed.

Research Methodology

It is a descriptive and mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) research study that has practical significance and potential solutions because answers of the research questions would be helpful for the triad (PTs, TEs, and CTs) for effective implementation of reformed teaching practicum. Furthermore, it is an exploratory study to determine when, why and how certain pedagogical beliefs and instructional skills are developed through practicum experiences by prospective teachers. The research is quasi-experimental in which pre-test, posttest one group design was used.

Sample of the Study

The population of the study, where the results are generalizable, i.e., all the students of B.Ed (Hons) who are getting teacher education and completing their teaching practicum according to the guidelines given in reformed teaching practicum. For the purpose, only an intact group of the B.Ed (Hons) students, studying at University of Gujrat has been taken as participants' group because the nature of the study is experimental. Here convenient sampling technique was applied and 28 students of B.Ed (Hons) 3rd semester students were selected as sample.

- D). For the four week placement of the prospective teachers five public girls schools of city Gujrat were selected with the consent of the Executive District Officer (Education) Gujrat. These schools were selected for the reasons:
- i) convenient access,
 - ii) consent of and facilitation from school and
 - iii) cooperation of cooperating teachers (CTs) from each five school.
- II). The CTs were elementary (grades 6-8) level teachers. Two selected CTs from each school, with subject background comprising Urdu, English, Islamiyat and Pakistan Studies, Math and General Science.
- i) The CTs having less than ten years of services were included in the study. The reason for not choosing 10+ years experience was providing an opportunity to study the CTs who educated the latest teaching skills/practices.
 - ii) Constraint to had access for more than two CTs in each school was the big issue because Head Teacher of concerned school had some academic difficulties in this regard.
- III). Teacher educators (TEs) were all the five members of research team of department of education, University of Gujrat who visited and collected data from five schools.
- IV). 28 students of B.Ed (Hons) third semester of university of Gujrat were the prospective teacher (PTs) for this research study. Ten CTs from these schools were called upon in the Department of Education, University of Gujrat and given orientation workshop of one day about the conduct of teaching practicum in line with the guidelines of reformed teaching practicum.

All 28 prospective teachers (PTs) were also given orientation about teaching practicum prior to their four week placement in schools for teaching practice. In this orientation a common format of lesson plan, classroom management techniques, student assessment techniques, the problem and issues, the behavior of Head teacher and staff, and the common culture of the schools were all discussed.

These PTs were placed at these five schools. The numbers of PTs were prescribed against each school. The PTs were ranked according to their CGP Aearned at the end of second semester and placed accordingly with mixed ability group keeping in view of their CGPA record.

Nature of data: Data sources and instruments

It is a mixed method study in which both quantitative and qualitative data was collected to address the research questions. The following were the nature and source of data:

- I. The belief inventory was developed and used to collect information about the beliefs of 28PTs at University of Gujrat. This instrument consisted of the beliefs related to 10 factors of teaching practicum.
- II. An observation scheduled checklist was developed and used to assess PTs pedagogical skill during class teaching. This check list consisted of five components of class teaching.
- III. An Interview protocol having 10 questions was developed and used for identifying reasons behind the changes in PTs beliefs and skills. The questions focused the 10 factors of beliefs inventory and five components of class observation.

Validation of the instruments

All three instruments were developed by research team. Developed instruments were pilot tested to the First, Third and Fifth Semester of ADE students of University of Gujrat to ascertain its reliability and validity. Cronbach alpha was computed to determine the inter-item consistency. After necessary adjustments and changes the instruments were administered to 28 students of B.Ed (Hons) the sample of the study.

Data Collection Procedures

The procedure of data collection was:

1. The 28 prospective teachers of B.Ed (Hons) of 3rd semester which was started on 10th October 2012 was divided in to five groups and placed at five public schools in Gujrat City for teaching practicum following the criteria laid down above. Five research team members were acted as TEs and they implemented the instruments to get information about the beliefs and skills of PTs in very first day and last day of four week teaching practicum by filling up belief inventory tool. Here the data collector was same to minimize the threat of biasness.

2. In the same way, pre-post classroom observation checklist about PTs was completed from three different observers, three times by three different observers at the initial and final stage of practicum. Finally the pre-observation and post observation mean scores were used for analysis.
3. For interview a training program was scheduled for interviewers regarding how to conduct interview, type of question, and probing question time. In order to avoid biasness interviewer were trained by research team/faculty member. Interviews were recorded and listened again and again to make data authentic. Probing questions were asked by the interviewer for cross validation/ to reconfirm the response of interviewee, though response was same.

Data analysis

This was a mixed method study in nature. The collected data was analyzed through SPSS. The observation and belief inventory was analyzed by applying “Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test” because there was the same group of prospective teachers from which continuous data was collected as repeated measures during the initial and final stage of the teaching practicum. This test which converts scores to ranks and compares pre and post median scores was used because the data was not fulfilling all the assumptions for t-test. This analysis was made to answer the research questions as to what extent the beliefs & skills of the PTs had changed during the teaching practicum, whereas the interview schedule was simply analyzed by percentage method due to small scale of interviewee.

Conclusion

Comparison of the set of beliefs reflected that there is insignificant change in pedagogical beliefs of the prospective teachers through teaching practice. While the data collected on classroom observation reflected that there is significant change in the pedagogical skills of prospective teachers regarding their class teaching. The factor wise comparison showed some slightly changed beliefs of PTs’ about school visits, triad meeting, and conference of PTs with teacher educator and cooperating teachers, classroom teaching, weekly seminar, observation, reflection on peer teaching, parents interaction, PTs assessment and teaching profession. It is concluded that visiting schools by prospective teachers influence their pedagogical beliefs slightly but not significantly. Although the stated factors are the part of practicum, hence they need to be more systematic to have significant not slight effect on prospective teacher’s pedagogical beliefs.

The component wise observation reflected that prospective teachers improved their pedagogical skills throughout teaching practicum, hence they developed their class arranging skills, improved their content command, ensured students involvement in better way and assessed them in effective manners with having teaching experience.

In the same way regular triad (prospective teachers, cooperative teachers and teacher educators) meetings, weekly conferences with teacher educators in the department, daily meeting with cooperative teachers, and supervised classroom teaching have a strong effect on the pedagogical beliefs and skills of the prospective teachers. The different factors of teaching practice i.e. classroom management, content knowledge, lesson planning, teaching skills, home work, and student's assessment procedure were overall improved after supervised teaching practice. Hence, teaching practice results the improvement of these teaching skills.

By interviewing the prospective teachers at the end of the practicum we have the results that almost all the prospective teachers like it very much because they have the opportunity to visit and observe the schools. In the schools the cooperative teachers and head teachers were more cooperative and they facilitate the students due to that they enhanced teaching skills like classroom management, lesson plan, problem solving and decision making, student's assessment, and different motivational techniques. Although prospective teachers observe some deficiencies like school discipline in (sometimes), traditional behavior of old teachers towards new teaching methods and lack of teacher-parent meetings even then prospective teachers show the passion to adopt the teaching profession.

Recommendations

Although we have some limitations of this research study even than positive effects are found in the beliefs and skills of the prospective teachers after observing the teaching practicum and also we unfold the factor behind these changes. Therefore, it is recommended that the universities in Pakistan follow the uniform practicum system and should create a suitable environment to implement. The School Education Departments of the provinces should also legitimate a uniform system of teaching practicum to facilitate the respective universities and affiliated teachers training institutions to enhance the quality of education that depends more than upon any single factor, upon the quality of their teachers.

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