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INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION ABILITIES OF THE TEACHERS TRAINED THROUGH DISTANCE MODE OF EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study that has attempted to evaluate the outcome of an Open University course in teacher education through surveying the competence of the teachers who have attained their Bachelor of Education at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in Pakistan.

An extensive review of the literature established teacher competencies generally agreed as necessary for effective interaction and communication while studies that researched the value and impact of distance education were also examined. To examine the extent to which teachers who obtained their degrees from AIOU possessed such competency, survey questionnaires were devised to gather data from several perspectives. The questionnaires were piloted and revised in response to comments from participants representing the sample groups. The populations sampled for this study were composed of:

- *135 secondary School Teachers who have a B.Ed degree from AIOU and are working in Pakistani schools,*
- *220 secondary school students from the classes taught by AIOU graduates,*
- *44 heads of secondary schools where AIOU graduates teach,*
- *20 academics from the Faculty of Education, AIOU, Pakistan.*

Interpretation of the analysed data has been discussed with recommendations for ways the study will be used to improve teacher education in Pakistan and more specifically in the field of distance education.

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LITERATURE

The teachers with good professional preparation are a catalyst for quality education (UNESCO, 1995; Chandra, 1994; Hallack, 1990). The issue of quality education is problematic with quality determined by the context in which the education system resides. For instance, perceptions of quality differ considerably from one country to another. This notion based on the needs and perceptions of different communities is in accord with the argument mounted by Habermas (1971) in which the unquestioned assumptions about education and its purposes were widely held in the community.

Prospective teachers enter pre-service teacher education institutions with different experiences, opinions, beliefs and conceptions about teacher and teachers (Kelly, 1993; Sarason, 1982; Lortie, 1975). It has been reported that some Preservice teachers hold disparaging views of professional preparation, such as believing that the work is easy and that it is of minimal academic value (Carter & Doyle, 1995). Prospective teachers entering pre-service teacher education with such views could attempt to avoid doing serious intellectual work during their professional preparation. For teacher educators, understanding and having some knowledge of prospective teachers' experiences could help them bring about desired changes in their trainees' conceptions of pre-service education and teaching in general.

Student teachers tend to practice strategies and routines that they acquired as students during schooldays rather than those they have learnt during the pre-service programme (Kelly, 1993; Sarason, 1982; Lortie, 1975). In the eyes of pre-service students, the value of a teacher education programme is reduced as a result of these perceptions. Entering teacher education institutions with such prior perceptions of teaching could adversely affect student teachers in pre-service work, and later when they become practicing teachers. It is, therefore, the role of teacher education to transform pre-service students into professionally prepared teachers by changing conceptions of education, as well as to develop particular skills and

competencies. In other words, “the life-world of the students is modified by the shared assumptions about education and specifically teaching derived from their experiences at the teachers colleges prior to assuming their role as teachers” (Habermas, 1971, p.135).

Apart from the courses taught, the opportunities provided for ‘hands-on’ teaching in schools (practice teaching) offers scope for student teachers to develop more appropriate conceptions of teaching and the broader work expected for teachers. About beginning teachers of teaching Kelly (1993, p.3) mentions, “Many of the conceptions of teaching developed during these experiences are based on organization’s practices and procedures rather than on the kind on teaching expertise promoted in teacher education courses”. The ideas and methods emphasized in the teacher education programmes do not accord directly with the challenges subsequently met in the classroom (Kelly, 1993; Ryan, 1980). The theoretical and practical endeavours often represent competing commitments to ‘ways of knowing’ and ‘coming to know’ teaching (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1986, p.154). It may be that the knowledge gained during their pre-service training might not be compatible with their life-world (Habermas, 1971, p.135). In the view of this dichotomy it will be useful for teacher education programmes to be grounded in the realities of the work environment from a professional perspective.

For the training of teachers, distance education has been considered as an important mode. Perraton (2000) gives us a clear picture of the achievements of distance education’s role in training teachers,

Distance education has gone some way to establishing a significant and legitimate way of training teachers. The evidence, on its success, is probably no worse than the comparable evidence on conventional teacher education, and, in some cases, it can have economic advantages. And yet it remains on the sidelines. (p.36)

In Pakistan’s distance education system of learning, as the learner and teacher are at a distance from one another, learning

materials are usually sent to students by postal services or via the internet. This material should be written in simple and understandable language. For the guidance of students, necessary diagrams, self-assessment questions and activities are added in the course. It is considered best that students understand the material without any external assistance. Each course may be half credit or full credit. A full credit course has eighteen units and half credit course has nine units. Normally a unit discusses a topic in detail. One unit covers the time duration of one week with two hours daily working. Radio and TV programs are broadcast for additional support to distance learners.

Distance education has been defined as “an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner” (Perraton, et al., 2001). Distance education can be a part of an open learning system which offers open access to courses, or it can be part of a structured formal degree program. This study is concerned with the educational process in which a significant proportion of learning and teaching happens while learners’ tutors are removed from each other in space and time. The learner can study at home, place of work, host university campus, in learning centers or through a combination of such arrangements.

PROCEDURE

The population sampled for this study was composed of:

1. Secondary students from the schools where AIOU graduate teach.
2. Secondary School Teachers who have a B.Ed degree from Allama Iqbal Open University Open University (AIOU) and are working in Pakistani schools. The teachers were working in different administrative controls i.e. Schools of Islamabad are in Federal Capital territory. It had its own directorate in the Ministry of Education under the federal government and was not part of the provincial departments. Teachers from Rawalpindi were taken from the Federal Directorate of Educational Institutions

(Cantt/Garrison) in the Ministry of Defence under the Federal government and the third group of teachers was drawn from one district of Punjab province of Pakistan.

3. Heads of high schools where AIOU graduates teach.
4. Academics from the Faculty of Education, Allama Iqbal Open University Pakistan.

Random sampling procedure was adopted for data collection purposes.

After revising the tools in the light of the pilot study, the differing questionnaires were sent to Pakistan electronically for data collection. Assistance of researchers in each setting was sought for data collection (names listed in Appendix-V).

In response, completed questionnaires have been received from those listed in the table 3.1 below.

Table 1

Region-wise and group-wise position of data collection

Region	Students	Teachers	Heads of schools	AIOU Academics
Islamabad	46/100	44/70	10/16	13/20
Rawalpindi	60/80	30/40	10/15	--
Multan*	35/40	18/25	13/13	--
Total	141/220	92/135	33/44	--

*A few respondents were also from Mirpur, Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

During the process of data collection a team collected surveys from different regions. The detail of the team members with their names is given in Appendix-V.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Since the study comprises four different groups of subjects therefore group wise presentation is as under:

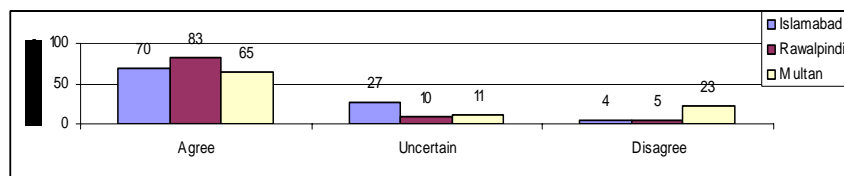
Students

The behaviour of teacher

The behaviour of a teacher is very important regarding his/her interaction and communication with others. The students were asked, "The teachers explain the behaviour they expect of you". A majority of students (83% Rawalpindi; 70% Islamabad and 65% Multan) agreed, some from all regions i.e. 27% Islamabad, 11% from Multan and 105 from Rawalpindi were uncertain and 23% from Multan, 5% from Rawalpindi and 4% from Islamabad were disagreed.

Figure 1

Behaviour of the teacher



(N= 92 (Islamabad 44; Rawalpindi 30 and Multan 18))

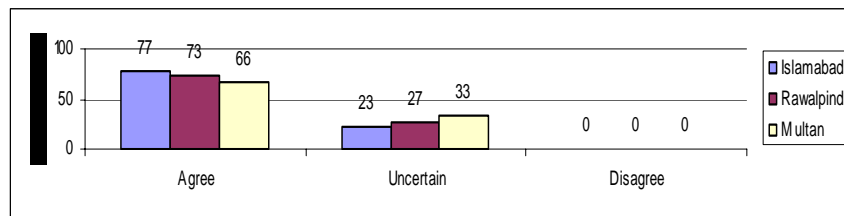
The relationship of teacher and students is normally clearly understood that is why the majority agreed but due to some individual and personality differences there are unexplained aspects which were uncertain or disagreed by them.

Teachers

Developing good relations with administration

The teachers were asked, "You have learned how to interact and communicate for developing good relations with administration and others". From all regions the majority agreed i.e. 77% from Islamabad, 73% from Rawalpindi and 66% from Multan. There was no one disagreeing with it but 33% from Multan, 27% from Rawalpindi and 23 % from Islamabad were uncertain in this regard.

Figure 2
Developing good relations



(N= 92 (Islamabad 44; Rawalpindi 30 and Multan 18))

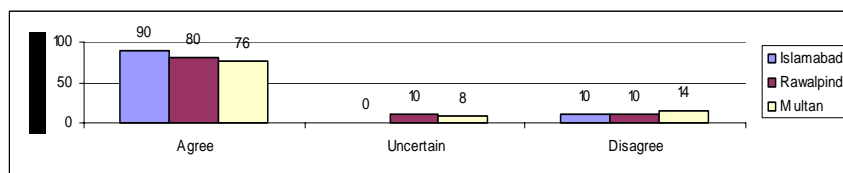
Human relations have an impact on the overall functioning of any system. Similarly, if there is good working relationship between teacher and head, an excellent academic atmosphere would prevail. The effectiveness of relations with others may depend upon one's way of interaction and communication. Teachers interact with their students, colleagues, parents of the students and the administration. Their rapport with administration matters more in the smooth running of the institution.

The response showing uncertainty indicates that teachers were indecisive in this regard. Actually the job structure in public sector schools is different from private sector and government employees get transferred from one school to another school and the heads of schools are mostly made responsible for the transfers of their staff. Moreover, the teaching staffs discourage and criticize one another to be closer to the administration.

Heads of Schools

Teacher's communication with professional manner

About the professional behaviour and attitude of teachers the heads were asked, "The teacher(s) communicates in a professional manner with the colleagues, parents and community members regarding educational matters". A majority of 90% from Islamabad, 80% from Rawalpindi and 76% from Multan agreed. There were some from Multan (8%) and Rawalpindi (10%) with uncertain and a small number from all regions (Multan 14%, Islamabad 10% and Rawalpindi 10%) were disagreeing.

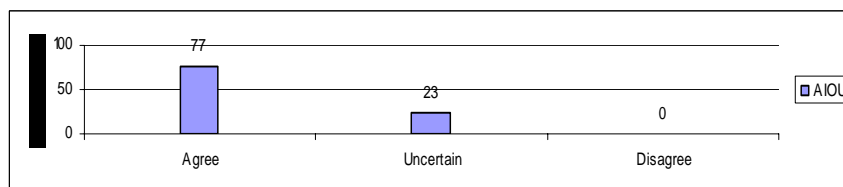
Figure 3**Teacher's communication in professional manner**

(N= 33 (Islamabad 10; Rawalpindi 10 and Multan 13))

As compared with heads; basically teachers have less opportunity to interact with the parents of students and other members of the community regarding educational matters. The heads of the schools take the responsibility dealing with such type of matters. That may be why the heads of schools remained disagreed or uncertain about this statement.

Academics*Communication with different persons*

"The B.Ed trainee should be able to communicate with students, parents, and other colleagues based on appropriate indicators; maintain records of student work and performance". The response of academics shows that 77% agreed with the statement. 23% had the opinion of uncertainty.

Figure 4**Communication with different persons**

(N=13)

Effective communication is one of the attributes of successful teaching. The teacher training programmes focus much on this aspect therefore the majority of the academicians agreed. The few who were disagreeing with it might be due to the reasons

of the word 'other colleagues' is given in the statement and they might be thinking of keeping the matter confidential.

CONCLUSION

Students expect teachers to explain their behavioural expectations of students.

Teachers learned how to develop good relations, facilitate group discussions in the class and use students' ideas and contributions by acknowledging, modifying and summarizing them and providing opportunities to the students to communicate their ideas to others.

According to heads of schools the teachers possess skills of oral and written communication and communicate in a professional manner with the colleagues, parents and community members regarding educational matters. However, there is lack of practice.

Teachers foster harmonious working relationships with school colleagues, parents and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well being. Moreover, teachers communicate to obtain feedback from students in a manner that enhances student learning and understanding.

Teacher should be able to communicate ideas and information with students, parents, and other colleagues based on appropriate indicators; maintain records of student work and performance maintained by academics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Teachers training courses should envisage guidelines for behavioural patterns of the trainees.
2. Teachers must practice of what they learn during their apprenticeship
3. There must be a mechanism in the school which provide for regular monitoring and feedback from the stakeholders.

4. Teachers should share their views with colleagues so as to strengthen their professional skills.
5. Maintenance of school record should be an uncompromising activity in the schools.

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