The Pedagogy of Secondary School Teachers Trained through Distance Education in Pakistan

Nabi Bux Jumani, Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad, Pakistan

Co-author: Elizabeth Stacey, Deakin University Australia

Summary

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 especially in classroom methodology who have attained their Bachelor of Education at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in Pakistan. Distance education mode has less recognition in the developing world as that of the traditional mode. Elsewhere, ease of access to information and communication technologies has meant that distance education has become an important form of learning and teaching around the world. The fundamental concept of distance education is simple enough: students and teachers are separated by distance and time. They use various media for interaction, often connecting asynchronously in flexible time frames. This is in contrast with traditional concepts of education in which teacher and individual learner met at the same time and place which has become an accepted mode of education. To examine the extent to which teachers who obtained their degrees from AIOU possessed these competencies, survey questionnaires were devised to gather data from several perspectives. 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 and 20 academics from the Faculty of Education, AIOU, Pakistan. Interpretation of the analysed data will be 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.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of distance teacher education and the teaching competencies developed through this learning process. The paper begins by analyzing the concept of distance education and its potential for the training of teachers. The literature on teaching competencies is examined to review the practices currently in vogue internationally. Also, an effort is made to assess how far teacher training through a distance
education mode is fulfilling the expectations of schools and to examine the important aspects of distance-delivered teacher education programmes. The literature was used to develop the tools for judging the quality of distance teacher education.

Binns and Wrightson (2006) conducted a study that used teacher education as a model of distance education (DE) that could be used to evaluate the impact of its systems, rather than because it was teacher education. The key findings of their research were:

- It confirmed (as well as affirming) what has generally been accepted in recent times – that DE models of teacher training are producing credible, acceptable and competent individuals, and that such training does promote change and development in teachers, their schools and local communities.
- Many people (head teachers and others) who in the research rated the DE-trained teachers/methodology as good had been trained conventionally themselves and had initially been somewhat sceptical about the new methodology. There appears to have been a significant change in mind-set.

This study aims to give an insight into the extent to which the teacher trained through distance education at the AIOU possess the required pedagogical skills.

**Distance teacher education**

Distance education is flexible. Those who have been trained as teachers in the conventional way can also continue their education through this system whereby the student and learner are at a distance from one another. They share their activities through either correspondence, face-to-face contact or the use of various instructional media.

Distance education is planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special method of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative arrangements (Moore and Kearsley 1996, p. 2).

Many developing countries are confronted with crucial problems in the field of teacher education which is a multidimensional activity encompassing various aspects of a teacher’s life and work. It aims not only to teach the necessary pedagogical skills but also to try to develop teachers’ initiative, reshape their professional attitudes and enhance their professionalism.

Bennet (2000, p.59) argues that “In order to keep pace with technological changes in society, the teacher education programmes of all levels in a country must be planned in such a way the teachers produced by these programmes are broadly educated, scientific minded, uncompromising on quality, innovative, courageous but sympathetic towards students”. Because of the magnitude of the problem and scarcity of resources, in many countries it has not seemed feasible to rely exclusively on the formal or traditional face-to-face system because of, for example, overcrowded classrooms, an increasing population of students and high drop-out rates. On the other hand, distance education offers a parallel system which has allowed many to continue their education while reducing the barriers of time and place.

Distance education depends upon media for synchronous as well as asynchronous communication. For instance, Evans (1997) states:

At the pedagogical level educators are encouraged to see their practices are being mediated, usually through electronic communication, along global lines. It is
said that the communication media, both directly and indirectly, are able take their teaching to learners around the globe or, conversely, they may use global resources via these media to foster or enhance their own teaching. (p. 12)

Effective teachers are able to incorporate their personal and professional characteristics into the classroom. A competent teacher practises certain principles inherent in educational pursuits to conform to professional standards of conduct and performance. The term “competency standard” refers to “a combination of attributes underlying some aspects of successful performance” (Gonczi et al., 1990, p. 9). There are many aspects of personality and skill that contribute to effective teaching but all of these characteristics and competencies need training, improvement and development. During the professional preparation of teachers, there is an emphasis on enhancing their competencies through developing new teaching skills. Teaching is a complex profession with both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, but it is essential that new teachers are trained in specific skills and competencies.

Messick (1984, p. 227) clarifies this concept in following words:

> Competence refers to what a person knows and can do under ideal circumstances whereas performance refers to what is actually done under existing circumstances. Competence embraces the structure of knowledge and abilities, whereas performance subsumes as well, the processes of accessing and utilizing those structures and a host of affective, motivational, attentional and stylistic factors that influence the ultimate responses.

Acquiring competence in teaching depends upon the nature of teacher training programmes, and the competence of teachers entering the profession is clearly a significant issue for providers of teacher education and the many educational bodies who employ graduate teachers.

The International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction (IBSTPI) (2007) refers to competence as “... an integrated set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enables one to effectively perform the activities of a given occupation or function to the standards expected in employment”. The IBSTPI competencies are statements of behaviour, not personality traits or beliefs, but they do often reflect attitudes.

The phenomenon of competence is not a recently contested issue, nor one that is unique to the teaching profession. To make the art of teaching more scientific and measurable, a considerable amount of work on teaching competencies has been carried out, particularly in Australia, USA and the UK. Ingvarson and Chadbourne (1994) mention that “American schools debate the wisdom of regular, compulsory teacher appraisal; teachers in the UK are forced to deal with the effects of mandatory appraisal of competence”. Similarly, Australian education bodies are involved in developing a nationally recognized set of professional standards (Board of Teacher Registration, Queensland, 2002). Teacher training institutions devise training programmes that suit their preferred objectives while education bodies that employ teachers have their own criteria and preferences about their competencies. A universal agreement on standards for competencies may not always be possible. Consequently the competence of teachers entering the profession is a significant issue for providers of teacher education and the many employing bodies.

The teaching profession requires teachers to continuously update their professionalism and learning. A teacher must not only be knowledgeable for their own students but must also continuously improve their own knowledge. In this context, the Australian government took the initiative of devising a national competency framework for beginning teachers for the benefit of the education community.
In 1974, the People’s Open University – renamed Allama Iqbal Open University in 1977 – was established to cope with such needs. AIOU was the pioneer distance teaching institution in the Asian Region. (AIOU 2003, p. 13). Also, the Education Policy (1998–2010) of Pakistan was designed “to start a three months intensive orientation programme for providing basic skills of teaching through non-formal education under the umbrella of Allama Iqbal Open University which structure to provide necessary training to a number of non-formal education teachers every year” (Government of Pakistan, 1998, p. 67).

In 1976, the university started with a few courses on Arabic, a Primary Teachers Orientation Course and Foundation Courses and had nine Regional Offices spread throughout the country. At the request of the government, it started Teacher Education Programmes such as PTC/CT/ ATTC for the training and orientation of the untrained teachers working in government schools (AIOU 1999, p. 16); and later its range of teacher education programmes was extended up to BEd (General), BEd (Arabic), MA Education, MEd (in four disciplines), MA EPM, Diploma TEFL, MA TEFL and MPhil (in four disciplines). To cater for the needs of the business community, the university also started bachelor’s and master’s degree programmes in Business Administration (MBA and BBA) through the distance learning system, subsidized by the government. Recently, business administration and computer programmes have been started, with some face-to-face instruction/teaching provided at the study centres.

Objectives of this study

1. To investigate the effectiveness of distance teacher education.
2. To survey the competencies being developed by training programme through distance education.

Research questions

1. What competencies are necessary for effective teachers?
2. To what extent do school teachers who gained their degrees from AIOU in Pakistan possess these competencies?
3. Does a teacher training programme through distance mode inculcate the required competencies?

Limitations

In this study the focus is on secondary school teachers working in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) who received a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree from AIOU.

Only teachers, heads of schools, AIOU academics and secondary school students studying in schools where AIOU qualified teachers are posted are included in the study.

Procedures

A list of those teachers who have an AIOU BEd degree and are working in ICT was obtained from the office of the Director General Federal Directorate of Education, Islamabad. Data-gathering tools were sent to their schools through the Directorate to obtain information from teachers who agreed to participate in this study. Care was taken to include only those teachers who qualified from AIOU after 2000 because before 2000 AIOU courses were not broadcast media-based. The consent of the Directorate was sought and received. Two other target groups – students of these teachers and the school heads – from the same schools were included when gathering data as it was important to seek their views in evaluating the competencies of teachers trained through distance education. A further data-gathering tool
was administered to academic staff at the Faculty of Education, AIOU, to obtain their perspectives.

**Classroom methodology**

**Opinions of students**

When students were asked whether “The teacher uses different methods to increase your learning”, their responses varied to some extent. A large number from each region (87% in Islamabad; 80% in Rawalpindi and 52% in Multan) agreed with the statement, but 34% from Multan, 13% from Islamabad and 8% from Rawalpindi were uncertain. No one from Islamabad disagreed with this statement but 12% from Rawalpindi and 14% from Multan did so.

![Figure 1: Use of different methods](image)

In order to make the teaching-learning process effective, a teacher has to use various methods suited to the classroom situation as well as the requirements of the content being taught. Teachers mainly use lecture and discussion methods as they take it granted that they are suitable for their students’ learning.

More teachers from Islamabad and Rawalpindi use various methods compared with teachers in Multan, and the trend is different in the far-flung rural areas where teachers don’t practice what they learned during their training.

**Teachers**

During the BEd programme trainees are given extensive knowledge of and practice in different methods and strategies of teaching. When they were asked “Are you are able to use a variety of teaching methods and strategies”, the majority of teachers from all regions (i.e. 90% Multan; 86% Islamabad and 74% Rawalpindi) agreed that they could, with only a small number (Rawalpindi 26%, Islamabad 14% and Multan 10%) being uncertain in this regard.

![Figure 2: Ability to use various teaching methods and strategies](image)

The teachers’ responses differ from those of the students. The teachers from Rawalpindi are more uncertain which suggests a deficiency in their training, possibly due to differences in the implementation of the various components (tutorials, workshops, assignments etc.) in different study centres.
The teachers in Multan and Islamabad claimed to be able to use various methods but, according to their students, they don’t put them into practice.

**Heads of schools**

In order to make teaching interesting, creative and understandable, teachers need to use a variety of strategies. In this respect, the heads of schools were asked to respond to the statement: “The teacher(s) uses a variety of effective teaching strategies”. Fifty per cent from Islamabad, 70% from Rawalpindi and 62% from Multan agreed that this was the case. However, there was a noticeable level of “uncertain” responses (Islamabad 40%, Multan 38% and Rawalpindi 10%) and disagreement (Rawalpindi 20% and Islamabad 10%) about whether their teachers employed a variety of strategies.

**Figure 3**: Variety of effective teaching strategies
(N= 33 (Islamabad 10; Rawalpindi 10 and Multan 13)

The responses of the heads of schools support the students’ viewpoints suggesting that many teachers, though trained to use various methods, do not apply them in their classroom instruction.

**Academics**

Similarly it was interesting to ask academics about the vision and approach enshrined in their programme. When they were asked to respond to the statement “The BEd trainee should be able to use a range of strategies to promote positive relationships, cooperation, and purposeful learning in the classroom”, 69% agreed but more than one quarter (31%) were uncertain.

**Figure 4**: Ability to use a range of strategies
(N=13)

Most of the academics agreed that various methods and strategies for making teaching purposeful were included in the programme, which was evident also from the teachers’ responses, but a significant number of academics disagreed with this, which is difficult to explain.

**Conclusion**

According to the students, their teachers use different methods and strategies to increase learning but they do not use various technologies (computers, overhead projectors and
models) in teaching or provide opportunities for practice. However, the teachers respond to students’ behaviour effectively and appropriately. The teachers said that they were able to use a variety of teaching methods and strategies and provide a stimulating learning environment as their preparation for teaching during training included observation of the classroom teaching of other teachers. The heads of schools agreed with the above view of teachers. The academics agreed that teachers should use a range of strategies for teaching, but they were not in full agreement about the teachers’ ability to do so to promote positive relationships, cooperation, and purposeful learning in the classroom.

**Bibliography**


