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Factors that Inhibit Teachers from Adopting a Student-Centered Teaching Approach

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Abstract

Condition of teaching and learning in Pakistani schools is not as it should be. Rather than using a deep approach or a student-centered approach, the teachers in Pakistani schools generally use a teacher-centered approach. As a result, the quality of education in Pakistan has been declined. Different writers believe that two factors are generally responsible for the poor quality of education in Pakistan. These factors include: (1) lack of required physical, financial and human resources in schools and (2) lack of teacher motivation. To highlight how far the factors mentioned above were inhibiting teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching approach, a small scale research study was undertaken. The factors mentioned above were translated into two basic factor including class size and principal's leadership. Based on these factors responses from 88 trained and 35 untrained teachers of 15 schools selected from various cities of Pakistan were compared and tested by using Chi Square method. Later on, the teacher's responses were compared with the responses of 36 B.Ed student teachers from one of the private education colleges of Karachi. The result revealed that school principals support student-centered teaching approach whereas class size is an inhibiting factor towards adopting a student-centered teaching approach.

Introduction

Pakistan has had a very slow pace of progress in education when compared with other developing countries which received independence more or less in the same years (Saad, 1999). The quality of education in Pakistan is affected by a variety of factors. Two of the major factors that are generally considered by the writer and reporters as responsible for poor quality of education in Pakistan include *(1)* lack of basic facilities such as electricity, drinking water, school building, play ground, furniture and so on (Haq and Haq, 1998 & Staff Writer, 2004 a), financial resources (Staff Writer, 2004 b) and

human resources (Correspondent, 1998); and *(2)* lack of teacher motivation (Staff Writer, 2004 b). Due to these factors, schools in Pakistan encourage adaptation of traditional school organizational models through which physical, human and financial resources can easily be controlled. At one end, the traditional approach to organization helps to controls resources and on the other end requires limited human expertise and time.

According to Kanter (as cited in Wallace & Wildy, 1995), the traditional beliefs of organization underlie a bureaucratic model which is concerned with departmentalization, separation and isolation. Wallace and Wildy (1995) assert that the principal in the traditional organization is seen to be in control of school and all decisions are made by the principal. The traditional organizational model places the teacher in a directive role, controlling the teaching-learning process by transmitting knowledge to students. Killen (1996) and Yadav (1992) name this teacher's role *the teacher-centered approach*. According to Wallace and Wildy, the directive role of the teacher (the teacher-centered approach) encourages teachers to ensure that "the curriculum is packaged into digestible pieces of content, ready to be dispensed by the teacher when appropriate" (p. 15). Apart from the content, the teacher decides the teaching methodology, the focus of which is transmitting knowledge, thus leaving limited choices for the student.

However, research reveals that even with the provision of good instruction, many students, including academically talented ones, understand less than we expect from them. They usually reproduce whatever they have been taught but demonstrate a limited understanding of the concepts taught (Nayak & Rao, 2002). Similar condition can also be found in schools in Pakistan. Students qualified from schools in Pakistan have not been able to reach the level where they can think abstractly and reason logically. They have demonstrated an inability to be problem-solvers or creative and critical thinkers; hence they found difficulty in fulfilling the requirements of the complex world. This is one of the reasons that have brought about a high unemployment rate in the country. Subsequently, the masses have lost their trust in education as a solution to solving the economic problems of the country.

To improve the quality of education, schools in Pakistan need to adopt a professional organization model. Wallace and Wildy (1995) define professional model of organization as a model which is characterized by an integrated approach to organizational structure where ideas from multiple sources are adopted. The principal is seen as an educational leader than bureaucratic administrator who encourages collaboration than isolation. The professional organization model places the teacher in a supportive role whose responsibility is to facilitate students' learning than imparting knowledge. Killen (1997) and Yadav (1992) name this supportive role *the student-centered approach.*

The student-centered approach helps in the overall growth and development of students (Piccinin, 1997) and in the development of an open and a flexible classroom environment which consequently enhances students' intrinsic motivation (Lambert & McCombs, as cited in Tan, 200l) and encourages teachers to establish strategies that match the students' needs and learning styles (Tan, 2001). However, the teachers in Pakistan are not motivated to use the student-centered approach during their classroom teaching as they feel that there are many inhibiting factors which prevent them from adopting this approach towards their teaching. Some of these factors are related to school facilities and some are related to the teacher motivation.

The rationale of this study was to identify whether or not class size (a factor related to school facilities) and principal's leadership (a factor related to teacher motivation) inhibit teachers in Pakistan from adopting a student-centered teaching approach. Even though it was a small scale research, the insights from this research would help schools in Pakistan to improve teaching-learning process within the schools.

Literature Review

It is generally noted that teachers focus on what to teach rather than how to teach. However, recent research in education reveals that 'how' a teacher teaches is as equally important as 'what' he or she

teaches. Indeed 'how' largely determines effectiveness. The 'how' depends upon the teacher's teaching ability, his or her self-esteem, teacher's awareness and practice of classroom management approaches. Furthermore 'how' is influenced by the whole school management style and by effective leadership within the school (Humphreys, 1995). Thus how teachers teach depends upon some factors out of those factors two are extremely relevant to situations in Pakistan. These factors are: class size and principal's leadership.

Class Size: A Factor Related to School Facilities

Common sense suggests that smaller classes can offer teachers the chance to devote more time to each student so as to improve their learning and a number of research studies support the small size class view (Archived information, 1999). For example, Salvin and Robin and Wittebols (as cited in Archived information, 1999) noted a clear evidence of positive effects of reduced class size. However, the effects of reduced class size were also influenced by the teacher's instructions. The positive effects of reduced class size were less effective if teachers did not change their instructional methods and classroom procedures when in smaller classes (Bohrnstedt & Stecher, as cited in O'Connell & Smith, 2000; Gilbert, 1995). But on the other hand, Achilles (as cited in O' Connell, & Smith, 2000) contends that because classroom management is easier with fewer students in small sized classes, teachers do not need to change their instructional practices, the benefit comes automatically.

Brain and Achilles (as cited in O' Connell, & Smith, 2000) are of the view that smaller classes increase the teacher's ability to monitor student behaviour and learning, help them to match their instruction with each child's ability and needs and use a variety of instructional approaches to meet learners' needs. However, Gilbert (1995) found students in higher grades were supporters of large classes. According to Gilbert, as there is less pressure on individual students, large size classes can help in producing independent, self-directed and lifelong learners. Nevertheless, classroom assessments are found to be negatively related to class size if the teacher is inexperienced. In large classes students prefer experience, qualified and knowledgeable teachers. Therefore Gilbert concludes that smaller classes are more effective than larger ones particularly in using student-centered approach towards the teaching and learning process.

Principal's Leadership: A Factor Related to Teacher Motivation

According to Leithwood (as cited in Brinkley, 1997), much of what happens in a school including the way people act and react, is dependent on the culture that evolves in the school. The school culture includes the underlying assumptions, norms, beliefs and values that guide the behavior of teachers, parents, administrators and students in a school. Thus Brinkley (1997) suggests that a school culture should have a collaborative relationship among its staff members.

The principal is the most important person in developing collegiality among the staff members (Sidhu, 1996). The effectiveness of schools in educating students is highly dependent upon the nature of leadership present within the individual school (Cavanagh & Silcox, 2003). The leadership of the principal affects both the teacher's teaching and the student's learning directly or indirectly. The teacher's classroom decision making is highly influenced by how the teacher perceives the principal's leadership. Positive teacher perception of the principal's leadership can encourage the teacher to take initiative to adopt student-centered approach whereas negative teacher perception of the principal can inhibit teachers from adopting student-centered teaching approach. Brinkley (1997) identified three positive images of principals among teachers which include: (1) supportive of teacher decision-making; (2) facilitator of shared values; and (3) promoters of mutual respect. A negative image of the principal's leadership according to Wallace and Wildy (1995) is the bureaucratic administrator.

To encourage positive image of the principal, Crowther, Hann and McMaster (2001) have introduced the metaphor called *parallel leadership.* The parallel leadership suggests sharing of

leadership opportunities between the administrator-leaders and the teacher-leaders. Crowther, Hann and McMaster believe that when both administrator-leaders and teacher-leaders engage in parallel leadership they share sense of purpose. That is, the teacher-leader assumes major responsibilities of pedagogical functions, including understanding school wide processes of professional learning and school's approaches to teaching, learning and classroom environment. The administrator-leader (usually principal), on the other hand, assumes responsibilities of strategic functions such as visioning, culture-building, aligning school practices with vision of the school and resource management. Crowther, Hann and McMaster further assert that parallel leadership connotes relationships that are grounded in mutual trust and such leadership value individual expression.

Most recent literature heavily emphasized that the school leaders should get involved in school's instructional programme (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore & Manning; Hill; Schlechty; as cited in Cavanagh & Silcox, 2003). Thus the literature supports instructional leaders (Murphy & Hallinger, as cited in Cavanagh & Silcox, 2003). Scheerens and Bosker (as cited in Cavanagh & Silcox, 2003) identified five dimensions of instructional leaders. These dimensions include: (1) The principal as a metacontroller of classroom process; (2) The principal as a quality controller of classroom teachers; (3) The principal as a facilitator of work-oriented teams; (4) The principal as an initiator and facilitator of staff professionalization.

However, Cavanagh and Silcox (2003) believe that instructional leadership ignore some aspects of teaching-learning process hence they suggest to replace the term instructional leadership with the term *pedagogic leadership.* Cavanagh and Silcox assert that effective school leadership is functionalized in terms of improving student learning. In this way, the outcome of leadership concerns pedagogy and the change process involved in improving pedagogy. Principals rarely engage in teaching and their influence on student learning is secondary in that the primary providers of learning are classroom teachers. Therefore the main focus should be capacity building of classroom teachers and improving the processes of school that contribute towards providing effective learning and this is what is the main focus of the pedagogic leadership.

Methodology

Research Sample and Instrument

The sample for the study was selected teachers from 15 schools ranging from middle to secondary schools in various cities of Pakistan (namely, Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Faisalabad, Multan and Gujar Khan near Rawalpindi). From the sample (teachers from 15 schools), two groups of trained teachers (Those who have completed any regular training that includes: PTC, CT, Dip Ed., B.Ed and M.Ed) and untrained teachers (Those who have not done a regular training) were formed.

The two groups of sample included 88 trained teachers (71.54% of the total number of the sample) and 35 untrained teachers (28.46 % of the total number of the sample), from middle to secondary schools. As the research sample was scattered all over Pakistan, questionnaire was considered to be the suitable tool for data gathering (Burns, 1997). The questionnaire was a combination of true and false statements and the respondents from both the groups were required to give their opinion about each statement on a Likert Scale. The opinions of the respondents were compared and the null hypotheses were tested by using Chi Square. The responses from the sample groups were also compared with the responses of 36 B.Ed student teachers from one teacher private education colleges of Karachi.

Limitations of Study

There were some limitations which may have influenced the results of this research study. They were: (1) Only one type of data collection tool (questionnaire) was used; (2) It was difficult to get equal number of trained and untrained teachers due to less number of untrained teachers in some school

(particularly in government schools) and due to the inability of some untrained teachers to complete the questionnaire; (3) Questionnaire was not translated in Urdu therefore some teachers from Urdu medium background might have misunderstood some questions.

Results

The Chi Square (χ^2) test was used for determining whether the two artificial categories (Gay, 1992) namely, trained and untrained teachers were significantly different from each other in terms of their opinion about two factors that could presumable inhibit them from adopting a student-centered teaching approach.

To compare teachers' responses for individual statements, the responses were arranged into three categories namely, the high level of agreement/disagreement (above 60%), the moderate level of agreement/disagreement (between 50% and 60%) and the low level of agreement/disagreement (below 50%).

Class Size: A Factor Related to School Facilities

The data gathered for this study supported the first hypothesis (Ho_1) [calculated $\chi^2 = 1.3$ whereas Tabulated χ^2 at $p < 0.05 = 3.841$). Hence it is concluded that there in no significant difference between the opinions of trained and untrained teachers regarding the impact of class size as an inhibiting factor towards the selection of a student-centered teaching.

Class Size and Student Achievement

The data gathered for this study confirms that both trained and untrained teachers disagree that in large size classes teachers devote more time to each student. The level of disagreement among trained teachers is moderate whereas among untrained teachers it is high (58% and 69% respectively). The teachers' opinion is consistent with the student teachers opinion but disagreement among the student teachers is higher than both the trained and untrained teachers (Disagreement = 75%). Similarly, both trained and untrained teachers disagree that large class size ensures higher student achievement at all grade levels. The level of disagreement among trained teachers is 50% (a moderate level of agreement) and among untrained teachers is 63% (a high level of agreement). Student teachers have also shown high level of disagreement (67%) with the same statement.

It was expected that trained teachers would show a high level of disagreement with the statements but unexpectedly in both cases untrained teachers have exhibited a higher disagreement than trained teachers. However, the disagreement among both trained and untrained teachers is consistent with that of Brain and Achills (cited in O' Connell & Smith, 2000). In larger classes the student-teacher ratio is high therefore teachers are unable to devote more time to each student. By contrast, in smaller classes the student-teacher ratio is low therefore they can devote more time to each student. In large classes teachers spend more time on non-instructional activities, such as managing students' behaviour whereas in smaller classes the time for non-instructional activities such as managing student behaviour decreases from 20% to 14% (Archived information, 1999). Thus teachers have more time to pay individual attention to each student. According to Achilles (cited in O' Connell, & Smith, 2000) smaller classes increase teachers' ability to monitor student behavior and learning.

When contrasted with the similarities between trained and untrained teachers presented in above paragraphs, there appeared to be some differences between the responses of trained and untrained teachers. Fifty (50%) of the trained teachers believe (a moderate level of agreement) that those students who experience small size classes demonstrate low academic achievement when they are sent to large size classes. By contrast, 56% of untrained teachers disagree with this statement (a moderate level of disagreement). The student teachers showed confusion while rating this statement as 42% of them showed agreement, 36% disagreement and 22% of them remained undecided. The opinion of trained teachers as well as student teachers regarding this statement contrast with the

literature whereas the opinion of untrained teachers is consistent with the literature. According to Archived information (1999), effects of the small size class experience on students persists even when they go to the large size classes. When compared with students from the large size classes, students from the small size classes outperform in all academic subjects.

Class Size and High-Order Thinking

Surprisingly, 54% of trained teachers agree (a moderate level of agreement) that large size classes help teachers to enhance students' high-order thinking abilities whereas untrained teachers are divided between agreement and disagreement (Agreement = 44% and Disagreement = 41%). It was expected that trained teachers would disagree that large size classes help teachers to enhance students' high-order thinking abilities but unexpectedly they exhibited a moderate level of agreement. This result is in contrast to that of Gilbert (1995). According to him, if higher-level thinking, application, motivation and attitudinal change are the primary concerns, then small size classes are the best. Nevertheless, student teachers' opinion is consistent with the literature as there is high level of disagreement (69%) among them.

It can therefore be concluded that the trained teachers believe that high-order thinking can be developed even in large size classes. This is because they are pedagogically equipped and can perform better in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2000) and due to their qualification, knowledge and experience, are preferred by the students (Gilbert, 1995). However, untrained and student teachers face difficulty in large size classes if they are to develop high-order thinking abilities.

The student-centered approach is the top priority of contemporary research. This approach encourages teachers to promote the student's qualities such as task commitment, persistence, determination, curiosity, adventurousness, tolerance, independence, self-confidence and willingness to take risks (Cropley, as cited in Tan, 2001). However, middle and secondary school teachers in Pakistan usually keep their classrooms teacher-centered from the teaching perspective. This is because a vast majority of schools in Pakistan are overcrowded (Staff Writer, 2004 b) hence, have large classes. Therefore class size is a factor that inhibits middle and secondary school teachers in Pakistan from adopting a student-centered approach towards the teaching and learning process.

Principal's Leadership: A Factor Related to Teacher Motivation

The data gathered for this research study supported the second hypothesis (Ho_2) [calculated $\chi^2 = 0.003$ whereas Tabulated χ^2 at $p < 0.05 = 3.841$). Hence, there was no significant difference between the opinions of trained and untrained teachers regarding the impact of the principal's leadership as an inhibiting factor towards the selection of a student-centered teaching approach.

Images of Principals

Both trained and untrained teachers agreed that principals do support teachers in their planning classroom activities that involve students. The agreement among trained and untrained teachers for this statement is 84% and 94.3% respectively. Student teachers also hold similar opinion as there is high level of agreement (72%) among them. They are satisfied with the provision of teaching resources for them to implement student-centered methods of teaching (agreement among trained, untrained teachers, student teachers is 77% ; 85.3% and 67% respectively). It is quite obvious from the teachers' responses that both trained and untrained teachers as well as student teachers hold positive images of principals such facilitators of shared values, supportive of collaborative decision making and promoters of mutual respect (Brinkley, 1997). Hence they believe that the principals engage themselves in discussing classroom matters with other teachers (agreement among trained, untrained teachers and student teachers is 89.4% ; 73% and 72% respectively). They also believe that the principals empower teachers to make decisions about their own classroom teaching (agreement among trained teachers = 75% , among untrained teachers = 71.4% and among student teachers = 63%).

Both trained and untrained teachers as well as student teachers disagree (the percentage of disagreement among trained, untrained teachers and student teacher is 59.3% ; 71.4% and 69% respectively) that the principals discourage teachers from adopting a student-centered approach.

From the result of the research it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in the opinion of trained and untrained middle and secondary school teachers regarding the impact of the principal's leadership on the selection of a student-centered teaching approach.

There can be a psychological effect of the principal's position on the responses of trained and untrained teachers as the questionnaires were distributed and gathered through the principals. Nevertheless, the responses of student teachers are consistent with the responses of trained and untrained teachers. As principals support teachers to adopt a student-centered teaching approach, principal's leadership is not an inhibiting factor towards adopting a student-centered teaching approach.

Conclusion

This research study focused on determining of factors that can inhibit teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching approach. The aim was to provide a research base to the prevailing assumptions among educators (teachers, school administrators and policy makers) about the factors that affect the teaching and learning process, particularly in the Pakistani context. It was found that out of two factors class size is an inhibiting factor towards adopting a student-centered teaching approach. The research also revealed that teachers hold positive images of school principals. Thus school principals support teacher in adopting a student-centered teaching approach.

Recommendations

On the basis of the results of the study the following recommendations are made:

- It is suggested that teachers ensure that they have acquired a mastery over the content knowledge as well pedagogical knowledge and skills. Only knowledgeable and skillful teachers are preferred in large as well as small classes.
- The school management needs to provide opportunities for their teachers to take part in various professional develop workshops, seminars and in-service programmes. These programmes should particularly focus on helping teachers to realize the importance of using a student-centered teaching approach, developing skills among teachers to work collaboratively with each other in order to improve condition for the use of a student-centered approach particularly in large size classes.
- Principals themselves should be well aware of the advancement in the field of teaching and learning process and have skills to motivate the staff to use a student-centered approach towards the process of teaching and learning.

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