

Meeting the Standards of Higher Education through Teachers' Awareness and Academic Optimism

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Abstract

Teacher's academic optimism is a key to success in meeting the standards of higher Education in any subject. Academic optimism is teacher's positive beliefs about his or her ability of teaching that he or she would be able to meet the academic needs of the students in terms of change in their academic performance and achievements, by keeping trust on parents and students to cooperate in teaching. This also requires teacher's self-confidence of reacting to failures and overcoming the hurdles with insistence. Optimism can be acquired to some extent by giving the knowledge about nature of job concerning teaching. The supposition will be explored by the opinions of the teachers, experts, and educationists through the data of an interview and opinion. The teachers were asked about their increase in confidence if they would have professional knowledge about 'what the Standards are, what the Strands mean, and how they are helpful in teaching' while deciding what, when, and how to teach. 'What assessment mean, which technique is appropriate to assess an achievement objective. The educationists and Experts also gave their expert opinion about 'how the awareness of teachers with typical but important educational aspects make teachers confident, optimist and able of meeting standards of education. The study supported the assumption that knowledge and concerning experience about the particular educational notions like "Standards, Strands, Specific Learning Objectives and Assessment Techniques" would make university teachers able to be academically optimist and ultimately keep their teaching aligned with educational standards.

Key Words: Standards, Strands, Specific Learning Objectives (SLOs), Academic Optimism

1. The background of Study

Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has taken many initiatives to meet the standards of higher education in Pakistan. Importance is given to the most essential element of education system i.e. 'The Teachers' who are responsible to attain the desired results. Teaching is a profession which involves some theory, practice and experience. The Countries like USA, UK have well established professional standards for a teacher which include 'professional knowledge of the teacher' as an important bench mark to get the certification to teach at any level. So far in Pakistan, teachers' training is also emphasized but it lacks at higher education. University teachers have 'content' (subject) knowledge but lack of professional knowledge which is one of the requirements of their professional development. One aspect of the professional knowledge is the knowledge of some important notions like 'standards, strands and objectives' of the curriculum. These notions are helpful to choose instructional techniques and overcoming problems relating to the students learning. This less awareness leads to decrease in academic optimism and so decline in attainment of the standards of education.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The main supposition was 'Lack of professional knowledge in university teachers leads to lesser academic optimism so decline in achievement of the standards of higher education'. To explore the above said supposition University of the Punjab was taken as a case with following objectives of the study.

1. Assessing professional knowledge of the university teachers concerning 'what standards, strands and objectives meant to attainment of learning of the students?'

2. Analyzing university teachers responses for ‘importance of Professional knowledge to make them optimistic for the achievement, concerning to their students learning’?
3. Analyzing opinions of educationists and curriculum experts for ‘increase in self confidence and hence in academic optimism of university teachers after getting professional knowledge’

Using a mixed approach (both quantitative and qualitative), the supposition is explored. First, the professional knowledge of the teachers concerning ‘what the Standard are, what the Strands mean, and how they are helpful in teaching’ while deciding what, when, and how to teach’ was assessed with the help of questionnaire. After an orientation concerning to this knowledge the teachers are asked for increase in “self-confidence concerning to teaching and hence increase in academic optimism”. To enhance the out comes, opinions of educationists and curriculum experts are also included for the verification of “increase in professional knowledge in university teachers regarding educational notion would increase academic optimism of teachers and thus help in meeting standards of higher education.

3. Conceptual Background

Academic optimism is teacher’s positive belief about his or her ability of teaching and being able to meet the academic needs of the students in terms of change in their academic performance and achievements, by keeping trust on parents and students to cooperate in teaching. This also requires teacher’s self-confidence .The way they react to failures and overcoming the hurdles with insistence (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006). The teachers who have no professional knowledge of some important notions of education like ‘Standards, Strands, Specific Learning Objectives and Assessment Techniques’ cannot improve their teaching and overcoming the difficulties, how would they react to difficulties. This would lead to their job stress, anxiousness, and ‘lower efficacy’ (Bandura, 1997; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002), so lesser optimism.

According to Tritton, 1957, In Islam , The most common methodology of teacher-training consisted of an initial thorough Education of the trainees in all available sciences at graduation and master levels, followed by qualified status conferred at different stages depending on the level they were to teach. In the later stages trainees were required to teach the younger groups in the presence of members of the community and supervised by their own teachers who acted as their mentors and guardians not only for their academic performance but also for their moral character and piety.

In Pakistan In-service training is the responsibility of the Curriculum Boards and Extension Centers. The provinces have given in-service responsibilities to one or more CGETs. There are three different types of in-service training: training of untrained staff in full-time crash programs that last three months; refresher courses that last for a short period of time; a few private initiatives such as the Ali Institute of Education in Lahore and the Teachers' Resource Center in Karachi. (Khalid,Mahmoud. 2009). Every province has an Education Extension Center responsible that is in charge of in-service education. The aim is to provide one in-service training session to each teacher at least once in every five years. But these sessions are fewer than the number of teachers as indicated by a study of in-service refresher courses in Punjab. This study found that the courses reached a nominal number of teachers. For instance, in 1988, 16 refresher courses were offered to only 4,400 teachers, out of a total teaching corps of nearly 180,000.

NAHE is a HEC project with the initial target to facilitate professional development courses for 3200 faculty members at different centers/universities across the country. NAHE goal is to promote students achievement but “through changing the culture of classrooms for all learners and training teachers to teach effective learning strategies and to foster resilience, positive self-concept, and strong effort in all students”. To accomplish their goal in phase –II Professional Competency Enhancement Program for Teachers (PCEPT) programmed to be launched in Jan.2008 One of the main focus areas are “Curriculum Planning and Development” and “Educational Testing, Measurement and Evaluation”. So it is evident from the above that even in Pakistan through in Service training of the university teachers it is thought that curriculum planning and assessment are the important areas to cater with for enhancing the professional knowledge of the university teachers. In curriculum planning the teacher would be aware of the notions like” standards, strands and objectives of education and curriculum and through other area like assessment and evaluation they would be aware of how to assess these standards and meet the desired requirement. (hec.gov.pk)

4. Outcome of the Study

As the teacher’s responses in different departments of university were taken into account through questionnaire to know the extent to which they were aware with the higher education standards and how professionally they take them into accounts the data shows that 75% of university teachers are aware that there are standards for higher education. 50 % of teachers know how these are related to their particular subject they are teaching 45.% of teachers are aware but cannot use these standards for their teaching methodologies enhancements.

70% of teachers are aware that there are certain areas of learning which leads to standards and objectives achievement but not know what they are called. 35% of teachers showed some familiarity to learning (psychological) domains but were unable to relate them content strand (areas). 80% of teachers use diverse teaching methods but do not take into account the psychological learning needs but taking into account content needs that whether teaching theory or practical. All educators and curriculum experts were agree to higher extent that professional knowledge of the university teachers is necessity and it was more important areas under study for the teachers to be familiar with other than other areas of professional learning of the teachers. Mostly university teachers 83% were agree that this type of professional knowledge will enhance their self confidence and they will be more optimist academically bit 28% were having the view that only command on content and their confidence along with teaching experience is enough for them to be academically optimist.

4. Review and Reflection

The above stated results showed that although the university teachers are aware of higher education standards and are willing to gain the standards through their effective teaching but it is their supposition that they can attain them through hard working and command over content (subject matter knowledge) as to give the direction to their teaching toward standards attainment of “professional knowledge” has been proved as milestones. Choice of appropriate teaching strategies is well versed and used only if one knows ‘what to attain?’ The matter of ‘what’ does not end at only knowing the answer of ‘what’ but it goes beyond toward the knowledge of ‘how’ and ultimately the answer of ‘how’ is undermine by professional teaching knowledge, skills and attributes. If the teacher is unable to distinguish between standards, goals and objectives only the content knowledge is unable to help him fostering students learning.

Strands, the learning area, consisting of content related or students learning level (achievement level for learning) are important to consider and work as ladder towards standards. Teacher were aware that what content related area are but not in professional term of ‘strands’ although for content it is sufficient. But to take student learning up to the mark it is necessary to know what learning ‘objectives’ are to be met with?.

Next comes assessment, mostly teacher are following trend for the choice for the procedure of assessment. It all depends on ‘learning objectives to be met with and objectives of assessment. The above reflection on results of study is also supported by the views of educationists and curriculum experts so leads to a clear and final conclusion that all university teachers, whether experienced or not needs professional knowledge. So it can be suggested here to accelerate the available in-Service teachers training and taking more initiatives towards professional development of the teachers.

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