CHANGE IN PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING PROFESSION AND TEACHERS' ROLE IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING: A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The role of teachers' beliefs is pivotal in teaching learning process. These beliefs are suggested to be shaped within the social context. Training also plays a key role in shaping the beliefs of prospective teachers. This qualitative study explores changes in prospective teachers' beliefs about the teaching profession and the teachers' role in education during a pre-service training. Eight prospective teachers, enrolled in a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) program in a Pakistani university participated in the study. Their entry time beliefs were compared with completion of training time beliefs. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal that prior to training the beliefs of the participants were significantly influenced by their school experiences and interactions within the society. Findings also show that these beliefs transformed substantially after they went through the teacher training program. Practicum experience and the impact of instruction in the training program were the major factors that seem to have contributed to changes in beliefs of the prospective teachers. Suggestions include the integration of topics on teachers' beliefs about the teaching profession and the teachers' role in the syllabi development in this and similar teacher education program.

Keyword: *Teachers Beliefs, Teaching Profession & Teacher Training*

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' beliefs play a central role in guiding their teaching practice (Fang, 1996; Khader, 2012; Shavelson & Stern, 1981; Soodak & Podell, 1997; Tilleman, 2000; Zheng, 2009). Beliefs are comprehensive set of diverse aspects dealing with teachers' perspectives on education and teaching, which affect their pedagogical aims and values (Ghaith, 2004). Research suggests that beliefs shape who teachers are as individuals (Almarza, 1996; Goodman, 1988; Fang, 1996; Rimm-Kauffman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta, & La Paro, 2006).There is a strong connection between teachers' beliefs and their expressions through teaching practices in the classroom (Bashirrudin, Khan, Younus & Dayan, 2012; O'Brien, 2001; Vartuli, 2005; Watkins, 2006). Teachers' teaching strategies, their decision-making, planning processes, their relationship with the learners and the materials and techniques

they select to implement in classroom are deeply influenced by their beliefs (Clark & Peterson, 1986).

The current study explores changes in prospective teachers' beliefs about the teaching profession and teachers' role after their exposure to a pre-service training. The study explores the impact of training on the beliefs of prospective teachers to provide a comprehensive view concerning the factors during training that influence prospective teachers' beliefs. The study, therefore, aimed at exploring possible answer (s) to the following research questions:

- ➢ What are prospective teachers' beliefs about teaching as a profession and about the teachers' role at the beginning of a pre-service teacher training program?
- ➢ What (if any) changes take place in prospective teachers' beliefs during training program?
- ➢ What factors in the training program influence changes in the beliefs of pre-service teachers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers' beliefs are a set of integrated conception of several dimensions related to the educational and teaching inclinations of a teacher, which affects pedagogical goals and values (Ghaith, 2004). Likewise, considering beliefs as deeply rooted in the mental and psychological state of a teacher, Khader (2012) and Zheng (2009) argue that teachers' beliefs play a pivotal role in guiding his/her teaching demeanor. The importance of beliefs in teacher education has been considered in philosophical as well as psychological views. Philosophical approach views the development of beliefs as one of the majors aims of education (Richardson, 1996) while the psychological approach to the formation of beliefs suggests that since learning is an active process, it is highly influenced by one's existing beliefs, attitudes and understanding (Korthagen, 2004; Richardson, 1996).

Literature reveals that personal convictions about the teacher's role and about the teaching profession play a vital role in the teaching process yet, studies show that in developing countries, such as Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, teaching is taken as less attractive profession as compared to other professions such as medicine, engineering, military services and other executive services (Ali, 1998; Haq & Islam, 2005; Verma, 2014).The main reason behind this phenomenon is that in these countries; teachers are poorly paid, that is why academically promising and motivated people do not get attracted to teaching profession (Haq & Islam, 2005; Verma, 2014).

Training can influence prospective teachers' beliefs and perceptions about pedagogical skills, the role of a teacher in education and teaching as a profession (Kagan, 1992; Saifi,

Shahzaman, Shah, Idrees & Zaman, 2013; Terman, 2012). For example, Saifi et al. (2013), in their study, conducted on 28 students of B.Ed (Hons) at a Pakistani university, concluded that prospective teachers' beliefs about teaching skills get slightly changed positively. Visiting the schools and interacting with students were found as major contributing factors. Similarly, the findings of Terman (2012) suggest that field experience in training could reshape prospective teachers' beliefs about teaching as a profession. Prospective teachers enter teacher education with a set of beliefs about the teaching learning process (Anderson & Bird, 1995; Pajares, 1993; Radulescu & Iucu, 2013; Wubbels, 1992). They are guided by these beliefs and assist them in perceiving and interpreting any new knowledge that they encounter (Borg, 2006; Farrell, 1999).

Research indicates that the early established beliefs prospective teachers hold, prevail not only throughout the period of training but also persist during the early years of teaching (Ball, 1990; Doolittle et al., 1993; Mattheoudakis, 2007; Murphy et al., 2004; Olson, 2003; Peacock, 2001; Richardson, 1996; Smith, 2000). Persistence in early beliefs of prospective teachers is often viewed in terms of the duration that a particular training program allows. For example, some researchers contend with genuine change in beliefs which is difficult to measure within an academic year (Hanrahan & Tate, 2001; Kagan, 1992; Mattheoudakis, 2007; Peacock, 2001; Richardson, 1996; Smith, 2000). Other studies show that change in prospective teachers' beliefs is possible through training (Aldridge & Bobis 2001; Cain, 2012; Kagan, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Saifi, Shahzaman, Shah, Idrees & Zaman, 2013; Tarman, 2012). Saifi et al. (2013), in their study of 28 students of a pre-service training program at a Pakistani university, concluded that prospective teachers' beliefs about teaching skills go through some level of change. Visiting the schools and interacting with students were found as major contributing factors.

Similarly, the findings of Tarman (2012) suggest that teaching practice during training could reshape prospective teachers' beliefs about teaching as a profession. Exploring the perceptions of prospective teachers on the role of teaching practice in their 'learning to teach' in Pakistan, Ashraf, Nauman & Waqar (2012) concludes that teaching practice contributes significantly to the prospective teachers' knowledge of teaching and allows them to learn about the application of theoretical knowledge in practical setting. Various studies have been conducted on teachers' beliefs previously, but with a focus on specific area in beliefs. Such as language teacher' beliefs; Mathematics and science teachers' beliefs; and self-efficacy beliefs of teachers (Bashiruddin et al, 2012; Borge, 2006;Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007; Peacock, 2001; Radulesue & Luca, 2013). The present study aims to explore the role of training in shaping prospective teachers 'beliefs concerning the teaching profession and the teachers' role in the context of Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study is case study, which involves the study of an issue explored within a bounded system that is a setting or a context (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005). Bassey (2007: 142) defines case studies in educational research as "critical inquiry that aims at informing educational decisions and judgments in order to bring betterment to educational practices". Case study design helps in exploring significant issues of the case, creating plausible interpretation of what is found and constructing a worthwhile story or argument (Bassey, 1999; Gillham, 2000; Stake, 1995). Eight female prospective teachers enrolled in a B.Ed one year training program in a teacher education and research institute at a Pakistani university, participated in this study. The participants' ages ranged between 25-30 years with Masters' degree from two disciplines (4 each from Arts and Science groups). Participants were selected using purposive sampling technique in which members of a sample are chosen with a purpose to represent a type in relation to a key criterion (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003)

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews which help researchers in getting an insight into a person's knowledge, perceptions, values and beliefs (Tuckman, 1972). Semi-structured interview is well-suited for the exploration of the opinion and perceptions of participants regarding complex issues and allows the researcher to search for more information, clarification and elaboration of answers (Barribal & Whiles, 1994; Cohen et al., 2007). Data collection took place in two phases: at the beginning of the training and then towards the completion of the training. The first interviews were conducted in the premises of the teacher education institute when prospective teachers had their initial orientation and subject related sessions but had not yet begun their teaching practice. The second phase of the interviews took place in participants' respective schools where they were teaching as student teachers. At this stage, the prospective teachers had spent a period of four weeks and had taught two or three subjects to elementary and secondary level students.

All the interviews were audio recorded. The audio recorded interviews were transcribed. Since the participants were non native speakers of English language, the interviews were recorded in their national language *Urdu.* After every two or three interviews, initial codes were assigned to each segment of the data, reflections were summarized and insights were recorded along with the reduction of bulky data. This process of reduction, coding and summarizing continued throughout the data analysis process. Relevant quotes were documented verbatim. Data analysis was done in four steps; transcribing, coding, identifying themes and explaining (Braun & Clark, 2006). As part of ethical considerations anonymity and confidentiality were ensured to the participants in the form of consent letter and their consent was obtained.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Major Findings at the Beginning of the Training

Beliefs about the teaching profession
At the beginning of training, almost all of the participants had similar beliefs about teaching profession. They regarded teaching as an easy and comparatively 'relaxed' profession as compared to other professions like medicine, banks and other office jobs because of its timings and the summer and winter vacations. For instance, participant 3 stated: *Teacher is the one who enjoys the most as he/she has an easy job. They come, deliver lectures and go back. Teaching is like an entertainment.*

Likewise, participant 4 said: *Who wouldn't love to have a long break of summer vacations, winter and spring vacations during the tiring routine? To me there is no other profession as attractive and secure as teaching.*

The teaching profession was believed to be particularly suited for females mainly because of the segregated system of the state schools. Due to cultural issues, (in Pashtun culture females are considered safe while working with females only), female teachers can work efficiently in girl schools. This was evident in the interview with participant 1 who stated: *Teaching is a very good and respectable job especially for females as they can easily manage it even after getting married. In our culture, there is no good job for females other than teaching. It becomes more relaxing if one is in girls' school and is teaching girls only.*

Teaching was also termed as a 'by chance' profession. Participants believed that when graduates do not get any other good job, they join teaching. It thus becomes a 'by chance job' not 'by choice' for the teachers and is therefore, viewed as unattractive and boring onwards. For instance, participant 2 articulated: *When people do not get admission in medicine or engineering, they opt for teaching. Although they are least interested in teaching but they do not have any other option to do.*

Although participants also perceived teaching as a respectable and prestigious profession, they found low socio economic status of teachers as the main cause of its being an unattractive profession. This was pointed out by participant 7 who shared: *Since teachers are poorly paid in our country [Pakistan], people look down upon them and that is why teaching usually lies at the bottom in the hierarchy of professional interests. In fact teachers deserve more respect because they not only teach simple and vital rules of life but make us efficient member of society also*.

Beliefs about the teacher's role

In the beginning of training, participants viewed the teacher's role as that of a task master who narrates the topic, scolds the students and leaves the class. Some participants believed that the role of a teacher is to teach the prescribed course and prepare students for examinations**.** This is also pointed out by participant 2 who stated, *'A teacher's role is to teach what is in the books only, and to prepare students for the examination.'*

Although participants viewed a teacher as a task master, they were aware of his/her role to be pivotal in the process of teaching and learning. For instance, participant 1 stated: *'The role of a teacher is not to teach subject matter only but to listen to students' problems and handle them carefully. A teacher is not a teacher in the classroom only but outside also.'*

Major Findings at Completion of Training

Beliefs about the teaching profession

At the completion of training, and after having a good experience of field, the beliefs of the prospective teachers about teaching profession seemed to have changed substantially. Teaching was viewed as an interesting, prestigious and rewarding profession. As Participant 4 stated: *I found teaching very interesting; I believe I was wrong [initially] in thinking that teaching is a boring job. My idea of becoming a fashion designer got totally changed first by observing my teachers at the teacher training institute and then having direct contacts with students during teaching practice. I am now keen to be a teacher.*

Although participants viewed teaching as the most interesting profession, they considered it demanding too. Preparing lessons and delivering contents needs proper time and attention. A teacher has to be prepared for sharing knowledge all the time. For instance, participant 2 stated*: 'A Teacher needs to be prepared all the time because he/she has to face many learners of different caliber. I learnt this in teaching practice that how a teacher has to prepare lessons and face students.'*

Participants viewed teaching as profession-cum-responsibility. A teacher must realize the demands of teaching. As participant 4 stated: *I realized after training that teaching is a profession-cum-responsibility. There is money in this profession, respect and honor, and relaxation too but with certain responsibilities on our shoulders and the responsibilities only demand honesty with the students.*

Participants considered teaching as a safe and suitable profession for females. An educated mother can help her kids in raising them in a better way. For instance, stated by a participant

2: An educated mother can teach her kids in a better and desirable way. A mother as a doctor cannot give her children proper time but a mother as a teacher can.

The analysis of interview data at the completion of training revealed certain changes in the participants' perceptions about teaching profession after setting field experience. Prior to training, majority of them viewed teaching as unattractive profession. However, after having an experience of teaching in natural setting, they realized that teaching is a prestigious and demanding profession.

Beliefs about the teacher's role

Like the beliefs about teaching profession of prospective teachers, their beliefs about the role of teachers also seemed to transform at the completion of training. For example, at the beginning of training, participants viewed a teacher as a task master whose job is to complete the prescribed course. However, at the completion of training, they believed teacher to be a role model, a change agent, a builder of society and a sympathetic person. Participants believed that teachers' role is not confined to the teaching of contents in the classroom only but to every walk of life. Teachers produce good citizens for the society. A teacher is a teacher everywhere and every child belongs to him/her. He/she is the generator of new knowledge. Teacher is the most important figure in a student's life, a role model who is emulated. According to participant 4, for instance, *Teacher is not only a role model but the builder of society. Whenever I watch someone throwing rubbish on roads or someone behaving awkwardly or a dishonest person anywhere, I naturally start blaming his/her teacher. If a teacher wants, he/she can mold people positively and make society a better place.*

Similarly, participant 2 articulated, *'...to produce good citizens for society is the most important role of a teacher.'*

DISCUSSION

The present study unfolds the fact that beliefs about teaching can change. For instance, prospective teachers' beliefs were found highly influenced by their school experiences and interaction with society. However, their beliefs went through a substantial change molded into a proper philosophy of education at the completion of training. Despite teachers' low salaries and status, they considered teaching the most prestigious profession. This seems in line with Richardson (1996) and Cain (2012) that prospective teachers' prior beliefs are open to change if teacher preparation programs are effective and ready to acknowledge those prior beliefs and provide field-based experiences and opportunities for modification in beliefs. The factors in training that contributed to a change in beliefs of prospective teachers include practicum experience, knowledge of students and teacher educators

(Aldridge & Bobis 2001; Radulescu & Iucu, 2014; Richardson, 1996). Practicum experience seems to have been the most influential source of change in beliefs of prospective teachers.

Close interaction with students let them reflect on their educational philosophy. These found links with existing literature (Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002; Saifi et al., 2013; Schon, 1990) suggesting that prospective teachers constitute their foundation of professional experiences initially in schools during their field experience which is an important bridge between theory and practice. This kind of experience provides prospective teachers with an opportunity to expand their beliefs about the teaching profession. Besides practicum experiences the role of teacher educators in this change seemed significant. Prospective teachers observed teacher educators during training and tried to fit themselves in the images of them. They made judgments about their teaching and applied the knowledge they acquired (Freeman, 1996). It is evident that teachers are viewed as role models from school through college and university. Traits of good teachers are selected and adapted through reflections on their practices. This is in line with Freeman & Richards (1996) and Radulescu&Iucu (2013) that trainees try to relate and observe their teachers; reminiscing their teaching style during the course in order to incorporate the sought out knowledge.

Research on changes in prospective teachers' beliefs thus seems at odd with the findings of the present study (e.g. Murphy et al., 2004; Doolittle et al., 1993; Oslon, 1993) that pre-service teacher education courses do little to change the beliefs that students develop during their primary and secondary schooling. Similarly, another important aspect of training that emerges from literature is the debate about the time that prospective teachers spend in training. Such as, the duration of training was found insufficient to bring change in beliefs or establish a well-defined philosophy of education (e.g. Hanrahan & Tate, 2001; Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004; Oslon, 1993; Peacock, 2001; Richardson, 1996; Smith, 1997). For instance, Murphy et al. (2004) argue that since prospective teachers get into teacher preparation program with specific beliefs that acquired early in life, change in these beliefs is difficult in a short amount of time. On contrary, an academic year is enough to bring change in trainee teachers' beliefs (Debreli, 2012; Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002; Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Terman, 2012). Findings of the current study support the second view, as participants of the study went through B.Ed course of one year duration with one month for teaching practice, and still a change in their beliefs was observed.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This qualitative paper explores prospective teachers' perceptions about changes in their beliefs about the teaching profession and the teachers' role as a possible consequence of a teacher training program in Pakistan. The study reveals that prospective teachers' beliefs

transformed after their exposure to teacher training. Major factors in training that contributed to a change in beliefs include field experiences, knowledge of students, and teacher educators as role models (Aldridge & Bobis 2001; Radulescu & Iucu, 2014; Richardson, 1996). Practicum experiences including short and long term teaching practice in schools appeared vital in changing prospective teachers' beliefs. In the light of these findings, it is suggested that teacher educators should include more curricular and co-curricular material that focuses on building the beliefs of prospective teachers during the training. In other words topics related to change in trainee teachers' beliefs should be included more substantially and overtly in the training program. This might provide help to the prospective teachers in building their philosophy of education through their beliefs and in applying that in their professional life.

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