Looking Ahead: Insights from the US for Pakistani Teacher Education

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Abstract

Pakistan teacher preparation programmmes (TE) have been criticised for not producing quality teachers like many developed and developing countries. Recently, a number of reforms have been introduced to improve teacher quality and teacher education by providing professional development to university and college faculties .It is assumed that developing TE faculties would move the TE system away from the tradition ways of teacher training and move toward a broader concept of teachers' professional development (PD).The shift has introduced National Professional Standards of Teacher Education in 2009 and also initiated the 4-year teacher preparation programme in several public institutions. However, in this discussion paper I argue that with introduction of 4-year teacher preparation programme (based on the US model of TE) comes greater responsibilities toward teacher educators and researchers in Pakistan to look ahead to avoid the pitfalls TE programmes have fallen prey to in the US. I provide some useful and practical suggestions based on the vast literature about teacher preparation in the US.

Keywords: teacher education, knowledge base, shared language, collaboration

Introduction

"Becoming a teacher, or joining the profession of teaching, involves a complex process in which there are numerous contributors and contributing contexts." (Faltis, 2011)

Pakistan teacher preparation programmes (TE) have been criticized for not producing quality teachers like many developed and developing countries (Ministry of Education, Pakistan, 2009). Recently, a number of reforms have been introduced to improve teacher quality and teacher education by providing professional development to university and college faculties (for instance, The USAID Teacher Education Programme (TEP), previously known as Pre-service Teacher Education Programme *PreSTEP*). It is assumed that developing TE faculties would move the TE system away from the tradition ways of teacher training and move toward a broader concept of teachers' professional development (PD).The shift has introduced National Professional Standards of Teacher Education in 2009 and also initiated the 4-year teacher preparation programme in several public institutions. However, in this discussion paper I argue that with introduction of 4-year teacher preparation programme (based on the US model of TE) comes greater responsibilities toward teacher educators and researchers in Pakistan to look ahead to avoid the pitfalls TE programmes have fallen prey to in the US. I provide some useful and practical suggestions based on the vast literature about teacher preparation in the US.

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The paper focuses on major issues pertinent to teacher education that I believe if not given attention today, TE in Pakistan might fall in to the same trench. The interrelated issues of teacher preparation in the US are:

- Knowledge base for teaching: Focusing on teaching or teachers
- Disconnects between TE and partnering schools
    - Ignorance about each other's practices
    - Lack of shared language
    - Unsupportive organisational structures

Knowledge Base for Teaching: Focusing on Teach*ing* or Teach*ers*

Many professions such as Medical and Law keep a record of their cases for prospective doctors and lawyers to use them as examples and learn from them. However, in the teaching profession, we still lack that kind of knowledge base. There is a divide found in researchers' arguments here in the US about what to consider as a knowledge base for teaching and how to document the knowledge base. More specifically, the divide is whether to focus on teaching or teachers to develop the knowledge base. I shall discuss the divide and the components of the knowledge base for teaching.

The proponents (in the US) of the recent emphasis on focusing on teach*ing* rather than on teach*ers* argue that to foster integral connections between knowledge base, teacher practice and policy, more attention should be paid to improving in instructional methods (teaching), rather than on improving the quality of teachers (e.g., Knight, 2012; Hiebert & Morris, 2012). The opening quote from Faltis (2011) counter argues the very essence of these recent deliberations. Teacher preparation is neither the responsibility of TE programmes nor the partnering schools, but rather it is a collective responsibility of both institutions. I argue that focusing either on teaching or on teachers might not bring those expected outcomes. Therefore,

1) Teacher education must centre its attention on both teaching and teachers concurrently in order to strengthen the connections between the knowledge base, teacher practice and policy.
2) Thoughtful and talented teachers and a well developed knowledge base does not make a difference in the quality of teaching, if university-based teacher education programmes and schools do not address this disconnects between them.

In the US, there always has been a constant emphasis on reforms and research to develop and organise some sort of knowledge base in teacher education. Considering *teaching* as the knowledge base, the first part of this paper discusses the components of the knowledge base. This part underscores the fact that because the knowledge base consists of "academic" and "practitioner"" knowledge, the quality of the knowledge base for teachers and teaching depends on the quality of teachers. In this paper, "academic knowledge" means is the knowledge possessed by college and university faculty (Zeichner, 2010). "Practitioners' knowledge" is not a natural part of the teacher education curricula. It "…is highly personal and, under current conditions, lacks the public vetting of researchers' knowledge" (Hiebert, Gallimore & Morris, 2002, p.4). Hiebert, Gallimore and Morris further wrote that the practitioner's knowledge develops "in response to specific problems of practice; it is detailed, concrete, and specific, and is integrated and organised around problems of practice" (pp.6-7). The definition of "practitioners' knowledge" provides the foundation for the first premise of my argument. Teacher education might develop "instructional plans" with the available "talented" teachers. However, for continuous improvement and for addressing problems pertinent to practice, the teaching profession needs a continuous supply of able, thoughtful, and reflective teachers.

Teaching: The Knowledge Base

Over the past three decades, the call for developing the "knowledge base" for teaching has gained momentum in reforms. For instance, the Holmes Group (1986) advocated the existence of a "knowledge base of teaching" which teacher education must embrace and use to improve teaching. For instance, to improve teaching and for researchers to improve the relevance of their work, the Holmes Group suggested,"… (1) mutual deliberation on problems with student learning and their possible solutions; (2) shared teaching in the university and schools; (3) collaborative research on the problems of educational practice; and (4) cooperative supervision of prospective teachers and administrators" (p. 56).

However, Shulman (1987) argued that the rhetoric of the reforms did not characterise this "knowledge base" or identify what is expected of teachers to "know, understand or profess" (p.4). Shulman put forth eight categories of the knowledge base, and he also suggested four sources that could be used to develop the knowledge base (for details see Shulman, 1987, p. 8). According to Shulman, the fourth source, that is, "the wisdom of practice" (p.8) which represents the "principles" and "rationales" underlying practices of effective or "able" teachers, is the least explored. He suggested that researchers and practitioners should work closely to detail what teaching practices look like. Exploring Shulman's fourth source reiterates the fact that to improve teaching, researchers and teachers must work together and must pay attention to both teachers and their teaching, to develop knowledge base.

Similarly, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) conceived "knowledge-*for*-practice" (produced by university researchers), "knowledge-*in*-practice" (produced by observing "exemplary" veteran teachers) and "knowledge-*of*-practice" (italics in original) to represent the knowledge base. The third conception, "knowledge-*of*-practice," is the knowledge that is required to "teach well." The authors argued that this knowledge evolves from "systematic inquiries about teaching, learners and learning, subject matter and curriculum and schools and schooling…[and] is constructed collectively within local and broader communities" (p.274). In their earlier work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990), the authors maintained that the theoretical knowledge taught in teacher education programmes is irrelevant for school teachers because school teachers' questions "often emerge from discrepancies between what is intended and what occurs" (p.5), and the theoretical knowledge is not applicable to teaching practice per se. However, in their later work (1999), Cochran-Smith and Lytle acknowledged educational researchers' work in their conception of "knowledge-*of*-practice. For instance, they wrote, "…knowledge is not bound by the instrumental imperative that it be used in or applied to an immediate situation" (p.273), and the knowledge might be useful for teachers to form frameworks "to make judgements, theorise practice, and connect their efforts to larger intellectual, social, and political issues as well as to the work of other teachers, researchers, and communities" (p.273). Cochran-Smith's and Lytle's knowledge base situates teaching and teachers together. To conceptualise the components of the knowledge base requires certain dispositions in teachers. For instance, teachers must be able to learn from their teacher preparation programmes and by observing veteran teachers. Most significantly, the knowledge base requires teachers to be involved in continuous inquiry about teaching, their learners' learning, the curriculum, and the context where teaching and learning takes place. It also requires teachers to be a part of a larger community.

According to Hiebert, Gallimore and Stigler (2002), the knowledge base constitutes of the "practitioners' knowledge," produced everyday by teachers in their classroom "through active participation and reflection on their own practice" (p.4). Their notion is closely related to Shulman's "wisdom of practice." To make practitioners' knowledge "professional," it should be made public, and the "system" must allow teachers to consider their teaching ideas as "objects" which could be shared with others, termed as "instructional products" by Hiebert

and Morris (2012). The expectations from teachers to improve the "products" require skills like thoughtfulness, reflection, and creativity on the part of teachers. This challenges the argument of focusing on *teaching* rather than on *teachers* and makes it less convincing. The research (for instance, National Commission of Teaching & America's Future, 1996; Sanders & Horn, 1998; Thornton, 2005) points out that teacher are not conduits of information or curriculum given to them by "experts" in the field. Teachers are considered as the "key" and the "curricular- instructional gatekeepers" to what happens in the classroom and what is taught and how it is taught in the classroom (Thornton, 2005). I argue that no matter how good the knowledge base teacher education develops for teaching, ultimately it is the teachers who make decisions about what gets taught and how it gets taught. Of course, expectations and rules along with specific contexts of teaching also make a difference.

However, whatever may be the context, if teachers are not thoughtful or do not possess skills identified by the proponents of the knowledge base and teaching in general, the availability of "annotated lesson plans or common assessment" will not make much of a difference. Therefore, teaching profession requires a continuous supply of thoughtful teachers who, besides possessing content and pedagogical content knowledge, "…have a clearer idea of what they are trying to accomplish and the strength to persist despite difficulties…they proactively *look for multiple perspectives and pursue multiple possibilities* because they recognise and respond to the complex needs of their students" (Fairbanks et al., 2010, p. 167, emphasis in original). These dispositions cannot be taught in any teacher preparation programmes. That said, the current disconnect between teacher education and schools may not bear the expected outcomes.

Disconnect Between TE and Partnering Schools

Teacher education programmes and schools are two main learning sites for new teachers (however, not the only two). Issues such as ignorance about each other's practices, lack of common language, and non-supportive organisational structures have resulted in a disconnect between teacher education courses taught to student teachers and learning opportunities available to them to enact teaching practices in schools (Bullough et al., 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2009; Zeichner, 2002, 2010).

Ignorance about Each Other's Practices. Zeichner stated that teacher educators and cooperating teachers are "mutually ignorant of each other's work and the principles that underlie it" (2002, p.61). He elaborated this "mutual ignorance" as teacher educators having little to no knowledge of what practices teachers use in P-12 classrooms in partner schools and, at the same time, school teachers having little if any knowledge about the "method courses" student teachers study on campus. Being "mutually ignorant" and working distantly highlight two things. First, even talented teacher candidates might be unable to make connections between their studies and school expectations. Second, this "mutual ignorance" can hinder the development of the knowledge base when both contributors to the knowledge base are not aware of each other's work.

Lack of "Shared Language."Another disconnect underscored by Stigler and Hiebert (2004), in their report on the TIMMS video studies they conducted to examine teaching practices of mathematic teachers in high achieving countries, is the lack of a "shared language." The authors argued that lack of common language between researchers and teachers hinders dissemination of "professional knowledge" among teachers. A similar concern was illustrated by Grossman and McDonald (2008). They stated that the teaching profession still lacks "a framework for teaching, with well-defined common terms for describing and analysing teaching, and researchers, as well as novice teachers, suffer the consequences" (p.186). To achieve this goal, Grossman and McDonald proposed to "parse" the domain. They argued that key elements of teaching could be identified by a framework to

analyse and break down teaching into components to develop a "common language" across "grade levels, subject areas, students, and school context and those that are particular to specific subject matters, to specific kinds of learners… or to particular contexts" (p. 186). The research shows that shared meanings or common language is almost non-existent, not only between researchers and teachers but also within their own communities. This lack of a common language or shared meanings has led to the failure of all the efforts put in by teacher education to select and prepare teachers to improve students' achievement.

Lack of Supportive Organisational Structures. Feiman-Nemser (2001) has drawn attention to yet another form of this disconnect. She argued that teachers are unable to work together on "problems of practice in serious and sustained ways" (p.1021), partly because of the unsupportive organisation of schools. Although she framed the problem with reference to teachers within a school, the same unsupportive organisation might hinder collaboration between teacher educators and school teachers as well as within schools and teacher education programmes.

Currently, the two forms of knowledge (academic and practitioner) exist separately and to some extent represents Abbott's notion of "hyper-rationalisation" (as cited by Grossman, 2008). That is, what is taught in teacher education "may be quite distant from the immediate needs of practitioners" (Grossman, 2008, p. 12), thus widening the disconnect between teacher education and schools. To improve teaching by developing knowledge requires teacher education/ teacher educators and schools/ teachers to engage themselves in collaborative deliberations, and research beyond their respective institutions.

As a Result… Ideally, research on teaching should lead policy change. However, on the one hand, reform initiatives do not take into account teachers' voices and insight to the profession (cf. Ball & Cohen, 1999; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, 1999; Zeichner, 1996). On the other hand, teacher education institutions do not have convincing evidence about what they think or do, or what the teaching profession needs to improve. For instance, Grossman (2008) quoted The Title II report, *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge* (U.S. Department of Education), that "there is little evidence that professional coursework or supervised practice makes a difference to the quality of teaching" (p.13). She added that researchers and teachers are "ill-prepared" to respond to any of the critiques with some evidence of effectiveness. Currently, research in teacher education revolves around single teacher education programmes, and as Grossman points out,

> We have plenty of strong opinions about all these issues, to be sure and lots of good hypotheses but very little solid empirical evidence that could help inform how we prepare future teachers or that could refute the criticism of skeptics who believe such courses are simply barriers to certification erected by the education monopoly. (p.15)

Wiseman (2012) also noted that "Policy development will be more supportive toward teacher education when we are able to study changes and the impact of these changes on the preparation of high-quality teachers and the achievement of school children" (p.90). She maintained that as there are no "solid" data that could support that teacher education is effective to prepare "effective" teachers at present, therefore policy decisions would be made on "public perception."

Conclusion: Implications for TE in Pakistan

Teacher education in Pakistan is in transition. With the introduction of 4-year teacher preparation programme, it is suggested that teacher educators in Pakistan must deliberate about documenting and developing knowledge base for our prospective teachers. From the research cited above, we know that we cannot and should not focus on either teachers or teaching but on both for a substantial knowledge base for teaching. Rather teachers who exhibit effective teaching must be carefully selected and their practices should be

documented for reference materials for new teachers to discuss and reflect on teaching practices. Moreover, the dispositions such as thoughtfulness, content and pedagogical skills, having multiple perspectives and ability to recognise students' needs cannot be taught in any teacher preparation programmes. As Feiman-Nemser wrote, "No matter how good a preservice teacher programme may be, there are *some things* that can only be *learned* on the *job*"(Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p 1026). The collaboration between TE and schools is a prerequisite.

TE and schools in Pakistan must collaborate and work closely to develop a shared language about teaching. Otherwise, the ignorance about each other's practices and needs of schools might lead to preparation of teachers who might not be productive and effective teachers in their localities they teach. Collaboration grounds teacher preparation to societal needs and close to the realities of teaching contexts. It is very usual that lack of collaboration between stakeholders leads to unsupportive organisational structures. Pakistan as a developing country does not have resources (monetary or otherwise) to waste. Therefore, it would be unwise not to use the available resources in a productive manner. Collaboration opens opportunities to use each other's resources available at TE institutions and schools. For instance, schools could use computer labs in TE sites and in return teacher educators could do research in schools.

That said, there is also a need to challenge the common notion that everyone can become a teacher. Similar to TE counterparts around the world, TE is Pakistan is labelled as being unsuccessful in preparing effective teachers. We must collect evidence by doing research to show the effectiveness of teacher preparation. By doing this, teacher educators and school teachers would contribute in enhancing the status of their profession, rather than ending up like TE in the US where teacher educators are considered as "ill-prepared" to answer the critique about TE effectiveness and to suggest any policy change.

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