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Teacher Education and School Improvement: a case study from Pakistan

ANIL KHAMIS & SHAHIDA JAWED

Introduction

The Institute of Educational Development at the Aga Khan University (AKU-IED) Master's Degree made an explicit link between teacher education and school improvement via the M.Ed., as discussed earlier in this volume. There were, at the outset of the M.Ed., three objectives defined for the course participants that were the basis of the Aga Khan University's intervention in teacher education in Pakistan (AKU-IED, 1991). Course participants who were to be designated as Professional Development Teachers (PDTs) upon graduation were:

1. to become good pedagogues (exemplary teachers);
2. to undertake teacher education activities on behalf of the school and AKU-IED; and
3. to become change agents in school.

The M.Ed. programme has been described in detail in Chapter 3 of this book and so these details will not be repeated here. One important point to be reiterated, however, as it concerns the central point of this chapter and links to the 'teacher education for school improvement model' being promoted by AKU-IED, is that the key to any success the PDTs might experience in schools was thought to be the active participation and involvement of head teachers and educational managers (see also Chapter 9). They would, it was thought, encourage and support teachers to introduce new approaches to teaching and learning strategies employed in the classroom, and this point is well covered in the literature on teacher education and educational change (Goodlad, 1990; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1991; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Bacchus, 1996).

This chapter presents lessons from a case study, undertaken in a cooperating school, that illuminates AKU-IED's impact by studying PDTs' roles in school. The School A case study presents an analysis of the most remarkable elements in the process of change undertaken in the school based on the agency of the PDTs. With the oversight of the principal, two PDTs led the School Improvement Programme, supported by Visiting Teachers in the areas of science, mathematics, social studies and English. Within four years, the school had more than 20 of its 40 teachers participate in Visiting Teacher programmes at AKU-IED (see Chapter 5). The school culture, role and function of the principal and the pre-AKU-IED initiatives of the school emerge as important factors that affected the work the PDTs were able to undertake. The PDTs' main initiatives reflect the learning on the M.Ed., which relates to the expected outcomes of the original AKU-IED model as described above (AKU-IED, 1991).

The Cooperating School

The AKU-IED programme began by identifying cooperating schools from which students were drawn for the M.Ed. The cooperating schools were central to the development of a cadre of teacher educators, PDTs, in partnership with AKU-IED. The PDTs were then expected to initiate school improvement activities in the school as well as work as adjunct faculty at AKU-IED. The case study presented here serves to illuminate the impact of the AKU-IED intervention.

School 'A' is one of the 14 schools with which AKU-IED first entered into partnership in 1994. It is a private, not-for-profit school catering to a low-income population. It began as a community initiative aimed at poor and orphaned children from upcountry centres, many from the remote mountainous Northern Areas of Pakistan, who had no access to formal education. This school had a history of school improvement programmes pre-AKU-IED, targeting teacher development and quality of education.

School A now belongs to a registered child welfare organization committed to providing social, cultural and educational uplift to children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Many of them are orphaned or from broken homes and are provided with accommodation in the school hostel. The school as a whole comprises three campuses. A boys' school campus and a girls' school campus, each of which has a primary and a secondary section, are located close to each other. A coeducational pre-primary section is also located on the boys' campus. A third campus, in different areas of the city has coeducational primary, secondary and pre-primary sections. Each school section has its separate administrative units with its own head and deputy head teachers

The first PDT graduated with the first cohort of AKU-IED M.Ed. in 1995. She was to return to the secondary branch of the boys' school after the two-year M.Ed. However, prior to resuming her duties her re-entry action

plan (a requirement at the end of the M.Ed.) was reviewed by the school management. In response to the action plan, it was agreed by the schools heads of the three campuses that each should benefit from the professional and pedagogical expertise now being offered by the PDT. Consequently, the school reviewed its entire management structure resulting in widespread changes that affected the relationships among all three campuses and the boys' and girls' schools. The two most significant and far-reaching organizational changes were the promotion of the secondary head of the secondary section to the position of principal and the whole school establishment of the School Improvement Centre (SIC) in 1996.

The first change rationalized and legitimized the role of the principal which had until now been informal and without executive decision-making powers. Each school now reports to one principal who oversees the management, administration and educational standards of the three school campuses, including the work of the SIC, and reports to an honorary management board drawn from the community. The SIC was charged with the responsibility of enhancing teachers' professional development as its role in the new 'School Development Programme'. The first PDT was appointed as the directress of the SIC. The second PDT rejoined the school in 1998 and was offered the position of deputy director of the SIC.

Case Study School A

School Culture Pre-AKU-IED Intervention

Before 1995 there was a Balkanised culture in the sense that each of the eight schools worked in isolation and the heads reported directly to the school management committee. Teachers and heads had little interaction across the campuses, resulting in different curricular and teacher development provision as well as different salary scales and increments. The result was the school's inability to rationally plan its school development programme and incipient competition amongst teachers who would opt for transfers between schools, especially from the girls' school to the boys' school and from primary to secondary.

School Improvement through Teachers' Professional Development

The School Development Programme (SDP) was initiated in 1987 two years after denationalization of the schools.[1] The impetus for the SDP was from the work of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and the Aga Khan Educational Services (AKES) which fund and run dozens of schools in Pakistan. Both are part of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). School A is nominally included in the Network as it initially began work in the same parochial community; however, it has a completely separate management structure and does not form a part of the Network in terms of its finances and reporting. School A was invited to become one of the original AKU-IED

cooperating schools in 1993, along with 13 other AKDN, private and government schools.

AKF and AKES had employed expatriate experts who devised improvement programmes based on school improvement and teacher education research conducted in Europe and North America (Bude, 1993; Black et al, 1993; Anderson & Sumra, 1994). Following these initiatives, the focus of the SDP at School A was on teacher development and improved curricula with the underlying belief that, until teachers are equipped with adequate content knowledge and pedagogical expertise, the quality of education cannot improve.

A strategy used to train teachers was to involve them in workshops conducted during the annual vacation. Various local teacher training agencies and individual experts were invited to conduct workshops. After a number of years of such workshops, it was recognized that these programmes were decontextualized since the invited facilitators were unfamiliar with local schools and the educational context in the country. AKES funding agency reports summarize that teachers' professional development efforts had not yielded significant benefits to students as teachers' own educational needs and other requirements were not addressed appropriately. For example, one participating teacher reflected, 'In spite of attending these professional development activities we don't even get any certificate and other facilities'. Not surprisingly, it emerged that there was very little uptake of the training provided and no effect was evident in teachers' classroom practices.

A further strategy to improve education in the school was the development of an English language improvement programme organized for teachers on Saturdays with a focus on learning grammar. The school had begun a drive to work in the medium of English soon after denationalization. Nationalized schools had been required to use the national language, Urdu, as the medium of instruction along with the provincial language (Sindhi). Mathematics and science were the first to be taught in English. The English language improvement programme was not sustained as teachers did not perceive its relevance to their teaching and the language workshops were considered an extra burden on teachers who were already overloaded with various tasks at school and had social and family responsibilities outside of the school.

Alongside the teacher development workshop programme, school heads were required by the school management to guide teachers in the implementation of a number of changes in the teaching methodology, syllabus planning, conducting examinations, admission policy and communication strategies with management, colleagues, students, parents and community.

Teaching and Assessment Process

Teaching is considered by most teachers in Pakistan, including those in School A's pre-AKU-IED intervention, as the transmission of information by the teacher to the student, and tends to be heavily teacher-centred. At the secondary level, the focus of the education is primarily on high stakes exam performance. Teachers, relying on the textbook, normally give lecture notes to students who are expected to memorize them with little or no attention given to understanding the content. Thus teachers have become textbook dependent and are overwhelmingly concerned to complete the syllabus so their students have at the least 'covered' the course content.

The AKU-IED's M.Ed. programme had established a number of conditions whereby course participants would be selected. First, the selection was of the school; that is, teachers could not directly apply for the programme unless supported by the school. Schools were also required to continue to pay the teacher's salary during the two-year M.Ed. and thereby not only invest in the development of the teacher but to take cognizance of the pressures on teachers to financially support their families. Applicants underwent a rigorous selection process undertaken by AKU-IED faculty which included observation of teachers' classroom practice and interview in addition to preset selection criteria to identify potential course participants.

When teachers in School A learned about the AKU-IED's M.Ed. programme, four teachers (one from the girls' secondary school and three from the boys' secondary school out of a total of some 60 teachers) put themselves forward as candidates. Most teachers could not afford the two-year time commitment due to family responsibilities. Ultimately, a teacher from the boys' secondary school was selected for the M.Ed. programme. She started the first M.Ed. programme in 1994 and went on to become the first PDT. A new teacher was appointed in place of this teacher.

The replacement teacher underwent a science Visiting Teacher (VT) programme in 1996 and was so motivated that she put herself forward as an M.Ed. candidate during the process of selection for the second M.Ed. When questioned what motivated her to undertake the M.Ed., she responded:

[My] reasons to attend the M.Ed. programme were first the change I experienced in my perception of teaching and learning by participating in the VT programme in 1996. Because the VT programme provided a variety of exposure ... how the teaching and learning process should be. It created great motivation and eagerness to explore the other ways of enhancing the teaching-learning process. Secondly, before joining the teaching profession I had always dreamed of being a Master's Degree graduate but due to many reasons I could not achieve the target; the school provided me a golden chance to change my dream into reality.
(PDT 2)

The PDT as Teacher, Teacher Educator and Change Agent

Upon the return of the first PDT in 1995, the school reviewed its school development policy. The new policy affected the administrative structure, role and status of (AKU-IED) qualified teachers, and remuneration and incentives were put into place to attract teachers to further professional training and development offered at AKU-IED and the increasing school-based provision being developed by the SIC.

A school-based teachers' professional development programme was initiated to be led by the PDT with oversight from the principal. Initially, the school chose to focus on enhancing the teaching and learning of science and mathematics after a needs analysis exercise conducted by the PDT. This was also the area in which the PDT had worked and had conducted action research with two other teachers during her M.Ed. study. An important aspect of the PDT's work plan was its foundation on action research and reflective practice. That is, the PDT consciously underwent and demonstrated an active learning process in which she taught a regular load, reflected on her practice and refined her efforts. This learning was then shared with selected colleagues at the school who were coached by the PDT. A further aspect of her plan was to work with those teachers who later attended VT courses at AKU-IED. The efforts of the PDT began to spread to different subject areas to both the boys' and girls' schools.

From August 1995 the PDT had started working with two science teachers in the boys' school. The teachers observed her teaching and discussed the lessons in open and frank exchanges. Gradually, they began to co-plan their lessons and team teaching emerged as a means to promote supportive and collegial relationships. During team teaching whichever teacher felt comfortable took the lead with others supporting and facilitating the students during the lesson. Teachers, working together, were given time by the school management to practice and reflect on their teaching and learning approaches, many of which were completely unfamiliar to them. Gradually the PDT's direct teaching role minimized as the co-teachers took on more of the teaching and planning as they grew in confidence and were motivated and supported to try new pedagogical approaches, such as more complex forms of group work, creating independent learning tasks, using library and locally available resources. By the end of the second year of the SIC the PDT's role was more one of facilitating teachers in different subject areas, promoting critical reflection, coaching, conducting demonstration lessons and initiating a school-based research agenda with her colleagues. The teachers who participated in the SIC professional development programme were granted free periods to work with their peers to plan lesson observations and to reflect and refine their teaching practices.

After the initial six months, when the work of the SIC had just started, the PDT had to report to AKU-IED to conduct a VT programme, a feature of a three-year post-M.Ed. contractual agreement of the AKU-IED with cooperating schools to share the PDT's time. The teacher development

programme initiated at the school was disrupted during this period while the PDT was at AKU-IED on a full-time basis and spent only one day a week – Saturday – working with teachers.

During this time, in addition to working full-time at AKU-IED and with the responsibility to work at all three campuses, with teachers in the boys' and girls' schools exhibiting different attitudes and priorities with regard to the school and their own professional development, the pressure and strain to work with all interested teachers was too much for the PDT. All school personnel and the students, who began to question the different prevailing practices amongst teachers in the same school, felt this pressure and serious reservations were voiced and questions raised about the possibility to initiate and sustain school development, teacher professional education, and not least the workability of the school-AKU-IED 'partnership'.

The pressure resulted in much rescheduling and time planning of the PDT who continued teaching and mentoring in both girls' and boys' secondary schools – the first time one teacher had bridged both faculties. However, tensions developed at the girls' school because the PDT's approach challenged the existing culture. Traditionally the head teacher of this school had observed classrooms as an evaluator or inspector. She took the same approach towards observing the classrooms of those teachers who were working with the PDTs. This attitude put the teachers on the defensive and made the PDT especially uncomfortable at the girls' campus. Two factors can be discerned here. First, the head of the girls' school had not attended the heads' seminars held at AKU-IED to initiate and expose them to the pedagogical approaches being developed during the M.Ed. Second, the two campuses had existed as separate schools for a long time and had developed a closed community. The PDT, from the boys' school, was considered an outsider and a threat to the independence of the school and particularly the head. With the reorganization of the management structure, in 1996, the principal personally facilitated the PDT's work in all the campuses, which was significant in overcoming the resistance experienced initially by the PDT.

Lessons and Change

Many lessons are presented in this case study. Students showed great enthusiasm for the new approaches to teaching and learning, as did teachers who felt reinvigorated. One teacher commented how she was being forced to go to the library regularly and learn '*new things because the children's questions are so good*'. Whilst the change process has not been smooth nor has the support of all the teachers, significant outcomes are evident. The most significant outcome has been the impact on students' learning. Teachers, heads and the principal all agree that students demonstrate much more confidence, have improved their information processing skills resulting in

asking 'better', more incisive questions, improved their communication and presentation skills, which are indicative of higher order thinking.

While new approaches to teaching were being introduced, the examination system had remained unchanged. This resulted in frustration concerning students' exam results and corresponding anxiety. Student exam results have actually been lowered since the start of the SIC's work which has been a point of contention between the principal, PDTs, and participating teachers on the one hand and certain heads and parents on the other hand. One student's testimony is illustrative:

[I like] the teacher's teaching, I have started taking more interest and I enjoy it, but I am frightened to show my results to my parents because I have failed the examination and my father will beat me.

The obvious consensus arising is that there must be a match between the teaching and learning approaches in the school and the assessment process (paper-pencil test). At the time of writing this chapter the school has begun to pilot more effective and relevant testing during term time. The efforts of the school staff to make changes to the in-school term tests have met with parents' satisfaction thus far. However, the final province-wide examinations still cause great consternation to those leading the change. It is not surprising then that many in the school have not been motivated to adopt new practices.

Thus, the teachers were concerned that the new teaching and learning methods took too much time. This would make it difficult to meet their objective of 'covering' the syllabus on which the students would be examined at the end of the term. There was school-wide concern that the new teaching and learning processes and strategies did not match the assessment practices laid out by the provincial Ministry of Education, which relied on students having memorized the 'correct' answers.

Selection of teaching and learning activities were also problematic, for example, parents raised concerns that their children's notebooks did not have much writing in them and that the students seemed to receive less homework. Colleagues who were not involved in the teacher development programme expressed consternation that they continually had to shift the furniture back into rows and columns after another teacher had done group work with the class.

Upon the introduction of cooperative learning, the PDTs had come to rely on informal evaluation. With the passage of time, teachers began to come to rely on formative assessment as part of their teaching practice and reflection. When modifications were made by the school management upon the behest of teachers in the paper-pencil test (not the end of year examinations set by the Provincial Ministry of Education), the head of the girls' school resisted the changes although her campus teachers supported the

changes. The PDT found solace in the words of the faculty who had taught her at AKU-IED,

Don't worry about change: don't expect that the whole school will support you during the process of change. If your students are with you it means you are successful, let's start to work with them. Don't wait for change at the whole school.

Three years after the AKU-IED intervention more than 60% of the teachers in School A had been trained in the VT programme and a second PDT has graduated from the M.Ed. programme. This increase in professional human resources led to management and pedagogical changes suggested by teachers themselves and facilitated by the principal. For those unable to access AKU-IED Visiting Teacher Provision (that is, Urdu, Sindhi, *Islamiat* teachers for which AKU-IED does not have programmes), a system of 'pools' or departments was created whereby language teachers work with English language VTs and the PDT and similarly *Islamiat* (religious education) teachers are pooled with social studies VTs and the PDT.

With these developments, including management and organizational changes, the focus and work of the PDTs evolved. They engaged in less classroom teaching and spent more time in classroom-related activities (observation, team teaching, and demonstration) with teachers and planning teacher development programmes, including in-class development strategies targeting teaching-learning approaches with an aim to improve students' learning outcomes.

The following are in evidence as successes of the AKU-IED model and whilst the pedagogical leadership can be attributed to the PDT, she, herself, acknowledges that the inspiration for her work is her continued association with AKU-IED:

- The school developed a mass of professionally developed teachers who viewed their teaching practices critically.
- The establishment of school-owned, planned, and delivered in-service programmes aimed at the development of all teachers.
- The availability of in-house professional development teachers who have teacher education expertise.
- The establishment of a mutually beneficial relationship with AKU-IED whereby the school engages in research and development of its school improvement model.
- Teachers acknowledged for their improvement efforts financially.
- Creation of a collegial teacher culture in which all teachers are involved through systematic and rational processes.
- Teachers themselves demanding their share of the available professional support rather than professional development being thrust upon them.
- Students reporting greater satisfaction with the teaching and learning available in school.

The first PDT describes the successes of the AKU-IED intervention:

Since 1995 we have observed a lot of successes related to teachers' professional development as well as students' learning, such as: development of confidence in teachers and students; teachers reflecting on their own classroom practices; students especially raising questions rather than remaining silent in class; teachers wanting to go beyond the textbook rather than totally relying upon it. The whole staff are busy in identifying innovative ideas for teaching because now students don't like the teacher to be doing all the talking in the class.

Challenges

However, many challenges still confront the school where most children come from poor and difficult family backgrounds. For example, in each class there are widely different ability groups. Teachers continue to face the challenge of providing individual attention and equal learning opportunities for all students. A notable point is that students from impoverished homes and backgrounds do not perform well academically and are consistently below average; teachers have struggled to show significant progress with these children. This has been identified and acknowledged as unacceptable to the school and raises important questions as to the ability of the school to cater to all children. The PDTs and teachers have met and are determined to initiate a dialogue with the concerned families to identify the underlying reasons and causes for students' performance and wish to work towards meeting children's educational needs in accordance with their family and home circumstances. The PDT remains hopeful that such challenges will be overcome and this is further testimony to the efforts of the PDTs to continue to learn and play the role of educational change agents to reach all those who are in the school.

The challenges faced by the school can be categorized into two areas with regard to school improvement and teachers' further professional development:

- The workload facing PDTs, pool heads and teachers is quite heavy and has impinged on non-school related activities and personal time. The first PDT felt initially that when the second PDT joined the school, her workload would be reduced. However, all those who are actively involved in the change process find themselves extremely busy.
- Initially the first PDT was involved in all areas related to school improvement including management in which the PDT was not trained. This has inevitably led to the PDT spending more time on administrative and management tasks when her time could be more profitably spent on teacher education and development.

In summary, it is clear that the PDTs' efforts via the SIC have spread to all the campuses and, in particular, inside the classrooms. Over a period of three years, the school's culture has evolved from being isolationist to more collaborative. The above-mentioned challenges have been exacerbated by the high annual teacher turnover rate of between 10-15%. This remains, in the school, the major obstacle to further teacher development and impinges on the school development plans; interestingly, the average turnover rate of AKU-IED trained teachers in the school is comparatively much lower at 3.5%. There are several reasons that have been identified by the school that yields this high turnover rate: change of residence due to marriage; a heavy workload; use of Saturdays for teachers' professional development activities; and better remuneration elsewhere – possibly outside the teaching field. No doubt this has been disruptive to students, parents, and the school and especially the PDTs who have had to keep training and inducting new teachers into the school's improvement model. The consequence has been that less attention is then given to teaching and learning improvements in the classroom and from ongoing development work.

Conclusion

This case study illuminates the applicability of the teacher education model and its appropriateness to teacher professional development needs as exhibited by the PDTs in this case study. That is, both PDTs exhibited and manifested their learning as pedagogues, teacher educators and change agents. As has been the case in this school, and this outcome is corroborated by evidence from other case studies of cooperating schools (Khamis, 2000), PDTs found greater professional satisfaction if perceived as teacher educators and change agents as opposed to only classroom-based teachers.

This finding has implications for the AKU-IED M.Ed. programme. The salient point is that, if the M.Ed. continues to emphasize change agency as a key role, then either (i) the requisite skills in planning and management of organization change will need to be developed; and (ii) roles PDTs are expected to play in schools will need to be carefully considered. The evidence to date suggests that PDTs aspire to play a school leadership (principal/head teacher) role or to become teacher educators at the tertiary level. Both these aspirations encourage PDTs away from classroom-based roles. With the dearth of qualified teachers and the even greater lack of postgraduates in the school system, it is understandable that PDTs have been urged to move away from the classroom by the school management itself.

Notes

- [1] All schools in Pakistan were nationalized in 1972 upon a decree of the military government. In 1985, Pakistan returned to civilian rule.

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