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Developing Researchers in Education through A Doctoral Programme: A Challenge in the Context of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This is a reflective paper on the challenges of developing educational researchers through doctoral education in the context of Pakistan. These challenges are discussed from the perspective of the PhD programme in education offered by the Institute for Educational Development of the Aga Khan University, a private university in Pakistan. The analysis was based on the author's experiences of developing and remaining actively engaged with the programme for more than seven years covering the period of admission of the first three cohorts of doctoral students from the year 2002 to 2009. First, the main features of the programme are described and then the major challenges faced are highlighted. A number of issues of concern have been identified; developing PhD students into independent learners, academic sustainability of the programme in the face of faculty attrition, maintaining a balance in quality assurance measures and ensuring financial sustainability of the programme. Some of these findings are unique to AKU-IED doctoral programme and some resonate with other programmes both in the developing and the developed world. Recommendations are also discussed.

Keywords: Developing world, doctoral education, education doctorate, education researcher

INTRODUCTION

There is a great paucity of research in education in Pakistan, which is at least partially due to a lack of people trained in undertaking such research. The Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) has attempted to fill this gap by developing researchers in education through a PhD programme in Education which admitted its first cohort of students in 2004. The author, by reviewing key documents and reflecting on her experience of both developing the programme proposal and implementing it over a period of seven years, discusses some of the major challenges faced in the context of Pakistan.

This covers the period of admission of the first three cohorts of doctoral students from the year 2002 to 2009.

From independence in 1947 to the 1980s, university education in Pakistan was the responsibility of the state and all universities were in the public sector. In 1983, however, policies were adopted to allow the charter of private universities for the first time in Pakistan. This led to a rapid growth in both private universities and programmes that are market oriented and in high demand, such as medicine, business/IT, etc.

As far as the doctorate in education is concerned, more universities in the public sector

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offer it than do those in the private sector. Exact statistics related to the number of PhD graduates in education from these universities are difficult to obtain, however, these numbers are bound to be very limited because the preparation of PhD prepared academics has been very limited in Pakistan. As a result, there is a severe dearth of PhD qualified human resource in the country. According to the Higher Education Commission (HEC) statistics only 25% of the teachers in universities in Pakistan have doctoral qualification (HEC, 2005). Doctoral preparation is not only needed for university faculty but for educational researchers as well. Clark states (2005, p. 61) that:

There is a critical need for research on education in Pakistan. With all the money being poured into education, it is essential to be conducting research on a peer-reviewed basis according to international standards of research. It is essential to know what works and what does not and why.

The formation of the Higher Education Commission in 2002 and the massive infusion of funds into doctoral education have registered a sharp increase in the enrolment of students in PhD programmes. HEC statistics show that 4500 students are undertaking PhD studies in Pakistan and another 5000 scholars are pursuing their PhD abroad. The majority of these scholars, nonetheless, are in science and technology. HEC has been critiqued for paying less attention to the development of social sciences as compared to the physical and natural sciences (Osama, Najam, Kassim-Lakha & King, 2009).

Another major criticism of doctoral programmes in Pakistan is that they are unable to support scholarship and consequently do not produce good quality research and researchers. Hoodbhoy concurs and writes:

While there are brilliant exceptions among Pakistani PhDs, most such graduates lack elementary knowledge of their fields...Although only a few meaningful

quantitative indicators of faculty quality exists, it is highly probable that a large number of university teachers, many with PhDs in mathematics and physics, would probably fail the 'A' level examinations [administered by Cambridge University to 17-18 year old students] in these subjects" (1998, p. 262).

It is in this climate that AKU-IED decided in 2001 to develop a PhD programme to reduce the severe shortage of people qualified to undertake research in education. Considering the poor reputation of doctoral programmes in Pakistan, three aspects were essential for development of a rigorous programme; to put into place policies and procedures that would ensure quality, to employ faculty of high calibre and appropriate qualification so that the programme enjoyed credibility and provide sustainable and committed resources to doctoral studies. To achieve these, three objectives have not been easy. To develop trained and highly qualified human resources within Pakistan was the first priority. For this purpose, AKU-IED took a long-term view of faculty development and a programme was put into place. Competent AKU-IED faculty and master's graduates were offered scholarships to undertake doctoral work in universities in the UK and North America subject to serving AKU-IED for a five-year period. In this way, over a period of ten years more than 20 faculty members were prepared for eventually teaching in the doctoral programme. An international PhD Programme Development Committee chaired by the author developed the proposal for a PhD Programme in Education for the Board of Trustees (Halai, Dean, Farah, Macleod, Shamim, Memon & Pring, 2004). It included policies and procedures to ensure quality in the programme. However, AKU-IED continues to grapple with issues pertaining to financial and academic sustainability of the programme (Connor & Halai, 2006).

Brief Description of AKU-IED PhD Programme in Education

The aim of AKU-IED's PhD Programme in Education is to develop high quality educational researchers able and prepared to conduct research in the *context* of the developing world with a *focus* on curriculum, teaching, learning, and leadership (Halai *et al.*, 2004). The programme comprises coursework, internship, and research work leading to submission of a thesis. It is a full-time programme that is expected to take four years for completion. The programme is conducted in English and the students are expected to write all the assignments and dissertations in English. Therefore, it is mandatory for the applicants to obtain a score of 6.5 or higher on the IELTS (or equivalent).

The first year is devoted to coursework and the second year is allocated to the internship and writing of the research proposal. The last two years are devoted to data collection, analysis, and writing the thesis. The formal coursework is spread over two 16-week semesters in Year 1 and is offered in three areas, namely: (a) educational research, (b) education and development, and (c) curriculum, teaching, learning, and leadership. The internship is a unique aspect of the programme. It comprises of 8-10 weeks of work-experience attachment to a programme or an organization concerned with research and/or development to give the student a broader intellectual experience. The attachment is normally expected to be to a non-university setting to expose students to research undertaken outside the university.

The PhD Programme Development Committee was cognizant of the constraints within which this programme was to be offered and hence a very limited array of courses were developed which were mandatory for all students. The small number of faculty available to teach in the programme and the small number of students enrolled does not allow the possibility of offering a larger number of courses. Hence, the students do not have a choice in the selection of courses - all students have to take all the courses in an almost lock-

step fashion. However, the advantage is that it ensures that the students take a sequence of appropriate courses to enable an optimum doctoral experience.

A maximum of six students were selected on merit on the basis of high level performance in a master programme (or its equivalent) in a relevant field. Admission to the programme is undertaken every alternate year. The three cohorts under discussion include 14 students (8 males and 6 females) of which 3 are from East Africa and 11 are from Pakistan. Six (i.e. more than half) Pakistani students are from the Gilgit-Baltistan province and the rest are from Sindh, where the AKU-IED is situated. Two students graduated in 2009.

Initially at least six of the eight courses were taught by a team of two, which included a PhD qualified full-time faculty member from AKU-IED, and one faculty member from a Partner University outside Pakistan. Two partner universities have played an important role in teaching in the programme, namely, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Canada and Oxford University Department of Education, University of Oxford, UK. The faculty members from the two Universities came to teach generally for one/two weeks during a 16-week semester in the programme - one exception was an eight-week teaching assignment. However, this particular support in teaching was slowly withdrawn. The fourth cohort that was admitted recently was entirely taught by the AKU-IED faculty.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for writing this reflective paper on the doctoral programme entailed recollecting my experiences of managing and teaching/supervision in the programme supported by a detailed reading of the contents of four kinds of documents, as described below:

- a. Minutes of the PhD Programme Committee (PPC) meetings from September 2004 to June 2009. This committee was formulated once the programme began formally and the PhD Programme Development Committee

was disbanded. The PPC consisted of all the faculty members of AKU-IED who taught or supervised students in the programme. This Committee met once a month in the early stages of the programme but later on reduced the meetings to only once a semester. These minutes provided a view of the day-to-day conduct of the programme.

- b. Reports of the five 3-day meetings of the international PhD Advisory Committee (PAC) held in Karachi every year. The PAC (as it was generally called) consisted of three members from the partner universities outside Pakistan, AKU-IED faculty teaching in the programme and the Director. The main objective was to advise the Director and Head of the programme on quality related issues in the programme. The first year of the programme was an exception when the PAC met twice in an academic year – February and August 2005. This forum provided an opportunity to discuss key issues relevant to the programme and find ways to move forward in light of international norms and policies.
- c. The report of the Mid-Programme review conducted by an International Review Committee in January 2007 provided an objective assessment of the programme by experts in the field.
- d. Official documents such as PhD Proposal, Assessment Policies, Admission policies, etc.

The reading of these documents provided an understanding of the major challenges faced and the manner in which some of them were resolved (or remain unresolved). The lens used for reading these documents was Schon's (1987) reflection-on-action, a process that takes place after the experience has taken place. This kind of reflection provides insights into and an opportunity to examine experience and to draw conclusions concerning future actions. It also allows the possibility of providing a conceptual clarity which may be absent in the throes of action.

The main responsibility of developing the PhD Programme was deputed to the 6-member international PhD Programme Development Committee with membership from both within AKU-IED and from universities outside Pakistan and which the researcher chaired till the 2004 when the proposal for the programme was accepted by the AKU Board of Trustees. Then, the researcher was nominated to lead the implementation of the programme which was for the three cohorts of PhD students before stepping down after completing the two terms as the Head of the PhD programme in June 2009. During this seven-year period, the researcher was even more convinced that developing countries such as Pakistan needed strong doctoral programmes to develop their own research agendas and research methods to help understand and solve national problems and develop a research practice that explores local ways of knowing, teaching and research (Smith, 1999).

Challenges in the Context of Pakistan

The challenges faced by the doctoral programmes in Pakistan and other countries in the developing world, often are referred to as the South, have many similarities. They are characterized by deficits of all kinds of resources (Altbach, 2002; The Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000). However, AKU-IED has attempted to overcome or reduce this resource gap and offered a rigorous programme.

Developing Independent Learners

To become independent learners and how to teach this skill are the goals to be achieved and processes to be learnt by the PhD students as well as faculty members. These would definitely take time and a lot of efforts (Biggs, 2003; Gow & Kember, 1990). During the 4-5 years of their studies, the students demonstrated perseverance, despite severe odds (including death of spouse, severe, and debilitating illness) and they continued their doctoral studies. However, it appeared that in the areas of academic and scholarly learning, tutors had to

urge and coax students to be more independent in their thinking. At least in the beginning, they appeared highly dependent on their teachers. This was evident by the substantial resistance offered by the students to come prepared to class with their readings completed and to take control of their own learning by initiating discussions and raising questions. This was a regular topic of discussion in the PhD Programme Committee meetings. A part of the problem was of course, the students' difficulty in reading and comprehending academic texts despite their IELTS scores of 6.5 or higher. The resistance they offered was different, i.e. there was a tacit (and sometimes overt) desire for the faculty to "teach" them what was required. For instance, the students articulated a need in at least some courses for lectures rather than interactive classroom discussions. Furthermore, students requested very detailed guidelines for assignments and saw attempts by the faculty to let them interpret at least a part of the assignments themselves as confusing.

One reason why doctoral students showed resistance towards independent learning could be due to what Hofstede (2006, p. 7) called power distance. In a large international study encompassing 40 countries, including Pakistan, Hofstede investigated cultural differences in the value systems, and identified four main dimensions, which was later increased to five, describing them as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and femininity, and long-term orientation. The five dimensions have been critiqued for being reductionist, among other things (Fang, 2003; McSweeney, 2002; Tayeb, 1994). However, replication studies have yielded very similar results, pointing to stability of the dimensions across time and possibly nations. Other studies which were based in Pakistan have also used the five dimensions productively (Islam, 2004) and hence, two of these dimensions were used in the paper because of their relevance for the doctoral programme.

Power distance and individualism vs. collectivism will be discussed in the paper as it

is pertinent to the PhD programme. Hofstede (2006) defines power distance as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally and has identified certain characteristics intrinsic to large power distance societies like Pakistan. This list includes affinity towards teacher-centred education, seeing elders in the society with both respect and fear and acceptance of hierarchy as existential inequality rather than inequality of roles established for convenience. The students were socialized in a large power distance society and had acquired quite a number of characteristics mentioned above. On the other hand, AKU-IED wanted them to become independent learners which is a quality more readily developed and sustained by small power distance institutions.

The problem is further exacerbated because AKU-IED is a mix of both small and large power distance organizations. For instance, AKU-IED encourages all the students to address their faculty members by their first names instead of adding the prefix of Dr. or Professor, as is the norm in other universities in Pakistan. The faculty and the management, including the Director of AKU-IED, often eat with the students and staff in the cafeteria and queue up for their food. This is unlike the normal practice of having separate facilities for the students and the faculty members. In the class, particularly at the doctoral level, the students are encouraged to discuss openly and frankly their ideas and to even strongly disagree with their professors. On the other hand, there are a number of practices at AKU-IED which are more reflective of a large power distance organization. For instance, the deference demonstrated by the management of AKU and IED to the views expressed by the faculty members from UK, Canada and Australia who teach or supervise in the programme as compared to the local faculty. Another example is that there is very little mingling of students and faculty (including supervisors) at the social and informal level. AKU-IED gives mixed signals to the students. Hence, it takes doctoral

students some time to be able to mediate the value systems within AKU-IED and become socialized into them.

Most Asian and African societies value collectivism where people are born in large families or clans; they value belonging to a group and have the “we” consciousness rather than “I” way of thinking (Islam, 2004; Jandt, 2001, p. 200). The stress is on belonging and harmony rather than on speaking one’s mind. The purpose of education is learning how to do rather than learning how to learn (Hofstede, 2006, p. 10). A large majority of the PhD students in the programme are from the regions which exhibit a strong collectivist culture. It is being a part of this culture that makes it difficult for them to disagree with each other or their tutors. In a sense despite being in Pakistan, they were exposed to and encouraged to inculcate the values of independence and individualism which are foreign to the Pakistani society. By the end of their doctoral studies, the students accomplished the harder task of a “conceptual addition” as opposed to a “conceptual change” where they were able to pick and choose the dimensions of power distance and collectivism to exhibit at AKU and to exhibit outside the University (Barnett & Hodson, 2001).

Management of Student Learning

As the Head of the programme for the first five years, the researcher was surprised to find that a great deal of time was spent in negotiating and renegotiating deadlines for assignments and other institutional activities, such as internship, PhD seminars, etc. Partly, this was due to the poor time management and students’ need for some feedback. The first PAC meeting minutes documents the suggestion that, “Wherever possible, assignments with a built-in formative component” will be planned for the students (AKU-IED, February 2005, section 2.5.6). Hence, as part of this strategy, the faculty decided to build in interim milestones within the assignments/activities so that the students would be required to share a draft outline of their paper some time before the final deadline or to make

a presentation before finalizing their report, etc. The tutors found that most of the students tended to ignore these milestones if they were non-graded. Or, they submitted ill-prepared drafts outlined in haste. In other words, the tendency of the students to miss deadlines continued. Meanwhile, delays and missed deadlines caused difficulty in a programme, as already stated earlier, which had little flexibility in the first year to allow students to take additional time for coursework. However, this problem was reduced by shifting the responsibility of submitting assignments on due dates to the Registrar’s office that did not have authority to extend deadlines or to accept papers that exceeded word limits and rigidly adhered to the policy of deducting points for late submission of assignments (AKU-IED Assessment Policy).

It was also challenging to help students to complete their programme in the relatively short period of four years and provide them with the opportunities such as internship (mandatory) and to study visit outside Pakistan (optional). Particularly as these four years included a whole year of intense coursework – eight courses spread over two semesters. The PhD programme has been critiqued for being too packed with things to do, leaving little room for reflection and other intellectual pursuits by the mid-programme review.

One option would be to reduce the coursework but the standard of higher education and research in the social sciences is very poor in Pakistan (Zaidi, 2002). It is absolutely essential that the programme maintains a strong taught component to ground students in research methods as well as both the theories and practice of education and development. Therefore, any strategy to reduce coursework does not appear feasible. Suggestions to increase the time to complete the programme to more than four years have met with resistance because this also means finding more funds to support the students in an already very difficult funding climate. Additionally, students would find it very hard to obtain study leave for more than four years as it is a full-time programme and at this point, doing it on part-time basis is not even an option.

However, the experience with students who have graduated or are close to completion shows that all of them took (or will take) more than four years to complete.

Quality Assurance with the Support from Partner Universities in the Developed World

Quality assurance in doctoral programmes in the universities in Pakistan is dependent on peer-review and external scrutiny as it does in most universities of the world. At AKU-IED, peer review is also the backbone of quality assurance processes. However, the foundational idea is to include experienced academics from the universities outside Pakistan (read West) to be a part of the: (a) teaching team for the taught courses, (b) supervision committees of students, (c) external validation of student assignments in coursework, (d) examination of thesis by two experts from “technologically advanced countries” as mandated by HEC (<http://www.hec.gov.pk>). In addition, and as already been mentioned, the programme is supported by an international PhD Advisory Committee (PAC). The HEC requires that the thesis be examined by two external examiners, while the other measures are peculiar to AKU-IED and demonstrate an excessive dependence on the North for validation.

However, these measures have been very helpful in a number of ways. Among other, they give confidence to AKU-IED doctoral supervisors and teachers about teaching and supervising at the PhD level. For example, after the first semester of the first programme, it was seen that AKU-IED faculty was much harder in the assessment of student assignments than the members of the PAC. The external scrutiny of the grading process of the course assignments, both within a course and across courses, gave both the faculty and students confidence that uniform grading standards are implemented across all courses and within each course. Meanwhile, the examination process demonstrated that the rigorous quality assurance process had paid great dividends to students and their supervisors as their theses were rated of

high quality and received offers for publications in international journals.

However, an aspect that needs attention is the level to which the development of new knowledge and research agendas in the South will be guided by academics in the North. AKU-IED must have robust quality assurance mechanisms if the doctoral programme is to maintain and sustain quality, but the assumption that scholars from the North will be better able to assure the quality than scholars from the South needs to be interrogated. An unintended consequence of this manner of ensuring quality is that we may be allowing the North to be the gatekeepers of the knowledge generation process and that may stifle the development of new and local ways of knowing. Scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999; 2005) challenge the Western ways of knowing and researching and have called for the “decolonization” of methodologies and for new agendas of research for the indigenous people. There is a danger of the research emanating from Pakistan to be seen as “research through Imperial eyes” (Smith 1999, p. 56). Thus, it is important for supervisors and PhD students to remain conscious of this “gaze” and allow alternate interpretations to emerge and not become marginalized.

Financial Sustainability

There are pressing demands from all sections of the society to make higher education more accountable and cost-effective in the delivery of educational programmes (Mok, 1999, p. 118). “New managerialism” as defined by Utley (2001, p. 1) means that the “imposition of a powerful management body that overrides professional skills and knowledge. It keeps discipline under tight control and is driven by efficiency, external accountability and monitoring, and an emphasis on standards.” The concept of the university as a corporate institution that should provide clients what they want at an optimal price is an idea that has slowly but surely penetrated both the public and private sector universities in Pakistan (Szerkeres, 2006).

The admission to the first cohort of the PhD programme coincided with the change in the management of AKU which partially brought the ideas related to the new management with them and had partially acceded to them because of the financial crisis which has engulfed the world. The concept of higher education, as a public good that society, has to contribute towards is being rapidly replaced by the new idea of higher education as a product to be developed for clients. In addition, these clients will have to pay for the products they purchase. This has led to a number of changes at AKU-IED related to financial management which has affected the funding available to support doctoral students.

One of the most important changes that AKU-IED has had to undergo is to obtain a part of its funds through the levy of a modest fee for all its programmes to make them sustainable. Cost recovery through fees covers only 30% of the tuition at AKU-IED, the lion's share, i.e. 70% of the cost is raised through endowments, philanthropic contributions, etc. Due to the high cost of the AKU-IED doctoral programme, even though this is just a small amount in relative terms, it exceeds the ability of the students to pay. In fact, the fee charged is almost three times the scholarship offered by HEC to candidates undertaking PhD within Pakistan. The high tuition fees at AKU particularly affects AKU-IED, as teachers and teacher educators do not get a substantial increase in their remunerations after completing their PhD qualification as is normally the case in other professions. Hence, they lack the ability to repay heavy loans after graduation. For short-term at least, extra financial support for students undertaking PhD in education is required as a form of affirmative action.

Between 2004 and 2008, the admission year of the first and the third cohorts respectively, a rapid change came in the financial support offered to doctoral students. All the students of the first cohort were on the scholarships given by AKU-IED but in the second and subsequent cohorts, the students did not receive scholarships, but they were supported partially through grants and partially through soft loans that the university had negotiated for them. All

the students did not get the same amount as they were assessed on a case by case basis.

For the grants that the students receive from AKU, they are expected to pay back by offering their services in teaching or research. A student assistantship programme has been initiated but has not taken off fully due to insufficient structures in place to utilize this untapped source of academic labour. Additionally, AKU-IED expects students to work for the faculty members who have grants to be able to "pay" them. At this point, at least in the area of education, very little public or private funds for large-scale research projects are available. Hence, it is very difficult for the faculty to obtain sufficiently large grants to support the students for the duration of their doctoral studies. Only a few faculty members have been able to support students but that too for a short period of time. Until this avenue of funding PhD students become viable in Pakistan, financial sustainability will remain a challenge.

Faculty Development and Retention

AKU, through its generous faculty development programme, was able to prepare a large cadre of more than 20 doctoral-prepared faculty members who became the backbone of the doctoral programme. It must be noted that HEC requires only three faculty members with doctoral qualifications to start a doctoral programme (<http://www.hec.gov.pk>). However, as the faculty members gained experience and became known for their work both within and outside Pakistan, the demands on their time for capacity building of other national and international institutions has increased exponentially. Meanwhile, a number of experienced academics have left AKU though they continue to supervise PhD students and teach in the programme. This has affected the intellectual climate of AKU-IED and the students' perception of the doctoral programme.

Skilled migration of human resource is a reality in the developing world and globalization has made it easier (Vinokur, 2006). However, incentives and reward structures need to be strengthened to encourage the faculty to continue serving AKU-IED. While AKU-IED is proud

to be considered a national resource, claims on the faculty time need to be balanced between University needs and national needs. The new management ideas which have gained acceptance at AKU have the potential for benefiting the institution as a whole. Appropriate questions on the accountability of the faculty and the sustainability of programmes have also been raised. Faculty incentives and rewards have rightfully been connected on scholarly output. However, the implementation of these policies without sufficient support and role models at AKU-IED has the potential to de-motivate the faculty (Winter, 2009). This may further limit AKU-IED's ability to offer a high quality PhD programme.

Diversity in Students Admitted into the Programme

The three cohorts of students admitted to the PhD programme included 14 students, out of which, 13 are affiliated in some way to AKU or the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). The applications received are not only large in number but are very diverse in institutional affiliations representing universities from all over Pakistan. The first stage of the selection process eliminated almost all the applicants from the public sector universities. The applicants who finally made it were almost exclusively either Master's students of AKU-IED or faculty at AKU's other departments or in some way belonging to the Network. This has been a source of concern for the faculty.

There are two important reasons for this situation. AKU-IED has one of the few masters' in education in Pakistan that requires the submission of a research thesis. Hence, the AKU-IED M. Ed. students' applications reflect the awareness and understanding of educational research that add value to their admission portfolio. Secondly, the information that the potential applicants get from AKU-IED administration about financial support available is at best unclear and ambiguous. The applicants do not know until the programme is well underway about the kind of financial support they will be offered. Hence, the applicants from

outside the AKU and the AKDN repeatedly seek clarity about the financial assistance package that they can expect and failing to get a satisfactory response choose to go elsewhere. Whereas, AKU alumni and the faculty were able to take in stride the vague statements of financial support as they were confident that AKU would come through with the required assistance in the end. However, the applicants from outside the University or Network do not have an understanding of the system and either chose not to apply or even after the short-listing process opted to go elsewhere. How the students will be able to pay for this programme is something that needs thinking ahead of time. The lead time should be at least 4-6 months before the beginning of the programme. Therefore, to encourage bright students from outside AKU and the AKDN to apply for the programme, the financial support offered to the students needs rethinking and streamlining.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Altbach (2002) stresses the importance of developing countries to acquire their own scientific systems (p. 146):

The newly industrialized nations must develop their own scientific systems and academic institutions ... in some ways the social sciences and humanities are even more important than scientific expertise because it is impossible to rely on external knowledge for analysis of society and culture. It is quite common to downplay or ignore these "soft" fields as academic systems expand. This is a mistake, since they can make significant contributions.

The development of indigenous systems of knowledge generation will enable the development of theories to explain human behaviour in the local context. Hence, it is absolutely crucial for Pakistan to develop its own cadre of researchers in education who can begin to examine issues important to the country.

Retaining and "Growing" Faculty

From AKU-IED's experience, it is clear that PhD programmes in the developing world face four kinds of challenges. Programmatic challenges include both academic as well as financial aspects. For the students, the major challenge is acquiring the habits of mind that characterizes higher education. Developing and retaining qualified people remain the major challenge as far as the faculty is concerned. Similarly, to maintain quality through quality assurance processes is a challenge that cuts through all the other four issues. The AKU-IED experience demonstrates that at least in this part of the world, universities cannot acquire or attract the faculty from outside because there is none available. They have to "grow" their own. At this point, the majority of the faculty members are those who studied for their M. Ed. at AKU-IED and went abroad for their PhD. This is a precious resource and thus, incentives must be provided to retain them or to continue to utilize their services in the form of "adjunct positions" even if they choose to leave AKU-IED.

Attracting Diversity in Students

There is apparently a great need to attract a diverse group of students to the programme. At this point, a majority of the doctoral students are AKU-IED's own M. Ed. graduates. Perhaps, better marketing of the programme is required, as too much "inbreeding" will not be very healthy for a small programme that admits only four students from Pakistan every alternate year. Thus, in order to attract students from outside AKU-IED, it is grappling with the question; what are the characteristics of a PhD applicant or student? Due to the multidisciplinary nature of education, this is both a pertinent and a difficult question to answer. The response partially depends on the purpose of the PhD programme. "Is the purpose of PhD to prepare future teachers for the universities, or to initiate into a conduction of research, or contributing original research or to train minds to contribute to the society at large?" (Rhodes, 2001, p. 2). So far, AKU-IED has been very focused in its aim

to develop educational researchers; a tracking of the graduates will demonstrate Pakistan's capacity to absorb such trained human resources. However, there are pressures to not only increase the number of doctoral students admitted but to also diversify the portfolio of the students as part of the overall broadening of the scope of AKU-IED within AKU. These changes will have to be brought in carefully.

Providing the Financial Support

Financial issues have two interconnected dimensions, namely, the high cost of the programme and the provision of financial assistance to the students. Most applicants find the programme too expensive and if they have sufficient resources, they choose to go abroad rather than staying in Pakistan for the same cost. For cost reduction, it may be prudent to consider lessening of external scrutiny through academics outside Pakistan other than the final dissertation examination as per HEC guidelines. With one cohort graduated and the second cohort close to completion, the faculty members teaching in the programme have gained both experience and confidence.

However, doctoral programmes by nature are expensive and hence, cost-cutting can only go so far; what is required is linking up with HEC and other national and international agencies that fund higher education to offer scholarships to students to help pay for their studies. This model has shown a great promise for providing funds for M. Ed. students (Ed-Links, 2010), but the length and the cost of the programme have not invited greater interest in investing in this particular programme.

Reducing the Density of the Programme

Academically, the PhD programme suffers from a problem which is the exact opposite of what is generally seen in Pakistan. The programme is too demanding and tightly packed without giving sufficient 'breathing space' between programmatic activities. An overseas faculty called it a 1.5 PhD. In other words, it puts

too much pressure on the students to complete whatever it is that has to be completed without the reflection and thinking time which is so essential for any programme in higher education. Thus, it may be worthwhile to consider making the internship an optional part of the programme similar to study visit abroad. While it is important not to leave the completion time of the PhD open-ended, it may also be more realistic to plan for a 4-5 year time period. Experience suggests this to be the case.

Creating National Partnerships and University Linkages

AKU-IED has been remarkably successful in using its international partnership arrangements to support both the teaching and supervision of doctoral students. To a lesser extent, scholars at the national level are also involved in assessing and evaluating thesis and thesis proposals. However, a greater effort is required for both the students and the faculty to benefit from the national expertise and expertise available at AKU through the establishment of intra-university and inter-university networks within Pakistan. This is absolutely essential as AKU-IED is a very small unit and cannot possibly expect to have all of the expertise required to teach and supervise doctoral students. Meanwhile, enhanced linkages with government policies and better synchronization with the HEC funding cycle will also benefit the students.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this bold attempt to provide a high quality doctoral programme in Education in Pakistan has the potential to contribute tremendously to the development of educational researchers in Pakistan and enhance the culture of research in education. However, this can happen only if the challenges facing this initiative are recognized and resolved through commitment and ingenuity.

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