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# **Teacher Education in Pakistan with Particular Reference to Teachers' Conceptions of Teaching**

*Amin Rehmani, AKU Examination Board, Karachi*

## **Abstract**

*This paper discusses teacher education in Pakistan with particular emphasis on teachers' conceptions of teaching in improving quality of education.*

*This paper is based on an initial study that examines teachers' conceptions of teaching in the context of Pakistan. The study seeks to explore whether teachers' conceptions of teaching influence decision-making in classroom teaching. It describes conditions of teaching and learning in Pakistan and argues for reform in teacher education to improve quality of teaching and learning.*

## **Introduction**

Teacher education and teachers themselves are a crucial part of educational change and development. Efforts are being made globally to improve teacher education programmes and enhance teachers' professional development in the wake of the advent of Information and Communication Technology and growing notions of globalization, including theories of free-trade market economy. The colossal socio-economic changes occurring at an unprecedented rate in demographic, political, economic, cultural and technological arenas have influenced reforms in education in general, and teacher education in particular.

A report of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first century (1996) submitted to UNESCO states:

The importance of the role of the teacher as an agent of change, promoting understanding and tolerance, has never been so more obvious than today. It is likely to become even more critical in the twenty-first century. The need of change, from narrow nationalism to universalism, from ethnic and cultural prejudice to tolerance, understanding and pluralism, from autocracy to democracy in its various manifestations, and from a technologically divided world... to a technologically united world, places enormous responsibilities on teachers who participate in the moulding of the characters and minds of the new generation. (Delors J. et al. 1996, pp.141-2).

Teacher Education in Pakistan is an important area for research. There is substantial literature available on Education in Pakistan, which suggest that the education system leaves much to be desired, particularly in the area of teacher education. In this paper, I examine questions such as why the quality of teaching and learning is poor in Pakistan. Does it have to do with teacher training or the ways in which teachers conceptualize teaching and learning? How far are their concepts of teaching influenced by the social and cultural environment within and outside the school, and whether or not these perceptions shape their understanding of teaching as enacted in their practices?

This paper is based on an initial study that examines teachers' concepts of teaching in the context of Pakistan. The initial study only examines contexts and cultures of schools to study how far these elements interplay with the teachers' concepts of teaching.

With necessary permission from all the stakeholders to conduct research, four course participants of an M.Ed. programme of the Aga Khan University-Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) have been considered here as four case studies using interpretive and constructivist approaches. Here I present only one case based on the initial study.

## **Conduct of Interviews**

In each case, beside the CP, his or her head teacher, two teachers and four students in a focus group of the same school were interviewed. In the selection and content of the interview schedules, the framework was drawn from the works of teacher educators and researchers such as Fullan and Hargreaves (1992), Ramsden (1992) Fullan (1993), Smyth (1995), Harris (1995) and Moore (2000) on teacher education and teaching; Watkins et al. (1996) Watkins (2000, 2001, 2003) and Moore (ibid) on learning; and Black and William (1998), Assessment Reform Group (1999), Gipps (1994; 1996) and Klenowski (2002) on assessment.

## **A Case Study**

The case is of a course participant hereinafter called Sara (a pseudonym) who participated in a two-year full time in-service professional development programme i.e. M.Ed. in Education of the AKU-IED.

## **Background to the Case**

Sara belongs to a lower middle class family. She studied in a good private English medium school in Karachi. Being the eldest in her family, she assumed more responsibilities from an early age, which included looking after and helping her siblings in their homework. She thought she was not a very happy child.

After completing her higher secondary school certificate, she could not go for medical education due to mostly financial problems, and instead joined as an untrained teacher in a government primary school. While on the job, she completed her BSc. and primary teaching certificate (PTC) courses as an external candidate. Sara also completed her Masters, switching between her school and the university. Having completed her Masters, she was transferred to this secondary school where she has continued to date. It was from this school that she applied for AKU-IED for its M.E.d programme.

### **Sara's School**

It is well established that school cultures and contexts play significant roles in making the school and classroom effective (Fullan et al. 1990; Watkins 2003). As Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) argue that in order 'to understand the teacher's teaching, it is important to understand... the context in which the teacher works' (p.44). Fullan's statement that 'the school is the centre of change because the norms, values and structure of the school as an organization make a huge cumulative difference for individual teachers' (1991:133), is the driving force in analysing the data of the case in order to ascertain teachers' conceptions of teaching of this school.

Sara's school, established in 1967, is located in the northwest part of Karachi. The locality of the school ranges from lower middle section to the middle section of the society. At the time of first interviews, there were thirty teachers including 10 male teachers. Total student enrolment was 690 from level VI to level X.

Being an English medium school in the public sector, the principal and the head teacher have to comply with demands from the high authorities to give admission to more students than its capacity (almost 70% admissions) resulting in high teacher student ratio (1:60). Shehla, one of the two teachers I interviewed said,

Higher authorities have recommendations so we have to take [give] admission, ... first time it so happened that we had to make

sections, I have 65 students right now.... we have, very congested, cramped situation; in one desk four students sit.

The researcher observed that three to four students were sitting uncomfortably on one bench; Shehla further said, 'they cannot fully concentrate on their studies. At times they fall down from the benches'.

### **School's Physical Environment**

The school has a fine purpose built building. As I approached the school gate, a gatekeeper verified my identity. In front of me was a long but narrow corridor from one corner of the boundary wall to the other with classrooms on both sides. Most classes and school administration offices including a staff room were situated on the left side of the corridor with some trees and plants.

I will now discuss a number of themes derived from the data, and these include: the learning culture in the school, teachers' professional development, teaching as a profession, views on effective teaching, approaches to and methods of teaching, teachers as persons and as professionals, teaching and students' learning and teaching and assessment.

### **Learning Culture in School**

Sara explained that the environment of the school was not very open and supportive. For example, innovations or initiatives were considered as threatening. When she wanted to implement extra-curricular activities, or set up a student library, nobody appreciated nor allowed her to do this. She lamented,

...there is no learning environment where you [can] sit and develop [and] no professionalism.... Instead of giving support, teachers withdraw... even if you want to sit and work productively, that is not appreciated.

Sara further asserted that the senior teachers and other colleagues were not forthcoming in sharing their teaching experiences and subject content knowledge in helping her to solve some of her classroom management problems. She stated:

... all the time I had problems with children, I was thinking how to cope with them, I go to senior teachers, but they never turned to be too much of help and they were not at all open. ...

Issues such as classroom management were seen as weaknesses, and such an attitude barred her from sharing or discussing classroom issues. In their rare discussions in the staff room, Sara felt that the teachers were not of much help because she thought 'their thinking was also very limited'.

Sara's frustrations for the teachers' indifferent attitude towards their work can be understood from the reasons that Anita, the head teacher and the two teachers Shehla and Nadia attributed as to why the staff always worked under pressure: a) the compulsory requirement of completing the syllabus according to the given monthly schedules; b) checking of students' work, regarded as a cumbersome activity, as the teacher student ratio was as high as 1:60 or more; c) short span of classroom period (30 to 35 minutes only); and d) lack of material and human resources. This did not allow the teachers to involve students in active learning, do group work activities, and pay individual attention as Nadia asserted,

... due to large classes we cannot give individual attention to students. ... but in our school we have very good teachers, they are involved in teaching and they are not satisfied that they cannot teach well due to these reasons. (Nadia)

Classroom discipline and control appeared to be a major problem. For Sara it was a major issue. Shehla and Nadia suggested that a lot of time and energy go into controlling rather than teaching. Watkins (2003) argues that context is an important consideration to bear in mind as 'learning can often remain very tied to a context' (p.37). Shehla pointed out 'No teacher can teach effectively with this strength in classroom. Controlling children becomes difficult'. Nadia got the best-teacher award because classroom control was one of the winning criteria. 'they see how is your class run, how do you deal with children in classes, ... how is your class control'. Anita believed that teachers should have 'classroom control power', hence any bustling noises arising from group activities (if any), were not appreciated and the teacher was blamed for disciplinary problems in her class because,

[a] teacher's quality [of being a good teacher] is judged by her classroom (discipline), if it is well controlled and silent then that is considered as good class. Teaching and learning have no meaning rather classroom must be silent. (Shehla)

The data suggests that Sara believed in learning from senior teachers and sharing her teaching problems. On the other hand senior teachers were not interested sharing and learning from each other. Understandingly so because

either they had no time due to the high workloads, or their classes were already well behaved for which they were rewarded and not on the quality of teaching and learning. Hence they did not bother to discuss classroom issues.

Collegiality and cooperation among teachers are important factors in developing a learning community in the school (Rosenholtz 1989; Fullan and Hargreaves 1992). Rosenholtz (1985) says 'the most effective schools do not isolate teachers but instead encourage professional dialogue and collaboration' (p.351).

Collaboration among teachers is also essential for learning from and interacting with each other (Fullan and Hargreaves 1992; Fullan 1991; 1993). The relationships are said to be collegial when teachers have opportunities to meet formally or informally to discuss issues related to classroom practices, students' learning and their achievements, and to share a common vision (Rolheiser-Bennett 1991).

In this school there seems to have been little interaction amongst the teachers to voice and share their concerns, as Shehla put it. '...we don't have a formal setting where we can share our concerns. Occasional discussions in the staff room are only related to classroom control' (Shehla). Sara presents a gloomy picture, 'there is no learning environment'. Teachers, as Sara had suggested above, do not come forward to help each other; rather any teacher who wants to take any initiative is not encouraged and faces criticism.

## **Teachers' Professional Development**

Levin and Lockheed (1993) suggest that developing countries, such as Pakistan, face problems in providing quality education to their younger generations and lack the most basic resources including qualified teachers. Some studies on education in Pakistan in general and teacher education in particular reveal that the general education level of teachers is poor. Bacchus (1996) opines that most teachers who come to AKU-IED may have poor qualification and professional academic background.

One of the main reasons for low quality education has been the low percentage of expenditure on education. Pakistan spends less than 2 percent of its GDP on education, compared to the 4 percent of GNP recommended by UNESCO for developing countries. Since 1995-96 the total expenditure from 2% has actually come down to 1.6 percent in year 2000-01 (Shariff 2003, p.213), and currently it is 1.8 percent. Haq and Haq claim that 'Pakistan is the only country in South Asia where public expenditure on education as a proportion of GNP has gone down since 1990' (1998, p.53; See also Aziz 2004). Quality of teaching is

inevitably linked with teachers' qualification and professional development and training. Although the government system does have a policy for in-service programmes, teachers often do not get opportunities for professional growth and development (Ali 1998).

Anita the head teacher stated that teachers attend workshops but new learning cannot be implemented due to resource constraints, lack of teaching time and shortage of teachers. Whereas, Sara, Shehla and Nadia opined that there were hardly any staff development programmes. Anita suggested, 'the government should provide facilities to teachers to teach well... they should provide training and workshops on all subjects and these be organized within the school'. Anita further stated that some teachers were not willing to go for any in-service programme, as they believed that, 'they are not students any more so why they should go and learn'. Sara lamented:

...there is no awareness in teachers. Teachers do not know that education is such a big field ..., before [joining IED] even I had never thought about this profession being so vast. In our environment we don't have this awareness; teachers also are not interested to upgrading themselves (Sara).

## **Discussion**

Some teachers' belief that they were no longer students, suggests that they were contented with whatever academic and professional qualifications they had and did not consider on going and continuous learning as important. One of the reasons for such an attitude towards new learning could be due to the conventional teaching methods teachers adopt. Teaching is mostly based on one textbook only. Teachers are hardly challenged to be innovative and creative which is demonstrated through vast reading. It is easier for teachers to prepare their notes once and use them over many years, as there is hardly any change in the curriculum and text books.

The above data suggests that school culture, attitudes towards staff development, school environment and collegiality are important factors that may affect teachers' thinking and behaviour towards teaching and learning, and may contribute towards developing certain attitudes and beliefs. School cultures could be open and encouraging or closed and impeding. It is likely that teachers' conceptions of teaching would get nurtured and influenced by such contexts. The teachers may be good and wish to contribute, but a number of factors such as

large classes and unavailability of resources serve as impediments in classroom practices and in their indifferent attitudes.

It seems that this school could not do much about promoting an enabling culture in the school. Public schools do not have any direct authority to send teachers for the professional development programmes and the decision lies with the government education departments. It appears that this has developed a negative attitude in most teachers who do not consider learning as a continuous and life long process. The staff relationships may be termed as what Stoll and Fink (1996) call 'dysfunctional' (p.33) i.e. a sense of unreliability; lack of trust and a blaming culture prevails.

## **Teaching**

### **Teaching as a profession**

Sara was of the opinion that teaching is not as rewarding a profession as other professions such as medicine are. She affirmed:

... in our society teaching is not as respected [a] profession as doctor [medicine or engineer[ing]]. Those who couldn't go to those professions, join this profession. ... I first applied for my admission in the medical [but] by chance... I became the teacher, [because] I was providing financial support to my family. ... But, on the other hand this is one of the most respectful professions for women in our society, so ... I could join this profession, and it is also very less time taking. I have to be in school up to 12 or one [o'clock] and after that I can manage my family work, so these were my feeling.

Shehla said: this is a half-day job that is the biggest facility'.

Teaching in Pakistan is a poorly paid profession. Teachers are underpaid compared to people with similar qualifications in other professions. Mostly, less qualified low-income groups who cannot get jobs elsewhere join the profession.

Somewhat similar examples are found in the USA and the UK. Educators such as Maclean, (1999), Bullough Jr., (2002) and Hellinan and Khmelkov (2001) suggest that teachers' social and economic conditions have not improved compared to people in similar or other professions. Hellinan and Khmelkov (2001) argue that teachers are seen as 'service personnel' (p.177). Maclean

(1999) asserts that in many countries of the Asia-Pacific region, teachers have been given 'semi professional (emphasis in the original) rather than a full professional status' (p.88).

In his discussion on teacher professionalism, Hargreaves (1999) concludes 'the forces of de-professionalization in teaching have cut deep, and in many places teaching has not even approached becoming a profession, by any definition of the term' (p.72 see also Hargreaves 2000). AKU-IED's (2002) *Discussion Report: Teacher Education* also suggests that teaching in Pakistan is considered a job and hardly a profession; and generally, teachers do not have a professional attitude towards teaching (Warwick & Riemers 1995). Most male teachers are engaged in other jobs or small businesses or work on farms after school hours (Ali 1998). Teachers usually give tuitions to make ends meet. Hence teaching is not regarded as a full time profession for economic reasons and because it is considered to be of low status. Teachers who join AKU-IED programme may come with such beliefs and attitudes towards teaching.

For Shehla, teaching was a family profession. But she was interested in homeopathic medicine. After marriage her husband did not allow her to continue as a homeopath so she unwillingly joined teaching. She said,

... so forcefully I did this job, but when I came here I started enjoying my attachment with children. I like ... student teacher relationship and now I feel that there is no better profession than this. [Moreover],

Shehla further stated that:

We should take this profession as Ibadat (worship), only then there is a benefit, our own conscious is also satisfied and children also get benefit, if we take it just as job then there is no use. ... This profession is such that not only we teach but we learn also, we learn a lot from our children, so we should be doing best, it gives us also opportunity to learn. (Shehla)

Both Nadia and Anita viewed teaching as a noble and sacred profession from the religious point of view. For them it is building a whole new generation. Anita believed that it is a demanding and serious profession 'although it is not a very rewarding profession [financially], one should fulfil the responsibility without expecting much reward'. Anita further explained:

... I think it is like [a] mother who nourishes her children ..., teachers' should consider students as their children and understand that the whole generation will be playing a key role in our society and they will be foundation of our country. In the teaching profession, one should be very sincere .... If we take from religious point of view, God has given us a great responsibility. In order to fulfil that, we need to be very sincere with our profession. We should leave our worries at home when we go to the class and focus on our teaching, considering that this time is amanat (trust) from God and fulfil [it] sincerely. (Anita)

## Discussion

The above responses can be categorized into three major points:

**Teaching as a sacred profession:** Firstly, they found an intrinsic value in teaching. They regarded it as a noble or religious cause. An Islamic view of teaching comes out predominantly. According to the Qur'an, God taught Adam. He taught Man with the Pen what he knew not (2:31; 92:5). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has been given the title of a teacher (Mu'allim) in the Quran. Throughout the Muslim history teaching has been considered as a sacred duty (Al-Aaroosi 1980; Kinnany 1980; Baloch 2000).

**Teaching as a respectable profession:** Secondly, it is respectable because teachers command respect in the society from a socio-cultural and religious perspective, rather than a financial one. Respect for teachers is defined by culture, history and tradition (Al-Aaroosi 1980; Kinnany 1980; Baloch 2000).

**Ideal profession for women:** Thirdly, although for Sara and Shehla teaching was not the first choice and it was adopted unwillingly or even forcefully, they regarded it better and safe from the female point of view. Seen in a socio-cultural context, teaching is considered as most 'suitable' and the 'ideal half time job' for women both in urban and rural areas (Bhatti et al. 1988:242), as women can attend to their family affairs (see Ali 1998). Mostly for these reasons parents or husbands allow females to go for this profession. Hence circumstances dictate that some to go for teaching.

Notwithstanding the religious views about teaching, the head teacher complained that although teachers in her school considered teaching as a sacred (*muqaddas*) profession; they did not regard it very seriously.

Sara explains why teachers did not take the profession seriously, ‘teachers did not take teaching seriously as one teacher [has to] take many classes. Although it is a half-day job one finds it difficult to agree with Ali (1998), that it is generally considered being an easygoing job. With regard to this school, teachers have to accomplish a lot in a few hours including teaching, checking of students’ copies etc. Anita views this issue as follows:

We have 30 minutes period ..., teachers have [the] load of completing the syllabus from the Board and have this in mind all the time that they have to complete this. They are checked on whether they have corrected the copies of the students and completed the syllabus. Naturally then, teachers’ full concentration would be on these two things. This happens in all the classes, inspectors come and observe these things only.

Shehla also voiced similar issues:

We have issues like completing the syllabus, less time per period, large strengths and correcting the copies. If I teach two sections, I have in both sections 60 to 70 students, so in two or three days also we cannot correct all the copies.

Notwithstanding the religious beliefs of the teachers regarding the teaching profession, it seems that factors such as lack of conducive and supporting environment, financial incentives, high teacher student ratio and work load, interplay with such beliefs and it becomes difficult for teachers to harmonize their beliefs with their practice.

## **Effective Teaching**

For Lockheed & Verspoor (1991), teachers’ content knowledge and pedagogical skills determine effective teaching and have a positive impact on the students’ achievement (Harris 1995; Moore 2000, 2004; Rehmani N. 2000). This is what Ramsden (1992) calls ‘good teaching’.. Levin and Lockheed (1993) suggest that effective teaching at its minimum involves: (a) presentation of materials in a rational and orderly manner, which is appropriate to the students’ age level; (b) active student participation; (c) enabling students to put their learning into application and practice; (d) giving the students feedback on their performance (p.29).

Effective teaching is said to take place when the teacher actively involves the students in the teaching and learning processes, and when the students are able

to make connections between their previous and present learning and also construct new meaning and improve upon it. This is what is called 'learning about learning' (Watkins et al. 1996; Watkins 2003). Watkins (ibid) argues that the word 'effective' is rarely defined. It is contextual and goal oriented i.e. 'effective for when? Effective for what?' (p.27).

Confessing her ignorance about what effective teaching was, Sara stated that she hardly involved students in their learning. Her teaching, like those of other teachers was traditional, 'before going to IED, I was not aware of this terminology (student-centred), I did not think that students should also participate in the class, and how much it is important to have their participation.'

Anita, the head teacher, believed that for teachers to teach effectively they should never consider their knowledge to be complete or perfect; they should learn more, acquire new knowledge, read new books and learn new techniques. 'Teachers should not rely on what they learned in their own times' (Anita).

Nadia depicts the real situation and the head teacher's remarks above make more sense in this context. The teacher said:

... what we are giving is only bookish knowledge... beyond that we are doing nothing, no more teaching and no more knowledge ... because of the strength of the class. No teacher can teach effectively with this strength in classrooms [1:65]; controlling children becomes difficult (Nadia).

Shehla suggested that even if they wanted to involve students in activities, it was not possible due to large number of students in the class and shorter span of time per class,

I tried to include some activities in my class to involve students, but failed. If we have a manageable class [size] only then we can manage this, but with full strength, we cannot manage. I prepare charts at home and hang them in class and [by the time I] try to explain, the class is over, so we cannot continue with this. If we have less strength then we can become effective.

Given that some of the teachers in the school did not believe in continuous learning due to the lack of library facilities, teaching limitations to one textbook only and frontal and teacher centred teaching because of the high teacher

student ratio and passive learning; it is unlikely that effective teaching could take place.

Another important point that can be highlighted is classroom context that may impede effective teaching and learning. As Watkins (ibid: 37) argues that context is an important consideration to bear in mind as 'learning can often remain very tied to a context'. If classes are overcrowded, classroom control and management become the priority rather than teaching and learning.

Beside over crowded classes, factors such as teaching and learning materials, library resources, use of multiple reference materials, small size of classes etc. are also considered important in creating conducive environment for effective teaching to take place. If not a leading indicator, a conducive environment is seen as 'a key underpinning of effective learning and teaching' (MacBeath 1999, p.47).

## **Approaches to and Methods of Teaching**

Generally speaking, teaching practices in Pakistan, hardly promote students' learning. Studies such as those by UNESCO (1977), Avalos and Hadad (1981), The British Council (1988), Farooq (1985), Ghafoor and Khan (1994), Warwick and Reimers (1995) and Ali (1998), suggest that teachers mostly rely on notes that they dictate to students. Whole class instruction is mostly based on lectures given from the front and there is minimum classroom participation by students. Little or no feedback is given to students on their written work and portfolios (Klenowski 2002), due to lack of ongoing monitoring and assessment practices. Teaching is generally 'rote, mechanical, expository,' teacher and textbook centered and examination oriented (Christie & Afzaal 2005).

Such teaching is considered as craft (Hoban 2002), or a repertoire of competences and skills to be mastered (Smyth 1995; Moore 2000), and implemented with little regard to teachers' knowledge, depth of the subject matter and the students' learning capacities.

Bacchus (1996) concludes that 'the same pattern of instruction which encourages rote memorization of facts rather than an understanding of processes is characteristic of teaching in Pakistan and the countries from which AKU-IED draws its students' (p.1).

As has been argued by Khalid (1996) and Hoodbhoy (1998), teaching approaches seem to have changed very little over the last five decades.

Sara was not aware of the child-centred approach. She did not know how important it was to involve children in the teaching and learning process. Discovery-based and inquiry-based methods, she said, were not known in her context, *these were not there at all in my school.*

Sara believed that she had no knowledge of any theory that underpins activity-based approach. She said she had no idea about group work. She tried to encourage students to use the library, to read more, but her colleagues rather discouraged her to do that. In her view, the school's attitude was totally discouraging towards taking any initiative. When she gave notes to students from other books, this was seen by them and their parents as a deviation from the prescribed text and was seen as problematic. She said when I gave them notes from other books, their parents came and they complained. The head teacher summoned her for an explanation. There was a lack of communication between the teachers, 'I don't actually know what other teachers were doing in their classes; there is no communication between teachers so they did not know much about each other's classes'. Sara indicated that most teachers' teaching, including her own, was textbook and teacher centred, rote learning and exam oriented.

Teachers resisted new ideas, thinking they would have to do more work. When I simply asked my students to colour a tree, my head teacher called me and said, why was I was asking children to do all those things, 'you are wasting children's time in making them colour, if they do not write they are wasting time'. I said to her that this was very important, for students, they can understand the digestive system better if they colour. 'No let them rote learn'.

The head teacher believed that the teachers were aware of group work strategies, but could not implement them due to short span of class time and the large number of students. The head teacher indicated that mostly teacher-centred approaches are adopted.

Anita said that teachers do some reading and preparation beforehand but no formal lesson planning is done. Teachers are trained and rely on use of blackboards and charts to teach. This was confirmed when Shehla said,

... Whatever I want to teach, I prepare that topic ..., we study in little detail whichever subject we want to teach. We should have mastery on our subject ... though we don't write down lesson

plans, but we have in mind that we follow, we deal according to whatever we have learned.

**Focus Group:** Four students in the focus group interview explained that they prefer a teaching method in which the teachers explain, *if we understand it feels good, if teachers explain the meaning then it becomes interesting*. They liked a particular teacher because she explained and used pictures and did not give burdensome homework. They further stated that *she gives chance to every student to read, so that if any one doesn't know, she explains, makes them learn, explains through reading, drama and meanings*.

It appears that some teachers have had prior understanding of, and believed in active learning. Conceptions of effective teaching and involving students in their learning do inform teachers as to what method of teaching and learning they should adopt, but the lack of school-learning-environment, focus on syllabus coverage and classroom realities make it difficult to put their conceptions into practice. Another important point is that senior teachers tend to hold on to their traditional methods, and show little or no flexibility in accepting new ideas or in adopting and using active learning methods to avoid additional responsibilities.

## **Teachers as Persons and as Professionals**

Teachers play a significant role as a person and as a professional in the lives of their students. Teaching as a profession cannot be separated from their personal lives, as both are linked with each other (Fullan and Hargreaves 1992). It has been argued that the teachers' exposure, and their experiences of teaching and learning from their past contexts, shape their belief and influence their teaching styles, as Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:36) state, 'among them are the times in which teachers grew up and entered the profession, and the value systems and dominant educational beliefs that went with those times'.

The RPs were asked to describe how they viewed themselves as teachers. How did their teachers teach them and whether they had any influence on their teaching? What were the characteristics of their favourite teachers and what role a teacher plays in shaping students' learning?

### **A good teacher**

Sara suggests that a good teacher always supports and encourages her students. She believed in encouraging her students because she herself was discouraged by her mathematics teacher and she could not learn but rather began to hate the

subject. It shows how teacher's encouragement or discouragement could impact on student's learning. She advocated that students must be appreciated and those who are weak must be looked after. Shehla believes that,

... teachers' main job is to teach, and they should have good command of subject knowledge. Their attitude should be such that they can attract students towards them to listen and understand, not that they get fed up and loose interest. ... Our relationship with our students should be of love and affection. I have this concept from the beginning, and till now I believe in that. I don't like to hit or shout at students. Teachers should be good [role] models so that children learn good qualities from them.

**Involvement in her work:** For Nadia, qualities of a good teacher include her total involvement in her work. 'First of all what ever the teacher is teaching, full involvement is important, [but] in our school we have large classes so we cannot give individual attention to students' ... (Nadia). She also maintains that teachers have to be strict particularly when they deal with large and cramped classes.

**Punctual and responsible:** Anita, the head teacher, considered punctuality as her virtue. In her eyes, a teacher is like a pilot. As the pilot is responsible for people's lives and should fulfil her responsibilities with sincerity and professionalism, similarly a good teacher who is responsible for students' lives is punctual, sincere, loves her profession and has a complete command on her subject.

**Loving and caring attitude:** For students in the focus group, the love and care of the teachers mattered the most. However, they may become strict or even punish physically to maintain discipline yet they should always be loving. They suggested:

Teachers should be strict, but also with love, students need to be disciplined, but should be given more love, only then they will learn. Some children don't listen to teachers, and then they should be hit ...some times teachers do hit children ....

**Teacher as a model:** One of the students stated: 'one teacher is model for me, I like the nature of that teacher, I also like the way she teaches, her gestures are good, she explains very well, encourages us to ask questions, she never scolds us, [her] attitude is very good.'

Students were of the view that they like teachers who explain with meaning and do not give more homework to do and give the students a chance to read.

The teachers' encouraging or discouraging attitude may influence students' learning in terms of liking or disliking a subject area. It may result in either the student's excellence or failure in that subject. On the other hand students like those teachers who are considerate, who involve them in their learning, who encourage them, who also are able to understand their problems and whose ways of teaching are interesting for and relevant to them.

It can be argued that the teachers' own qualities, traits, behaviour and roles are seen as influencing students' attitudes towards learning. Their love, care and concern for their students, along with their commitment, support and help and the subsequent understanding of students' issues and problems are important aspects of good teaching. Notwithstanding the fact that classes are overcrowded, these effective aspects seem to play deeper role in making the teaching and learning effective.

### **Influence of their Teachers on the Research Participants**

All the research participants believed that they had good teachers who taught them with love. They were polite, caring and inspiring. Anita believed that 'they had a spirit, which is lost due to many problems and tensions. Such as: 'in those teachers were respected and parents supported them but today parents only complain and blame teachers, the situation has changed'.

Sara thinks that although memorization and lecture methods were the trends, her teachers valued students and gave them responsibilities. There were many opportunities for learning.

Nadia suggested: 'we used to get individual attention in our school, I was lucky we had good teachers, they had good teaching style and approaches ...'

Shehla asserted:

First thing, they were full of peace and ease; very loving and caring, they tried their best to teach as much as they could. In those times, students and teachers had peaceful environment, we never used to have difficulties in those times as we have today.

Sara, Nadia and Shehla asserted that their teaching has been influenced by their teachers, 'Unconsciously, I was using the same methods of teaching as they

were...'(Sara), while Anita believed that those times were different than their own because nowadays teachers have more stress and worries than the teachers of the yesteryears. Teachers' own personal and moral character, therefore, is thought to be important not only in serving as a role model, but also in grooming students' personalities. This is what Moore (2000; 2004) calls *charismatic*.

A significant point that comes out clearly is that although the methods and approaches of the past teachers were mostly teacher-centred; their care, personal attention, sense of seriousness, responsibility and the committed attitude towards their profession and on the command of the subject knowledge, were considered as highly inspiring and motivating factors. Students learned from them and liked them very much.

Teachers play a major role in enhancing the students' learning, especially in the context of Pakistan, where he/she may be the only resource available. In a context where learning is mostly passive and teacher-centred, and where teachers have authority and control over their students, their influence is one of the major determinants of student learning.

## **Teaching and Students' Learning**

Sara believed that learning takes place when students understand but saw understanding as difficult for most students to attain, as they memorized to reproduce information in the examinations. She suggested that even if the emphasis is on understanding, students do not have well enough writing power to articulate themselves in answering questions, hence it is likely, that they would do poor in their exams. 'They should understand what ever they are learning ... [but even] if they understand, they don't have the power to write the answers by themselves. Sara is making an interesting link between understanding and writing. It suggests that students' poor writing skills have implications on articulation of their thought and understanding. This opens the whole debate of 'language and thought' as has been propounded by Vygotsky.

Shehla also indicated lack of writing skills in students:

We have language problem here, children come from Urdu medium. ... [A] child in class six [first year of secondary school], cannot write his name properly; how can he write in English? Urdu medium child cannot cope up with English texts.

Shehla when probed further, said, 'no, [I teach] in Urdu, the material is in English. I have requested madam [head teacher] that I cannot explain in English, so I teach in Urdu only'. This shows the level of proficiency of a teacher in public English medium school.

The head teacher thinks that teachers exert a lot of influence on students:

Teachers have a lot of impact on students, their style of teaching impacts; children learn from teachers, they take their habits, so the teacher becomes the best model. (Anita)

Sara viewed teachers' own learning as a prerequisite for students' learning.

Until teacher herself doesn't learn, student learning cannot take place, there is a link between the two: if teacher is learning, then student will also learn, she will create for and give more opportunities to students': If teaching is good, learning will be good as well... students take whatever teacher gives them.... Even students might have many views, if we involve them that will enrich teaching and learning as well.

Nadia highlighted aspects of her own professional pre-service teacher training in which she learnt 'to motivate and involve students, children in their learning... We should give them the opportunity to share and speak, and then we should take them further from there'.

But she pointed out that it was not possible for her to apply her knowledge in the school,

...what ever we learn in terms of teaching approaches, when we come back to our government school, we cannot implement, so we become more confused and double minded, as we cannot use that knowledge, hence we are not satisfied with our teaching and performance.

For the head teacher the relationship between teaching and learning is like a mother and a child relationship:

Whatever the role of the mother is, it is the same... if a teacher is well educated, experienced, and has spirit to make their students the best, [she would] give such kind of teaching.

Conducive environment for learning is important because no matter how much effort a teacher makes or how well he/she may teach, if the environment for learning is not conducive, it is likely that teaching and learning will not be effective. A conducive environment for learning is said to be one in which all the stakeholders in the school believe that learning is an ongoing process. It takes place by learning from each other through sharing experiences of teaching; it is an environment in which schools provide learning resources, classrooms are interactive and students have plenty of opportunities to actively participate in their learning (Watkins 2003). These can include creative writing, making presentations and group discussions.

## **Learning and Assessment**

Purposes of assessment can enrich or impede learning. It is argued that one of the prime objectives of assessment is to help students improve their learning. Assessment *for* learning therefore, looks at the process rather than product of learning, diagnoses students' learning and gives feedback for what needs to be done next in order to improve their learning. If the purpose of assessment is testing to prove something as a product of learning, it is likely that it would direct teaching and learning towards reproduction of knowledge without much meaning making. It would show what instruction has been given through 'timed written tasks' with 'right answers' (Watkins 2003).

Learning based on rote memorization and regurgitation of facts and its oral or written reproduction in examinations (Hayes 1987; Warwick & Reimers 1995; Rehmani 2003) rewards better results. Passive and assessment driven approaches to learning are termed as *surface* (Marton and Saljo 1984; Marton et al. 1993), *superficial* (Ramsden 1992) or *thin* (Watkins 2001), reducing it to atomistic and unconnected facts (Gibbs, 1992) in comparison to *deep*, *transformative*, *rich* and *integrated* (Entwistle 1992; Gibbs 1992) approaches to learning, which are based on active participation, understanding, meaning making and critical reflection. These later approaches are generally missing from learning experiences in Pakistani schools.

In the context of Pakistan, it is generally the product of learning that is measured. This is truer at grade 9 and 10 levels, the terminating levels of secondary schooling, where public examinations are conducted. Research has shown that school and teacher-related factors have greater influence on students' learning outcomes (Avalos and Hadad 1981; Warwick and Reimers 1995).

The head teacher confirmed: yes we have teacher centered approaches only, because we have limitations. In classes 9th and 10th we focus more on curriculum because of the Board exams.... Sara's view is almost similar.

They [students] had to learn the traditional examination system; we were preparing our students for those exams, like machines. ... Because the way I teach influences students' learning. I teach so that they get good marks in exams, more and more, in this way it has influence on teaching and learning (Sara)

The head teacher stated that children learn as per the pattern of examination and teachers identify those areas of learning on which questions are likely to come in the examination.

Teachers teach well in the beginning but then they have to prepare students for exams, for rote learning. ... Teaching is from that point of view only, we make guesses that this chapter is important and this question is important so we try that children rote learn [those] well.

Teachers mostly teach for examination. Usually past years examination questions are repeated, and it becomes guesswork for teachers and students to see which questions are likely to come in the next exams, and hence they prepare accordingly. The study becomes limited. Anita reiterated, 'we identify the important topics and questions which they learn by heart and marks are given according to their reproduction. Children also learn from that perspective only'. Shehla stated:

For question papers we have one pattern only, it doesn't change and we cannot change. Marks system is fixed. ... Children think how they can get the passing marks; that is how they learn. It can be called examination oriented rote learning.

Students in the focus group opined: 'we prepare questions and answers, learn every thing, sleep little and prepare more'. Two of them stated the process: 'First I read questions, understand [them], and then remember (learn by heart), then write'. Another one said that soon after the school, 'I go to tuition and learn and remember, write [practice] three to four times [whatever] I have rote learned'. Only one of them suggested that he was not for the rote learning: 'Not by rote learning, I forget, so I try to understand and remember'.

The student also pointed out at the malpractices in the examination. They opined that many students try to cheat in examinations, a common phenomenon in Pakistan (Bhatti 1987; Khursheed 1993; Warwick and Reimers 1995; Greaney and Hasan 1998) and put the percentage of cheating as high as 60%. '60 percent children cheat; very few children are hard working. However they said firmly that there are those who do not like to cheat because, 'those who cheat have to answer to Allah'.

How much of the said has to do with schools, teaching and students' learning, their intellectual capabilities and socio-cultural backgrounds? Warwick and Reimers (1995) have cited a number of studies on student achievement in developing countries, which suggest that teachers and schools have much greater influence on their achievement than the students' background (p.106).

The above data suggests how classroom teaching and learning can be driven by an examination system that can reduce teaching and learning to a product, rather than process of learning (Watkins 2003). Teachers have come to believe that their job is to prepare students for examination only. It may be argued that an examination system in a particular context plays a determinant role in shaping teachers' conceptions of teaching.

## **Preliminary Findings and Conclusions**

In this case, I presented conceptions of teaching of Sara, her two colleague teachers and the head teacher. These conceptions were examined to ascertain what factors, including school culture and context, in which Sara worked, contribute in the development and shaping of her conceptions of teaching.

The data discussed above suggests that teachers' conceptions develop in a socio-cultural context that plays a crucial role in shaping approaches to teaching and learning. Factors such as teachers' own schooling experiences, ways in which their teachers taught them, the type of pre or in-service teacher education programmes, and the cultures of the schools where they teach influence their thinking and beliefs (Chan 2001) and play a determining role in shaping their conceptions about teaching.

Teaching was regarded as a responsible, serious, and sacred profession. Although it was not materially rewarding, it was intrinsically satisfying through what is called a 'psychic reward'. It is what Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:33) call 'important and central to sustaining teachers' sense of value and worth in their

work', yet it was challenging and demanding in terms of managing large classes and checking scores of students' copies.

Teachers used lecture methods, chalk and talk, transmissive, along with teacher-centred and authoritative approaches to teaching. Their conception about the scope of education was limited.

Collaboration and good relationship among teachers is significant, but school management's encouraging or discouraging attitude has a bearing on creating such a supportive culture.

The head teacher's beliefs in classroom control, strictly following and not deviating from curriculum content, completing the tight coverage schedule, rewarding those who managed their classes well, completion of checking students copies on time and teaching for examination purposes only, speak of the role of school management in creating collegiality. In such an environment it is natural that the last thing they would want to do is to discuss issues of teaching and learning and help their colleagues. This is the reason that some teachers did not take teaching seriously although they believed in teaching as a religious duty and wanted to teach well.

The teachers' averse attitude towards their professional development, lack of training opportunities, narrow understanding of the field of education and the classroom management problems, all indicate that there is something seriously wrong with the teacher pre-service training programmes, which seem to be failing in broadening trainee teachers' vision of teaching and learning. They seem to be lacking in equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills of handling large classes. It is obvious that teachers find it difficult to handle large classes. Students do not have proper and comfortable seating facilities, hence classroom disruption becomes natural. No effective teaching and learning are likely to take place in such an environment.

Policy makers and school administration have to think hard on how to address these issues, bring reform in teacher training programmes and evaluate the factors that hamper effective classroom practice. A whole area of research is warranted in dealing with large classes.

In the context of Pakistan, teachers have tremendous influence on shaping the students' learning, where most students have little opportunities to engage themselves in independent learning; the teacher hence becomes the major source of learning for them. It has been argued that although teachers play a major part in students' learning, there are other factors that hinder effective learning.

Hence, teachers' own professional development and 'real world context in which teachers work' (Fullan and Hargreaves 1992, p.21) play a determinant role.

Teachers' rapport with the student was considered to be important in identifying and understanding their learning needs, in developing a trust in them so that they feel confident in sharing their problems.

A concept of the loving and caring teacher was considered important in students learning. This may be termed as a 'caring conception of teaching'. Teachers in some cases were seen as inspirational and motivating. Their encouragement and support can spark children's inclination and attitude towards learning.

Teachers' who believed that learning is an ongoing and a continuous process by considering students' prior knowledge and information as significant in building further learning, and at the same time being prepared to learn from their students, are significant concepts in understanding the approaches teachers could adopt towards teaching and learning.

On the other hand, those teachers who considered themselves as having sufficient knowledge thought that they were no longer students, and therefore, needed no further training or professional development, are likely to adopt passive and surface approaches to teaching and learning.

Again it is the system of examination that makes teaching and learning examination oriented. It leads to limited study and guessing work, and cheating; as reproduction and regurgitation is highly awarded. The findings denote that an examination system can have serious influences on conceptions of teaching and learning. Assessment *for* learning was not a widely known concept. Giving feedback for improvement and enhancement of learning was also limited.

Preliminary findings and some initial conclusions thus drawn from this study illuminate that teachers' schooling background, their own teachers' approaches to teaching, socio-cultural contexts of the society in which they live, the teachers' own knowledge, their understanding of teaching and learning, their professional development, the school environment and their colleague-teachers attitudes play significant roles in shaping teachers' concepts of teaching.

Teachers' concepts range from teacher-centered transmission and conventional approaches to child-centered approaches. However, active and transformative, reflective and reflexive conceptions did not significantly emerge.

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