

Teacher educators' perceptions of professional standards: Implementation challenges in Pakistan

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The aim of this research was to assess teacher educators' knowledge, perceptions and understanding of the *Strengthening Teacher Education in Pakistan* (STEP) project which was designed to develop professional standards for teachers in Pakistan. Using a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews, data were collected from teacher educators (N=12) across various elementary and secondary teacher education programs. Through thematic analysis, four themes were identified - teachers' firm belief in the need for change and reform, the relevance of teaching standards to current day Pakistan, support for implementation, and confidence in implementing teaching standards. Overall, participant responses indicated that all teacher educators believed that professional standards were appropriate as a set of guided principles encapsulating a professional body of knowledge, which ideally provided the benchmark and framework to assist pre-service teachers in implementing effective teaching practices in their classrooms. However, the same educators revealed that the integration of such Standards in teacher education programs was yet to be achieved, due to various execution challenges. The article discusses the need to integrate the Professional Standards into current pre-service teacher training programs while being sensitive to contextual givens.

Introduction

Issues related to teacher quality and teacher education have gained increased importance in recent years, and global initiatives have been undertaken to improve the quality of teachers and their teaching practices through transforming teacher education policies (Iqbal, 2011; Mason, 2013; Santoro & Kennedy, 2014; Wang, Lin, Spalding, Klechal & Odell, 2011). In particular, in developing countries, teacher education has also been the subject of much debate as the status of the teaching profession is seen to depend, at least to some extent, on the professional knowledge of university teacher educators and the nature of the training they receive. The central assumption underpinning this paper is that high quality, ongoing professional development pertaining to professional teaching standards is indispensable to the raising of professional teaching standards, and by extension to the learning outcomes of students (Santoro & Kennedy, 2016; Tuinamuana, 2011).

The growing international emphasis on teacher quality has called for the execution of professional standards as teacher educators have endeavoured to better understand what teachers believe, know, comprehend and are able to enact as professional practitioners in their fields (Ingvarson, 1998; Kennedy, 2015). Many countries like the US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, and those in the Caribbean and South Pacific are in the early phases of devising and implementing professional standards for teachers

based on policy priorities that state that teacher quality can be enhanced through the implementation of professional standards (Hudson, 2009; Ingvarson, 2001; Sachs, 2003; Santoro & Kennedy, 2016; Tuinamuana, 2011). Indeed, Mason (2013) reported that the three main issues that negatively impact upon the quality of teacher preparation are insufficient knowledge and skills to meet the learning needs of students, inadequate connections forged between teacher education, their professional training and the needs of the school, and a lack of well-structured and systematic induction programs for pre-service teachers.

Since Pakistan's creation as an independent state in 1947, quality in teacher education has always been a policy topic, although in the first few decades it was based primarily on the British model of post academic training programs. In the 1980s, several formal teacher education institutes such as the Provincial Institutes of Teacher Education (PITE), and informal training through distance learning such as through the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) were established. However, the most prominent changes in teacher education in Pakistan emerged in the mid-2000s with the creation of certification and diplomas in teacher education such as the *Primary Teaching Certificate* (PTC) and *Certificate in Teaching* (CT). The pre-service teacher education programs in the current landscape of teacher training were introduced in collaboration with USAID offering qualifications such as the *Associate Degree in Education* and *Bachelor of Education (Honors)*, as well as some advanced diplomas and certificates in teacher education.

In Pakistan, on paper at least, education is one of the primary agendas following the UN's *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) (United Nations, undated) and thus recognised as an essential requirement for attaining sustainable development and economic growth. However, owing to a lack of robust policy planning, Pakistan faces a number of challenges in the economic, leadership, social and safety fronts. Pakistan's educational system remains extremely unstable, unreliable, and in a far from an acceptable condition (Richter, 2018). Indeed, none of Pakistan's education indicators compare favorably with other countries in the region, let alone globally. This is a consequence of decades of government's under-investment in the education and the social sectors, which has led to the dilapidated physical condition of public schools, limited access to educational facilities, high dropout rates, and low literacy rates across the country (Richter, 2018), although over the past few decades, literacy rates have slowly increased with the current literacy rate at 62.3% (Ministry of Statistics Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017-18).

Nationwide, teacher education programs have produced teachers who have received compromised quality training, as widely reported in scholarly literature, mass and social media as well as in reports of foreign donors and international organisations operating in Pakistan. Sahito & Vaisanen (2018) pointed out that although thousands of pre-service teachers graduate every year, their professional knowledge and understanding of content and delivery are not satisfactory. The latest Education Policy of 2017 (Government of Pakistan, 2017) therefore recommends the improvement of quality teacher education as one of its most urgent concerns. This is to be done through a revision of the old teacher education programs and replacing them with newly structured programs, and offering

professional development courses to in-service teachers to meet the *National Standards for Teachers* (Chang, 2014).

Teacher education in Pakistan has long been subject to criticism by concerned stakeholders and vested interest groups (see for example, Akram & Zepeda, 2015; Butt, 2008; Dilshad, 2010; World Bank, 2006). Scholars have suggested that the Pakistan Government is doing too little to train teachers for the realities of school life, arguing that teacher training programs lack congruency with school contexts, school syllabi, sufficient resources, and universal entry standards into teacher education programs (Ali, 2011; Levine, 2006). Crucially, teacher education programs currently tend to emphasise theory and content, but do not bridge the gap between theory and practice (Ahmed, 2008). In other words, teacher education programs have not crafted the professional competencies of teachers according to the needs of schools. This results in teachers exhibiting poor application of teaching skills and pedagogies, eventually leading to a lack of understanding of how students learn, how to plan adequately, and how to implement effective teaching programs (Iqbal & Shams, 2012). In essence, the influence of the professional standards has been minimal in the Pakistani context due to the lack of alignment with teacher education course content.

STEP: An initiative to revamp teacher education in Pakistan

To meet the challenges in teacher education in Pakistan, in 2008 the Policy and Planning wing of the Ministry of Education (MOE) in collaboration with the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designed the *Strengthening Teacher Education in Pakistan* (STEP) project. The STEP project focused mainly on developing the *Professional Standards for Teachers* in Pakistan, through discussions with various stakeholders (hereafter referred to as "Professional Standards" or simply "Standards"). This initiative was taken as part of an international movement for teacher quality based on the assumption that such an initiative would contribute to the improvement of educational quality and thus impact on students' learning outcomes in many fields of human endeavour (Akram & Zepeda, 2015; Government of Pakistan, 2009; Huma, 2016).

Importantly, the ultimate aim of this initiative was to bring to fruition the development of national, regional and international agreement on Professional Standards based on knowledge, skills and dispositions that were generally thought to be valued by the teaching profession. Nationally approved Professional Standards were developed to describe capabilities, skills and attributes considered to be indispensable for preservice teachers, accomplished master teachers, teacher educators and other educational specialists. These Standards were also designed to guide the development of pre-service and in-service programs of teacher education and to guide policies, procedures and systems for accrediting teacher education programs (Butt, 2008).

The quality of teacher education in Pakistan has been a topic of frequent debate in recent years by concerned constituencies (Akram & Zepeda, 2015; Butt, 2008; Dilshad, 2010; Government of Pakistan, 2009). In order to meet the increasing demands on teachers at

different levels, the National Professional Standards were established as a framework to formulate professional competencies for teacher education. These Professional Standards for teachers also provide a policy mandate for implementing categorical structures of quality teaching. Theoretically, the Standards can be used to concurrently standardise the profession and enhance its status (Leonard, 2012).

The Pakistan Government has specified and advocated 10 Professional Standards (Government of Pakistan, 2009b): subject matter knowledge, human growth and development, knowledge of Islamic values, instructional planning and strategies, assessment, learning environment, effective communication and proficient use of information communication technologies, collaboration and partnerships, professional development and code of conduct and the teaching of English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL). Each of these Standards comprises three components, (i) *knowledge* (what the teacher knows); (ii) *dispositions* (behaviours, attitudes and values); and (iii) *performance* (what the teacher can do and should be able to do). In collaboration with UNESCO and USAID the Ministry of Education established these standards in 2009 through provincial and national workshops, to regulate and institutionalise teacher training preparations, accreditation and certification procedures, aligned with the National Professional Standards for Teachers. In doing so, the government's main aim was to set a procedure for measuring teachers' professional knowledge, content and skills on a set of significant areas of professional standards in line with the National Curriculum. By employing these standards in their teaching, teachers can design and employ meaningful and sensitive teaching for all students.

The ultimate aim of the introduction of these Standards was to link the curriculum of teacher education programs to the National Professional Standards for teachers in addressing classroom needs (NACTE, 2009). According to the National Educational Policy 2017, teacher education content should include contemporary content knowledge, as well as particular skills and dispositions aligned with the Professional Standards to address students' learning needs (Government of Pakistan, 2017). These professional Standards have not, however, become widely incorporated into teacher education programs (Akram & Zepeda, 2015) and their successful implementation in the classroom is yet to be achieved. It would appear that one of the reasons for the slow rate of implementation might be that, in turn, the National Professional Standards for Teachers have been slow to be incorporated into university teacher training programs.

The central assumption underpinning this paper is that, despite wide scepticism, high quality, ongoing professional development that aligns with the national-level Professional Standards in Pakistan can be indispensable in raising professional teaching standards at the national level. For example, the acquisition of teacher knowledge and the momentum for learning have been reported to be of greater value when directed explicitly on how teachers engage with their students in their implementation of the classroom curriculum (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Mayer, Mitchell, Macdonald & Bell, 2005). In relation to the crucial nature of teacher professional growth, questions can be raised about the professional Standards for providing a detailed framework for delineating the teachers' professional learning attributes required to become effective practitioners.

Seen this way, teacher education becomes more of a process of guided induction into the tricks of the trade (Korthagen, 2010). Observing teacher education as a career-long developmental progression, that is becoming more capable, skilled and proficient, involves rethinking the purpose and pedagogy of teacher education (McMahon, Forde & Dickson, 2015). Based on this construct, movement along the professional continuum can be accelerated through the integration of professional standards for teachers engaged in teacher education programs providing the benchmarks and developmental tools for appropriate and adequate professional learning, support and development.

With an appreciation and acknowledgement that teacher educators are key to teacher education reform, the purpose of this paper then is also to explore the perceptions of teacher educators regarding the implication and relevance of the Professional Standards. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to critically investigate why the Professional Standards were not being incorporated into the fabric of teacher education programs and what challenges and implementation practices became barriers in executing these Standards into teaching content in the context of Pakistan. Specifically, this study aims to investigate the views of teacher educators on the employment of Professional Standards while teaching to preservice teachers. It is guided by the questions: What are the perceptions of teacher educators regarding the nature, value and application of National Professional Standards for teachers in Pakistan? To what degree do they consider these Standards to have been integrated into university teacher education programs?

Research design

The research design for this study envisaged a constructivist qualitative case study approach, involving descriptive data collection through interviews with teacher educators. These interviews facilitated the rendering of their perspectives about the introduction of professional Standards for teachers, in order to make explicit their interpretation of the Standards. Using a constructivist-interpretive approach, it explored the multidimensional views of participants regarding the components of the Standards and the challenges encountered while integrating these into their own teaching practices.

The 13 university academics involved in training teachers who gave their consent to be interviewed represented four different public universities in Lahore, Pakistan. All of these teacher educators had been involved in teacher education programs to prepare students as teachers - six teacher educators taught elementary programs while the other seven taught secondary teacher education programs, thus representing the two main streams of teacher education programs. Details about gender and academic rank are presented in Table 1.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as this method offered the potential to uncover rich descriptive on the personal experiences of participants' data, beyond the scope of pre-set categories (Zorn, 2010). Such information was gathered to move the innovation process from the general domains to more specific insights that would allow both the development of a preliminary hypothesis, provide explanatory relationships and create a foundation for further research (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Semi-structured interviewing was also considered as the most suitable approach because there was only

one opportunity to interview each participant (Bernard, 2000). In addition, this approach to data collection was also a preference as the questions were able to be arranged ahead of time allowing the interviewer to be prepared and appear competent during the interview and for the participants to feel free to express their views in their own terms, in turn providing reliable, comparable qualitative data (Zorn, 2010).

Table 1: Teaching status of the interview participants

University respondents	Gender		Academic rank			
	Male	Female	Lecturer	Assistant professor	Associate professor	Full professor
Uni-1 (n=7)	2	5	4	2	0	1
Uni-2 (n=1)	0	1	0	0	1	0
Uni-3 (n=3)	2	1	0	1	1	1
Uni-4 (n=2)	1	1	0	1	0	1

Ethics approval from one of the researchers' affiliated institution's Research Ethics Committee was obtained prior to communicating with relevant educational institutions to approach the teacher educators. Following their consent, a participant recruitment email was circulated to the administrators to invite teacher educators to attend interviews at a time and place of their convenience. The teacher educators were interviewed at the end of the final semester of the teacher education program. The interview questions were framed by the content areas of the *National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan* (Government of Pakistan, 2009b) addressing professional competencies as well as the three components of knowledge, attitude and performance around the 10 areas of Professional Standards as outlined above (see Appendix 1 for interview questions). In formulating the questions, the intention was to elicit from the teacher educators their perceptions regarding the *Strengthening Teacher Education in Pakistan* (STEP) project designed to develop the Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan, and the nature of difficulties they faced in implementing these Professional Standards while teaching pre-service teachers. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. As a means of ensuring trustworthiness of data in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2015), member checking was conducted by inviting participants to check the accuracy of their interview transcript.

Findings

The descriptive data on the personal experiences of the participants was coded using the matrix framework proposed by Bryman (2012), with themes identified by analysing instances of repetition across the participants. Bryman noted that repetition is the most common criteria for establishing themes. After coding, four main themes were identified in the present study. While examining these four themes, it was evident that while the participants agreed with the need to improve teaching Standards, they did not always consider that the Standards were consistently relevant to Pakistan, or that they had received sufficient support for the implementation of the Standards. This resulted in a lowering of their confidence in implementing the new teaching Standards into their teaching programs. The following sections provide examples of the participants' comments linked to the four identified themes (pseudonyms are used).

Theme 1: We believe in the need for change

The first persistent theme that emerged from the data was about participants' perceptions on the need for change in teacher education programs. Specifically, participants were asked to what extent the Standards facilitated or hindered the conditions under which changes were possible; after all, as Khadija, a young (33 year old) lecturer participant put it: "teachers' performance can only be evaluated if you have Standards". Not surprisingly, however, as Reshma, an Assistant Professor with 10 years' teaching experience pointed out, "the majority of college teachers are not aware of the existence of these Standards".

Although teachers' negative attitudes often appeared to originate from such ignorance or lack of knowledge, not all participants were frustrated about the Standards. Indeed, some were quite positive, explaining that they were "very well matched with the needs of classroom teaching. These are general in nature but still can be adopted and adapted in any contextual situation." Others said that the Standards were "relevant", a "platform to progress", "comprehensive, compatible with international standards", "appropriate" and had the potential to "bring about change in teaching style to make [a] difference in students' learning". Among the participants, the eldest, Nazia, and younger, Mumtaz, both female teacher educators, appeared to be more positive and optimistic, probably because of the professional development opportunities the latter had been afforded:

Professional skills and dispositions are very important to be inculcated. My professional development experiences have opened various vistas to understand and implement different teaching learning strategies. All areas are very important ranging from knowledge base to the implementation of assessment, management, research, child psychology, curriculum development skills, etc. These are the core areas of teacher professional development. (Nazia)

Participants however were cautious that they needed "modification first", and "improvement" to ensure "proper implementation". As participant Khadija, a young lecturer, explained:

The Standards are standards [and] are aligned, and they fulfil the needs of our education system, however, we need resources and training to implement them... and more strategic planning to integrate these into the students' education. (Khadija)

Khadija was specific in her recommendation. She explained:

Curriculum development skills allow educators to analyse, construct and build learning systems. With evaluation of working systems, they can then become policy formulators for educational change. Such skills are noticeably absent in Pakistan, so it is encouraging to see some respondents moving a little towards this realisation. (Khadija)

Hence, participants generally endorsed the significance for Standards as they saw them providing policy guidelines for classroom instructions in facilitating better student learning. However, they noted that the mechanism to align these Standards into content integration was still a missing component which resulted in confusion or indifference to

the Standards. It appeared that there is a need for strategic planning for practising desired professional competencies through the Professional Standards.

Standards as a cornerstone for effective teaching

Participants generally agreed on the significance of the Standards for effective teaching, while also recognising the importance of different *areas* of Standards. These Standards explain the specified knowledge, skills and attitudes in the diverse areas of teaching such as subject matter knowledge, assessment, learning environment, and code of conduct. Anwar, who was 58 years old and working as a full professor in a public university with 20 years of service, explained:

There should be some standards to devise teacher education programs to determine objectives of teacher education programs and then to evaluate output of teacher education programs against these standards. Teachers' performance can only be evaluated if you have standards. (Anwar)

Ahmad who was 42 years old and working as an Assistant Professor, recommended that the creation of a code of ethics as part of professional development was a "vitally important aspect of teaching that improves the quality of teacher knowledge and understanding about the teaching profession".

It appeared that most participants had certain concerns - not so much about the Standards themselves - but about *how* the Standards were being implemented, noting that they all had "shortcomings (that) need(ed) improvement in some areas". Razia, an assistant professor with 15 years' experience, went on to suggest that "we must first, however, design evidence-based and measurable quality indicators based on these Standards". Such statements were recurrent and gave the impression of a general feeling of scepticism towards the practicalities of implementing the Standards, especially with regard to the intentions of stakeholders to facilitate conditions for effective teaching.

A way to look forward to implementation

In most cases, it appeared that teacher educators knew that they did have some 'standards' but they were not aware of what exactly these standards were, specifically. The Government had not taken any decisive initiative to integrate the Standards into the teacher education content. However, the design of appropriate measures to optimise Standards so that they are contextually sensitive and practically efficient can be difficult in an education system which has a documented history of negligence in curriculum development at the policy level (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron & Osher, 2019), which has left educators with little capability and lack of willingness for handling and directing change. Ahmad pointed out that the Standards "are in black and white form", yet provincial and local governments in districts and school levels are reluctant in taking them seriously. Participants were concerned about such lack of sensitivity to local contexts in the construction of the Standards, some of which, as Reshma argued, "reflect(ed) Western standards so they should be reframed according to our context" based on local "ideology and norms and [the] education system".

Significantly, while supporting the need for change, some participants also began to highlight difficulties with the Standards, despite their firm belief in the need for change. Khadija noted that “implementation is a challenge”, while she explained that “I need some training of using these Standards and we need a mechanism that can reinforce to use these Standards. I don't have sufficient knowledge about useful activities that I can use to teach my students”.

Participants lamented the lack of awareness of the Standards among teacher educators and the absence of government initiative in integrating these Standards into the teacher education content. A recurrent concern was the policy-practice gap as the participants continued to explain that although the Higher Education Commission had revised the curriculum, it did not emphasise the need for “the Standards to be incorporated into the teacher education program”. In fact, Reshma was visibly upset that she was “not given any training about the understanding of these Standards”. On the other hand, participant Ayesha, who was working as an associate professor with 15 years' teaching experience, was quite optimistic, notwithstanding some reservations:

Overall, the teaching Standards are in line with the Pakistani classroom needs but there is a need to revisit Standards 7, 8 and 9 by breaking each of them in two because in these Standards two different concepts are embedded into a single standard which does not seem to me to be [logical]. Lastly, I think Standard 10 should be discarded. (Ayesha)

In Ayesha's case, it was also obvious that she was aware of the Standards in a more informed way, unlike most of the other participants of this study.

Theme 2: Consultation and the relevance of teaching Standards to Pakistan

The Pakistani Government appeared to have been strongly influenced by counterpart Standards in the United States, especially in recent years, resulting in the Standards being aligned with the same knowledge, attribution and dispositions as in the US (Chung & Kim, 2010). These Standards reflected the highly resourced US system and were, in turn, seen to be difficult to implement in Pakistan due to budgetary constraints and other logistical limitations. Despite the launching of the teaching Standards, most respondents were unaware of the process the Government had used to develop the Standards. It was understood by some that committee members comprised both educationists and technocrats and as a number of ‘foreign models’ were consulted, local input was, in turn, diminished. It is significant that the Professional Standards were formulated by the Ministry of Education through a highly bureaucratic process in which university teachers (and teacher educators, in particular) were not consulted in any manner; nor did they provide any input in designing the Standards. In the current system nearly all decision making is undertaken by policy makers and bureaucrats, and there is no official or authorised forum where teachers are allowed to register their voice in case of policy amendments. Anwar, a full professor and the most experienced participant voiced his frustration regarding the formation of the Standards:

No, I was not aware of how the new teaching Standards were developed by the government. I also remember that some teacher educators (at a Standards seminar)

highlighted that the Standards needed amendments according to the Pakistani teacher context. As we have lack of resources, laboratories, infrastructure and teaching aids, we need Standards according to our existing facilities. We don't have well-equipped labs; we cannot teach students according to the latest technology. (Anwar)

Contextual sensitivity and Pakistani standards

Generally, the teacher educators were disappointed that the Standards were not sufficiently contextualised for the Pakistani education system. Participants stressed that none of the areas of teaching Standards were in line with the needs of the Pakistani classrooms and that they certainly required amendments. Participants also spoke about the need for resources and infrastructure to implement the Standards. Indeed, their classrooms were often not sufficiently technology-oriented to facilitate the Standards. They explained that due to lack of resources some of the Standards were simply overlooked, such as the need for continuous professional development of teachers, and human growth and development. Jamal, a full professor from a public university, emphasised on the relevance of the professional Standards and explained:

Some Standards are aligned and some are not, they just reflect Western standards so they should be reframed according to our context. We have our unique ideology and norms and education system and teacher training should be based on these. (Jamal)

Regarding the relevance of Professional Standards in relation to classroom needs, Reshma, a 36-year-old assistant professor at a public university, explained:

The Standards are not aligned (to school classrooms); neither are they are addressed to teacher education programs. Initially there is a need to look at the Standards and their suitability into our teaching system. They cover Islamic values and their awareness though teaching skills and that is an encouraging element. (Reshma)

On the other hand, some respondents had positive comments on the Standards, stating that they were quite well-matched with classroom realities, with just a few modifications needed. These participants, however, noted that the introduction of the Standards was essentially a USAID run project, with predictable and attendant problems of 'cloning' a foreign innovation without modification, following the intentions of American educators. Still, given the recognition that Standards were a direct introduction by US curriculum experts from a foreign curriculum base, it was not surprising to find that some respondents saw this as a major source of concern. As Ayesha, a 49 years old associate professor, explained:

I think these Standards were based on Western needs and they don't address Pakistani needs in our context. We have lack of resources and training, and these Standards require a great deal of training and understanding of teacher educators. We need Standards according to our classroom needs. (Ayesha)

Theme 3: Support for Standards implementation

By far most of the participants commented that a minimum level of support was definitely required for the implementation of these Standards, such as well-equipped libraries,

availability of Internet in the classroom, guidance centres, assessment policies, etc. There was also a persistent concern with regard to the nature of training to integrate these Standards into the teaching content. Teacher educators were not offered any workshop or training to incorporate these Standards while addressing the content to preservice teachers. Nor were university courses aligned with the areas of Standards, making their implementation a major challenge. However, the major concerns were that the introduction of Standards had no true implementation plan, and that the monitoring and evaluation of Standards documentation lead to a 'dead-end', in the eyes of most of the respondents. Young female participants such as Uzma and Zubaida, both lecturers at a public university, explained as follows:

No, I didn't have sufficient training to implement these teaching Standards. They are just (in a) document. They are not integrated into our teaching content and syllabus. No, we are not practising Standards and I don't have sufficient understanding and professional knowledge about these Standards to implement them into my courses. (Uzma)

Notwithstanding, some Standards are vague in nature they cannot be implemented into classroom like professional partnership. (Zubaida)

It seemed that there was little information provided, and the Pakistani Government did not launch any program to train or support university teachers to understand how to implement the new teaching Standards. In the absence of resources and Standards integrated content with required implementation instructions, it was a great challenge for teachers to take these Standards on board. Education authorities and leaders were well aware of the scarcity of resources, although reports on Standards implementation had not been followed up in any formal or accountable way. Participants also highlighted that effective training needed to be arranged on the implementation of these Standards through evidence-based activities, considering that these were the fundamentals of teaching, and that a good teacher should have adequate knowledge of implementing these in the classroom. Some participants were frustrated that the new teaching Standards were insufficient for enhancing the quality of education in Pakistan. A few participants voluntarily observed the process of Standards' introduction, such as participant Nasir, a mid-career teacher educator and assistant professor:

No training was provided as such by anyone. It was all self-learning and implementation through trial and error; nonetheless, the faculty in Education Department had discussions on the Standards. The curriculum was revamped by various departments. We aligned Higher Education Commission (HEC) requirements with the University expectations and consulted curricula of various universities in the United Kingdom and United States. The best Standards were identified and a draft was developed for implementation on trial basis. (Nasir)

According to these participants, Standards' integration with evidence-based activities and their implementation policy was a missing component on the part of the Ministry of Education. However, some participants were already teaching professional competencies as a core component for the teaching profession, although they were not integrating these professional competencies as part of Professional Standards. Participant Nasir further explained:

I wonder how these Standards are a direct concern of a university faculty member. A teacher educator has to do something on his own or through statutory bodies to improve these Standards and incorporate them into teacher training programs. The Standards would be appropriate if support were to be provided by the Government and teacher training institutes to modify the existing Standards. I'm not sure that a [Pakistani] needs analysis was done before developing these Standards. (Nasir)

Most participants had the same concern with regard to seeking support from the government for the training, capacity building and education so that teachers could implement teaching Standards in an effective way. After all, as the participants explained, any implementation of teaching Standards required support from government in the form of providing resources such as the provision of facilities and financial resources. Also, a certain environment is required before these Standards can be freely implemented. In theoretical terms, there can be debate about the value of the Standards; it could be argued that the Standards have clouded the intentions of an objectives-led curriculum and education. This debate was reflected by respondents wishing for debate and informed direction within a government supported environment. Participant Ayesha believed that:

We are touching these Standards to some extent because we have course outline objectives - they bind us to teach accordingly. The Ministry of Education provided us with a copy of these Standards and they also instructed us to use these Standards into classroom. They also guided us how to use Standards as a benchmark to improve teaching quality. (Ayesha)

Again, theoretically the Standards' role in framing desired teaching skills, dispositions and attributes according to classroom needs is an important one, however Standards' execution in the teacher training courses remains to be addressed since their introduction in 2009.

Theme 4: Personal commitment to implementing the new teaching Standards

Participants often viewed the task of the implementation of Standards as a personal agenda, which required personal commitment. They lamented that there was no formal training program designed or organised to raise the awareness of university teachers with National Professional Standards for Teachers and any discussion to incorporate these Standards in teacher education programs. Participants also revealed that universities were not instructed to implement these Standards - probably because universities are never directly involved in policymaking. Hence, some participants showed their personal willingness and eagerness to incorporate these Standards into their teaching content and achieving at least 5 out of 10 National Standards for teacher self-assessment and teachers' evaluation through their students. Some respondents also believed that even though they had sufficient self-acquired knowledge, they would still welcome more help from the Government. The two oldest participants, Javaid and Anwar, outlined their personal efforts to integrate Standards in their teaching:

I try to design some activities that address these Standards and sometimes I get information about these activities from the web, since I have no training but instead use my own ability to incorporate these Standards in various courses. (Javaid)

I tend to read examples of integrating Standards into my teaching by looking at their course content and finding activities to align with these Standards, though my colleagues don't care of this practice and just focus on general professional competencies. (Anwar)

Even with such intrinsic drives in adopting the Standards, there was still a feeling that their 'foreign origin' will make it more difficult than it should be. For instance, Pakistan is a developing country and its social structure is different and more 'socially-bound' due to society-wide traditional cultural practices, therefore it seemed unrealistic to adopt Western teaching concepts into the Pakistani teaching system. Although some participants forecasted additional intricacies in terms of developing teaching qualities through these Standards in the form of teacher education programs, irrespective of their claims, they were clearly incapable of developing the qualities required by these Standards in their preservice teachers.

Such mismatch was evident with the participants on several occasions. Participants often thought the focus of the Standards was on the students in their classrooms. It was, therefore, necessary to consider the actions of the teacher to facilitate student behaviours leading to a 'particular standard'. It was assumed by most participants that the training of teacher educators was required as a first step to develop the abilities of trainee teachers to practise these actions. Mid-career teacher educator Nasir argued:

The focus of Professional Standards is teaching, not teacher training. Therefore, in my opinion, these Standards are neither suitable for teacher licensing and accreditation of programs, nor for improving the quality of teacher education. There is need to learn from countries like Australia and the UK. Yes, there should be the implementation of these Standards with proper guidance and resources. True implementation of these Standards will improve the teaching status and will provide a mechanism to assess the performance of the teacher educators. (Nasir)

One major loophole appeared to be the missing concept of teacher licensing in Pakistan, which is an accountable way of setting and determining the professional competencies of teachers through certifications based on the fulfilment of Professional Standards. A teacher licensing system also ensures teacher competencies at minimum acceptable Standards. In the current situation, sometimes, due to lack of resources, it is hard to apply all the Standards. However, whenever the Standards are applied, the quality of teaching and learning may then improve. Although Standards for Teacher Education were generally welcomed, a number of respondents pointed out potential difficulties. One male and two female teacher educators across different age groups presented their conflicting views. Reshma explained:

We are not trained to implement these Standards into a teaching context, we have a lack of information on how to design evidence-based activities for the transmission of professional Standards and how to address school and community needs through these Standards. (Reshma)

Similarly, Ayesha highlighted the significance of teacher licensing to strengthen teacher education. She questioned: "The teacher licensing body issues a license. How can it issue a license until it has a testing process that will conduct tests based on these Standards?"

In other words, it could be said that in the existing scenario, Standards were not seen as helpful in improving the quality of teaching. Nasir explained it a bit differently:

The capacity of teacher educators has not been developed properly in their teaching and implementation; prospective teachers do not see any implementation of Standards by their own educators, and ultimately the attitude and skills of prospective teachers are not developed in favour of the implementation of the Standards. There exists no process, procedure or mechanism to ensure the implementation of Standards at classroom level in the universities. (Nasir)

This final remark is particularly pertinent because the universities offering teacher training have no influence on school classroom actions once the trainees have graduated. If the Standards are to be monitored in school classrooms, Divisional Inspectors in the Provinces are very unlikely to have access and the necessary competence to undertake such a task.

Discussion

This study reports on the perceptions of 13 teacher educators involved in teaching pre-service teachers who were interviewed to assess their knowledge and understanding of Professional Standards and their opinions on their introduction in Pakistan. In doing so, it considered a wide range of perspectives from teacher educators who represented a fairly wide spectrum of educational backgrounds, experiences and professional attachments.

The strong emphasis in the data on '*belief in value for change*' gives the impression that teachers are indeed in favour of professional standards for teachers. However, professional standards for teachers was often seen as a Government initiative with a political aim to demonstrate action in education, rather than a well thought out response to real life problems. In recent decades, it has become common for curriculum change to be driven by Western perceptions of the problem in hand, without much regard for the peculiarities of the local culture. This has been termed 'curricular cloning' and is known to likely lead to implementation problems in the host country (Dimmock, 2000; Watkins, 2000; Dimmock, 2002). With improved global communications leading to educational curricular content becoming 'institutionalised' internationally (Meyer, Kamens & Benavot 1992), the impact of resource-rich donors such as UNESCO and USAID have become extensive in less developed countries. As we have seen, both of these bodies were instrumental in the preparation of the Pakistani National Professional Standards for Teachers (Government of Pakistan, 2009b).

Koster and Dengerink (2008) pointed out that Standards are not necessarily helpful in themselves to the teacher community. The authors were concerned with the lack of autonomy that Standards can impose on teachers, and in a European context, the desirability of the teachers themselves being involved in curricular change and 'ownership' of the new scheme. Since the Pakistani Standards were formulated following the procedures and examples of Western countries, particularly the US, teachers felt that there was significant implementational discrepancy in the local Pakistani context.

The responses of the teacher educators in this study suggest that in Pakistan it might have been a mistake to not have had a more organised and broader consultation exercise with all stakeholders, but especially with practitioners, which would obviously include in-service and pre-service teachers.

Regarding the '*relevance of teaching Standards to Pakistan*', it is observed that the static nature of the Pakistani Standards curriculum model with no built-in implementation and review phases was picked up by several of the respondents, who expressed their dissatisfaction with the mindless 'cloning' and replication of the Standards into the local context. But even so, one respondent reported that, at an institutional level, it is still possible to work from the Standards document and modify and adapt to build up a working, standard-compliant teacher education curriculum. Ideally, the Ministry of Education Policy and Planning wing should be a powerful force for curriculum development in Pakistan, and the HEC a facilitator for change in the higher education institutions. As the responses in this survey illustrate, both bodies are responsible and need to take greater (and joint) responsibility.

Policy change without such a model is hardly likely to succeed. In the past, too many ambitious projects funded by international donors in reference to South Asian education and economy have neglected such a model to their disadvantage (Ahmed, 2018; Ribould, 2005). Rather than grandiose development schemes, Hallak (1990) has proposed building from small-scale schemes that are proved to work before instituting national change. Likewise, Iqbal and Pell (2016) traced the development of a cyclical curriculum research model, which encompassed the needs of present-day Pakistan. Within such a model, pilot studies and formative evaluation would be expected to precede any full implementation of change. The respondents in this study also conversed the need to initiate pilot projects of the professional Standards before their implementation into teacher education.

As university teachers, the respondents did have a modest knowledge of the Standards, but appeared to remain doubtful or sceptical of their immediate applicability to classrooms. They cited the problem of lack of 'support for implementation' and the proper execution of professional standards due to lack of alignment and integration into teaching content. While most have read the Standards and are familiar with them in a sense, there is a lack of purpose as to how to proceed from this point – in other words, there is a degree of confusion as to how to implement policy directives in pedagogical practice in their day to day teaching in classrooms. Respondents also pointed out that Pakistan is resource-deficient in education, while implementing Standards often, if not always, required access to facilities and organisational systems that Western countries take for granted.

The 'lack of resources' argument appears to be a way of stifling further consideration of Standards implementation, rather than suggesting modifications and possibilities of what can be done, within constraints. For example, ICT and computer technology integration is an important segment of professional Standards, but it is not properly addressed in the classroom due to lack of resources. Nor are teachers fully equipped with sufficient information about technology integration and digital tools to connect classrooms with the

global world. In addition, teachers lack sufficient capabilities to use hardware and software to connect globally. Likewise, understandings about human growth and development and community engagement are limited, due to teachers' lack of knowledge about their implementation.

Regarding '*confidence to implement Standards*' there is some support within this teacher educator sample for a movement towards the teachers themselves becoming part of the teaching and learning innovation process. This will permit a modified and relevant version of the Standards to emerge in higher education institutions. As the Dutch experience with standards has shown (Koster & Dengerink, 2008), curriculum change is more effective when practitioners 'own' the system they have modified to work within. With the absence of any provincial or national training in Standards implementation, it is encouraging to hear that some respondents were acting on their own initiative as curricular 'change agents' within their own institutions.

The Standards have not been implemented in higher education and no provincial or national training has occurred in support of implementation. Respondents attribute the blame for this on the HEC, although generally, the Government has failed to provide any support at all. In terms of value, all but one of the respondents felt that the Standards are desirable for building or revising the curriculum throughout the country. It is pointed out that despite their Western origin, the Standards recognise a psychological model of learning common to *all* cultures so can be used comfortably in the Pakistani system, both for school learning and teacher appraisal. In the case of staff appraisal or teacher licensing, as Standards focus on school students in their classrooms, if a teacher appraisal system is to be developed, it is necessary to judge what actions the teacher must demonstrate to bring about relevant behaviours in students. Teacher educators could have a role here in contributing to trial appraisal schemes.

In terms of teacher education, the benefits of introducing Standards into the curriculum are broadly appreciated in the community. However, designing a sensitive curriculum might remain a challenge due to the lack of expertise in curriculum development amongst teachers, administrators and Government officials, as evidenced by the continued practice of 'buying-in' foreign expertise from USAID and UNESCO in the first place. It is of interest that in the Dutch system, where university educators are well trained in curriculum studies and have active teacher professional associations, it has proved possible to fit a viable standards framework into the existing curricula (Koster & Dengerink, 2008).

Conclusion

It is no doubt appreciated that the introduction of Standards into Pakistani education will be beneficial. Standards will allow the curriculum to be revised throughout the country, not least in the teacher training institutions. Despite the perceived 'foreign' source of the Standards project, most respondents could, after all, identify the commonality of the educational needs of students globally and see the value of the Standards in restructuring the curriculum and as a means of establishing a teacher licensing system. The lack of

effective curricular development in Pakistan has led to international donor schemes of doubtful quality that do not become established within the local educational culture (Iqbal & Pell, 2016). There is danger that the Standards scheme could also fall into this category. With no implementation strategy for Standards coming from the Government and the HEC, it is necessary for conscientious teacher educators to act as 'change agents' and initiate actions to modify and revise the existing curricula, for which they have immediate responsibility. Teacher educator change-agents could have an important role in a country where curriculum development structures are weak (even so historically, see Hoodbhoy, 1998). Iqbal and Pell (2016) saw such educators working within professional development centres at selected university bases, as in systems where development from central government is slow or lacking, universities can be a source of problem-solving activities and creative ideas (Whitty, 2006).

The geographical limits of the sample for this study and its relatively small size necessarily reduce the generalisability of the findings reported here, but a consistent pattern has emerged of a curriculum change imposed with the best of intentions, but lacking the strategy to ensure that it could be easily assimilated into an existing structure. It is recommended that a much wider sample now be aimed for by using a questionnaire survey, focusing on the respondents' experience of the introduction of Standards, asking questions of the mechanism of change in a bureaucratic system (Niaz, 2010). As well, studies need to find out how certain discourses are perhaps privileged over the others in the formation of the Standards – in other words, whether there were vested interest groups whose needs were reflected, and if these were inconsistent with the views of the teacher educators.

Professional standards should be introduced in the professional development content courses of teacher education programs to enable students to know the professional competencies to become an effective teacher. Likewise, teacher educators must deliver the areas of professional standards by aligning them with their teaching subject matter. The National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE) is duty-bound to consider the weightage of professional standards integration with course content while examining the accreditation process for teacher education programs in Pakistan.

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Appendix 1: Interview questions

1. To what extent do you believe you were provided with sufficient knowledge and understanding about the teaching Standards?
2. To what extent do you feel you had sufficient opportunities to provide input into the development of the new teaching Standards?
3. To what extent do you think the implementation of the new teaching Standards required a greater level of support from the government than you received?
4. What are significant aspects/areas of the teaching Standards to prepare pre-service teachers for real classroom needs?
5. Do you think you have sufficient training to implement these teaching Standards into your content courses through evidence-based teaching strategies?
6. Do you think that the areas in the teaching Standards are in line with the Pakistani classroom needs or do they need any amendments?
7. Do you think the teaching Standards provide a platform to progress teacher licensing and the teacher education accreditation authority, in order to improve the quality of teacher education?

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