

The Perceptions of Teachers Concerning BS 4-Years Program: A Case Study of University of Peshawar

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed at investigating the perceptions of university teachers concerning Bachelor of Studies (BS) program at the University of Peshawar. Teachers of twenty disciplines from faculties including basic and life sciences, numerical sciences and social sciences constituted the sample. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The views of teachers regarding the impact of the BS program on the university environment, the attitude of BS students and the problems faced by the teachers were explored. The findings include a categorical positive change in the behavior of BS students. The study revealed that although a vast majority of BS students are very responsive and participative; teachers of BS program are overloaded. Due to heavy workload their professional development bears both positive and negative aspects. Diversity and variety of subjects in the curriculum of BS program make it positive while rapid exams and preparing results make it difficult for the teachers to concentrate on their research and other related tasks. The system of evaluating the students is of good standard, but it is partially implemented. The induction of sufficient regular staff for the BS program, in-service training and proper implementation of assessment techniques have been recommended.

Keywords: BS Program, Perceptions, University of Peshawar, Teacher Training

Background

The Semester System is being adapted by the Higher Educational Institutions (HEI's) of Pakistan for various Bachelor of Studies (BS) programme, i.e. four years integrated academic programs. The BS program is recognized by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) as an international level degree program. This program is equivalent to the regular Master's degree awarded after 16 years of education. A graduate with the BS degree is eligible for employment in BPS-17 and for pursuing Higher Education in relevant discipline of MS/M.Phil Programs.

Admission is offered to those who have passed Higher Secondary (Intermediate) examination or equivalent examination in at least second division (50 percent marks) from a recognized board of examinations. However, students who are already graduated, or are enrolled in any graduation program are not eligible for admission to a BS program.

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In the following sections a brief background of the semester system followed by the characteristics of adolescent students is presented. Following this the objectives of the study, the research methodology, findings and discussion are outlined.

BS 4 Year Program: Introduction

The BS program comprises eight semesters i.e. two semesters per academic year called spring and fall semesters. The semester duration is 16-18 weeks. The course load for students is 15-18 credit hours per semester and the total credit hours required for the degree is 124-136. The BS program is carried on by a combination of variety of courses, i.e., core courses, general courses, major courses and elective courses. Students are assessed continuously through home assignments, presentations, quizzes, class tests, mid-term and final term examinations. Assessments through the above mentioned techniques are inter-related. Besides, attendance is mandatory. Generally, up to 70% attendance is considered as compulsory. In addition, every student is required to conduct a small scale research project by the end of final semester.

Students who do not reach up to the required level in any subject, could reappear in the next semester when the course is being offered. Besides, make-up tests are also arranged for such students. There is no supplementary or special exam for students who fail in the course. They are required to repeat it. If a student fails to attend regular classes during the first four weeks of semester, his/her admission shall stand cancelled without notification. Students can freeze a semester and retake admission in the same semester (Semester Rules and Regulations, University of Peshawar, 2013).

The grading system is calculated through GPA i.e. Grade Point Average (a measure of a student's academic achievement at a college or university; calculated by dividing the total number of grade points received by the total number attempted). The HEI's either use Absolute GPA or Relative GPA. Final grading of all semesters is calculated in terms of CGPA i.e. Cumulative Grade Point Average or the overall grade points received by the students in the entire courses of program.

Students' Age and Characteristics

Students of BS level are adolescents, a period beginning with puberty and ending around 18 or 20 years of age. This period is characterized by tension, worries, and a high level of anxiety due to sudden physiological changes (Brooks-Gunn & Warren, 1989; Rosenblum & Lewis, 1999) along with psychological and environmental influences (Krause, Bochner & Duchesne, 2003). Stanely Hall (1904) has described this period as "a period of storm and stress." Adolescents encounter a number of crises including identity crisis (Erikson, 1997) where they search for identity, role in society and a standing in group (Krause, Bochner & Duchesne, 2003). At this stage of life, students like autonomy and freedom. They do not like to be directed by others (Erikson, 1997). If adolescents are even directed by their teachers or parents, they react aggressively. They have little patience for others (Dayan, 2013). All students of BS program are adolescents. They, therefore, need to be handled carefully. The present researchers observed over time that sometimes handling adolescents in mixed classes (girls and boys) during instruction becomes difficult for a

teacher. Do all teachers encounter the problem of classroom management? Do all teachers are overburdened with teaching and related tasks? How do teachers perceive the attitude of BS students at the university level? These and similar questions intrigued the present researchers' minds.

The current study, therefore, aimed to explore the perception of university teachers towards BS program at the university level. For this purpose, the following main questions guided this research.

1. What is the impact of BS program on the overall university environment?
2. How do teachers perceive the attitude of BS students?
3. What (if any) problems do teachers face concerning BS program?

Objectives of the Study

The present study was focused on the perceptions of university teachers concerning BS program. The study, therefore aimed to:

1. Explore the impact of BS program on the university environment;
2. Examine the attitude of BS students;
3. Find out the problems faced by teachers.

Methodology

The current study adopted a qualitative methodology. The research design was a case study, which according to Yin (1994) "...is an empirical inquiry that explores a contemporary phenomenon within natural settings" (p.13). Bassey (2007) defines a case study in educational research as a "critical inquiry that aims at informing educational decisions and judgments in order to bring betterment to educational practices" (p. 142). Case studies usually do not aim at testing or confirming theories but aim to explore significant features of the case under study (Khan, 2013). This seemed the most appropriate design as the present research aimed at exploring the perceptions of university teachers teaching to BS students.

Participants

A total of 20 teachers, 2 (one male and one female) each from 10 departments including Bio-technology, Botany, Chemistry, Economics, Education, Mathematics, Physics, Social Work, Sociology and Psychology were selected as a sample. The participants were selected through purposive sampling technique as in this sampling individuals are selected in the light of the characteristics needed by the researcher (Johnson, 1995; Singh, 2006). Further, purposive sampling allows the researchers to look for cases that could provide rich information and make an in-depth study possible (Bashiruddin et al., 2012). Only those teachers were selected who had three years or more teaching experience to BS students.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews as it is a useful tool for data collection in social sciences (Cohen et al., 2007) enabling researchers to gain insight into a person's values, perceptions, and beliefs (Tuckman, 1972). Semi-structured interview is

well-suited for the exploration of the opinion and perceptions of participants regarding complex issues. It also allows the researcher to probe for more information, clarification and elaboration of answers (Baden & Major, 2010; Barribal & Whiles, 1994). An interview guide was developed that helped the researchers in asking the same questions from all participants. The interview guide included open-ended questions for the sake of eliciting rich data for the study. The duration of each interview was about 40 -50 minutes. The interviews were conducted at the work places of the participants during their free timing. All the Interviews were audio recorded with prior permission of the participants.

The analysis of data proceeded in the four steps: transcription of the data; initial coding; identifying themes and developing explanations (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Findings

The following section outlines the findings relating to university teachers' perceptions about the impact of BS program on the university environment, the attitude of BS students and the problems faced by the teachers. These themes are elaborated with relevant quotes from the data obtained from interviews.

Students' Attitude

The data revealed that students' attitude was a little immature in the beginning. A sudden shift from college to university left them feel maladjusted. In addition, age was also regarded as one of the main reasons for their immature attitude. However, with the passage of time they are adjusted to the new environment. For instance, one of the participants stated:

"Except for a few students, majority of the BS students behave quite immaturely. They need to be guided on little things like how to sit in the class, how to listen to the lecture and how to keep quiet. However, I observed a positive change in their behavior with the passage of time" (Participant 3).

Similarly, comparing the behavior of BS students with Masters Students, another participant shared:

"BS students are relatively younger in comparison to those entering Masters programme. They enter the university after 12 years of education where they face a different environment from school and college. Since they are still in adolescence, they get angry at little things. In class, their behavior is disruptive and annoying. Under such conditions teaching becomes difficult. Sometimes, I feel that I spend my quality time in managing the class. On the other hand, students of Masters are understanding and easy to handle" (Participant 5).

Heavy Workload

The study revealed that most of the teachers were overburdened with teaching and related responsibilities. Most of the departments were running various programs simultaneously with few teachers. Heavy workload was regarded by the teachers as a big barrier in

carrying on their research related activities. For instance, one of the respondents stated that:

‘I am highly packed with multiple tasks such as coordinating the BS program and serving as a controller of examination, besides, taking classes and supervising research students’ (Participant 7).

Similarly, another participant articulated that:

‘Our department is running a number of programs including BS, Masters, M.Phill and Ph.D for which staff is not sufficient. Visiting teachers for the courses are hardly available. The junior teachers are committed but the senior ones do not take any extra responsibility. Therefore, I am assigned with a heavy timetable due to which I can hardly find time to concentrate upon my professional development’ (Participant 11).

In addition, some of the respondents were found teaching beyond their required credit hours.

Professional Growth

Teaching to BS affects the teachers’ professional growth both in a positive and negative way. Positive in the sense that in BS program new subjects are introduced. Therefore, teachers consult different resources and reconstruct their knowledge. However, reconstructing knowledge does not bring fruitful results all the time especially for the newly inducted teachers who need to accomplish research related tasks. As one of the participants argued:

“I am head of the department but due to a lack of sufficient staff, I carry the maximum workload. I teach to Masters, M.Phill, Ph.D and BS. I want to work on some research projects which I have planned years ago but unable to carry it. Looking after the department matters along with teaching does not allow me to come up with empirical work” (Participant 4).

Similarly, another respondent shared:

“Though teaching to BS is interesting and beneficial as it adds to one’s current knowledge, yet it is time consuming. Since promotion to the next grade depends on one’s qualification and number of publications, I find it difficult to improve my qualification and get promotion” (Participant 13).

Another participant was of the view that teaching to BS has negatively affected his professional growth. Busy schedule is a big barrier in the way of his research productivity.

Lack of Proper Implementation of Assessment Techniques

Findings of the study showed that majority of the participants positively regarded the assessment techniques suggested for BS students. Variety in the assessment modes i.e.

quiz, presentations, assignments, paper-pencil tests and research projects make it possible for a teacher to assess students holistically. Variety of assessment techniques also helps students getting knowledge of their potential abilities, their position in the class and expertise in various subjects.

Unfortunately, the study revealed that these assessment techniques are not properly implemented in most of the department. For example, one of the participants stated that,

“Assessments techniques seem effective but the question is that of its proper implementation” (Participant 10).

Similarly, another respondent argued that the various assessment modes are good enough but most of the teachers assess students through traditional paper-pencil tests. She further stated that:

“Teachers do not check students’ assignments properly and on time. There would be few teachers who would check assignments and come up with feedback (Participant 10).

Another respondent shared that:

“There are some teachers who do not make papers according to the standard and pattern recommended by the HEC” (Participant 2).

In short, though there a very well-defined evaluation system for BS programe but most teachers are not following the system in its true spirit. It is mainly because teachers are overburdened with teaching and they find little time for proper evaluation of the students.

Discussion

Findings on teachers’ perceptions regarding BS program revealed certain issues including students’ immature attitude, heavy workload, impact on professional development of teachers and a lack of proper implementation of the program. For example, students’ behavior was mischievous and disruptive especially in the beginning. Teachers had to manage the class during teaching. Productive time of class used to go wasted on directing students regarding discipline. Students were not ready to follow rules set by their respective teachers for class. They seemed to enjoy autonomy in the class. This seems in line with Erikson (1997) and Krause, Bochner & Duchesne (2003) who stated that adolescents do not like to be directed by others. Boys were found more mischievous than girls.

Heavy workload was found to be a major barrier in the professional development of teachers. Participants had the desire to improve their qualification. They were struggling their best to achieve their goals but teaching variety of subjects along with other related responsibilities were making it difficult for them. Most of the departments were running various programs including Ph.D, M.Phil and Masters with insufficient staff. This led every teacher to be overburdened with teaching. Their research projects were left incomplete. The data also revealed that teachers with heavy workload were not paid for the extra classes. However, some positive aspects were also found in the program. For

example, teaching various subjects was regarded as a source of widening the horizons of knowledge for the teacher.

Moreover, ongoing assessment in the form of quizzes, presentations, assignments etc. were emphasized but teachers were found with little such practices. Teachers were using the traditional paper-pencil tests for the assessment of students. Similarly, checking of assignments and quizzes were often taken for granted by the teachers.

Conclusion

This qualitative paper explored the perceptions of university teachers concerning BS program at the university level. Findings revealed the pros and cones of BS program. Teaching various subjects that widens the horizons of knowledge of teachers is among the pros. However, this variety in subjects proved to be a major hindrance in the professional development of teachers. Similarly, handling adolescents in inclusive classes (both gender) is found to be a challenging task. Their attitude was a little immature in the beginning. The proposed assessment technique for the BS program was found appropriate but in some of the departments, teachers were found using the traditional assessment modes.

In the light of findings, induction of sufficient teaching staff for the BS program is suggested so that all teachers could accomplish their research related tasks successfully. It is further suggested that teachers, particularly teaching to BS students should receive in-service training in the subject of Adolescent Psychology and Educational Psychology. It might enable teachers to handle adolescents (BS students) effectively.

Regarding the problem of assigning subjects, it is suggested that only those subjects should be offered for which teachers with subject mastery are available. Teachers should not be assigned with subjects beyond their expertise. Teachers with extra workload could be properly paid for the extra work. For the holistic evaluation of students, the prescribed assessment modes should be truly implemented.

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