



EXPLORING UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ABOUT THEIR PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

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Paper ID: AMRJ-04

Volume 2 Issue 1

Key words:

University Teachers, professional competence, professionalism personality traits, professional knowledge, professional ethics, professional attitude

Abstract

This qualitative research study intended to record and document university teachers' perception about the nature of professional competence. University teachers from two selected universities in Balochistan province of Pakistan formed the population for this study. A sample of 10 university teachers was drawn by employing criterion technique of sampling. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview. The analysis of data shows that the university teachers have different opinion about the nature of professional competence. The results of the study also reveal that the respondents consider a variety of attributes and characteristics important building blocks for professional competence. These attributes and characteristics include professional knowledge, professional attitude, professional ethics and professionalism.

1. Introduction

1.1 The shift from the narrative of teaching (knowledge exchange) to the worldview of learning is one of the major important objectives of education throughout the post-industrial society period, that is, within the timespan of breakthroughs and technological development (sharing competences – stimuli towards actions). Currently, even when in political discussions regarding education, the term "competences" is frequently employed. Educationists demonstrate that information, skill, and practical abilities developed by

students during their studies must be translated into competence in order to help solve additional issues and respond to a variety of developments and requirements in the industry and the job market. Due to the importance of education to the growth of nations, society is constantly concerned about the quality of education. Education creates a large pool of highly skilled labourers and influences employees' morals. For many years, educators have been interested in the topic of professionalism in teaching. Indeed, it has been asserted that the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of educational programmes mostly depends on the credentials and sufficient of the faculty when they are employed with devotion, expertise, and competence (Ibad, 2016). The researchers were driven to scrutinise the problem from the perspective of university instructors' opinions of professional competence because they are professional teacher educators and have a direct involvement in improving the standard of instructions and learning and its effect on student accomplishment. To look at this more broadly, it is necessary to acknowledge that developing human resources is the most important aspect of developing a nation, and that Pakistan is a case in point. The fundamental duties that educational institutions are expected to carry out within the scope of mandatory education vary depending on the circumstances. However, aside from meeting the unique requirements of each era and region, an educational institution's primary goal is to guarantee both great student productivity and equal access to possibilities for all students. The problems of our time, such as multicultural coexistence, the dominance of technology, the development of the sciences, and the quick renewal of knowledge, are taken into consideration when asking educational institutions—and notably higher education institutions—to perform these tasks. Higher education institutions strive to prepare students for both the present and the always changing future.

The qualities of a modern higher education institution stated above largely define a teacher's function as well. A teacher ought to be qualified and knowledgeable in their field. So the issue is, "What abilities and traits are required for a university instructor to be competent in his job? Despite the diversity of opinions on what makes a good teacher, there is a general agreement on what a good teacher actually entails. The thoughts of teachers about their professional competence are discussed in this article.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

This study aims to explore and elaborate on the perception of university teachers about attaining professional competence.

1.3 Research Question

The study is based on the following research questions:

- How do university teachers perceive professional competence?
- What characteristics/elements in university teachers' perception form professional competence among university teachers?

2. Literature Review

Teachers are facing many challenges within their educational profession. Teachers have been asked to give education to every child with their best ability, also maintain high academic standards for every student so that way they achieve competency in their profession. The capacity to possess information, attitude, and professional abilities is referred to as professional competence. To succeed in learning and teaching, every teacher should possess professional competence (Rahman, 2014). Currently, important tasks in the modernization of the higher education system include enhancing instructional efficiency, raising the degree of professional competence of experts, motivating academic staff to engage in new activities, applying inventive education and ICT to the teaching practice in higher education sector, and mastering and strategically directing sophisticated international experiences. Each specialist needs to continuously improve their professional competence in order to be able to endure the intense competition that currently dominates the labour market. In English, the word "competence" communicates the notion of "capacity" literally. Additionally, the information helps to highlight how "theoretical knowledge is effectively applied in actions, the embodiment of a higher degree of occupational expertise, skill, and talent (Toshtemirovich, 2019). Professional competence includes integration of comprehensive information and activities in each autonomous direction, in addition to the professional's development of appropriate expertise. Education's competence - based approach is now the focus of active comprehension in pedagogical theory and practise. Additionally, it is observed that scientific advancements of the competency approach's core precede the practise of education. Today, a different kind of teacher is required—one who is approachable and functions more as a "interpreter" and a facilitator than as a supplier of knowledge (Kwieciski, 2000). Theorists, legislators, and most likely institutions educating teachers are all looking for effective techniques to develop teachers and give them the skills they need to succeed. A broad functional model in which contemplation, creativity, emotions, communication, responsibility, and autonomy play important roles is beginning to take the place of technical, one-sided preparation (Dyrda & Przybylska, 2008).

2.1 Theoretical Background

Constructivism theory is a learning theory that shared a lot of assumptions and an interpretative epistemological stance, and it was developed by “Jean Piaget”. An author who has been for a lifetime occupied in detailing a constructivist theory of knowledge is “John Dewey (1859-1952)”. There are many theorists who reviewed the study, but among all of them “Jerome Bruner” is the most prominent cognitive constructivist theorist. Constructivism, according to Bruner in the year 1961 stated that learners create their knowledge and achieve it by using coding systems through organizing and classifying information. Bruner believed that the most effective way to develop a coding system is to figure it out, instead of being told by the teacher (Pagán, 2005). This theory also believed in the learner's own creation of meaning via experience, and that meaning is affected by the interplay of previous knowledge and new experiences (Walden, 2019). In contrast to conventional education, when information is merely passively transferred by instructors to students, constructivist learning theory supports a range of student-centered teaching approaches and strategies (Kasalak & Dagyar, 2020).

2.2 Professionalism

The term professionalism is originally a Latin word. It usually refers to people who have some expertise, skills, and knowledge in the field. Similarly, professionalism also refers to the strategies and rhetoric occupations perform their work for improving the status as well the salary of the professionals. Professionalism is used to recognize a profitable occupation related to respectability as opposed to performing tasks voluntarily (Özdemir et al., 2019). Therefore, the teaching profession is highly important. Teacher professionalism is the way to develop and work on teachers' perceptions. Their behavior and how they implement their knowledge and skills are associated with their profession (Holz, n.d).

2.3 Professional Competence

In literature, it has been evident through the “Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)” in the year 2013 that the development of teachers in their profession has been defined by seeing the activities that are aimed by developing individual skills, their expertise, and knowledge (Kasalak & Dagyar, 2020). As well as the other characteristics of being a teacher although, professional development helps them to find out the solutions for certain difficult situations in self-qualification and pursuing the teaching profession. The professional development of teachers has been enabling them to improve their professionalism and attain competency through involving them in different yet significant activities. Some of the examples for professional development in education have been made

by focusing on the process to develop professional skills for teachers through their peer forums.

2.4 Exploring University Teachers' Perception of Professional Competence

The modern pedagogies including socio-constructivism focus on the implementation of teamwork for a conducive learning process. The process of learning has only initiated at the stage in staff generation and development (MR, 2020). Although, when teachers are receiving staff development training on any new technique it becomes challenging for them in beginning. It has been approved from previous researches that constant practice of any new skill will help them in achieving and maintaining professional competency (Rasheed, Kamsin, & Abdullah, 2020). As teachers receive staff development training based on some previous theory and technique that sometimes being a true challenge for them to begin the business.

3. Research Methodology

There are four types of research philosophies "positivism, interpretivism, realism, and pragmatism" and from these, for this study researcher has used the "interpretivism philosophy of research". According to the selected philosophy, the researcher has directly collected the data through respondents with the help of a semi-structured interview. Moreover, in this study, the researcher has selected inductive reasoning (inductive design of research) and did not follow deductive reasoning. The reason behind selecting inductive reasoning is that this study does not have any hypotheses and all the data has been collected on the basis of research objectives. Moreover, "qualitative, quantitative, and mix-method research" are three different types of research methods that can be usually used by researchers in studies. However, for this study, the researcher has used a "qualitative method of research" and the reason behind this is that all the data has been collected in the theoretical and descriptive form directly from the respondents through semi-structured interview.

Moreover, for this study, the researcher has used qualitative design of research because all the data has been collected through personal interviews. For the purpose of personal interviews, researcher used a semi-structured interview. Moreover, for this study, the researcher has used a non-probability sampling technique because all the data has been collected only from those respondents who are related to the study and have knowledge regarding the study. In short, only those respondents will become the part of the study who has knowledge regarding the study. Moreover, university teachers were the population of this study, and the actual sample size of the study was 12, which was selected using criterion sampling technique. The criteria set for recruitment of research participants was having 3

years of teaching experience at university level minimum. While conducting the interviews, the researcher noticed the repetition in responses after 10th respondent, so the researcher decided to keep the study sample as 10. Moreover, the researcher has used "thematic analysis (TA)" for analyzing the collected data. With the help of TA, the researcher has made different themes according to the interview protocol and analyzed the responses according to the themes. Moreover, the researcher has also ensured the confidentiality of the study and stated that no data of the respondents will be shared with anyone at any cost.

4. Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this research was to collect and gather the opinion of university teachers their professional competence. The teacher's perceptions were explored to identify whether different activities and programs were perceived to enable university teachers with their valuable knowledge for promoting their professional competence. The analysis of obtained data is presented in the following lines.

Thematic Analysis

Several themes (main/sub) emerged after a comprehensive and detailed interpretation. In general, three themes from the responses were obtained such as:

Nature of Professional Competence

The responses of the participants were diverse while answering about nature of professional competence. Majority of the respondents were of the opinion that accomplishment of assigned professional tasks and duties to the satisfaction level or up to the pre-determined standards is called professional competence.

“As far as my understanding is concerned, I think professional competence is a broad concept. It may vary from one profession to the other. However, the basic elements of the concept of professional competence for me, irrespective of profession, would remain the same. These basic elements as I understand are professional knowledge, professional skills, attitude, and professional ethics along with the personal attributes like interpersonal communication.” (Respondent # 2).

These findings support the explanation of the idea and concept of professional competence given by various scholars (Antera 2021; Andersson and Köpsén 2017; Ellström 1997)

Another participant (Respondent # 6) replied that:

“Professional competence is the consistent and intelligent application of interaction, information, professionalism, critical thinking, attitudes, ethics, and introspection in everyday professional life.”

“According to best of my knowledge, professional competence is a combination of several set of knowledge, information, skills, attitudes, values and ethics. For example, if we talk about

professional competence of a doctor, then a doctor should possess not only sufficient knowledge of pharmacopeia, but he/she should be able to apply that knowledge in an efficient manner. Further to that a doctor should possess adequate knowledge about the patient as well as the communication skills should be at best.”

(Respondent # 7)

The above statements of respondents verify and testify the definitions of professional competence provided by Epstein and Hundert (2002) and Mulder (2001).

Attributes/Characteristics necessary for Professional Competence

The question relates to finding the experiences and crucial abilities of teachers that can construct a professionally competent profile. The respondents expressed their viewpoint in different statement. Few excerpts from the statements of the respondents are re-produced in following lines:

“For me, professional competence is a multifaceted and multi-dimensional concept that may comprise of various elements. When we talk about professional competence, then the first thing that comes to mind is the expertise in executing the job. This execution may require higher level of knowledge (whether it is academic, professional, or situational), skills and professional attitudes.”

(Respondent # 3)

Similarly, another respondent shared their thought in a way that:

“The main characteristic I believe is to have the accurate and right mindset about my teaching role and purpose. It will create an impact on my students and other colleagues as a prerequisite to pursuing an effective teaching profession.” **(Respondent # 4)**

In addition to this, another response from respondent revealed that:

“To be competent professional, it is important to show your interest, confidence, energy, and friendly attitude towards your practice. Moreover, it is very important to have sufficient amount of knowledge about your profession, matching application skills and positive attitudes towards your job are the key elements of professional competence.” **(Respondent #7)**

One respondent who was a teacher educator replied as:

“If we talk about professional competence, then I would say that it has several domains like professional domain that consists of the characteristics and attributes related to the profession (as we speak off professional competence of teachers, this domain may contain knowledge, skills and attitudes including subject matter knowledge, knowledge about how that subject matter knowledge can be transferred, skills to transfer that knowledge, knowledge of learner, emotional intelligence, social skills like critical thinking, problem solving, empathy, leadership, etc), personal domain that is concerned with one’s personality traits and the third one is professionalism.” **(Respondent # 8).**

Another respondent added that:

“I think to be a competent professional and especially a competent professional teacher, one must have few characteristics and attributes like knowledge of the content, job skills (pedagogical skills), job knowledge (instructional knowledge), situational and environmental knowledge, professional attitudes like critical thinking, problem solving, empathy, leadership skills, professional integrity, honesty etc. One more thing I would like to add that in contemporary era one competent professional must have the knowledge and skills related to effective use of ICT.” (Respondent # 9)

After going through above statements of the respondents, few themes were drawn which later were linked with the previous literature. The themes that emerged are discussed in following lines:

1st Theme: Professional Knowledge:

Almost all the participants, in their responses, mentioned professional knowledge as one of the important elements for a competent profile. In any profession, for development of professional competence, knowledge plays an important role. Here ‘knowledge’ refers to different types of information and knowledge (general, job/work, professional etc) and in case of teachers, it may be divided into several components like general knowledge or subject matter knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of learner (educational psychology), organisational knowledge etc. Previous literature (Epstein and Hundert 2002; Batista, Santos Graça and Pinto 2011; Stoof, et al. 2002; Shulman 1986) also testify the statements of the respondents as as per the literature knowledge is referred as a basic building block of professional competence.

2nd Theme: Professional Skills

It was clear that teachers focused on specific facets of competence's operational (skill based) aspect. While some educators emphasised the significance of adapting knowledge (subject matter to students), others spoke about the significance of developing and mastering skills.

In such a scenario, the skills referred by the respondents are pedagogical or instructional skills, which are focused to the ways and manners of transferring the knowledge to the students, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, leadership skills and other professional skills like assessment and evaluation, lesson planning, time management, classroom management etc. All such skills have already been mentioned in the literature (Burganovaa, Abdugalina and Shaiheslyamova 2016; Navarro, et al. 2016; Ilanlou and Zand 2011).

3rd Theme: Personality Traits

Personality traits are the personal attributes and characteristics of a teacher. (Alqiawi and Ezzeldin (2015) termed this as personal competence. It comprises the qualities that ideal teachers ought to possess. Values, attitudes, dispositions, and personal effectiveness all fall under the category of personal competence. Knowing the students, school, family, social interactions, knowledge, and fostering better relationships with members of the learning community and learners are among the specific distinguishing features of personal competence that are crucial to their success. All the participants of this research mentioned personality traits and qualities as one of the building blocks of professional competence as these qualities affect teachers' work performance. The findings of this research about this particular theme are in line with previous researches (Selvi 2010; Shabani 2006; Bhargava and Pathy 2011).

4th Theme: Contemporary Teaching Methods, Technology and Research

Utilizing technology teaching methods that are based on research indicates that both the teacher and the student have the necessary resources and tools to effectively teach and learn. Teachers use a variety of digital collaboration techniques to instruct their students. It is impossible to teach students who have grown up in the digital era using traditional classroom teaching techniques. Application and use of advance teaching methods, technology and research was considered as a fundamental element in development of profile of a competent university teacher by the respondents of this research. This finding supports the findings of research study of Alqiawi and Ezzeldin (2015) and (Bhargava & Pathy, 2011) who did conclude that these competencies are vital for a competent professional university teacher.

5th Theme: Interpersonal Communication

For effective communication and collaboration with individuals and organisations in both your personal and professional life, interpersonal skills are crucial. People who have outstanding interpersonal skills are more likely to establish lasting bonds and get along well with others.

Majority of the respondents of this research emphasized on interpersonal communication skills as a vital component of professional competence of a teacher. Teaching as we know is a two-way communication where one speaks and the second one listens and understands so this makes interpersonal communication more important for a professionally competent teacher. This particular finding of this research validates and supports the findings of Alqiawi and Ezzeldin (2015) who while suggesting a model for professional competence of teachers included interpersonal communication under the domain of personal competence.

5. Conclusion

Being a diverse activity, teaching calls both current information and a broad outlook. A student teacher may be endowed naturally with certain qualities that make them capable teachers. However, a thorough comprehension of learner behaviour is developed via professional acumen and the implementation of pedagogical ideas.

The research has concluded that there are different building blocks of professional competence amongst teaching professionals. According to the teacher's perception, an adequate competence description could not be developed by utilizing any sort of expert professional practice or model. The professional behaviors could not be analyzed to some myriad of components without losing their contingent nature in professional practice.

In addition to this, the literature also suggested that competent professionals have the attributes necessarily required for job performance to their appropriate standard. As it is the responsibility of the teacher to provide quality education for their student. As well as to make sure that student masters their learning skills. The purpose of this thematic analysis is to explore the opinions, experiences, and perceptions of their staff development at the university level. Different educational programs at different levels help them in perceiving the concept of competence. The study majorly focused on the perception of teachers about developing core competences university teachers must possess.

By focusing on competence development in the curriculum, continuous training programs can address the issue of individual differences with regard to university teachers. To achieve this, practise teaching sessions and the refinement of microteaching methods are required.

Future Recommendation

For future research, this study may be implemented for the development of various elements of professional competence of university teachers. This study can help to build a consensus among the stakeholders (educational policy makers, educational administrators, and managers) about the antecedents of university teachers' professional competence and future professional development plans for university teachers may be aligned to these antecedents and focused on the development of these traits and attributes.

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