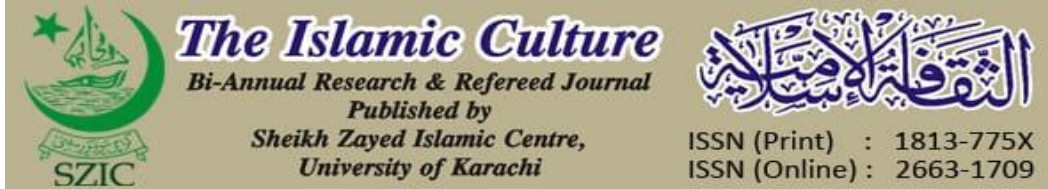# Teaching Second language: The key Issues, Problems and the New Challenges within the Board of Intermediate & Secondary Education Hyderabad, Pakistan

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Abstract

The Education system within the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Hyderabad, Pakistan has been criticised for ineffective teaching and poor implementation of standardized testing. The BISE is well aware of the problems and has introduced drastic measures to help address critical issues as a result. For example the BISE introduced four measures: (1) the master training program for teachers; (2) vigilance teams to monitor teaching in the classroom; (3) monthly tests to evaluate students' progress; and (4) opening more colleges to reduce the number of students per class. The aim of the current paper is to identify the potential factors affecting the teaching and learning of students in the BISE. Adopting a case study approach, this study suggests that there may be four potential causal factors that undermined the quality of teaching/learning in the B.I.S.E (1) over-crowded classrooms (2) course content (3) teachers' professional development and (4) the examination system. To explore these issues, this study set two research questions:1. What are the causes of declining standards of teaching and learning Second language within the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Hyderabad? 2. How can a teacher bring a change into thinking of students and classroom practices to improve the Progress of learners' in education?

Constructivist grounded theory approach was adopted. This qualitative case study was conducted using carefully designed interviews and data was analyzed qualitatively. it was found that structural redefinition of the culture of teaching is inevitably required for teachers to lead educational change process within the BISE.

Key words: Teaching Second language (Arabic or English etc), training program for teachers, course content etc, Board of Intermediate & Secondary Education Hyderabad, Pakistan.

Aim of the study

This qualitative case study aims to investigate and describe the possibilities and challenges of teaching Second language within the (BISE) which is in-Hyderabad, Pakistan and suggests pedagogical interventions to improve the quality of education. In this regard, it explores the beliefs, assumptions and knowledge[1] (Woods, 1996) of teachers who have been teaching Second language in the college setting for many years. The study investigates the issues of the falling standards of teaching, ineffective assessments and teachers professional characteristics. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences both as learners and as teachers of English and to reflect on the method by which they had learnt Second language and which approach if any, they chose or were told (by education authorities or curricula) to teach. In addition, participants were asked for their views on the present syllabus, classroom teaching environment, interferences of school authorities and political intervention.

Literature review

On the philosophy of curriculum, [2]Yoshmoto,(2011) suggests that progressive tenets are based on developing the hidden potentials of learners. It advocates a learner-centered approach and expects big change on the part of attitudes, behaviour, and learning as an outcome. In broader terms, it is a journey of enlightenment, progress and educational change that occurs as new ideas and new possibilities in the world are explored by learners. Black and William[3] (1988), have proposed an effective teachers training to strengthen their ability to conduct effective classroom-based formative

assessments to raise educational standards. Further,[4] (Rogan, 2006: 43), discusses the "zone of feasible innovation" which urges teachers to take small and manageable steps to innovate in their teaching at school level, in spite of having limited facilities. He adds that "learning outcomes identify the deeper learning that a course intends to produce the overall impact of the course" which means that the outcomes define the attitudes and abilities that should result from the learning but are not necessarily measurable in the short term.

[5]Snyder, (1992). points out that curriculum is jointly created and individually experienced by students and teachers. He adds that "teachers are creators rather than primarily receivers of curriculum knowledge" (p. 429). He expects of teachers to bring a change to the thinking and practice of their students by adapting and supplementing external knowledge within the given curriculum. [6]Fox ,(2009). suggests micro-level change in curriculum which must be based on grounded research to identify key leverage points from the observations of social actions and analysis of discursive samples of stakeholders- a process leading to transformational change. The leverage points discussed by [7]Fox ,(2007). presents curriculum as more than prescribed books, course contents and final grades of learners.

On the part of curriculum, standardized testing has been an integral component of education reforms by governments all over the world for years. Policy makers have proclaimed these test-based accountability programs to have been designed to promote improved standards of teaching and learning [8](Brindley, 2008; Black & Wiliam,1998; Slomp, 2008). However, research has nevertheless identified a number of important problems such as the narrowing of the curriculum and increasing pressure on instructors to "teach to the test". [9]((Black &Wiliam,1998; Brindley,2008; Fox & Cheng, 2007; Slomp 2008). Further, Darville (1990) suggests that selection of texts and teaching materials should relate to the practical needs in learners' lives. In addition, he has called teaching an alignment that balances the aspirations of learners with the goals of teachers

and introduces them to the world's realities other than reading texts. He describes teaching is social all the way down; it should work for learner's life, actions and upward gradations. The studies discussed here seem to have paid little attention to the issues related with the education system [10](Rehamani, 2003) in the poor and thickly populated countries like Pakistan.

This study seeks to focus on this issue by addressing the above stated research questions.

Method

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach [11](Connelly 1998), this qualitative case study was conducted using interviews with four experienced college teachers and the former controller of examinations to explore possible interventions to upgrade the falling standard of Second language teaching in the (BISE) Hyderabad. In this section, I will describe the participants, instruments used for data collection, research procedure, and data analysis.

Participants

The participants of this research were four Second language teachers and a former controller of the board of intermediate and secondary education in Hyderabad. Each participant has been teaching Second language to the intermediate students in the college setting for more than five years in the BISE, Pakistan. All the teachers are male and have completed M.A in literature from the University of Sindh, Pakistan. Two of them have M.Ed. degrees. All participants were between thirty-five to forty years of age. All the participants have received education from primary to university in the same classroom environment, almost same syllabus and the same education system. Each participant was assigned a letter for identification within the study (e.g. participant (S), participant (N), participant (Q), participant, participant (M) and (I). The former Controller of the Board has worked as a college teacher of U rdu (national language of Pakistan) for the last twenty-five years and worked as a controller after retirement from 2008 to 2011. (under BISE rules, only retired teachers can be controllers). The main responsibilities of the

controller in the BISE Hyderabad include: to nominate invigilators and members of vigilance teams for annual examination of the board. More importantly, the controller must make arrangement for the assessment of students' answer scripts and announce the results.

Data Collected: Instruments and Procedures

For each participant, a semi-structured interview on Skype was conducted. The semi-structured interview was a thirty- minute session that asked ten explanatory questions to investigate the tensions and possibilities that these participants identify in relation to the falling standard of education in the BISE, Hyderabad (see Appendix-A). With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded. The researcher noted the facial expressions and other non-verbal communication, such as when a participant hesitated during his response. The researcher informed all the participants about the nature and content of the study in advance and ensured their privacy and confidentiality. The former controller of the board hesitated to answer in Second language so on his request the interview was conducted in Urdu. The researcher then translated his ideas into English. After the interview, the recorded interviews were repeatedly listened to and themes were drawn from the data.

Approaches to data analysis

Following the constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), the researcher followed [12]Saldana ,(2009). and determined themes based on the categories. Some subheadings were generated from the data in line with (Saldana, 2009). Finally, important categories were recognized. The researcher verified the accuracy of the category system and did some minor modifications. In the grounded theory literature, a good category system is said to have "emerged" from the data (Saldana, 2009).

Results and Discussion

Given the constraints of this paper (10-12 pages), only a brief summary is provided below.

In response to the first research question; *What are the causes of declining standards of teaching and learning Second language within the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Hyderabad?*, the following causes were identified:

(1)Over-crowded classrooms

When participants were asked about the factors which undermine the standards of Education of BISE, they indicated that classrooms are overcrowded. For example, participant (S) said "there are many factors: overcrowded classrooms, teaching system, syllabus, and assessment issues." he explained: "you know students have zero interest in class readings, but they know that they have to pass the board examination. And I know that I have to teach them book from A-Z to get them good grade". Participant (M) said "that main reasons are political interference, unions and the bureaucracy." He described that most of the teachers are recruited on the recommendations of members of the parliaments without consideration of the qualification or merit, so you can imagine the results." The participants were also asked why they do not make class interactive and interesting by involving students in different activities like: pair work, group discussion, scaffolding, jigsaw etc. Participant (S) said that "there are 115 students in his class and sometimes there are not enough seats and students stand for the whole class to copy out the notes I write on the board for them". He explained further that "in such a big class I could not arrange any activity, it is impossible. Apart from that I have to finish my text book". He added, "you know if I do not teach text book, the students will complain against me to the principal, and the principal has no interest in my extra activities in class, he wants me to finish course word by word and that's it". In response to the question of how do they assess learners' performance in such a big class, participant (N) said "there is no classroom test". He added " it is simply impossible for teacher to arrange a test for

so many students" he added "there is the board examination in the end of the year, and I teach lessons from text book ,write answers for students and ask them to memorize them for board's examination".

while responding to the question: how can a teacher play a role in uplifting the declining standard of education in this situation, participant (Q) said "yes at least we can try to teach them something they need" he added "you know sometimes students come to my office to learn how to write-e-mail, a letter or job application". It suggests students want to learn the things they need. Further, it indicates that they are not taught in the classroom what they need. The former controller of the BISE was asked to discuss the causes of unsatisfactory performance of the board and he mentioned that "I agree that there is a corruption, improper methods of assessment and manipulation of grades". He added that "board conducts annual examination for seventy five thousand students, and resources are limited. Further he said that "we have to announce the results within two months because students have to apply for university admission in August".

(2) Course content

It was noticed that the participants unanimously agreed on the immediate revision of the syllabus. All the participants unanimously pointed out that they were teaching the same content of the course which was taught to them twenty two years before. They added that as a student they did not like such an old, boring and uninformative set of text books; and unfortunately it was the same still. Participant (M) said "I don't know why is it not changed? He added "I don't like to teach such a boring and useless stuff". Further he said "you know even students don't take interest when I teach them 'The Miracle of Radio' or 'The Wolves of Cernograz'. He explained "that's why they (students) go to private centers to learn English and come into my class to get course notes as they may pass the board examination". Participant (N) said "I prepare my students for annual examination". He explained " you know the easiest way is to write answers of the previous five years

questions because questions are repeated in the paper" and you know he added "students are interested more in notes than my teaching". It is opposite to the **"Literacy as practices, teaching as alignment: A message in a bottle"** by [13]Darville (1990), who suggests that the selection of texts and teaching materials should relate to the practicability of materials to learners' lives. Participant (Q) mentioned that some students visit his office and seek help in writing email, letter or application. It means that courses in- practice do not improve students' skills that are highly required in the practical life. Further, it indicates that text books teach only passive knowledge and fails to make students creative and develop analytical tools. In this regard, [14]Darville (1990) has called teaching as an alignment which balances the aspirations of learners and introduces them the world's realities beyond reading texts. After all, teaching is social "all the way down".

In recent years, Second language in which English has become the common business language, students need particular specializations in using English according to the nature of their field or job. Non-interactive courses may not prepare learners to meet the challenges in the competitive market. Students do not take interest in the classroom and have to pass the Board examination to attend university. Students know that they could pass the examination only if they memorise the notes given by the English teacher. For this purpose, teachers used to write answers of the previous five years test papers from A to Z, as indicated by the participants. This shows that teachers teach for the test and students to pass the test. As such, learning is relegated in the process.

Further, teachers seem to focus on teaching text books, and preparing students for the board examination. From their responses, it was clear that they were also taking no extra effort and interest to discover learners' hidden potentials. Here, there seems to be a lack of interest and responsibility on the teachers' side. Teachers can bring some change into the thinking of learners by making some personal efforts and scaffolding learners' zone of proximal development [15](Vygotsky, 1978 as cited by Rogan.p.102). They can engage

themselves into zone of feasible innovations Rogan and Grayson (2003) who suggest innovative actions to employ learning activities in the classroom. Further [16]Rogan ,(2006). urges teachers to take small and manageable steps to innovate ways of teaching at the school level in spite of having limited facilities.

(3) Teachers' professional development

In the response of the question whether they have got any professional training on modern teaching and assessment techniques, all participants unanimously said "that they had not received any training in the last five years. Specifically participant (N) said "government is not investing much money into education" he added, "You know not a single training in all five years". Participant (Q) said "I think no need to get training for assessment because I don't assess, it is board examination; I have to finish my course, that is it".

In response of the question about communicative method of teaching English, participant (N) said "I think we don't teach English, we complete our course which is the text book". He added "I have prepared notes-all questions in text book are answered, I write word by word on board." He added "my students always get good grades in the board's examination." From the answers of participants, it can be inferred that teachers have become a part of the system; they do not feel responsible to teach for learning. They have been teaching for more than five years, but, because of not having professional training or a "refresher course" in teaching communicative methods, they do not make any effort to innovate their teaching.

(4) Examination system

All participants mentioned that the examination system encourages students to memorize the test materials rather than focusing on learning. In the same way, it limits the teachers to teach only text book to ensure good grades of their students. Further, the participants mentioned that students know that they will pass the examination by other means, such

as by cheating in the examination hall, influencing the examiner during an assessment or bribe the board staff. The statements of participants were supported by the former controller of the board, who agreed that "there is interference of board's union, bureaucrats and hidden hands in the manipulation of grades". For example, he added that "there is cheating in the examination hall" and the "nomination of teachers for central assessment is also not neutral".[17] Khan, (2003). has pointed out that students getting into medical and engineering universities are often sons of politicians and bureaucrats because they manage to get "A+" in board examination and deprive poorer, often more deserving students. Because of these elements, the board's results are considered dubious by the public in general.

In the response of the question of why the controller could not improve the conditions and culture of the board and testing system in his tenure, he said "I was part of the system; I was retired, it was contract job and I was politicised". He added "when you are a retired and on contract you become insecure and much compromised." He expressed "I worked as teacher for 25 years, I wanted to improve the examination system but I was helpless". However he added "I agree that there is corruption, improper methods of assessment and manipulation of grades". But you know "board conducts annual examination for seventy five thousand students". He added "resources are limited; we have to announce the results within two months because students have to apply for university admission in August".

In this case may be laid on the policy makers, political intervention and examination system. But it may not be ignored that Pakistan is thickly populated country and Hyderabad is the second largest city of the province Sindh. Therefore another board may be established in the region to manage great number of the students and produce trustworthy results.

In the response of second research question: *How can a teacher bring a change into thinking and classroom practices to improve the progress of learners' in education*, this study found that there is a lack of awareness and responsibility among the teachers.

All the participants hardly took the responsibility on their part; instead they kept on complaining against the old curriculum, overcrowded classrooms, lack of professional training, and meagre financial investment by the government into education sector. However,[18] (Woods, 1996) suggests that teachers are the front- line stakeholders in the education system who could bring a lot of change and improvement if they commit to changing the classroom teaching. [19](Snyder, 1992) adds that "teachers are creators rather than primarily receivers of curriculum knowledge" (p.429). He expects teachers to bring a change in thinking and the practice of their students by adapting and supplementing external knowledge within the given curriculum. A good teacher can teach old and outdated lessons with new ideas and modifications [20](Fox, 2009). For example, participant (Q) said "yes at least we can try to teach them something they need" and tried to help students in writing applications, emails and letters in his office and students took interest in learning. Therefore [21](Rogan, 2006, p.103) has said, "We don't have a curriculum, we have a pedagogy". Further (Fox, 2013) a good teacher can teach Second language with any content. Therefore Markee (1993, as cited by Rogan, 2006). suggests that raising the awareness of professional training for teachers may lead to better learning outcomes for the broader learning rather than the measurable work (learners reproduce the material without understanding and analysis).

 CONCLUSION

The education system of Pakistan is facing new challenges such as increasingly overcrowded classrooms, a lack of funding, shortages of trained and qualified teachers, political intervention and a lack of modern technology. In the (BISE) Hyderabad, Pakistan, the quality of education is on the decline in spite of the fact that the present government has initiated drastic measures to improve the quality of education. For example it has introduced the semester system as a replacement of the annual

examination; teachers training program establishment of language laboratories and announcements of new education policy[22] (Rehamani, 2011). However the quality of teachers is questionable because teachers are appointed on the recommendation of members of parliaments. It is evident that without teachers' transformation, we cannot transform the education system and improve the quality of education [23](Markee,1993). In this regard, a series of education reforms in the area of teacher education is inevitable. Particularly, teachers' professional development, teacher-students relationship and implementation of standardized testing need immediate attention. Further, curriculum, which has remained the same for last twenty two years, needs a drastic reformation to take into account modern needs, demands and standards of teaching and learning. Overall, the stakeholders- learners, teachers, and policymakers have to play a major role in uplifting the declining standards of education.

This research has indicated that Second language teachers should be trained in modern methods of teaching and assessment. A monitoring policy to evaluate teachers' performance may be introduced. In Pakistan, the teacher is not considered to be responsible for poor results of students. Rather, when there is failure in the course, policy makers, school administrators or the students are blamed. Particularly, policy makers and curriculum developers have to redefine the needs of learners and to put all the pieces together to enable them to compete in the international market where functional English is considered the key to success [24](Rehamani, 2003)

Limitations of the study

The participants in this study were limited and do not represent all of the Second language teachers within the BISE, Hyderabad. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized. This study only focused on a limited number of participants' experiences; therefore, a more representative sampling of this population would be helpful in future research. Further, administration of the BISE and students may be interviewed to collect their points of view to make a balanced judgement.

Future Research

Future research should be conducted in terms of collecting wider data from an increased number of participants, some stake-holders of the board and teachers' unions, students, parents and education administrators should be approached to investigate the root cause of the decline in the quality of second language teaching. Also these perspectives could be used to frame some suggestions to increase the standard of classroom teaching practices, examination reforms, syllabus revision and teachers' professional training. Unless the overall culture of teaching, learning and assessment is reformed, the quality of education may not be improved.

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