

Pakistan Perspectives on the Challenges Associated with the Standards of the Quality Assurance for the Teacher Education Programs - A Critical Review

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Abstract

The study highlights the challenges associated with the quality assurance standards/indicators of Teacher Education Programs (TEP) in Pakistan. Within the qualitative research paradigm, a phenomenological approach parallel with the document analysis is undertaken. Experts' opinions on teacher education standards, set by the National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE) are gathered from forty-five university teachers. It is supported with document analysis of the National Standards for Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs. Findings unveiled a lack of integration of contextual trends in the professional teaching standards. The accrediting body greatly relies on manual documentation with superficial observation. The overall mechanism is not consistent to ensure quality improvement. Participants identified a gap in taking ownership by teacher education institutions and NACTE for teachers' professional development. It is suggested to take an action-research oriented approach parallel with traditional quality assurance mechanism; revise documents in light of accreditation models of the Asian countries; replace hefty paperwork with digital documentation; encourage research-based evidence; promote open educational practices, and share the quality assurance report to the global community as an open educational document. It is proposed to design contextual open online courses on the standards and accreditation documents. Besides, each institution should take ownership to strengthen internal quality mechanisms.

Keywords: teacher education, national standards, accreditation, NACTE

Introduction

Students' learning and achievements are correlated with the efficacy of teachers' professional development and experience.^{1,2,3}

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¹ Nathan Burroughs, Jacqueline Gardner, Youngjun Lee, Siwen Guo, Israel Touitou, Kimberly Jansen and William Schmidt. 'A Review of the

One of the studies, based on the systematic literature review, highlighted teacher guidance as crucial for stimulating collaborative learning.⁴ Findings of another study underlined that teacher guidance improved learning and increased learners' cognitive participation at one of the public universities in Germany.⁵ However, research claims are sparse. Further, previous studies did not explore the impact of teachers' professional development on learners' achievement in an online learning environment.

The global education system anticipates teachers to possess specialized knowledge and multi-dimensional skills like intercultural communication, empathy, multiculturalism, commitment to equity, and value diversity.⁶ We hold this opinion that acquisition, participation, field experience, quality mentoring, research-based teaching, reflective

Literature on Teacher Effectiveness and Student Outcomes', in *Teaching For Excellence and Equity- Analyzing Teacher Characteristics, Behaviors and Student Outcomes with TIMSS*, 7-17. Nathan Burroughs, Jacqueline Gardner, Youngjun Lee, Siwen Guo, Israel Touitou, Kimberly Jansen and William Schmidt, 1st ed. Springer, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16151-4_2

² Sigrid Blömeke, Rolf Vegar Olsen and Ute Suhl, 'Relation of Student Achievement to the Quality of Their Teachers and Instructional Quality', In *Teacher Quality, Instructional Quality and Student Outcomes- Relationships across Countries, Cohorts and Time*, 21-50. Trude Nilsen and Jan-Eric Gustafsson, 1st ed. Springer, 2016. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16151-4_2

³ Meichen Lu, Prashant Loyalka, Yaojiang Shi, Fang Chang, Chengfang Liu, and Scott Rozelle, 'The Impact of Teacher Professional Development Programs on Student Achievement in Rural China: Evidence from Shaanxi Province'. *Journal of Development Effectiveness* 11:2 (2019), 105-131. doi:10.1080/19439342.2019.1624594

⁴ Van Leeuwen, Anouschka and Jeroen Janssen, 'A Systematic Review of Teacher Guidance during Collaborative Learning in Primary and Secondary Education', *Educational Research Review*, 27 (2019), 71-89. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2019.02.001>

⁵ Elisabeth Fischer and Martin Hänze, 'Back From 'Guide on the Side' To 'Sage on the Stage'? Effects of Teacher-Guided And Student-Activating Teaching Methods On Student Learning In Higher Education', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 95 (2019), 26-35. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2019.03.001>

⁶ Ariel Tichnor-Wagner, Hillary Parkhouse, Jocelyn Glazier and J. Montana Cain, 'Becoming a Globally Competent Teacher', Last modified 2019. <http://www.ascd.org/Publications/Books/Overview/Becoming-a-Globally-Competent-Teacher.aspx>

and critical thinking skills, digital competencies, personal identity exploration, and ownership of teaching and learning are the key skills that a global-minded teacher should possess. These competencies significantly rely on TEP. Darling-Hammond, Hyler, Gardner, and Espinoza highlighted, 'Sophisticated forms of teaching are needed to develop student competencies... In turn, effective professional development is needed to help teachers learn and refine the pedagogies required to teach these skills'.⁷

Teacher education is the reflection of the entire education system. However, a good number of TEP lack quality. The World Bank⁸ surveyed teacher training in thirty-eight developed and developing countries. A myriad of teacher professional development programs in low and middle-income countries remain unevaluated. The report underlined 'The quality of in-service teacher training varies dramatically across countries, but much of the training does not align with practices that are associated with better student performance'.

Quality assurance mechanism is pertinent to maintaining the quality of TEP.⁹ The question arises, is there any global consensus on the quality assurance mechanism to ensure the efficacy of TEP? OECD¹⁰ underlines that it is difficult to measure the quality of teaching through the lens of TEP because the entry requirement, content, duration, and professional development vary across the countries. In our viewpoint, there is a nexus between teacher competencies and the quality of TEP, but there is little consensus on which parameters, teachers' professional development should be assessed? Unless quality is guaranteed in teacher education policies, programs, and practices, democratic values among teachers cannot be fostered. In the absence of quality assurance, teachers

⁷ Linda Darling-Hammond, Maria E. Hyler, Madelyn Gardner and Danny Espinoza, 'Effective Teacher Professional Development', *Palo Alto (CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2017)*, 5. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Effective_Teacher_Professional_Development_REPORT.pdf

⁸ World Bank Group, 'World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise', World Bank Group, 2017, 133. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018>.

⁹ Christopher Day, 'Policy, Teacher Education and the Quality of Teachers and Teaching', *Teachers and Teaching*, 25:5 (2019), 501-6. doi:10.1080/13540602.2019.1651100.

¹⁰ OECD, 'Review Education Policies-Teacher Initial Education', Last modified 2020. <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducationpolicies/#!node=41731&filter=all>.

will continue bringing their ideologies into practices that may result in detrimental outcomes.

TEP is accredited by the national/regional institutions/bodies/councils. Programs are judged on certain parameters and standards. Globally, independent and national professional associations are established that follow accrediting standards set by the academic or governing bodies. For example, in South Australia, The Teachers Registration Board; in New Zealand, *Education Council of Aotearoa*; in the USA, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE); in India, National Assessment and Accreditation Council; in England, the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), whereas in Canada, each province has set-up a separate governing body to certify TEP. Few countries, however, still lag to initiate the accreditation process. Despite the existence of accreditation bodies in many countries, teacher education courses lack quality due to poor accountability, politicization, and unavailability of the standard accreditation model^{11,12}. A good number of accreditation bodies focus on assessing TEP on shallow standards based on market-oriented frameworks.

Pakistan inherited the teacher education system from the colonial era.¹³ Previous national education policies have recognized the importance of teacher education and suggested restructuring TEP. To maintain the quality, the National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE) was constituted by the Higher Education Commission (HEC). NACTE introduced standards for the accreditation of TEP across Pakistan. For each teacher education program offered by a university, the concerned department is required to gather documentary evidence (internal evaluation). The team comprises NACTE members who visit the institution to assess the quality of TEP (external evaluation). Based on performance, accreditation status (out of four levels) is assigned. The accreditation is valid for three years, after which, re-accreditation is mandatory.

The question arises, are professional standards, set by NACTE contextual? Is there any integration of global education? Is the mechanism to assess TEP, sustainable? One of the studies hinted that the

¹¹ Jillian Fox, Colette Alexander and Tania Aspland (eds), *Teacher Education in Globalised Times* (Singapore: Springer, 2020).

¹² Xudong Zhu, A. Lin Goodwin and Huajun Zhang (eds), *Quality of Teacher Education and Learning: Theory and Practice* (Springer, 2017).

¹³ Muneeba Tahira, Ayesha Hassan, Amjad Malik and M. Imran Yousuf, 'Teacher Education in Pakistan: Issues and Problems', 2020. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED608314.pdf>

National Professional Standards for TEP lacks sustainable interventions.¹⁴ Whereas another study highlighted that teacher education standards lack implementation strategy.¹⁵ In addition, universities lack awareness and preparedness towards the implementation of national accreditation standards and the embracement of internationalization.¹⁶

Previous local studies are scanty and did not illustrate the actual challenges. In particular, there is a gap in the identification of the challenges in the teacher education standards offered by NACTE. Through the lens of experts, this paper identifies challenges associated with the standards of TEP.

Research Question

What are the realistic challenges associated with the standards of quality assurance of teacher education programs?

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative research paradigm. A phenomenological approach parallel with the document analysis is undertaken. Teachers' experiences, grounded on their exposure to the system are extracted through descriptive phenomenology. With that, documentary evidence is used to give voice and meaning to the subject matter. Triangulation guarded against biases. Expert opinions on teacher education standards, set by NACTE are gathered through the semi-structured interviews with forty-five university teachers from six universities, located in Sindh, offering teacher education programs. These participants are selected through criterion sampling- having ten years of university teaching experience. One of the strengths of the phenomenological interview is to surface lived experiences of participants.¹⁷ However, phenomenological

¹⁴ Qudsia Kalsoom and Naima Qureshi, 'Teacher Education for Sustainable Development in Pakistan: Content Analysis of Teacher Education Curriculum and Standards', *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2019. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3388457.

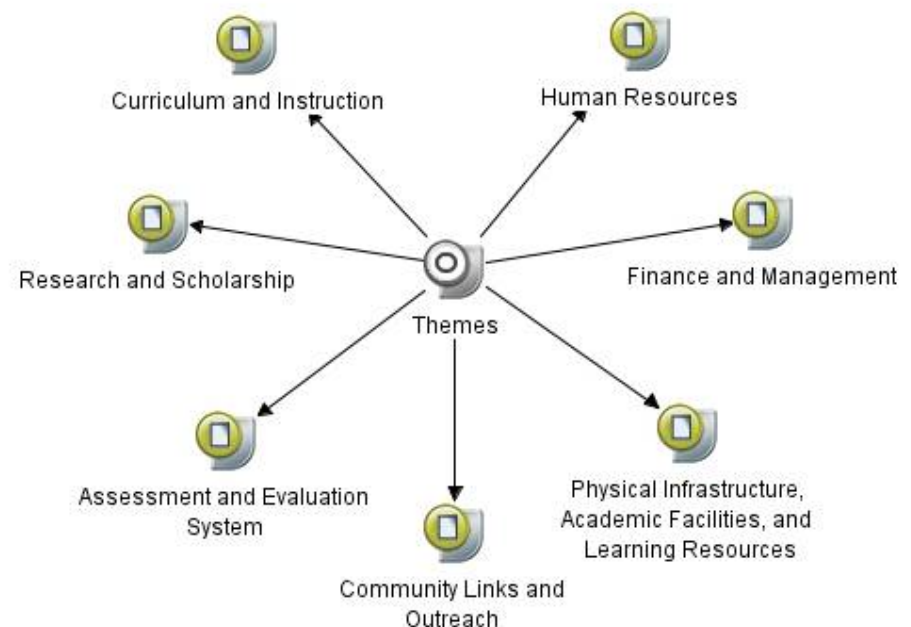
¹⁵ Sadia Shaukat and Raqib Chowdhury, 'Teacher Educators' Perceptions of Professional Standards: Implementation Challenges in Pakistan', *Issues in Educational Research*, 30:3 (2020), 1084-1104.

¹⁶ Seema Arif, Zunaira Liaqat and Ayesha Afzal, 'Quality Assurance & Accreditation of Teacher Education in Pakistan: Scope for Internationalization', *UMT Education Review* 02:01 (2019), 01-21. doi:10.32350/uer.21.01.

¹⁷ Stan Lester, 'An Introduction to Phenomenological Research', Last modified 1999. <https://www.rgs.org/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?nodeguid=7ad9b8d4-6a93-4269-94d2-585983364b51&lang=en-GB>

data is often subjected to researcher biases. To reduce subjective interpretation, interviews were transcribed and shared with participants for validation purposes. Data is subjected to narrative analysis. In conjunction, document analysis of the National Standards for Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs is interpreted by the researchers and fused, where applicable.

Data Analysis



Following themes are generated through an inductive approach

i) Curriculum and Instruction

Standard one of the Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs focuses on the appropriate dissemination and implementation of curriculum and instructions by the institutions offering teacher education (TE). Participants highlighted that the curricula are not aligned with the vision as set by the national education policies. It lacks the involvement of key stakeholders including university teachers. Besides, it is not allied with the global curriculum guidelines.

A good number of participants exclaimed that the curricula are not competitive, and the revision of the curricula is not research-based. One of them expressed,

‘Today, teacher education curricula demand constant changes with research-based evidence; however, curricula are not revised regularly. Its implementation is guided by fragmented and fluctuated policies and forgery leadership’.

These views are seconded by a few research studies^{18,19,20}. Concerning the relevance of the TE curriculum, Shah²¹ revealed, ‘Majority of the teacher educators seems dissatisfied from the curriculum used by them in respect of the content present in the recommended books for the development of teaching skills in the prospective teachers’. Participants shared that although guidelines drafted by NACTE for standard one are comprehensive, it needs clarity.

About the revision of the curricula, and roles and responsibilities, participants hold this viewpoint that the first standard chiefly applies to the Higher Education Commission, which designs the curricula in consultation with selective university teachers. One of the participants shared,

‘For example, whether the curriculum is revised/updated and disseminated to the teacher education institutions, should be inquired from HEC, who sets curricula. NACTE should use the terms prudently to avoid confusion’.

Another participant stressed,

‘The roles and responsibilities defined in standard one need revision. For example, ‘The curriculum development process involves key stakeholders’- the operational definition of key

¹⁸ Ayesha Bashiruddin, *Teacher Development and Teacher Education in Developing Countries* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

¹⁹ Munir Moosa Sadruddin and Zaira Wahab, ‘Are We Preparing Global Competent Teachers? - Evaluation of the Incorporation of Global Education Perspectives in Teacher Education Curriculum in Pakistan’, *Bulletin of Education and Research* 35:1 (2021), 75-94. http://www.pu.edu.pk/images/journal/ier/PDF-FILES/Munir%20Moosa%20Sadruddin%20&%20Zaira%20Wahab_V35_No_1_2013.pdf.

²⁰ Sadia Shaukat and Raqib Chowdhury, ‘Teacher Educators’ Perceptions of Professional Standards: Implementation Challenges in Pakistan’, *Issues in Educational Research*, 30:3 (2020), 1084-1104.

²¹ Syed Zia Ullah Shah, ‘Relevance of Teacher Education Curriculum for Quality Enhancement of Teaching Skills’, *Journal of Elementary Education*, 18:1-2, 21-33. Accessed 3 April 2021. [http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/JEE/PDF-Files/JEE-18\(1-2\)%20No_2.pdf](http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/JEE/PDF-Files/JEE-18(1-2)%20No_2.pdf).

stakeholders is not mentioned. Generally, genuine teachers are not involved in this process’.

Participants are of the view that the accreditation body does not have a standard rubric to assess whether the revisions made in the course outlines are research-based. One participant stated,

‘Accrediting body should assess whether the course outlines are prepared in line with the curriculum, and offer the inclusion of global knowledge and skills. They should also demand research-based evidence for making changes in the existing course outlines. Comparison of two-course outlines is not sufficed’.

Participants detailed that the TE curriculum is stated as inclusive, appropriate, relevant, diverse, and flexible. However, these parameters are complex to assess. They uncovered that there is no mechanism to ensure the availability of contextual reading resources in the institutional library. Even if the reference books are available, no one checks their relevancy. One participant underlined,

‘One of the parameters looks at the availability of lists of websites and recommended books of recent editions for each course. Its availability and relevancy, along with efficacy through the lens of students and teachers are not triangulated. Interviews that are conducted to verify documents are superficial, and documents often tamper’.

Reflective practices such as action research and writing a reflective journal are critical dimensions of teachers’ professional development^{22,23,24}. Participants added that the concept of maintaining a reflective diary and conducting action research is rarely practiced at TE institutions. One of the participants narrated,

‘Neither we are encouraged by teacher education institutions nor NACTE to conduct action research for solving classroom challenges. Therefore, it is perplexing to identify the real challenges faced by teachers about curricula, course, and classroom practices’.

²² Gregory Hine, ‘The Importance of Action Research in Teacher Education Programs’, *Issues in Educational Research*, 23:2 (2013), 151-63. <https://www.iier.org.au/iier23/hine.pdf>

²³ Maura Sellar, *Reflective Practice for Teachers*, (2nd Edition). (Australia: The University of Newcastle, 2017).

²⁴ Ruth Leitch and Christopher Day, ‘Action Research and Reflective Practice: Towards a Holistic View’, *Educational Action Research*, 8:1 (2000), 179-93. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/09650790000200108>.

Most of the participants voiced their reservations over maintaining a hefty course file. One of the participants expressed,

‘NACTE demands teachers to prepare a course file during each semester. They must encourage teachers to maintain and update documentary evidence on LMS or via e-portfolio’.

Participants are in the view that through one-time visits and observation, it is challenging for the NACTE team to assess the use of innovative teaching methodologies by teachers. They expressed that culturally responsive pedagogy, along with Communities of Practices (CoP) is not invigorated in teaching practices, both by the institutions and NACTE.

Participants uttered that the integration of information and communication technology and its implementation are dubious. One of the participants remarked,

‘It is hard to assess skills and competencies of ICT through documentation. A good number of teachers lack digital literacy. It requires vigorous and consistent analysis of future teacher skills and competencies, which at times are fabricated via documentation’.

The preceded lived experiences coincided with the challenges apparent in standard one. From the document analysis, it is derived that a few parameters are unclear with overlapping expectations. In particular, evidence associated with the use of ICT, teaching practice mechanisms, and classroom management lack a quality assurance mechanism. A few indicators are competitive, yet need clear directions with a flexible approach.

ii) Assessment and Evaluation System

Standard two looks at the reliable assessment and monitoring system. Participants shared that the assessment and monitoring mechanism is faulty. They expressed that the documentation alone is not sufficient to check the performance of teacher educators and evaluate the efficacy of overall programs. One of the participants reported,

‘Assessment and monitoring of teacher educators and prospective teachers are mainly performed traditionally. A constant feedback mechanism is missing. Assessment tools should be validated’.

Participants added that although written records of the stakeholders’ grievances and the solutions are available, these are not maintained. Also, the feedback from alumni and employers is not preserved. Likewise, there is a lack of a mechanism for teachers’ assessment by peers at most TE institutions. One of the participants critically reflected,

‘Microteaching sessions and documentary evidence are not the pre-requisite. Also, Learning Management System is not thoroughly scrutinized’.

Participants shared that standard two focuses on ensuring fairness and consistency in the assessment system, but it is challenging to evaluate transparency in the assessment scheme through documentation.

The culture of research among Pakistani university teachers is growing. However, academic malpractice is at its peak. Similar views are narrated by a few participants. One of the participants claimed,

‘Mostly teachers publish multiple research papers at a time for upgrading their posts, which certainly affects the quality of research output. The accrediting body mainly relies on documentary evidence without ensuring its potentials and impact on research and learning communities’.

These views coincide with the opinion of Naveed.²⁵ He endorsed, ‘The focus of higher education in Pakistan today is more on numbers and less on quality. The ‘number’ of institutions, the ‘number’ of PhDs, the ‘number’ of research articles/papers published. No one takes quality into account’.

Few participants validated that due to the disproportion in teacher-student ratio and course workload, many teachers are unable to participate in research activities. They are then intimidated to conceal the realities. These issues are covered by institutions and rarely noticed by the assessment team. One participant shared,

‘Teachers are not assessed based on the quality rather the number of publications in HEC recognized journals. Who will understand the pressures put on teachers to publish papers?... Publication as open educational resources is not encouraged. The accreditation body has a limited role in encouraging institutions to promote open research culture’.

Tools to assess the knowledge and skills of future teachers are mainly in the form of quizzes, tests, assignments, mid-term and final examinations. Participants shared that there is no mechanism to certify the quality of assessment. One of the participants underlined,

‘Institutions provide sufficient proof of assessment and evaluation. But tools that are used to assess prospective teachers are outdated. The role of NACTE is one-sided. They should work with institutions to resolve these challenges’.

²⁵ Hamza Naveed, ‘Quality, Not Quantity’, *Dawn Newspaper*, 2017. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1334644> 27.

From the documentary analysis, it is derived that few areas in standard two are figurative and overwhelming, and need clarification like valid assessment system, quality improvement plan, complete record, feedback mechanism, dissemination of results, reliability of assessment system, and validity and reliability of assessment tools. The standard anticipates institutions to use valid and reliable tools for prospective teachers' assessment. There is no elucidation, on how NACTE supports and guides the institutions to meet this standard.

Physical Infrastructure, Academic Facilities, and Learning Resources

To initiate any teaching degree, institutes are required to have adequate resources, facilities, and infrastructure. The third standard looks at the academic facilities and resources as well as opportunities offered to the prospective teachers.

The accreditation team visits institutions to check infrastructure. The main purpose is to assess, for example, the location of the building, a hazard-free environment, and the adequate number of classrooms and labs. One of the participants hold the following reservations,

‘Accreditation team members are not experts to assess infrastructure. It is a challenging task to ensure via documentation, if buildings are free from man-made and natural disasters or not. Similarly, needs of special people are not thoroughly assessed during quality assurance check’.

Participants stressed that there is a weak mechanism to ensure a hazard-free environment across TE institutions. The accrediting body does not have any system to ensure the implementation of disaster risk reduction training for teachers and prospective teachers. One of the participants revealed,

‘Some institutions do not have adequate classrooms, lecture theaters, and laboratories. Facilities and equipment are also inadequate, yet these are often overlooked by the accreditation committee. Also, why don't we include disaster risk reduction education in TEP? Why NACTE has never taken lead or encouraged institutions to take initiative?’

Regarding learning resources and national documents, including the national education policy and NACTE documents, participants shared that these are unavailable in most institutional libraries. Participants are in the view that unless teacher educators and prospective teachers are familiar with these documents, its implementation cannot be ensured. They also shared that a good number of teacher educators are unaware of

the procedures to prepare documentation for accreditation. One of them said,

‘NACTE team has not yet initiated any training program for teacher education institutions regarding the preparation of documents. These training are only for their team members. It is not possible to meet their expectations in the absence of clear guidelines’.

These views are seconded by Shaukat & Chowdhury.²⁶ In their research, one of the participants highlighted ‘Lack of awareness of the standards among teacher educators and the absence of government initiative in integrating these standards into the teacher education content’ is one of the barriers to ensuring quality mechanisms in teacher education programs.

Concerning access to digital libraries, one of the participants asserted,

‘Accreditation team looks for the academic facilities and learning resources. But they often overlook the needs of prospective teachers. Papers and e-books from the field of education and social sciences are rarely accessible. In this regard, NACTE should support institutions’.

The preceded knowledge claim is supported by Asghar and Rehman.²⁷ He underlined ‘Lack of access to quality journals is a major reason behind the research development disparity between developed and underdeveloped countries... Researchers from countries such as Pakistan and India rely mainly on personal relations to access quality research literature’.

Participants confirmed that the availability of teaching and learning resources, as suggested in the course outlines is inadequate. The state of the digital library is deplorable. The accrediting body does not have any mechanism to provide access to open educational resources. One of the participants pointed out,

‘There is no parameter to assess if trained and prospective teachers have access to digital literacy. In reality, teachers are dependent! Institutions, as well as an accreditation body, have never taken the initiative to train teachers about digital

²⁶ Sadia Shaukat and Raqib Chowdhury, ‘Teacher Educators’ Perceptions of Professional Standards: Implementation Challenges in Pakistan’, *Issues in Educational Research*, 30:3 (2020), 1084-1104.

²⁷ Rana J. Asghar and Abid Rehman, ‘Research Blocks’, *Dawn Newspaper*, 2019. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1334644> 27.

literacy like designing free resources through open educational practices. The team looks at the availability of resources than building capacities and competencies’.

Internship for all the prospective teachers is mandatory. Participants highlighted that these internships are being carried out to meet the requirements of a teacher education degree, however, institutions have failed to check its effectiveness for the professional grooming of prospective teachers. One participant suggested,

‘Institutions and accrediting body greatly rely on documents than working closely with the internship institutions for the reality check. Rather than relying on a follow-up file, a reflective diary should be maintained by the prospective teachers. They should also carry out action research projects’.

From the document analysis, it is revealed that standard three heavily relies on documentation. Approaches to assessing elements are passive. NACTE has imposed overwhelming demands that are difficult to assess on quality parameters. The role of NACTE for institutional support is misplaced.

Human Resources

The availability of professional teachers is at the forefront of the effective functioning of TEP. Participants shared that there is a lack of availability of specialized supporting staff at some teacher education institutions. One of the participants expressed,

‘Some institutions lack full-time teaching staff. They hire visiting or adjunct faculty members to meet accreditation requirements. In many TE institutions, few courses are taught by untrained teachers’.

Participants reminded that although an institutional code of ethics document is available, the quality assurance committee has failed to assess its implementation. Participants agreed that institutions lack ownership to bridge these gaps. In this regard, the internal quality monitoring committee should take ethical leadership on board. One of the participants said,

‘The association between NACTE and teacher education institutions should be like a mother-child relationship. However, both deter cooperation to benefit teacher educators and future teachers due to lack of ownership’.

Teachers’ professional development is crucial for quality teaching practices. However, participants grieved that they are not encouraged to join these programs. Also, these opportunities are not offered at the

affiliated colleges, where a good number of prospective teachers are being trained. One of the participants underlined,

‘There are limited opportunities for teachers’ professional development. Few universities occasionally offer training to meet formal requirements with no productive outcomes. If the faculty members want to attend professional training externally, funding opportunities are limited. Even if they gather funds from external sources, professionals envious deter their intellectual growth. These realities are masked from NACTE’.

Regarding workload, participants shared that most of the institutions follow the HEC workload policy, but faculty members are also engaged in several administrative tasks, which affect their efficacy. For workload and incentives, institutions provide documents to NACTE, which are not parallel with realities. One participant revealed,

‘Accreditation body assesses the workload of the faculty members, but they overlook realities. In many institutions, teachers are pressurized to perform additional work, which affects their quality of teaching and research output’.

Another participant exposed,

‘Back in 2015, I was compellingly assigned an additional task. In 2018, despite knowing my field of specialization, I was forced to teach a subject from another field. At times, I was hopeless. These internal battles are beyond the imagination of the NACTE team’.

The findings of a few local studies^{28,29} coincide with the above claim. Document analysis unearthed that standard four is chockfull with heaps of expectations from the teacher education institutions. There is no clear mechanism to ensure transparent procedures and criteria for the recruitment of teacher educators. Availability of documentation and physical interviews are the only sources to verify staff recruitment and development. Most of the elements demand teacher education institutions take ownership; therefore, the NACTE team can't unearth

²⁸ Faisal Farida, Noor Nadia and Khair Amtul, ‘Causes and Consequences of Workplace Stress among Pakistan University Teachers’, *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 41:3 (2019), 45-60. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1244645.pdf>.

²⁹ Ishrat Siddiqa Lodhi and Fouzia Ghias, ‘Professional Development of the University Teachers: An Insight into the Problem Areas’, *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 41:2 (2019), 207-14. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1229451.pdf>.

actual realities alone. Regarding teacher professional development, competence and knowledge about recent educational trends are dependent on their participation in programs, but these opportunities are missing. For professional development, the NACTE role is not defined.

Finance and Management

Standard five reflects on the idea of ensuring a transparent mechanism of institutional finance and management. Participants expressed that most of the clauses related to finance and management heavily rely on paper evidence. NACTE members, who pay a visit to the institution do not include any auditor to assess finances. One participant said,

‘Evidence of budget and funding dissemination need scrutiny. Availability of documents alone cannot ensure a transparent mechanism. The team members only check availability of document without verification’.

When inquired about the management of teacher education programs, participants expressed that their universities have well-established policies and procedures regarding admission policy and certification requirements. But the interaction of the NACTE team with the main stakeholders is limited. There is no vigorous activity, except checking documents to ensure that the program meets quality standards. One of the participants opined,

‘From admission policy to the certification requirement of the degree, accreditation body looks at the documentation to ensure effective and efficient management of TE programs, but their interaction with institutional key stakeholders is shallow’.

Participants identified a few loopholes in the management system. For example, most of the institutions keep enrolment records of future teachers but overlook the actual reasons for dropouts. Additionally, institutions lack a plan of action to tackle this challenge. The same is not cross-checked by the NACTE team. One of the participants reflected her experience,

‘The concept of big data in TE is missing in Pakistan. A good number of prospective teachers leave institutions due to personal reasons. But these and other underlying reasons are neither explored by institutions nor assessed by the accreditation members’.

Regarding co-curricular activities, a good number of participants are in the view that these activities are not arranged for future teachers, particularly those enrolled in weekend courses. For guidance and

counseling, some institutions offer dedicated services, however, their effectiveness is not assessed. One of the participants shared,

‘Some TE institutions allocate counseling timings for student teachers, but the efficacy is not measured. Also, there is no social-counseling unit available at most of the TE institutions’.

When inquired about the types of counseling offered at their institutions, nearly all participants confirmed its academic nature. Mental health and social counseling are not offered to future teachers, which, in their view is pertinent to teachers’ well-being. Participants suspected NACTE’s assessment for the latter.

Researchers evaluated standards and highlighted that almost all the parameters demand institutions to provide documentary evidence for finance and management. Data triangulation is missing. There are a few elements that need vigorous inspection like rules and regulations regarding all academic and administrative matters and awareness of stakeholders about their roles and functions. Assessment about the retention of the prospective teacher is purely submissive. The role of NACTE to guide and support institutions is not acknowledged.

Research and Scholarship

Standard six focuses on promoting research culture among teachers and future teachers. Participation in research-based activities is crucial for teachers’ and future teachers’ personal and professional growth. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has emphasized institutions on increasing quality research outputs.³⁰ It has taken several initiatives to promote research cultures such as funding opportunities and incentives, however, participants mourned that teachers lack the skills and competencies to carry out quality research studies.

Participants shared that the accreditation body looks for evidence of planning, execution, and dissemination of research. But their contribution to assess the quality, and provide research support is sparse. One of the participants said,

‘NACTE provides limited support to institutions for research studies/training. They look for quantity over quality. Mostly research scholars have failed to conduct quality researches addressing issues related to TEP and institutions’.

³⁰ Higher Education Commission, ‘Higher Education Medium Term Development Framework II’, Last modified 2015. http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/pakistan_higher_education_medium_term_development_framework_2011-2015.pdf.

Participants expressed that there is a gap between research priorities set by the Higher Education Commission and teacher education institutions. One of the participants underlined,

‘HEC has emphasized scholars to conduct research studies on local and national issues. They also expect research scholars to increase the number of publications, whereas institutions encourage teachers to conduct research studies on a variety of topics. It is suggested if both can work together to draft collective policy plans in the presence of NACTE leadership’.

The same is expressed by Hoodbhoy.³¹ He narrated that research scholars are producing a ‘bumper crop of researches’ due to weak policy interventions.

Participants said that teacher educators and future teachers disseminate research findings via poor-quality research journal publications, or by paying a hefty amount. One participant highlighted,

‘Evidence provided by the institutions on research-based findings and its use to improve teaching and learning are mostly counterfeit. It is difficult for NACTE to ensure its relevancy and efficacy. Globally, teacher educators and prospective teachers are encouraged to use Twitter, blogs, and other social media platforms for the dissemination of research findings, but in Pakistan, it is not appreciated- Not even by the NACTE team’.

When inquired about incentives, most of them expressed that although some universities offer an incentive to teacher educators for publishing research papers in recognized journals, such facilities are not available for the prospective teachers.

It is discovered from the document analysis that standard six, research and scholarship lack a concrete assessment mechanism. Elements such as ‘evidence that measures are undertaken to encourage publication and dissemination of ongoing or completed research’ is apparent. Similarly, using research outputs for the improvement of the programs and institutions is an overwhelming expectation from the NACTE side. In absence of support and guidance, promoting a quality research culture remains a challenge.

³¹ Pervez Hoodbhoy, ‘Let’s Stop Promoting Corruption in Pakistan’s Universities’, *The Express Tribune*, 2013. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/488992/lets-stop-promoting-corruption-in-pakistans-universities/>.

Community Links and Outreach

Standard seven echoes the importance of teachers’ involvement in community practices. It emphasizes sustainable and equitable educational practices to benefit wider communities.

Participants shared that most TE institutions appreciate future teachers participating in an internship, but very few encourage them to play an active role in community development. Also, relatively little attention has been paid to designing mechanisms or policies to ensure their sustainable participation in community services. One of the participants shared,

‘The main focus of TEP is to train future teachers. Working for community welfare is often neglected’.

Participants asserted that a few parameters are challenging to assess. Like, in the absence of community-related subjects, participation of teachers and prospective teachers in the planning and implementation of community projects is difficult. One of the participants reflected,

‘Due to time limitations and lack of integration of subjects like community services in teacher education, these ideas cannot be turned into a reality’.

Document analysis uncovered that facilitation, resources, and involvement of key stakeholders in the accreditation process to build community linkages are sparse. Research dissemination to the concerned stakeholders for improving programs and institutions requires NACTE support, but their role is passive.

Discussion

NACTE was established to maintain the quality of TEP in Pakistan. It started formal accreditation of teacher education programs in 2011. All the institutions, running TEP are required to get their programs accredited with NACTE. According to the National Standards for Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs, accreditation is a combination of internal evaluation by the institute and external academic audit by NACTE. There are some defined standards, each divided into elements with further splitting into operational indicators. All the programs are judged on these parameters by a team of experts. According to the annual report of NACTE, 2017-2018, it had accredited more than three hundred and fifty TEP till 2018.³² In addition to

³² NACTE, ‘NACTE Annual Report 2017-18’, National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE), 2018. <https://www.nacte.org.pk/assets/download/NACTEAnnualReport2017-18.pdf>.

NACTE, a few initiatives were taken by international organizations including DFID and USAID to improve the quality of teacher education. Despite this, TEP lacks quality. Chang³³ highlights, 'There is a lack of an effective professional monitoring system and accreditation for teacher education... Although a government body under the federal government was established, it lacks teacher education representation, with an overrepresentation of bureaucrats...'. Our experiences suggest that TEP deeply relies on the acquisition of knowledge and traditional skills due to fluctuations in the education policy, and sporadic attempts for teacher education reformation.

Phenomenological data highlights that although the contribution of the accreditation body is appreciable, the standards and a good number of parameters set by NACTE require vigorous analysis and enhancement. Its reliance on documentation and limited physical interaction, along with inadequate data triangulation, and lack of emphasis on research-based evidence is apparent. Additionally, NACTE's consistent interaction with institutional quality enhancement cells and participation in improving the quality of TEP through sustainable interventions are inadequate.

Documents adopted by NACTE for quality checks are influenced by the models of developed countries. These are not designed contextually. Document analysis and interviews also confirmed the passive role of NACTE and the lack of support and facilitation to the teacher education institution before, during, and after the accreditation process. Overwhelming expectations, substantial dependence on documentation, and weak parameters are apparent. It was established from participant interviews that there is no research-based evidence available to ensure the validity and reliability of the tools used for the assessment. It was also apparent that there is a cessation between HEC policies, institutional quality assurance mechanisms, and NACTE standards. Digital documentation and the concept of peer review in TEP are missing. Multiple grievances of teacher educators underlined their limited participation in the accreditation process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present research identified the challenges associated with the standards of quality for the recognizing of TEP in Pakistan. Findings

suggest that institutions lack quality mechanisms, and the role of NACTE to support institutions is distant. Building transparent institutional mechanisms requires active participation and support from the accreditation body. Moving from dependencies to independencies, taking ownership, and participating in communities of practices are crucial for strengthening the institutional mechanism for improving the quality of TE.

NACTE should revisit the accreditation standards and revise superficial parameters. It is suggested to improve standards in light of successful accreditation models of the Asian countries. Consistent collaboration and coordination between NACTE and institutional quality enhancement cells are crucial for ensuring quality assurance. The concept 'active role of institutions and the passive role of NACTE' for accreditation is blurry. NACTE along with teacher education institutions must participate in communities of practice and involve all stakeholders throughout the process. For this purpose, an alliance should be established. NACTE must triangulate institutional documents with vigorous observations, research-based evidence, and digital portfolios. In this regard, an action-research-oriented approach parallel with the traditional quality assurance mechanism is suggested. Digitalization of documentation and peer review of programs must be ensured. For this purpose, the NACTE team and teachers across universities must be trained and encouraged to remain open to learning and improvement.

It is highly recommended to promote open educational practices for cyclic review of documents and share the quality assurance report with the global teaching community as an open educational document. It is proposed to design contextual open online courses on the standards and accreditation documents to make institutions understand the process and documents of accreditation. Teaching standards and additional resource materials should be published and disseminated by the institutions regularly.

³³ Fida Hussain Chang, 'Teacher Education Policies and Programs in Pakistan: The Growth of Market Approaches and Their Impact on the Implementation and the Effectiveness of Traditional Teacher Education Programs', Ph.D., Michigan State University, 2014, 145.