

A Study Of National Professional Standards For Esl Teachers At Primary Level

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ABSTRACT

The educational quality is highly dependent upon the quality teachers, having ample amount of knowledge, dispositions, skills and honesty when it comes to their teaching profession. Quality teaching is directly proportional to the learners' high level of performance. In order to enhance the process of quality teaching and learning, the government of Pakistan with the help of UNESCO launched National Professional Standards (NPSTs) on 23rd February 2009. The present study was aimed to figure out the practices of head teachers and English as Second Language (ESL) public sector teachers at primary level. The study also aimed to explore the differences between the teaching practices of male and female public sector primary level head teachers and English language teachers. The study employed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative in-depth structured interview questions were developed by the researcher after reviewing the document of NPSTs. It was concluded that there were no significant differences among the teaching practices of male and female English language teachers and head teachers of public sector at primary level. It was also seen that all of the teachers and head teachers were seen to be observing NPSTs in their classrooms even if they have not gotten more trainings on it.

Key words National Professional Standards, ESL Teachers, head teachers, primary level

Introduction

Education refers to be a pivotal agency which is said to be involved in testifying the distinguishing position of any nation or country. It is also helpful in bringing out the nations as enlightened and cultured on the map of the world. Education provides us a deeper insight on the fact that how a nation can be improved on a scholarly sphere. Teachers along with other education scholars are meant to be the kernels and the main spring for domineering the pillars of education in such a way that they can be genuinely involved in the process of nation building (Minhas, 2012).

Currently, it is seen that the educational world has turned out to be more globally interested regarding professional development of the teachers. The notion for teachers' professional development has exclusively imported not only a new way of introducing the scheme for teacher accreditation but it also provides a structure for assessing the individual expertise of teachers. Science and technology have brought about enormous growth and improvements that must be leading towards a lot of changes. It is mandatory to keep our teachers updated with the changes, so resultantly teachers must be well equipped with all the necessary knowledge and skills to make sure that the curriculum is effectively implemented in the classrooms. Moreover, teachers are required to deliver their lectures in such a way as predicted in the curriculum (Kubow, 2010). Hargreaves (2009) stated that in many ways, schools are considered to be the last centers where problems are most likely to be solved when other societal organizations and centers appear reluctant to solve those problems. The success of every school is directly centered upon teachers. In addition to that teachers are those essential change leaders that could bring about changes with respect to educational work for students (Santoro & Kennedy, 2015).

The evaluation of teachers' work has never done like before (OECD, 2012). There is an increase in the accountability process related to the teaching profession and governments have also approved some standards that are meant to be essential for the upgradation of the schools (Alshurfat,2016). Teaching profession in many countries is going through a lot of steady changes. The Educational field is experiencing many changes which are helpful for the teachers to work collaboratively so that they can be responsive to all those changes that can lead to higher level of performance in a better way. Hargreaves (2000) stated that teaching style has a lot of new appeal to it which includes higher level thinking, the thirst and appeal of learning new skills for working as a team as well as the successful use of information technologies. Resultantly the need of the hour is to professionally develop and train our teachers and to devise a new manner of teaching process.

Teachers who are tired of their lower job incomes need to learn all these skills and they have been exposed to such circumstances in which they were required to learn all of the standards for teaching along with the objectives of the curriculum in a detailed way. All of the above stated shifts and demands of the new educational world were considered to be an essential factor for inducing teachers to reevaluate their professional competencies so that they can make right choices for their profession. Moreover, the organizations that are funding in professional capital reveal that spending money on education refers to the backing in human capital progression from early infancy till adulthood. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) explained that additionally funding should be made if they deliberately want to make a turn on education.

National professional standards are as following

- Knowledge of subject matter
- Human Growth & Development
- Knowledge of Islamic Values
- Instructional Planning and Strategies
- Assessment
- Learning Environment
- Effective communication and proficient use of ICT
- Collaboration and Partnerships
- Continuous Professional Development
- Teaching of English as a Second Language

Each standard comprises three parts

- a. Knowledge (content, what the teacher knows about his subject).
- b. Disposition (behavior, attitude, values).
- c. Performance and skills (what the teacher can do and should be able to do).

These standards are, in fact, the main pillars of quality instruction but the question arises whether they are followed with the same spirit and interest as expected.

Significance of the Study

The professional standards for teachers constitute three parts and talk about knowledge, skills and competencies of teachers that is a contributive factor of elevating learning of the students. (i.e. effective teachers). The main focus of the study is to find out the awareness and practices of NPST among the primary school head teachers and teachers. The outcome of this research study is going to be beneficial for the management of the school so that they can devise those strategies which can be feasible in order to know what are the possible ways of improving the attainment of the teachers and how to improve the performance of teachers by making them aware of the NPSTs) The results of the current research will also be beneficial in yielding profound and actual reforms in teaching practices of teachers and it will also be contributive in improving awareness and practices of the said standards. This research will help to find out the ongoing issues and prominence and quality of awareness in practicing the NPSTs in public sector primary schools of District Jhang Punjab.

Objectives of the present research

The following are the objectives of the research study:

- To compare the current classroom practices of public sector primary level English language teachers with National professional standards.
- To compare the current classroom practices of public sector primary level head teachers with National professional standards.

Delimitation of the study

The current research study was delimited to the following NPST's. i.e. Subject matter knowledge, Knowledge of Islamic ethical values and social life skills, instructional planning and strategies , assessment and Effective communication and proficient use of information technology.

Research methodology

The researcher has employed qualitative methodological approach in order to reach out for the desired outcome of the research. To get the most appropriate results, every research must be conducted in a clear, disciplined, systematic (planned, ordered, and public) manner. It is common in qualitative research for the researcher to look for meanings and insights within a given context [Strauss & Corbin, 2008; Levitt et al., 2017], which is inductive in nature. Techniques that use purposive sampling and semi structured, open-ended interviews [Dudwick et al., 2006; GopalDas, 2016] are referred to as "open-ended interviews." It is important that every research must incorporate a clear, structured and logical proposal in order to seek for relevant findings for reaching appropriate results. For addressing the research questions and objectives of the proposed study constructive approach has been used by the researcher. It is argued by Honebein (1996) that the constructivism philosophical paradigm is an approach which holds that humans build their own knowledge and understanding of the world by engaging in direct experience and reflection on that experience. Many of the things people learn from experience are built on analogies or grounds (kalender, 2007). The constructivist, on the other hand, sees learning as a process of generating meaning. Purposive sampling was used for choosing English language teachers and head teachers for structured in depth interviews. Nonprobability sampling, purposeful sampling or qualitative sampling are all the terms that have been specified for purposive sampling technique. In purposive sampling techniques, cases or units are not chosen or selected randomly but on the basis of a specific purpose (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Six primary schools of district Jhang were selected by the researcher out of which there were three girls and three boys' schools and only those schools were chosen that were willingly ready to cooperate with the researcher. While teachers and head teachers were chosen through purposive sampling because the objective of the present study was to get proper insight of the subject under hand. From each school one English language teacher and head teacher were interviewed and it was made sure that they were available and willing to be part of the current study. The sample comprised of both male and female teachers.

Study sample

District	No of schools	No of male English language teachers	No of female English language teachers	No of male head teachers	No of female head teachers
Jhang	6	3	3	3	3

Semi- structured interviews technique was selected to explore the awareness and practices of head teachers and teachers regarding National professional standards for teachers. The supervisor assisted the researcher in developing semi-structured interviews. This instrument was thoroughly tested and then refined with the help of experts. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards, both during and before data collection. The study's research questions informed the development and interpretation of the study's themes.

Findings of the study

When the research participants were asked that had taken any training on National Professional Standards, it was discovered that all of them had, however they differed in the amount of trainings they had taken. While interviewing the participants, the researcher surprisingly came to know that even if they have not seen the document of NPSTs or have not taken enough trainings even then they are aware of NPST and unconsciously been applying some of the standards in their classrooms.

Results and Discussion

Teachers' professional standards specify the information, abilities, and competences that should be had by teachers in order for them to be considered effective teachers. Despite the fact that the content is vital, some consideration must be made to how standards will be evaluated (norms and assessment). National Professional Standards for Teachers are the subject of very few research studies in Pakistan (Akram & Jadpda, 2015; Messo, 2010; Shakir, 2012) that have been undertaken in the country. In Pakistan, no in-depth research studies have been undertaken to study and assess teachers' awareness of and practises in the wake of the National Policy on Teaching and Learning (NPSTs). Because of this, there is an urgent need to analyse this critical feature of NPST in order to attain quality embedded outcomes in the classrooms of teachers. The analysis and findings of the rest of the interview questions are presented under the themes based on the selected NPSTs.

Subject Matter Knowledge

This standard focuses on the effective delivery of the lecture in a way that reflects that the teacher has a good command over the subject s/he is teaching and is well aware of all the basic concepts and theories related to the subject. This standard also talks about the right techniques for teaching, with all the necessary and essential teaching tools with proper time management. When the participants were asked about their opinion regarding whether national curriculum is fulfilling the needs of our students or not, H1 replied: "Well, feel that it must be changed as the demands of educational world have changed across the globe so it is very important to make necessary changes wherever it is required so that our students can meet the standards of international markets". Whereas H2, H3 and H4 were of the view that the curriculum was fair enough for catering the needs of our students and they seemed to be quite satisfied in this regard as they felt that there were no loopholes in our curriculum design. On the other hand, H5 and H6 expressed their views

by saying that up to some extent there was a satisfactory element in our curriculum design, but it needs to be revised on some level.

When the teachers were asked the same question T1, T2, T3 and T4 affirmed that the curriculum must be revised as per the demands of the 21st century as new trends have been introduced in education at the international level and we are still following the old patterns for decades now. T1 added “the use of right techniques for teaching our students are missing too, so a change must be brought out in our curriculum framework”. On the other hand, T5 and T6 were of the view that curriculum seemed to be fine and that they are satisfied with it as they always came prepared to the classes and inculcated right concepts in the best possible manner, so it is of great help in the knowledge acquisition. When they were inquired about giving appropriate examples for making subject matter knowledge meaningful to the students, all the six teachers were of the view that provision of relevant examples from our everyday lives is a good way for memorizing various different concepts. T2 said: “In order for our students to have a better understanding of the core concepts regarding subject matter knowledge, we provide examples from everyday lives as without examples it would be difficult for students to understand various concepts”. On the other hand, all the six head teachers agreed upon the idea of providing students with the relevant examples. For example, H4 said: “It is the best way of inculcating new concepts in a better way among the students and the subject matter knowledge becomes more meaningful in this way”.

The key findings of this standard show that according to the head teachers, curriculum must be changed as the educational trends are changing at the international level. Three head teachers were satisfied with all the curriculum framework. Moreover, two head teachers were of the view that slight changes must be made. The majority of the teachers were of the view that curriculum needs to be revised whereas two teachers said that curriculum seemed to be fine. Furthermore, all the teachers and head teachers shared the same idea that in order to make subject matter knowledge more understandable everyday examples must be provided.

Knowledge of Islamic ethical values and social life skills

This standard lay stress on the significance regarding the knowledge of Islamic values among the students because the knowledge of Islamic ethical values presents a highly significant part in building the positive image of Islam among the minds of the students. Therefore it is the need of the hour that teachers should be aware of their roles via giving mini lectures on Islamic ethical values and code of conduct that can be of great help in strengthening not only the societal norms of the students but also the Islamic ethical values among them. Interactive sessions must be projected and put into focus so that such norms and values can be consumed by the students effectively. Basic and fundamental knowledge of Islamic values is the main and major focus of this standard. All the teachers were in favor of this standard. T2 said:

Indeed, Islamic values play an important role in our lives and it is evidently clear that our education department is putting a lot of stress on the acquisition of Islamic ethical values as these values are

considered to be a part and parcel of a Muslim; life. For this, we begin our lessons with a Hadith or Verse from the Holy Quran.

The teachers also said that they try to deliver a 10 minutes short lesson on Islamic values like the importance of greeting others with Salam.

All of the head teachers were of the view that it was the need of the hour that our youth must be taught the Islamic ethical values and that teachers must devote some time daily in their classrooms for inculcating the true essence of Islam. H6 said:

It is our everyday practice to teach students by quoting examples from our Islamic history. Moreover Latest trends of this modern era are leading towards a lot of changes in our society as various new inventions and innovations in our lives had turned all of us especially our students away from the true essence of Islam and so in this regard it is very important for us to teach and guide our students towards the right teachings of Islam.

T1, T2 and T3 opined that teachers are considered to be the role models and pillars of our educational system so teachers are always expected to have a high role in infusing Islamic ethical values among the students. Whereas T4, T5 and T6 said that teachers must be aware of their roles in helping students to realize their roles as true Muslims. T5 commented that “Islam has given teachers a very significant role of spiritual parent for his/her students so being teachers we must not forget our roles of spiritually in elevating the moral values of our youth”.

H1, H2 and H3 and H4 summarized that teachers are seen as the corner stones of bringing positive changes among the lives of the students and teachers could inculcate Islamic moral values in a better way other than their parents and guardians even. H5 said that “teachers should not forget their roles in improving and raising the standards of Islamic morality as teachers are considered to be the agents of change”.

The findings reveal that all of the head teachers were of the view that teachers are the nucleus of educational systems and they were the ones who are responsible for building the ethical and moral values of the students. All of them were of the view that our youth should be taught the Islamic ethical values as it is the need of the hour because it could be the only way of bringing a positive change in the outlook of the youth. The government of Pakistan in their constitution of 1998 highly emphasized the same idea that according to the teachings of Islam, the only way of bringing a positive change in an individual’s attitude is through education and by helping them to build a sound Islamic society (Go P, 1998).

Three perceived that teachers ARE the pillars of the educational system and in inculcating Islamic ethical values their role could never be forgotten whereas the other three teachers were of the view that teachers must be well aware of their roles. The findings suggest that although the teachers and head teachers in this study have an understanding of Islamic ethical values, however, the majority of them were not playing their roles effectively in encouraging students for promoting Islamic ethical values appropriately.

Instructional planning and strategies

This standard talks about the use of different instructional strategies which resultantly can increase cooperative learning. The teachers should make use of all the resources to ensure better instructional planning. Teachers should not be focused on teacher centered classrooms i.e. traditional teaching methods should not be given due importance. Teachers are expected to bring new innovative ideas into the classrooms and make their lessons fun interactive sessions for the students. Teachers should remain focused on proper lesson planning in order to reach the desired learning outcomes. It can be a good enhancer for the teaching purposes also.

All of the teachers agreed and said that we keep our diaries for planning lessons for our students and we never ever go into their classrooms without proper lesson planning. T3 said:

Despite our good teaching experiences, we are being provided lesson plans from the government in the form of teacher guides so that we could take help from them anytime. On the other hand, for promoting critical thinking skills we provide our students with an essay or a topic so that they could write on it and make logical connections at the end.

All of the head teachers agreed that critical thinking skill is a very important skill that could be helpful for the students in the long run. H5 said:

Since a large part of teaching critical thinking skills revolves around applying knowledge and evaluating solutions, primary school teachers are encouraging decision making skills. We ask our students to connect different ideas as connecting different ideas is the key for teaching critical thinking.

H6 remarked: “We give our students topics and ask them to work in groups and provide us with all the relevant answers through brainstorming”. All of the head teachers also mentioned that the government also provides them with lesson plans for all the primary classes so that teachers could be guided how to teach a concept or topic effectively.

When asked about the usage of the aids in the classrooms, T1, T2, T3 and T4 said that they use chart papers to make their lessons more attractive for their students. T5 and T6 said that they bring various objects in their classrooms so that whatever they are trying to teach could be well understood by the students. All of the head teachers reported that they always making sure that their classrooms are well managed and cozy so in this regard different charts are placed on the walls and students are always encouraged to make different charts as it could be of help for teaching purposes too.

The findings show that in view of the study participants, instructional planning is extremely important when it comes to teaching. It is highly important for the teachers to select such instructional methods which can be helpful in making their lessons more understandable. Keeping in view the importance of instructional planning and strategies, the government of Pakistan is providing proper lesson plans to teachers of all the classes at the primary level so that students could be facilitated with the ample amount of knowledge by using right techniques for teaching.

However, the current findings revealed that teachers were not bringing new teaching ideas into the classrooms. Shakir (2012) promulgated the same idea that teachers need knowledge along with an extensive scope of skills that includes deep content knowledge, variety of instructional strategies, creating a positive learning environment, use of various assessment methods, having a better understanding of human growth, the competence of working with varied groups of learners, substantial communicational skills, planning and devising lessons, the capability of building good relationships with the community at large. The professional practices of the teachers can be reflected through professional standards. Familiarity with the professional strengths and achievement of the goals are intended to be achieved through professional standards.

Assessment

Assessment methods tend to be highly influential in knowing that how students would learn. This standard talks about the two types of assessment methods that is the formative and the summative assessment. The assessment of the students can be done in both ways that is either in the form of classroom feedback or the other way is by taking annual exams in order to check the learning outcomes of the students. The formative assessment is of two types, one is oral test and the other one is monthly basis test. The head teachers were inquired that which kind of assessment techniques are used by them for fostering better learning of the students. H1, H2, H3 and H4 responded that they we usually have exams on yearly bases but in addition to that there are scheduled monthly tests for the students so that teachers could be able to assess how far a content was earn and understood by the students. H6 said that

In our school, exams are held on both quarterly and annual basis as well as teacher give students tests according to their ease and according to the demand of the content they are teaching, for example if the students are taught a difficult topic, they could give them a written test for the very next day in the class and if it was easy, we opt for an oral quiz in the next class.

On the other hand, T1, T2, T3 and T4 said that short written tests were used along with the oral tests. T2 added: “However, in order to enhance a stronger learning environment, competitions among two different sections of the same classes could be organized as a mode of assessment”. T5 said: “Yearly assessment method was the best way to evaluate the thorough or overall progress of the students”. T6 stated that “all sorts of assessment are useful in bringing out the best talents and capacities of the students, it was immaterial whether they are being taken on weekly basis or fortnightly or monthly or quarterly or even annually”.

The findings suggest that assessment methods are a great way of assessing the learning capabilities of the students. All of the head teachers reported that they take on yearly basis. Along with that monthly and weekly tests are also considered to be another way of assessing students. Whereas four teachers said that short written tests are taken along with the oral assessments. On the other hand, one teacher was having opinion that yearly assessments are the best way of evaluating students whereas one teacher was of the view that every sort of assessment could be

useful in bringing out the desired results from the students. In short all of the research participants were seen to be aware of different assessment modes, but they were having different opinions regarding the implementation of those modes according to their convenience.

Effective communication and proficient use of information communication technology

This standard focuses on the usage of ICT. Information technology is the way of teaching students about learning different techniques and leaning through different techniques. In order to improve verbal and non-verbal skills of the learners, questioning techniques should be introduced and promoted. In today's world of science technology, special attention should be given for improving communication skills of the students as students are seen to be influenced by their first language while communicating. So special focus should be given to the communicational skills of the learners.

All of the six head teachers reported that integration of technology could be a great factor for increasing the productivity of the learners, manifolds. Technology is everywhere these days so the integration of technology could bring a shift in the educational world as the use of various technique can engage students in useful interactions thus helping them to enhance their communicational skills. All of the teachers also agreed that technology helps in increasing learning for many learners across the globe. Various soft wares are being introduced for teaching and learning pronunciation whereby the students could imitate and always feel encouraged to repeat and practice on the pronunciation

All the head teachers opined that in order to complete a good teaching and learning process, government school teachers are provided with ICT training as well as it has been found that female teachers of private sector have an ample amount of knowledge with regards to the use of computer, ICT, internet and they use social media for their personal lives rather than for professional pursuits. H1 said:

Primary schools are still lacking in the wide-spread use of ICT which is a hindrance in bringing a positive change. In order to meet new educational standards, the government has provided tabs in every primary, secondary and elementary school of Punjab, Literacy and Numeracy Drive (LND) is being introduced for Mathematics, English and Urdu and a test is being conducted and assessed by reading and evaluation assistant thus help students to practice addition, subtraction and multiplication on those tabs.

T6 said:

Well, now a days, teachers are well aware of the use of ICTs in order to complete teaching and learning process effectively, but in primary schools they are not allowed to use any technology except LND in their classes.

Jamil (2017) promulgated the same idea that in order to complete a good teaching and learning process, government school teachers are seen to be given ICT usage training as well as it

has been found that female teachers of private sector have an ample amount of knowledge with regards to the use of computer, ICT, internet etc. in comparison to the public sector teachers.

The findings shows that the introduction and use of ICTs is a great way of helping students with ease and develop great interest, but when it comes to primary schools the use of ICTs is prohibited as all the research participants explained that they are not allowed to use any technology for presenting information. What an irony that it has been heavily stressed in the document of NPSTs that use of ICTs is highly imperative in today's changing world of science and technology as it can bring forth fruitful learning outcomes but the government itself is prohibiting the use of ICTs in the classrooms.

Conclusion

After conducting interviews, it was seen that male and female English language teachers have more or less the same awareness and practices of NPSTs whereas the male and female head teachers shared the same notions and ideas regarding the awareness and practices of NPSTs. In order to achieve the desired outcomes, teachers must be made aware of the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPSTs). If the highest levels of government can come up with programmes and courses that educate ESL primary school teachers about the goals of the National Professional Standards for Teachers, they will be better equipped to provide high-quality instruction to their students.

Recommendations

This research has come up with following recommendations:

1. All the Government high officials may try to devise and plan such programmes and courses that can help teachers to be familiarize the ESL teachers at primary level with the objectives and the formulation of National Professional Standards for Teachers so that they might better be prepared to bring quality in their teaching practices .
2. Government should conduct more training and workshops for instructional planning so that teachers can be well versed in proper lesson planning and how effectively to instruct their students by bringing new teaching ideas in the classrooms.
3. During summer vacation refresher courses and workshops must be organized to help teachers so that they could work on their continuous professional development process.
4. When we talk about the Effective Communication and Proficient use of Information Communication Technologies, that government should allow them to use ICT in their classrooms for teaching processes .it has been written in the document of NPST that use of communicative technologies are highly important and government itself recommends it in the document but they themselves are prohibiting them not to use any technology at primary level except for class three where they are allowed to use laptop for LND .

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