

Master in Education Student Attitudes towards Research: A Comparison between two Public Sector Universities in Punjab

Intzar Hussain Butt

University of Education, Lahore

Jahan Ara Shams

University of Education, Lahore

ABSTRACT

In modern world, attitudes of people are considered more important than their experiences and academic preparation. A positive attitude towards research is a key to success and progress in the knowledge based societies. This study explored the student teacher attitudes towards research. The sample consisted of 194 participants from two public universities of Pakistan and it was taken by using census sampling technique. The participants were Master in Education students in their second semester. The Attitude towards Research scale was used for data collection. The scale was consisted of 30 items which were divided into five factors: research usefulness, research anxiety, positive attitudes, relevance to life, and research difficulties. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-test and ANOVA. The results showed that student teachers have a negative attitude towards research. A significant difference was found in the attitudes with respect to the type of program and prior areas of specialization. The paper demonstrates a clear need for focus on research into student teacher attitudes towards research. Low student teacher attitudes have negative impact on the pupils. The ability of teacher education programs to alleviate the problem has wide-spread implications. The paper produces empirical evidence about the low student teacher attitudes towards research and raises questions relevant to teacher preparation role of the teacher education programs in developing higher attitudes towards research.

KEY WORDS: Research Attitude, Student Teacher, attitudes toward research, knowledge based societies, teacher education.

Introduction

Traditionally, teaching has been characterized by the acts that involve various activities that help younger people to learn (Szucs, 2009). It involves planning and delivering lessons, marking class and home work, and examining students' progress. Teachers, traditionally, were not expected to undertake research in order to explore the problems that they would face in the process of teaching and

learning. They have been relying on the experts from other fields such as psychologists, philosophers, mathematicians and scientists for the solutions to their problems. This is evident from the fact that there has been a substantial contribution, to the field of teaching and learning, from the people who were not trained as educationists (Polya, Thorndike, 1910).

There has been a shift in the role of teachers (Scheirer, 2000) and now they are expected to explore the solution, by themselves, to their immediate classroom problems through action research. They are also expected to involve in scientific investigations through rigorous research methods (Peterson, Clark & Dickson, 1990). Zeuli (1992) stated that “research of various types forms the bulwark of teachers' professional preparation”. He further said that reading research is imperative for learning to teach. It gives future teachers a vision about the practical implications of different approaches, their validity, rationale for decision making, targeting problems and brining improvements, etc. (The importance of research for education's future, 2011). That is why initial teacher training program has been added courses on research methods and trainee teachers are also expected to culminate their program with a research project.

In Pakistan, at Master in Education (MEd), which is an advanced teacher preparation level, the trainee teachers are required to write a thesis on a topic of some educational importance. The students in the MEd program are comprised of in-service teachers and also those who do not have any teaching experience. People are inspired to join MEd program due to a variety of reasons that may include rapid progression in the carrier, advancement in the pedagogical research knowledge and skills, and better status in the society. Majority of the MEd students are naive to carry out a research project. During their prior academic preparation, they were trained to memorize and reproduce in the exams in order to obtain a bachelor degree in content and pedagogy. They have hardly any experience in the research moreover they do not find any models, from their own field, for their guidance through the journey of writing a thesis. So in the absence of their own exposure to research it becomes problematic for MEd students to think, plan, carryout and write a research report. One of the reasons could be the attitude of MEd students towards research which is considered vital for success in any field (ZigZiglar, n.a). Researchers (Swindoll, 2012; Abraham, 2003) claim that attitude is more important than experience and academic preparation. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) state that attitude is a “learned disposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object”. Defined in another way attitude is a way of thinking and inclining towards optimism and pessimism (Lopper, 2006) which exerts a strong influence on the way a person responds to a particular situation or thing (Gross, 2001; Exforsys Inc., 2007). Attitude influences the success or overall performance (Attitude is Important, so pick a good one, 2009; Neo,2010; Why is Attitude so important to your success, 2011; Bajah, 1999; YARA, 2009). Hill (2007) in his book “*Think and Grow Rich*” stated that a positive attitude contributes in the progress towards

your goals. So we can say that attitudes govern lives and direct how to deal with people and situations.

Measurement of attitudes is of interest not only to psychologists but to everyone who is involved in any persuasive or developmental activity in one or the other way (Arul, 2012). McLeod (2009) stated two ways in which attitudes can be measured: direct measurement and indirect measurement. This research used paper-pencil type self-report method – direct method – for the measurement of attitude which is the most frequently used and a reliable method (Arul, n.d).

Exploring attitudes of prospective teachers towards various aspects (Ozel, 2007; Aslan & Guneyli, 2009; Uyangor & Karaca ECE, 2010; Kutluca, 2011; Zientek, Carter, Tylor & Capraro, N.D; Dutton, 1951) of teaching and learning is not a new phenomenon. The relationship of teacher's attitude with student's attitude and performance has also been the subject of many studies (Indoshi, Wagah & Agak, 2010). The findings of different studies draw attention to the significance of measuring the attitudes of the teachers (Okpala, 1985; Onacha, 1985; Chako, 1981; Odubunmi, 1986; YARA, 2009). However, there is a scarcity of investigations into prospective teachers' attitudes towards research at the international level and especially in Pakistan. Hence it is important to investigate the attitude of prospective teachers towards research at MEd level in order to add to the existing set of knowledge. The results of this study, in the context of Pakistan, will potentially provide insights to the curriculum developers, teachers and policy makers regarding trainee teachers' attitude towards research.

In Pakistan, Iqbal (2011) conducted a research to explore the research attitudes of prospective teachers in different degree programs of teacher education like science education, business education, Islamic education, child education, etc. He found significant differences in attitudes of prospective teachers from different teacher education degree programs. He further highlighted that there is urgent need of conducting research in this area. There is scarcely any other research which has explored prospective teachers' attitudes towards research. This study is aimed at exploring MEd students attitude towards research. It would be interesting to explore the attitude of Pakistani students towards research who, by themselves, have hardly experienced this phenomenon and whose teachers have barely involved in scientific research. This paper is aimed at exploring the trainee teachers' attitude towards research and comparing attitude of trainee teachers' gender, the university they attend and prior academic preparation. This study will specifically explore the following questions:

- Q1.** What is the level of trainee teachers' attitude towards research?
- Q2.** Is there any difference in the trainee teacher attitudes towards research with respect to the program enrolled?
- Q3.** Is there any difference in the trainee teacher attitudes towards research with respect to their prior academic preparation?
- Q4.** Is there any difference in the trainee teacher attitudes towards research with respect to the university attended?

Methodology

Sample

The sample consisted of 200 participants from two public universities of Pakistan and it was taken by using census sampling technique. The universities will be pseudo named as the Canal Bank University and the River Bank University. As most of the trainee teachers were females, therefore, there was a disproportion in the sample in favor of females. The participants were MEd students in their second semester who have had studied a compulsory introductory graduate course ‘Educational Research’. The introductory research course covers the basic concepts and methodologies of research which include identifying and defining of the research problem, reviewing literature, collecting and analyzing data, and writing research report. The trainee teachers had learnt statistical terms, techniques of developing and validating instrument as well as ensuring reliability during this course.

Data Collection

The data were collected by using the Attitude towards Research (ATR) scale which has been developed by Papanastasiou (2005). The survey was consisted of 30 items which were divided into five factors: research usefulness, research anxiety, positive attitudes, relevance to life, and research difficulty. The ATR was comprised of both negative worded and positive worded items and a higher score represented higher level of attitude. The survey was administered for data collection with the prior permission of its developer. All the students enrolled at both the universities in MEd program were contacted for data collection. One hundred and ninety four trainee teachers returned the questionnaire. The response rate was 97% which is considered very high (CITATION). Ninety percent (n = 181) of the respondents were females trainee teachers.

Data Analysis and Results

The table 1 shows the mean score for each of the five factors – research usefulness, research anxiety, positive attitude, relevance to life and research difficulty – and overall mean. The data was collected by using a five-point Likert scale. The median for the scale was 3. The factor ‘research usefulness’ explored the student teacher opinions about the value of research in their professional lives, career advancement, its benefits to the students etc. the mean for this factor was 2.06 (SD = .651) which shows low student teacher attitudes towards ‘research usefulness.’

Table 1
Descriptive for Attitude towards Research

Factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Research usefulness (RU)	194	2.06	.651
Research anxiety (RA)	194	2.31	.602
Positive attitudes (PA)	194	2.29	.793
Relevance to life (RL)	194	2.63	.722
Research difficulty (RD)	194	2.54	.912
Overall	194	2.30	.400

The second factor ‘research anxiety’ explored student teacher opinion about “tension, stress, fear, [and] difficulties in understanding research” (Papanastasiou, 2005, p. 19). The mean score 2.31 (SD = .602) indicated higher level of research anxiety. The mean for third factor ‘positive attitudes’ was 2.29 (SD = .793). This shows majority of the students did not like and enjoy involving in research activity which indicates negative student teacher attitudes towards research. The fourth factor looked into the student teacher opinions about “use of research in a student’s personal life” (Papanastasiou, 2005, p. 19). The mean for this category was 2.63 (SD = .722) which revealed majority of the students perceived research have little relevance to their daily lives. The last factor explored student teacher opinions about the ‘research difficulty’. The mean value 2.54 (SD = .912) can be interpreted as the student teacher face trouble and find it difficult to understand the research processes. The overall mean score 2.30 (SD = .400) indicated that the respondents have a negative attitude towards research.

In order to look into the difference in attitudes with regard to the university attended, and type of program the data were analyzed by conducting independent samples t-test. The results of t-test confirmed that attitudes of student teacher, from both the universities, towards research, on average, were same, $t(189.687) = 1.038$, $p = .301$. Similarly, the attitudes of respondents, in the morning and self-support programs, towards research were compared by conducting independent samples t-test. The results indicated that the respondents in the self-support program ($M = 76.16$) had a significantly higher attitude towards research as compared to those in the morning program ($M = 71.75$), $t(187.751) = -2.499$, $p = .013$.

Since the students in the MEd programs come from varied academic backgrounds – they have studied various subjects at earlier levels – the means were compared by analyzing the variance (ANOVA). The results of ANOVA showed statistically significant difference in the mean scores of teacher trainees for the subject they have studied in intermediate, $F(4,189) = 3.107$, $p = 0.017$. Post-hoc comparison using Tukey’s HSD test showed that the mean score for the subject of pre-medical ($N = 20$, $M = 82$, $SD = 11.617$) was significantly higher than

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the subjects of Arts (N=149, M=72.72, SD=12.570) and Computer Sciences (N=10, M=67.40, SD=13.492).

Table 2
ANOVA for difference in attitude for prior areas of specialization

	Sum of Squares	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1951.609	4	487.902	3.107	.017
Within Groups	29678.561	189	157.029		
Total	31630.170	193			

Discussion

This study has successfully explored the student teacher attitudes towards research at MEd level. It is concluded that majority of the respondents have a negative attitude towards research. It is theorized that behaviors are learnt by observing the others who exhibit that behavior (Bandura, 1971) and that other may be a friend, teacher, parent or any role model. The model performs a behavior and the observer tries to copy and imitate it (McLeod , 2007; Heider, 1946 ; Zerres, Marezyk, Brattig & Wienholtz, 2003, Lopez,n.a). Students role model their teachers from as early as they enter the schools. Teachers' attitudes play an important role in developing the students' attitudes. Students try to copy and imitate their teachers. The students develop a feeling of likeness for the thing the teacher likes and dislike a thing the teacher dislikes.

A closer look at the student teacher opinions about the *research usefulness*, *research anxiety*, *positive attitudes*, *relevance to life*, and *research difficulty* showed a low attitude towards research. The student teachers believed that research is a difficult process, it is hardly useful for their professional life, have very low relevance to their lives, and it increases their anxiety level. Most of the respondents have hardly involved in the research activity before entering into the MEd program. The respondents had studied a course on educational research prior to the data collection for this study. A negative attitude towards research of the respondents has shown that the teacher preparation programs needs to be focused on inculcating positive attitudes towards research.

It was interesting to note that the student teachers from both the sample universities have, on average, same levels of attitudes towards research. This could be attributed to the lack of research culture in Pakistani universities (Iqbal & Shams, 2012).). The better attitudes of student teachers in the evening program may be related to their eagerness to learn more (Elyıldırım & Ashton, n.d). The evening programs attract students who are employed as teachers or as educational administrators. They join the MEd program while having real professional experiences so they are desirous to learn and explore.

Most of the respondents had studied social sciences and humanities subjects, at intermediate level, before joining the MEd program. The higher attitudes of the respondents who have had studied pre-medical subject at intermediate level as compared to respondents with social sciences and humanities, and computer sciences backgrounds are reported by this study which is in line with the other studies (Niemi-Murola, Kalso & Rosenberg, 2007). One reason could be that the students of premedical group are expected to conduct experiments, collect data and prepare reports as a part of their practical work during the course of study.

The student teachers negative attitude towards research should be a matter of concern for policy makers, curriculum developers, teacher preparation programs and the profession itself. This study has explored student teacher attitudes from a relatively small sample. Further studies are needed to explore the causes of negative attitudes towards research at large scale. A closer look at the current issues undertaken by the educational researchers may potentially answer the question of usefulness and relevance of research to life.

Conclusions

The results of the present study shows that, overall, prospective teachers have negative attitudes towards research. This should be an alarming situation for the profession. Student teachers low opinions about the usefulness and relevance of research to life will potentially be a big hindrance as far as their own participation in the research activity is concerned. The research component of the advanced teacher education programs needs to be reviewed so that the future teachers can develop an understanding and realize the importance of education research as professionals and as role models for generations to come.

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Biographical Note

Dr. Intzar Hussain Butt is Acting Director at the Division of Education, University of Education, Lahore-Pakistan.

Jahan Ara Shams is an MPhil scholar at the Division of Education, University of Education, Lahore-Pakistan.