

Pedagogical knowledge base: A conceptual framework for teacher admission

Ramin Akbari, Babak Dadvand*

English Department, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran

Received 12 November 2011; revised 3 November 2013; accepted 4 November 2013

Abstract

The present study aims to reduce part of the existing gap in the application of research findings on teacher cognition to L2 teacher selection/recruitment practices. To this end, research findings on teacher cognition were employed to establish categories of pedagogical knowledge of six EFL teachers in Iran as revealed through stimulated recall technique. Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) then mapped these categories onto the Methodology section of Iran's MA TEFL admission exams in order to measure the content validity of the tests. Construct validity test was also used on the exams using SPSS. The results were then examined vis-à-vis the top pedagogical knowledge categories identified from the six EFL teachers' classroom teaching. This comparison revealed a significant degree of construct under-representation and construct irrelevance in the exams. Many exam items either failed to adequately assess relevant aspects of the pedagogical knowledge base of EFL teachers, or measured vaguely defined knowledge areas. Implications for teacher education policies and practices are discussed at the end.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Construct irrelevance; Construct under-representation; Pedagogical knowledge base; Stimulated recall technique

1. Introduction

In the context of the Iranian higher education, tests and written examinations are the main instruments for selection into graduate language teacher education programs. Within the Iranian central system of educational administration, many applicants follow a year or two of intensive preparation for taking the national university entrance exam held each year. According to the latest census from the Educational Measurement and Evaluation (EME), the agency in charge of both undergraduate and graduate admission exams in Iran, around 10,000 applicants compete for less than 1000 places in graduate programs of English Language Teaching (ELT) annually. With the admission ratio of less than 10%, key stakeholders, including teacher educators, administrators, and various national examination committees, are obliged to ensure that the measurement instruments used in such high-stakes assessments have the required degree of validity and trustworthiness.

In screening candidates for graduate programs of ELT, the EME uses multiple-choice test batteries as its main assessment instrument. These test batteries are designed by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in the domains deemed

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: akbari_r@modares.ac.ir (R. Akbari), babak.dadvand@gmail.com (B. Dadvand).

significant to the future practices of the prospective teachers. Consulting with SMEs in planning, administration and evaluation of screening tests, the EME aims to identify ‘innovative and scientific’ methods of screening/assessment that can test the accumulated knowledge and dispositions of candidates, and thus select the most qualified graduate students. To design valid and accurate screening tests, the EME collaborates with academics in the related fields in different universities and institutes of higher education across the country. In so doing, the EME aims to draw on the knowledge and expertise of SMEs in the design and administration of its screening exams.

To date, no study has examined the validity of screening tests for graduate programs that test the professional knowledge of pre-admission graduate students in ELT. In the absence of such research, the present study aims to show the extent to which knowledge studies in teaching can be used for teacher screening in graduate programs of teacher education. The rationale for the study is that understanding knowledge base of teachers and its various dimensions can provide the necessary theoretical basis for achieving more reliable and valid methods of teacher recruitment. In addition to its theoretical contribution, this research is particularly important for contexts which have a competitive ELT teacher recruitment process through tests and exams. The next section of this paper reviews recent developments in the studies of teaching and teaching knowledge in order to show how conceptualizations of teaching have evolved from somewhat simplistic behavioral interpretations to more cognitive and situated understandings.

2. Studies of teachers’ knowledge

Freeman (2002) names the 1970s as the *decade of change* in the study of teaching and teachers’ knowledge. Prior to the 70s, teaching was mostly defined in behavioral terms. The agency of teachers, as well as their internal thought processes, was mostly ignored and “the teacher, then, was viewed as a doer, as an implementer of other people’s ideas – about curriculum, methodology, and even about how students learned” (Freeman, 2002, p. 5). However, the behaviorist quest for ‘effective teaching variables’ connected to ‘learning outcomes’ gradually came to be viewed as overtly restrictive since it presented only a “fragmented and mechanistic view of teaching, in which the complexity of the teaching enterprise was not acknowledged” (Verloop, Van Driel, & Meijer, 2001, p. 442). In the behavioural tradition of research in teacher education, there was no room for teachers’ thinking and cognition; the agency of teachers was also reduced to subject and classroom management skills “without reference to teachers’ intentions or cognitions, oblivious to their contexts and constraints” (Shulman, 2004a, p. 371).

As behaviourism came in for increasing criticism by the early 70s, process-product studies came to be replaced by more qualitative and hermeneutic research in teaching. This re-orientation happened primarily due to a shift in psychology towards a more situated understanding of knowledge and action (Wilson, 2004). In a critique of teaching research in behavioral psychology, Walberg (1977) called for a more mentalistic approach to understanding teaching and teachers’ learning. He coined the term ‘teachers’ mental lives’ to describe the hidden cognitive dimensions of teaching. Teaching came to be understood as a complex mental process in which “teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs” (Borg, 2003, p. 81). Teaching research also took a cognitive turn and began to provide *thick description* of teachers, teaching and context (Reeves, 2009).

A major development in the studies of teaching knowledge resulted from publications by Shulman (2004b, 2004c) in which he used the term ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ to describe an amalgam of subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge that is uniquely the province of teachers. According to Shulman (2004c), pedagogical content knowledge marks “the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction” (p. 228). For Shulman (2004b), the importance of pedagogical content knowledge was such that he referred to the lack of research in this domain as the ‘missing paradigm’ of knowledge studies in teaching. In addition to pedagogical content knowledge, Shulman (2004c) identified six other categories of knowledge for teachers. These categories include: content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of the educational context, and knowledge of educational goals and purposes.

In another classification, Richards (1996) used the term ‘maxims’ to describe teachers’ pedagogical belief systems. Maxims are a set of “rational principles which serve as a source of how teachers interpret their responsibilities and implement their plans and which motivate teachers’ interactive decisions during a lesson” (p. 286). According to Richards, maxims, as the embodiment of teachers’ pedagogical beliefs, function as a benchmark for educators’ classroom decision-making. As such, the main function of maxims is to guide teachers’ activities through shaping

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/373404>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/373404>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)