

Innovating Teacher Pre-Service Education in Bahrain: An International Partnership Model

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Abstract

This chapter reports on the process used to develop a revised curriculum for initial teacher education in the Kingdom of Bahrain, using this case-study institution to reflect on the evolving nature and purpose of teacher preparation in the twenty-first century (McMahon, Forde & Dickson, 2015), and the drivers and impediments in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to ensuring that teacher education programs keep abreast of wider social change. The chapter, therefore, contributes to the burgeoning literature analyzing the worldwide evolution of teacher education (Tan, Liu & Low, 2017).

The chapter begins by explaining the reasons underpinning a proposed revision of the Bachelors in Education (BEd) programme. It next reports on the process that was adopted to undertake the curriculum revision, arguing that the concepts of ‘policy borrowing’ and ‘policy learning’ are both problematic, and suggesting that these should be replaced by the idea of ‘institutional partners’. The chapter subsequently examines how potential tensions between local and global practices were leveraged in the revision through this partnership model.

This case study in the development of a pre-service teacher education curriculum is of interest to international scholars as it explores the place of teacher education in both driving and reflecting social change, and it raises questions about how competing conceptualizations of teacher education reflect contrasting visions for society (Säfström & Saeverot, 2017). Interweaving sociological and philosophical perspectives on teacher education and development, this chapter will be of interest to curriculum developers, teacher educators, and teacher practitioners alike.

Keywords: institutional partners, policy borrowing, policy learning, teacher education, curriculum revision.

Introduction

This chapter reports on a review of the Bachelor of Education programme at the Bahrain Teachers College. It outlines the reasons driving the review, and links these to international debates about the changing nature and purpose of teacher education in contemporary society. It describes the process that was decided upon for undertaking the review, and the priorities established for the process, connecting these to the concepts of policy borrowing and policy learning. The idea of institutional partners is suggested to replace these two concepts. The chapter concludes by identifying ongoing tensions in such curriculum development for pre-service teacher education.

In 2008, the Bahraini government launched *The Economic Vision 2030* (Economic Development Board, 2008), in which it established a planned pathway to a post-oil economy that was dependent upon the development of the Kingdom's human resources. Education necessarily lay at the heart of such an endeavor, and concomitantly the government reviewed the performance of all of its educational establishments. The outcome of this was the establishment of the Bahrain Teachers College (BTC), with the responsibility, amongst other things, for pre-service training of primary school teachers through its BEd programme. This BEd programme, and recent work on revising it, is the focus of this chapter.

Instituted in 2008, the Bahrain Teachers College is the sole teacher training provider for public schools in Bahrain, and its BEd programme is the main route through which it trains teachers for primary schools across the Kingdom. A Bachelors programme was thought to make teaching an attractive option for high-performing students, who receive a stipend throughout their undergraduate studies. The BEd curriculum was provided upon the founding of BTC by Singapore's National Institute of Education (NIE) and was closely modelled upon its own Bachelor of Education

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Our curriculum review process has established an approach to such international comparison that is not based on the blunt instrument of policy-borrowing (Mohamed & Morris, 2019), nor even on a commitment to policy-learning (Chakroun, 2010), but on genuine partnership in which both local and overseas partners are involved at every stage of curriculum review. It is rooted in trust in the domestic stakeholders who are expected to implement policy change.

This chapter has detailed how institutional partnerships were established to spearhead the review of the BEd programme at the Bahrain Teachers College. It has noted some key challenges that such a partnership may expect to encounter. However, it is evident that there is insufficient research into the processes that best leverage global insights into the evolving nature and purpose of teacher education (Cochran-Smith et al, 2018; Flores, 2016) while respecting the primacy of understanding local enactments. Further studies based on systematic empirical research are, therefore, required to enhance this model.

Some teacher educators have had an explicit commitment to radical social change in the way that they conceptualize teacher education (e.g. Edwards, Hill and Boxley, 2018), but their focus has typically been on changes internal to their own country. The model proposed here suggests a no less radical change in the way that teacher educators work together across national boundaries. We have called for reciprocity and equality in such institutional relationships. We will know that these relationships have been radically altered when it is no longer non-Western nations leading the call for such partnerships, but Western institutions are calling for the insights of, say, Arab education with equal frequency.

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