Exploring the Contribution of B.Ed. (Hons) Programme in Preparing Prospective Educators for their Professional Roles

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Abstract

This research employs an exploratory case study design within the qualitative paradigm of educational research. The study has been conducted in one of the private teacher education institutes in Karachi. On HEC's notification of phasing out of 1-year B.Ed., the institute offered B.Ed. (Hons) degree programme in affiliation with the Karachi University. The first cohort of B.Ed. (Hons) is working at different educational institutes. This study was carried out to explore the contribution of the B.Ed. (Hons) programme in preparing prospective educators for their professional responsibilities. Employing a qualitative research method allowed the researcher to transmit the ideas, experiences and testimonies of the B.Ed. (Hons) graduates. Reflecting on their experiences, graduates have acknowledged the contribution of different aspects of the programme including learning from the compulsory and enrichment courses, exposure of academic and co-curricular activities, research and field work experiences of teaching etc. creating an impact in their professional lives. The perceived experiences of the participants show that learning from B.Ed. (Hons) has helped them change their perspectives of teaching and learning, provided them with greater opportunities at the workplace and helped them to meet their professional responsibilities and commitments. The study recommends continuation of providing support mechanisms and enrichment courses for the student body.

Keywords: B.Ed. (Hons), professional practice, prospective educators, teacher education, teaching experience.

Introduction

On Higher Education Commission's notification regarding phasing out of B.Ed. programme from Pakistan (Abbasi, 2016), one-year B.Ed./IGCE programme offered in a private teacher education institute was replaced with B.Ed. (Hons) in 2017.

Previously, different institutional research studies carried out by the faculty had informed the impact and contribution of the programmes offered at the institute as well as some of its specific components like action research and teaching practice (e.g. Gulab & Sharjeel, 2019; Rizvi, 2010; Schneider, 1997; Thomas, 2008). B.Ed. (Hons) Secondary is a newly introduced programme by HEC and there is a gap in studies informing the implications and impact of this programme. This study attempts to address this gap. This research provides insights into different aspects of the B.Ed. (Hons) programme that have contributed in preparing prospective educators for their professional roles. Furthermore, the insights gleaned from this study helps to identify the gaps in the practice.

Research Question

The key research question of this study is:
Q: How and to what extent B.Ed. Hons programme has contributed in preparing prospective educators for their professional roles?

Furthermore, the study is guided by the following subsidiary questions:
1. How and to what extent the learning from the courses offered in the B.Ed. Hons programme has contributed in preparing prospective educators for their professional roles?
2. How the field works (teaching practicum and action research) facilitated the prospective educators for their professional roles?
3. How the participation in academic and co-curricular activities facilitated the prospective educators for their professional responsibilities?

Literature Review

Teacher Education is an umbrella term for the courses, programmes and provisions developed to facilitate the pre-service and in-service teachers to perform

their professional responsibilities effectively (Akayoglu et al., 2020; Chang & Peterson, 2018). There are different modes of professional development including short courses, workshops, peer coaching and so on. However, the teacher education programmes provide a rigorous formal professional training to the prospective educators over specific time duration to help them prepare for their professional roles and responsibilities (Samsujjaman, 2017).

Effective teaching is a vital element to raise the standards of education and therefore the teacher education programmes serve as the building blocks for developing teaching skills and competencies. In the context of globalization, there is an increasing need of the teachers to address the new challenges and meet the learning needs of the students differing from each other in terms of their culture, ethnicity, religious orientation, values, learning styles and competencies (Korthagen et al., 2006).

The teacher education programmes provide opportunities to the prospective educators to gain sound knowledge and understanding of the content and pedagogy of their specialized subjects. Furthermore, these programmes also promote creativity, critical thinking and reflective skills. The field work embedded in the courses provides them opportunity to experience working in the educational setting under the guidance of their mentors (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Many prospective educators after completing their course of study find little relevance between the educational theories and contextual realities at the workplace. Therefore, bridging the gaps between the theory and practice is a key concern (Guillen & Zeichner, 2018; Jenset et al., 2018).

The value of a teacher education programme depends on its outcomes on improving the standards of teaching and learning. The rigour in the programme and the quality learning experiences provided during the course of study are important factors to create the desirable impact. For instance, the quantitative study by Baran et al. (2019) with 215 prospective teachers enrolled in the last semester of the teacher education programmes in Turkey found a positive correlation between the teacher education strategies and the prospective teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge. On the other hand, in Norwegian context (Instefjord & Munthe, 2017) reported a weak positive correlation between the institutional support and prospective educators' digital confidence. In Sub- Saharan Africa, the absence

or limited exposure of field work in the teacher education programme created challenges for the prospective teachers to contextualize active learning strategies in the school. Consequently, teaching practicum was incorporated in the teacher education programmes in Ghana allowing prospective educators to implement the principles of students centered pedagogy in schools (Instefjord & Munthe, 2017).

Teaching requires dealing with the complex problems and challenges connected to the students' learning. As in Australia and some other countries, including action research projects in the teacher education programmes lead to empowering prospective teachers in shaping their professional identities as teacher-researchers. This would also help them to address their classroom problems by doing an action research, when needed (Hine, 2013; Singh et al., 2019).

Understanding the dynamics of modern societies is fundamental for integrating theory and practice. Modern societies are culturally diverse and educational institutes in many countries offer courses on multicultural education. The research studies highlight the need of culturally responsive teacher education programmes and to embed the teaching of multiculturalism within it (Grant, 2021; Kim & Choi, 2020). The prospective educators also need to be familiarized with the strategies of addressing the racial, ethnic, gender or any other form of prejudice and discriminatory attitudes among the students (Bristol & Goings, 2019; Clark & Newberry, 2019; Reyes & Harvey, 2018).

Globally, research studies in the teacher education programmes also identify the need to have more emphasis on providing technology experiences to the prospective educators. A study on a teacher education programme in Indonesian context reports benefits for both supervisors and supervisees in communicating via e-mail, Google Forms and WhatsApp (Habibi et al., 2018). The technology experiences need not to be limited only for communicating with the faculty but also part of classroom teaching. The study conducted by Reyes and Harvey (2018) reports that about 31.5 % of the faculty members in an Australian university integrate technology in their teaching but they do not orient the prospective teachers on how to use it. For meeting the needs of modern classroom teaching, it has become increasingly important to orient the prospective educators on ethical approaches of using technology, particularly, as a pedagogical tool (Ratheeswari, 2018).

Teacher education in Pakistan has been critiqued for many gaps making it less compatible with the changes taking place in the landscape of education. This includes not focusing on contextually relevant pedagogies and heavy orientation towards theories without making its connection with the school practices. To address these gaps, in 2012, new programmes i.e. Associate Degree in Education (ADE), B.Ed. Hons (Elementary) and B.Ed. Hons (Secondary) were introduced (Kalsoom & Qureshi, 2019; Rizvi & Khamis, 2020; Shaukat & Chowdhury, 2020).

As B.Ed. (Hons) is a newly introduced programme, there are only few studies informing about its implementation and outcomes. Qutoshi et al. (2020) have reported about the problem in implementing B.Ed. (Hons) in two public universities located in the northern areas of Pakistan. The main obstacles identified were lack of resources and problems of integrating technology in teaching. Project method, inquiry based learning and constructive feedback are not practiced though recommended in the design of the programme. Similarly, teaching practice as it is offered, does not meet the standards of global practices in teacher education. Many universities do not have funds to meet the expenses needed for quality assurance (Amir et al., 2020; Arif et al., 2019; Sahito & Vaisanen, 2018; Shaukat & Chawdhury, 2020; Zafarullah & Pertti, 2017). As discussed, there are only a few studies reporting on implementation of B.Ed. Hons. More studies are needed to inform the impact, contribution and challenges in B.Ed. Hons programme. This study attempts to address this gap.

Methodology

This research employs an exploratory case study design within the qualitative paradigm of educational research. Employing a qualitative research helped the researcher to explore the viewpoints without predefining rigid and narrow categories (Glesne, 2016; Pelias, 2019). The choice of qualitative paradigm allowed researcher to gather the viewpoints of alumni graduates without forming rigidly predefined narrow categories (Labra et al., 2019). Case study methodology was considered as most appropriate because the researcher intended to address the research focus by analyzing data for critical and in-depth understanding of the impact of B.Ed (Hons) programme in preparing prospective educators (Students of 2017 cohort, n = 15) for their professional roles (Fraenkel et al., 2012). he data was collected from the semi structured interviews conducted from 7 graduates using purposive sampling strategy. The criteria for selecting participants for the

research was in terms of :(1) work experience after completing B.Ed. (Hons) i.e. serving as professionals in any educational institute (2) their availability to participate in the study during the required timeframe (3) voluntary willingness to share their experiences for the research study. Table 1 provides information about the professional positions and responsibilities of the research participants. As a part of ethical considerations, pseudonyms are used instead of participants' real names. Furthermore, to maintain confidentiality, the name of the institutions where they are working is also not mentioned.

Table 1
Professional Positions and Responsibilities of the Research Participants

Participants	Professional Position
Grace	ECCE Teacher
Hannah	Head Teacher
Inara	Assistant Manager & Academic Support Facilitator
Precious	Secondary School Teacher
Rose	Teacher Educator
Sunita	Middle School Teacher
Michael	Middle School Teacher

The information provided in table 1 shows that the B.Ed. (Hons) graduates are not necessarily working as secondary school teachers but are engaged in different positions. The distinct professional positions and job experiences of the research participants helped the researcher to gather rich data on how and to what extent their learning from B.Ed. Hons is contributing in helping them meet their current professional responsibilities. The thematic analysis of the data's content was based on the model of data analysis by Labra et al. (2019) and was guided by the study's key question.

Findings

Teacher education programmes are structured to bring about positive change in the educational landscape of Pakistan (Amhag et al., 2019, Schneider, 1997; Viccaji, 1997). The data of this study also clearly indicates that the learning from the compulsory and elective courses offered during the B.Ed. (Hons) programme has contributed in preparing the prospective educators for their professional roles. This is evident from the examples of their practices and commitment to fulfil their

professional responsibilities and meeting the challenges at workplace.

Similarly, the fieldworks encompassing teaching practicum and action research has helped the prospective educators to learn major aspects of classroom teaching and research initiatives.

Lastly, the participation in academic and co-curricular activities during the B.Ed. (Hons) programme has contributed in enhancing creativity of the prospective educators and has helped them learn value of diversity and collaboration.

Result and Recommendations

This section is divided into subsections based on the major themes emerging from the data analysis.

Professional Responsibilities and Commitments of the Graduates

The research participants after the completion of programme are serving in different capacities and performing varying roles. For instance, as a head teacher of a school with classes from nursery to matriculation, Hannah places special emphasis on continuous professional development of the group of 24 teachers working in her school. She provides them exposure to different online and on-site professional development activities to enhance their teaching skills.

Similarly, Inara, as an assistant manager at a private educational institute, is not only involved in organizing professional development activities but is also working for short term and long-term planning for addressing educational needs of her community. For instance, she stated, "Currently we are working for strategic planning to meet the educational needs of the community in the next 15 years. I am taking a leading role in evolving such programmes..." (Interview, 5 March 2021)

From the interviews, it appears that the graduates are not only fulfilling their professional responsibilities assigned to them but have made personal commitments to become agents of change and take practical steps towards it. For example, Precious stated, "It is my personal motive as a teacher that I do not work only on teaching subject matter, but also work to bring positive change in students' behaviour. I work on fostering ethical values in my students." (Interview, 6 March 2021).

Setting Examples of Good Practices

Many graduates have shared examples of their work being acknowledged and appreciated by their colleagues, administration and other stakeholders. As an example of developing effective learning resources, Precious stated "My PPT presentations have been uploaded on the school's official website. Not only students, but parents and community members also saw it and appreciated my work." (Interview, 6 March 2021). Similarly, Sunita's class activities (such as use of a Venn diagram to sum-up the lesson) and worksheets are well recognized by her teacher colleagues and school management. She stated, "My fellow teachers like the worksheets that I make for the students. The head teacher has also appreciated me for it." (Interview, 5 March 2021).

From the data, it appears that the educational institutes have high expectations from the graduates and they are given important responsibilities at the workplace. For instance, Precious who is currently working as a teacher was given responsibility by the school management to conduct a professional development session for the 60 teachers on "Effective teaching techniques". Rose, got an opportunity to conduct a professional development session on effective leadership for the school principals. Sunita was given important responsibility to lead a school programme with an expectation to "plan and organize as you have learned in the B.Ed. Hons Programme." (Interview, 6 March 2021).

Professional Challenges at the Workplace

The graduates in general are thrilled with excitement to contribute their role as professionals; some of them have also discussed the professional challenges being encountered at the workplace.

One common problem faced by everyone was the sudden closure of educational institutes due to Covid-19 pandemic. This posed many challenges for the graduates at the beginning of their career. The use of digital technology became increasingly important and unavoidable. In the words of Hannah, "We know that ICT is of fundamental importance in the 21st century teaching and learning. In the pandemic times, it became even more important to have proficiency in ICT skills for teaching and learning." (Hannah, Interview, 5 March 2021). Though having no experience of virtual classes, the graduates were quick to learn different modes

of e-learning by "trial and error" to face the challenge. For teachers, that included "taking zoom classes, making online learning resources and video recording the lessons" (Sunita, Interview 6 March 2021). Inara believes over a period of time, new changes have occurred creating an impact not only on teaching methodologies but also learning styles of the students. She noticed, "I could see a major difference in students' approach towards learning when I used to teach in 2013 and now when I started again in 2019. I cannot generalize it to everyone, but I have observed many changes in students' absorption capacity, their learning styles and preferences." (Interview, 5 March, 2021).

Other challenges faced by the graduates were particular to their specific context and work responsibilities. For example, for Grace it was difficult to deal with the small children in an overcrowded classroom. She stated:

> It was my first experience of teaching in Early Years (Prep 1 class). I am not too rigid with discipline. I know how to manage the class. But the problem was having about 50 students in a class. This was a challenging factor for me. Nevertheless, differentiated instructions that we learned from Kezia (name of a faculty member) helped me in addressing this challenge. (Interview, 6 March 2021)

Another challenge being faced by Grace is having less freedom and space to teach using innovative strategies. As an example, a short anecdote is quoted here:

> It was an art period. It was raining outside. I gave students colouring activities. To make students enjoy the lesson, I played light music. Children were very happy to hear the music. All of them were on task. But I was being called and instructed not to play music while there was a class. (Interview, 6 March 2021).

Grace experienced having less autonomy as a teacher. She has to depend on the permission from the head on small matters such as "taking students to the playground for outdoor activity". However, she is managing to cope with this challenge by making contingency plans. In her own words, "The main purpose is to keep children engaged in learning. If plan A does not work, so I implement plan B and so on."

Contribution of Learning from the Compulsory Courses

The participants have found learning experiences of different courses being helpful to them in fulfilling their professional responsibilities. Giving an example of a challenging issue, Precious stated:

> There is one group of grade 10 students with many behavioral issues. It is difficult for the teachers to teach them without getting angry. I have learned to teach them without being angry. I know when a student passes an offensive comment; I do not need to be aggressive. (Interview, 6 March 2021)

Giving specific examples of classroom management, Hannah shared:

> Appropriate seating arrangements in the classroom, print rich environment and effective communication are important for effective classroom management. I learned that the teachers need to have a welcoming attitude. Instead of setting rules for the students, we need to let them set their rules so they own it. Teachers need not to frighten or force students. The teaching strategies need to be meaningful and enjoyable for the students. (Interview, 5 March 2021).

As a teacher, Michael and Precious found the course on assessment helpful to them in developing formative and summative assessments for their students. Similarly, the course on classroom management and general methods of teaching helped them learn different creative teaching strategies. They also found learning from inclusive education of great value. Michael shared that learning from this course helped him address the needs of the students with individual differences. He learned to give more attention to the students with special education needs (SEN). He also realizes the need to tailor the task assigned to the students as per their capabilities and potentials. As an ECCE teacher, for Grace, learning from the course on teaching literacy was very beneficial. This course helped her in learning about "phonemes, graphemes, morphemes and stages of language development" (Interview, 6 March 2021). This understanding helped her to teach effectively at early years. Many of the graduates have reflected on the importance of theoretical knowledge. Some of them found the implications of psychological and sociological theories in an integrated manner in their work experience. For instance, Grace

reinforced "When I am working for the holistic development of my students, I can find interconnection of philosophical and psychological theories in practice." Elaborating it further, Michael stated, "Learning from psychology has helped me to plan lessons keeping in mind developmental stages of the students. Theories of sociology and psychology have been very helpful. I can reflect on its practical implications in my teaching." (Interview, 4 March 2021). Similarly, reflecting on students' behaviour and theories of learning, Hannah added "Psychological theories helped me understand why all children cannot learn at the same pace and in the same manner. I learned how to cater the learning needs of different students." (Interview, 5 March 2021).

As an assistant manager, Inara found an application of learning from the curriculum course when she was involved in 'designing English curriculum for a training programme' (Interview, 5 March 2021). On the other hand, Michael-as a school teacher was "not directly involved in the curriculum development process" but could see its application in doing "scope and sequence of the content and designing learning experiences for the students." (Interview, 4 March 2021).

Being in a leadership position, Hannah found learning about theories and forms of leadership as very insightful. Reflecting her own leadership style, she stated "I believe in democratic leadership. I do not make my own decisions but I do it along with my staff. We decide together how to work for the betterment of school." (Interview, 5 March 2021). As a teacher educator, Rose sees her leadership role in the form of "guiding, coaching and supporting spark teachers and principals". (Interview, 4 March 2021). She finds learning from the courses like classroom management and general methods of teaching, particularly helpful to plan out professional development sessions.

Contribution of Learning from the Elective Courses

Many of the participants recalled learning from the elective courses being helpful to them. For Michael, who is teaching English, the learning from the course was directly relevant to his professional responsibilities. He specifically recalled activities like word wall and brainstorming in English classes as being helpful to him in teaching. Inara believed her learning from English and Mathematics courses helped her in developing programmes on STEM education.

On the other hand, graduates who are not directly involved in teaching of English also believed in the value of their learning in both personal and professional lives. Rose and Precious believe that learning from the B.Ed. Hons programme has helped them enhance their English-speaking skills. This has helped them communicate effectively in English with others.

Similarly, graduates have also shared the impact of learning from Pakistan Studies courses in their professional commitments. Sunita-who is a Social Studies teacher, narrated:

> Recently I was teaching the topic of Mughal Emperors through activities…As a student, I never learned these topics in such a manner. I always did *rattafying* (rote memorization) with no conceptual understanding…Now I am completely changed. For me students' conceptual understanding and interest in the subject matters a lot. (Interview, March 6 2021).

The graduates who are not teaching Pakistan Studies do not find direct application of their learning from the course in their professional roles. Nevertheless, they still find their learning worthwhile in different ways. As a head teacher, Rose found that many students in her school think Pakistan Studies as a "boring subject". She encourages the teachers to use interesting activities to teach it. Further, she has asked them to approach her, if they need ideas. Michael-, who is currently working as English teacher, shared that Pakistan Studies classes helped him learn to teach students not just by giving lectures, but through hands-on practical activities like role plays and art work. Though not teaching Pakistan Studies or Social Studies currently, Rose expressed her wish to teach it, if given opportunity to do so. She stated, "I enjoyed Pak Studies classes. I wish I could teach Social Studies. Though I am not teaching it, I still read more on it, for my own learning." (Interview, March 6 2021).

Contribution of Learning Computing Skills

All the graduates, irrespective of their prior knowledge and experience of computing skills, value their learning experience of ICT. Two representative voices are worth quoting:

My knowledge of computers was very basic. I did not know much about it. Now I have learned a lot and continue to learn further." (Rose, Interview, March 4 2021). "Even before I joined this institute, I was good at ICT skills. From here, I learned its pedagogical value. I learned how to use ICT to make teaching effective. (Inara, Interview, 5 March 2021).

Both in online and on-site physical classes, the learning of ICT was found to be very productive. Michael views the value of ICT "across all subjects being taught at school." (Interview, March 4, 2021). On the contrary, Grace observed that in her school, teachers are not encouraged to integrate ICT in teaching. However, Grace finds the learning from ICT helping her in doing new online short courses. She is also able to help her colleagues with low digital know-how.

Contribution of Field Experiences

The field experiences of the graduates largely comprised of teaching practicum and action research project. Teaching practicum gave opportunities to the prospective educators to plan a well detailed lesson plan under the guidance of their mentors and teach it at cooperating schools. Michael noticed a difference in guided teaching practicum at B.Ed (Hons) programme and teaching at school. He stated "Teaching is more challenging. During practicum, the students are well disciplined because the cooperating teacher or the mentor is also there to observe and support. As a professional, when I am alone at class then the challenge is to manage all by my own." (Interview, 4 March 2021). Nevertheless, teaching practicum helped the prospective educators learn and practice major aspects of classroom teaching and learning. In the words of Precious, this learning included "making lesson plans, applying different methods, making class interactive, using chalkboard effectively, assessing students' learning, giving feedback to students, effective communication and time management." (Interview, 6 March 2021).

Reflecting on her teaching practice, Sunita recalled, "I used to teach before doing B.Ed (Hons) but now when I look at my teaching, it's completely different. I try to teach students in the same manner as I learned during teaching practicum." (Interview, 6 March 2021). Grace also believes to have gained confidence to teach as a result of teaching practicum. She regrets for not being able to implement many activities in her class as a safety measure against Covid-19. She however, hopes to

try that out when the situation will turn back to normal.

As a head teacher, Hannah is helping her school teachers learn how to develop lesson planning skills. She also conducted a professional development session for the school teachers on making smart objectives. She stated

I learned a lot about lesson planning from Flora and Crystal (teachers). I conducted a session with the school teachers on lesson planning. I helped them learn how to make objectives using Bloom's taxonomy. I encouraged them not to focus only on the length of the content to be taught but also on the depth of understanding needed to be developed among students. (Interview, 5 March 2021).

Learning about research and undertaking a research project has benefited graduates. Michael reflected that insights he got from his action research project on developing creative writing skills is helpful to him even in teaching English at a different school. Furthermore, he has learned to do need assessment and reconnaissance to identify gaps between the current practice and desired practice. He gave an example:

Action research project helped me learn how to identify problems in the class and to systematically address it. In my class, I have observed that the students are good at writing skills but are reluctant in speaking skills. I am planning on how to address this need. (Interview, 4 March 2021).

For instance, Rose is currently undertaking a research project aiming to develop lesson planning skills of the teachers. Similarly, Hannah has observed students of a particular class not taking interest in learning Urdu, especially in writing tasks. She is intending to plan an action research project aiming to explore strategies to motivate students for Urdu writing. Not having a full-time job, Grace is not planning to undertake a research project, however she continues doing reflective practice, which is an essential component of action research. She elaborated it, "Action research has helped me a lot. I continue reflective practice on my sessions and make changes in the plans (for future sessions) accordingly."

Contribution of Academic and Co-curricular Activities

Student led morning assembly is a regular feature at the institute. With exception to Inara, all graduates found the experience of attending and participating in assembly worthwhile. They listed different benefits of assembly such as helping them energize, socialize with the students of other classes and cohorts, creating readiness to attend formal classes, developing skills (e.g. problem solving, cooperative learning, team building etc) and providing them a platform to showcase their talents. In the words of Sunita:

> It was a time when we interacted with the students of other classes. We used to see different talents and creative abilities. Such unique and interesting activities were conducted that I could never think of on my own. These activities are helping me in teaching too. (Interview, 6 March 2021)

On the other hand, Inara did not find 'uniqueness' in the activity. According to her, initially the activities were interesting and fun-filled. Over a period of time, these activities failed to capture her interest. She expressed her experience:

> I found the activities boring. It failed to capture my interest. During my first year I was quite regular in attending assembly. Over a period of time, I lost my interest. I did not find uniqueness is any activity. There were many repetitions. Even when there were new activities, I did not find it interesting. (Interview, 5 March 2021)

While Inara did not personally see much value in morning assembly, she especially thanked institute for providing her opportunities to be involved in different academic activities which have helped her a lot in her professional life. These academic activities include opportunity to assist Crystal (faculty) on a school-based project, doing a joint session with Karoline (faculty) and helping in editing newsletter.

Graduates also recalled their experiences of curricular, co-curricular and class activities for example Hannah stated: "Crystal did a lot of activities with us. It was exciting to learn from her in each class." (Interview, 5 March 2021). Similarly, Inara expressed: "Initially, there were less activities. When Christina

started teaching we saw grand activities usually at the end of each semester. These were good opportunities for the students to showcase their talents." (Interview, 5 March 2021).

Graduates have recalled different activities particularly making puppets and Greek salad in enrichment classes, role plays, educational concerts, exhibition and field trips. All graduates have recommended having more field trips and excursions. Graduates have also listed different ways in which these activities have been beneficial to them. These include helping them energize, developing creativity and collaborative skills. Discussing the value of these activities Hannah commented:

> In my opinion co-curricular activities were equally important as curricular activities. It enhanced abilities of creative thinking and fluency in speaking. It made us learn the importance of practicing. It made us learn working with each other and listening to the ideas of others. (Interview 5 March, 2021)

Celebration of different events and festivals at the institute has contributed in developing an appreciation of diversity and pluralism. A few examples from the perceived experiences of the graduates are quoted here:

> Navroz celebration was something new for me. I did not know anything about it before. At this institute, I for the first-time celebrated Holi. Celebrating these festivals did not affect my faith. We learned to accept and appreciate differences and share happiness together. (Precious, 6 March 2021)

Whether it is Holi, Navroz, Easter or Christmas- we celebrated it together. We never discriminated against anyone on the basis of religion. We respected diverse traditions." (Hannah, 5 March 2021). ''I loved the celebration of Christmas and Easter here. It gave me insights about Christianity. I was inspired by these celebrations. Though, these are not my religious festivals-I enjoyed celebrating it. (Inara, 5 March 2021).

Opportunities, Challenges and Way Forward

Graduates have reflected on challenges and opportunities for them doing B.Ed. Hons. The challenges were mainly in terms of academic rigor and meeting deadlines for the assignments.

Recalling her student life, Rose commented, "The journey of learning was not very smooth. There were many difficult times and challenges. As a student, I faced difficulties. But this all helped me to develop critical thinking, decision making and analyzing skills."

Furthermore, Rose has listed important lessons learned at the institute which are helping her in professional lives. These lessons include, "Effective time management, effective way of communication, socializing, remaining calm and humble, dealing issues in a polite and professional manner, listening to others, patience and courage." (Interview, March 4 2021).

Reflecting on his professional experience, Michael also remarked, "When I reflect on my professional responsibilities and learning from the B.Ed. (Hons), I cannot simply think of anything which the institute has not taught me. It has in-fact taught much more than what I am currently practicing it." Giving an example of how challenges faced during learning became opportunities to cope with professional responsibilities Michael stated, "There is quite a workload but unlike other teachers, I don't feel overburdened. B.Ed. (Hons) has taught me to take challenges, meet deadlines and do multitasks to fulfill the responsibilities." (Interview, 4 March 2021).

Rose recommends the need to reinforce speaking of English in the institute. She recalled:

Many times, we were being told to speak in English. Crystal and Christina also used certain strategies like reinforcing charts in the assembly room. However, despite reminders- the rule of speaking English all the time was not fully implemented. I do not know why it did not work but I believe something more needs to be done to reinforce it. (Interview March 4, 2021)

Other suggestions given by the graduates for B.Ed. (Hons) programme include arranging professional and career development events, getting affiliation with any international well recognized university, opportunities for students to participate in sports and other activities after classes, organizing competitions in collaboration with other colleges and universities, teaching basic concepts of mathematics and ethics, teaching how to make a unit plan and doing syllabus break-up in teaching practicum, teaching effective communication skills for dealing with co-teachers and school management.

Discussion

The results yielded from the data analysis show that the B.Ed. (Hons) programme has opened doors to different career paths for prospective educators. This aspect signals the importance of the B.Ed. (Hons) programme as the value of any teacher education programme is often viewed in terms of the likelihood of career opportunities it creates. For instance, the study by Mukminin, et al. (2017) reports the voices of prospective educators regarding their choice for the enrollment in the teacher education programmes. Some of the reasons given by them include getting opportunities for professional growth and to work as a teacher or educator.

Many prospective educators, after completing their course of study, find little relevance between the educational theories and contextual realities at workplace. Therefore, bridging the gap between theory and practice is a key concern (Guillen & Zeichner, 2018; Moon, 2016). Nevertheless, the findings of this research also indicate that the graduates are trying to find relevance between their theoretical learning and its practical application at the workplace. Moreover, they are able to connect the implications of learning from various courses, including classroom management, curriculum, assessment, educational leadership and psychology, with their respective professional responsibilities.

The results of the study also identify a dire need to orient prospective educators with technological-rich pedagogy. The challenges faced by the graduates during the Covid-19 pandemic of managing virtual teaching and learning created a necessity for teacher education programmes. Before the pandemic, in many contexts, the teaching of digital pedagogy and assessment were not focused upon in teacher education programmes. For instance, Reyes et al. (2017) report that about 31.5 % of the faculty members in an Australian university integrate technology in their

teaching but they do not orient the prospective teachers on how to use it. To meet the needs of modern classroom teaching, it has become increasingly important to orient prospective educators on ethical approaches to using technology, particularly, as a pedagogical tool (Kasemsap, 2021; Ratheeswari, 2018).

Field experiences of teaching practicum and research are also identified as an important experience by the graduates. However, the graduates have also recommended changes to make it rigorous and comprehensive. Research studies in different contexts recommend changes in the teacher education programmes to make them compatible with the changing needs of the teaching profession (Korthagen et al., 2006; McDonald et al., 2011). There is a need to embrace more field work and teaching practice in the teacher education programmes. Besides teaching specific lessons in the specialized subject areas, the prospective educators also need to be given opportunities to observe the lessons, learning resources, assignments, course books and other records maintained by the teachers. Building on the school experience, prospective educators need to be given the exposure of wider community experience. This will help them to learn the value of community engagement in school activities (Korthagen et al., 2006; McDonald et al., 2011).

Conclusion

From the work experiences of graduates, it is quite evident that B.Ed. (Hons) programme opens the door for different career opportunities in the field of education including teaching at school, working for teacher education as well as school administration and leadership. The analysis of the data shows that graduates value their overall learning experience and strongly believe that these learning are helping them in fulfilling their professional commitments and responsibilities. In many cases, the organizational heads also maintain high expectations from the graduates and assign them important work responsibilities.

As discussed, the varied nature of different courses- ranging from teaching literacy and classroom management to educational leadership and research have contributed to the professional lives of graduates working in different capacities within the educational field.

Graduates particularly cherish memories of participating in different academic and co-curricular activities. Also, technological-rich learning experiences

are important for the graduates to meet their professional responsibilities. Commitment to lifelong learning, developing professional acumen, respect for diversity and pluralism are some of the important values that graduates learn.

The institute needs to continue supporting students in teaching practicum and research. These early experiences of the fieldwork help them shape their professional identities and become stepping stones in their careers.

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