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In the name of educational research **By Shafqat Hussain**



IN 1999, the School of Education, founded by the University of Chicago in 1892 by the father of modern educational research John Dewey, was closed on the recommendation of a social scientists' panel which suggested that the research being produced in the name of educational research does not have any relevance to practice and the ground realities. In Pakistan, however, educational research and the researcher are considered sacred, whose methodologies, findings and recommendations are never questioned, the reason being, as a new discipline of research in Pakistan, research culture has not matured enough to develop the culture of internal and external critique. Therefore, research findings and suggestion are incorporated in framing policies and practices which do not bring any change in the real process of learning and teaching in the classroom setting.

As a student of educational research, a teacher and teacher's trainer, I happen to have many concerns about the practicality, validity, rationality and effectiveness of educational research for the improvement of our educational standards. To be able to address these concerns, I read and also share with others the critical reflections of novice researchers with our research experts to find the causes responsible for the declining state of educational research in Pakistan.

The theoretical, methodological and instrumental paradigms being followed in Pakistan in the field of research have been developed in the industrialised and developed countries. They have to be molded according to needs, time and place. However, the methods and instruments are implemented and practiced in the field without making the necessary changes. Concerns have already been emerging over the validity of these standards in our context from the West, from where we imported the 'unquestionable standards' of educational research.

The most important critiques of this phenomenon Restivo & Vanderpool (1974) state that the hegemony of frameworks, methods and theories of the industrialised countries in the West in the field of educational research have developed dependence and subordination among the less-developed third world countries.

Another reason is that educational research in Pakistan is loaded with jargon and technical terms that even the educated people are unable to understand. I still remember what an M.Ed student

once said to me. Before joining M.Ed he thought it to be a part of the social sciences. However, after joining the course it occurred to him that the discipline was linked closely to nuclear, biological and chemical sciences as its terminology is similar to these disciplines.

If even M.Ed students are lost in the maze of finding meanings to words, how are they going to reach the spirit of research? Voices are emerging over this issue. The jargon syndrome in educational research has already been detected and questioned in neighbouring India. As, Kulwinder (2001) states, the educational researcher speaks and writes in a language, which becomes incomprehensible for the major stakeholder.

Furthermore, donor agencies priorities and recent educational research development plans in the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan are working on what kind of research is required instead of what is needed or what should be done in practical terms to improve classroom practices. The academic war between qualitative and quantitative methodologies has overshadowed the objective of educational research in Pakistan.

The qualitative method was highly worthwhile earlier with the foreign donor agencies wanting to know the perception, opinions and in-depth understanding in the educational context. Library shelves in educational institutions were filled with case studies, ethnographies and other forms of qualitative research work. But the donor agencies now need to see an impact which can be best described in the quantitative paradigm. There is a rat race going on among public and private universities to produce quantitative research and researchers without understanding its contextual needs.

Finally, educational academics and researchers like to demonstrate their ‘research power’ to each other at the international educational seminars and workshops. The major stakeholders — classroom teachers, parents, students and novice researchers like me — find them incapable of understanding. According to Pring (1960), the philosophers and researchers of education tend to talk with each other rather than talk with the wider educational readership. The situation demands rethinking of the objectives of our educational research. Is the research merely being done to improve our educational standards or is it only for getting funds?

There is a conformity and orthodoxy about the theories, structures and frameworks of educational research in our educational training institutions. The slightest of deviations from the settled and suggested path by the teacher, and text book is considered a heresy. Students pay a heavy price for this in terms of academic loss. A majority of students assimilated in that kind of culture become parrots of theories, methodologies and framework of educational research without any kind of proper understanding.

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the US has found a phenomena of exploitation in the teaching educational research. As, Lynda (2006) states that students in the discipline of educational research are forced to follow standardised routines, formats and methodology. In this process of suppression, the innocent students are absorbed into the culture and the wise ones get exploited. The writer further refers to such teachers and their attitude by calling them “The priest and their orthodoxy”.

By and large, the educational researcher, in the context of the West and developing world, initiate their research on assumptions and prove their assumptions in reality using theoretical framework and methodologies. One such example shared with me by another M.Ed from an education training college was his telling me that “To prove the assumptions and ideas of a research course, teachers cook up data.” In case of not following such a practice, they can lose their marks. Well-known educational researchers Roberts and Riches (1997) who are very critical of this trend in educational research describe this phenomenon in these words: “Educational researchers are very fond of playing the game ‘Hunt the concept’. This is the same game played by the children in which children find the hidden slipper. But there is a difference between what the children and these researchers seek — the slipper exists, the concepts and assumptions don’t”.

The trend of finding and hunting concepts and assumptions is quite prevalent in our educational research scenario. Instead of bringing effective and positive change, the framing and implementing of policies on the findings and recommendation of fake research brings further deterioration to our education system.

It is an acknowledged and proven fact that educational research plays a pivotal role in improving over all educational standards. Especially in Pakistan, educational research can play a very important role in the country’s present and future in order to bring positive changes and advancement in the field of education. However, contextualising the research practices, improvement in teaching and the learning process of research methods in private and public universities, are the areas demanding an overhaul.