

Research Article

Impacts of British Council's Core Skills Activities on Students-Teachers' Performance and Whole School Environment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

A good teacher can bring more positive changes in the behavior of students, the teacher's knowledge and skills are important to achieve the required targets of the institution. The researcher aimed to explore the effectiveness and benefits of British Council's trainings programs, a professionally skillful teacher may impart knowledge and skills to the students. The main objective of the study is to know the impacts of British Council's Core Skills Activities on the student-teachers' performance and whole school environment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It was a descriptive and survey type research. The population of the study was 480 governments male-female primary, middle and high schools and 960 teachers trained by British Council for connecting classrooms Core Skills Activities. The sampling of the study was 200 teachers of 100 randomly selected schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The six core skills are Critical Thinking & Problem Solving, Communication & Collaboration, Creativity & Imagination, Citizenship, Digital Literacy, and Student Leadership & Personal Development. The selected data was properly analyzed, tabulated, explained and interpreted through some statistical tools and a chi square test was used. The major findings showed that British Council is an international organization which works positively for the professional development of teachers and uplift of students. The findings depicted that majority the teachers agreed with the statement that British Council Connecting Classrooms activities i.e. Core Skills also called Twenty First Century Skills improved the overall performance of students-teachers and whole school environment. The traditional teaching methodology of teaching was changed to activity and conceptual based teaching. The most important fact was found that critical thinking and problem solving skills was the need of the day, it really develops the thinking approach of the students and teachers. Communication, computer and leadership skills of students were also developed by adapting core skills activities in and outside the class. On the basis of findings some recommendations were made that the Core Skills activities may be embedded by the teachers in school curriculum. Such training session may be provided to all teachers and head teachers by the Elementary & Secondary Education Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa under the supervision of British Council experienced and skillful team.

Keywords

British Council, Connecting Classrooms, Core Skills, Critical Thinking & Problem Solving, Creativity

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1. Introduction

The British Council identifies six core skills that are essential for individuals to thrive in the 21st century. These skills are often referred to as the "Six Core Skills" or "Global Skills," and they are considered important for personal, academic, and professional development. These skills are also called 21st century skills. Here are the British Council's Six Core Skills:

1.1. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

This skill involves the ability to analyze information, evaluate arguments, and solve complex problems. It encourages individuals to think critically, make informed decisions, and approach challenges with creativity and logical reasoning. In this the students think and observe things with different angles. By developing this skills, the students know the solutions of complicated problems. According to Othman, Mohd Salleh, al-Edrus and Sulaiman [11], students learning context is one of the factors that contributes to generic skills deficiency, particularly towards critical thinking and problem solving skill. For example, teaching and learning process in the classroom which emphasize on rote learning and too focused on the content cause students to memorize the knowledge learned, rather than to analyze and synthesize the exact meaning of the knowledge. Since they do not have deep understanding regarding the knowledge learned, it leads to reduce their ability to think critically as well as to solve complicated problems [15].

1.2. Communication and Collaboration

Effective communication encompasses both verbal and written communication skills. It includes the ability to express ideas clearly, listen actively, and convey messages in a way that is understood by others. Strong communication skills are vital for building relationships and collaborating with others. Collaboration skills involve working effectively with others in a team or group setting. This includes skills like communication, compromise, and the ability to contribute to group goals. Collaboration encourages individuals to work together, share ideas, and achieve common objectives.

1.3. Creativity and Imagination

Creativity involves thinking outside the box, generating innovative ideas, and approaching tasks with imagination. It's about finding new solutions, fostering innovation, and embracing different perspectives to solve problems. Creativity and imagination enable individuals to make something new and useful things, ideas, projects, inventions, discovery etc. These skills develop students' performance and self-confidence. Magno [10] stated "creativity is a product of an executed imagination" (p. 10). He identified that "play

depends on two rudimentary ingredients: safety and stimulation" (p. 81). On the one hand, play involves uncertainty; thus teachers should recognize this risk-free ramification. On the other hand, play involves the use of personal energy and strategy. Adequate stimuli are necessary to make that happen.

1.4. Digital Literacy

In today's digital age, digital literacy is crucial. It encompasses the ability to use digital tools and technologies effectively, navigate the digital world safely, and critically evaluate online information. Digital literacy includes skills related to using computers, the internet, and various digital platforms. To become an international citizen of the world, knowledge and skills of ICT is mandatory. Now the whole world is just on finger tips, just click and see the world. The digital literacy is very important for students and teachers as well. They can search for all topics, subjects and problems by using internet.

1.5. Citizenship

Citizenship skills are about being a responsible and active member of society. This includes understanding global issues, valuing diversity, and being aware of one's rights and responsibilities as a citizen. It also involves promoting social justice and ethical behavior. Citizenship develops the zeal to work for the welfare of people. It develops the sense of responsibilities of the individuals, the students think globally and they think not only for their own country but for the whole earth.

Student Leadership & Personal Development

Student leadership is increasingly becoming a stated priority of higher education institutions. Programs that claim to develop leadership capabilities in students are proliferating across university campuses worldwide. This trend has been occurring steadily over the past two decades [7]

Student leadership and personal development skills develop the leadership skills of the students. Student leadership skills is very important for teaching and learning process as well. The students with good leadership qualities can take part in all school activities. In class group activities, a leader student can lead the group, in sports activities the active and bold students can lead the team, in scout activities a good student with leadership qualities can lead properly. Even in the social welfare activities also students can play a good role. So, student leadership skills are as important as other related skills for the students.

These Six Core Skills are not only valuable in education but also in various aspects of life and career development. They are considered essential for individuals to adapt to an ever-changing world and succeed in a globalized and interconnected society. Many educational institutions and organizations emphasize the development of these skills to prepare

individuals for the challenges of the 21st century.

In Pakistani schools, very less number teachers and students are aware of the six core skills. British Council is now playing a concrete role to provide training session on such important and useful skills. The incorporation of core skills in the curriculum and teaching methodology is really needed.

Statement of the study

The topic, *"Impacts of British Council's Core Skills Activities on Students-Teachers' Performance and Whole School Environment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan"*, explained the British Council activities and its effective role in the development of education and teacher performance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government schools. The main objective to analyze the impacts of British Council Core Skills activities on students-teachers' performance and whole school environment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

1.6. Significance of the Study

The study has great importance for the uplift of students and betterment of educational institutions. British Council Connecting classroom activities especially the core skills are the need of the day. The activities mainly focus on critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and imagination, communication and collaboration, citizenship, digital literacy and student leadership. The six core skills are also known as 21st century skills. It will make the individuals creative, responsible and leaders who will take care of the natural resources. The study will highlight the importance of connecting classrooms activities. There will be enthusiasm among the people towards internationalism; all students and teachers will be able to know what's going on in the world. The study will explore the world's students and institutions work for future. We need skillful and technically sound minded people for the society and connecting classrooms project is doing fantastic work on it effectively. The study will be very useful for teachers, students, educationist, research scholars and ordinary people of my country as well for the whole world.

1.7. Research Objectives

1. To know about the British Council role in Pakistan
2. To understand the importance of Six Core Skills
3. To analyze the impacts of British Council Core Skills Activities on student-teachers' performance and whole school environment

1.8. Research Questions

1. What do you know about the British Council?
2. What are six core skills, why these skills are important for students-teachers?
3. What are the impacts of British Council Core Skills activities on student-teachers' performance and whole school environment?

1.9. Hypotheses of the Study

1. British Council plays a good role in promoting education in Pakistan
2. The core skills develop the critical thinking and creativity skills of the students
3. The core skills develop students' communication and collaboration skills
4. The core skills bring awareness among the students-teachers about the importance of digital literacy.
5. The core skills make the students responsible citizens, they know the rights and responsibilities of good citizens
6. Core Skills training activities improve the students-teachers' performance and whole school environment

2. Literature Review

Ahmad; Amin & Rashid [1], described the positive role of British Council in Pakistan regarding teacher's trainings and other academic activities. They also explored the positive effects trainings on the government primary school teachers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It was concluded that the primary school teachers performed better as compare to other teachers who didn't get trainings. On the basis on such data it was recommended that British Council may arrange more trainings for Pakistani government school teachers.

According to Rodzalan & Saat [13], critical thinking and problem solving skills is important for undergraduate students. They further compared the critical thinking and problem solving skills of the students of social sciences, science and engineering students. They pointed out that social sciences students perceived the critical thinking skills better than science and engineering students. The study was taken part in the Malaysian Public Universities for undergraduate students.

Sholihah & Lastariwati [16]. Stated that critical thinking and problem skills is the one of the important skills of 21st century. This skill is very important for all students especially for vocational high school students. The study was conducted to know the competency of students in the critical thinking and problem solving skills, for this purpose a classroom action research was designed. It was concluded that problem based learning model can improve the competency level of students in critical thinking and problem solving.

Snyder & Snyder [18]. Pointed out that critical thinking and problem skills may be developed by good instruction and teaching methodology. They further stated that critical thinking skill is important for secondary and post-secondary students, they must be taught conceptually and activity based rather than traditional method and rote memorization. They also described some hurdles i.e. lack of training, limited resources, biased perceptions, and time constraints which affect the critical thinking and problem solving process.

According to Tsai [19], the overall activities of the school may be based on creative work and imagination. The students

must be equipped with the creative skills and this is the role of a school and teachers. He pointed out that the teacher should encourage the students for play, creativity and imagination. The students may be free and independent for the activities which develop their creativity and imagination skills.

Riel [12], said that collaboration and communication is the new technology for 21st century students. It is a new exchange form of facilitation among the students and teachers. It requires carefully planning for teachers and educational institutions so that the students work collaboratively and learn effectively. Like cooperative learning within the classroom, collaboration across classrooms provides students the opportunity to learn from and teach one another.

Dean [5], stated that citizenship skills is very important for students for their social life. The study further revealed that the Pakistani curriculum gives less stress on citizenship means the students role regarding citizenship is passive. He further noted that the students in Pakistani schools are not only lacking in citizenship but also they didn't develop their critical thinking, problem solving and decision making skills.

According to Shopova [17], the digital literacy skill is so important for students, teachers and all individuals, the digital competency is improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the leaning process. He recommended that ICT skills of the students may be developed and motivation for digital literacy skills may be inculcated among the students.

Dempster & Lizzio [6], stated that student leadership is the need of the day, every educational institution should develop leadership skills of the students. They further suggested that leadership courses and trainings programs may be adapted in school for the development of leadership qualities among the students.

Braun [2] focused on improving critical thinking methods in business education curriculum development. Celuck and Slama [4] identified methods of integrating critical thinking skills into business courses. Other researchers (Catanach, Croll, & Grinaker, [3]; Saraoghu, yobaccio, & Louton, [14] studied hands-on activities that required students to think critically and apply their knowledge to specific tasks.

Critical thinking refers to an ability to analyze information, to determine the relevance of information gathered and then to interpret it in solving the problems (Gagné [8]. It requires high-level thinking; involves the process of analysis, evaluation, reasonableness and reflection, Jeevanantham, [9]. As

future human capital, university students need to equip themselves with critical thinking and problem solving skill as this is the focus of employers in hiring new people.

3. Population of the Study

The British Council arranged training sessions in 32 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa effectively. They selected 15 schools (08 male and 07 female schools) from each district. A teacher with head teacher were selected randomly from each school. There were 2 high school, 2 middle and 04 primary schools were selected for male while 2 high school, 2 middle and 3 primary schools were selected for female in each district.

Thus total 480 government primary, middle and high schools were selected for training session in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in which 960 male/female teachers of primary, middle and high schools were trained properly in the area of core skills.

So, all the 480 schools and 960 teachers are the population of the study.

Sampling of the Study

The sample size of the study is 200 teachers of 100 schools where British Council core skills training was delivered. 200 male/female teachers and head teachers were selected from all regions and divisions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Stratified sample technique was used.

4. Research Design & Method

The research design is descriptive and survey type while quantitative method is used to know the facts and figures of the teachers regarding impacts of core skills activities on the teacher-students' performance and whole school environment.

Research Instruments:

A questionnaire was used to collect primary data from the teachers'/head teachers in all districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The questionnaire is comprised of 25 statements and sent to all respondents personally, via email, WhatsApp or messenger to know the perceptions of teachers and leaders regarding impacts of British Council Core Skills activities on the student-teacher performance and whole school environment. Some statistical tools, techniques and chi square test were also used to analyze the data effectively.

5. Data Analysis

Table 1. Perceptions of 200 Teachers & Head-teachers.

S. No.	Statements	Strongly agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed	Strongly disagreed	Total	X ²	P value
1	The British Council works positively for the betterment of education in Pakistan.	63	92	21	19	05	200	35.50	<0.05

S. No.	Statements	Strongly agreed	Agreed	Nuetral	Disagreed	Storngly disagreed	Total	X ²	P value
2	The teachers and leaders participants learn good skills and knowledge from connecting classrooms activities.	73	91	23	12	01	200	38.10	<0.05
3	The content and all instructional materials for sessions were up to date and effective.	55	102	25	14	04	200	40.22	<0.05
4	The master trainers were experienced and skillful, they delivered the topics well and cleared your all concepts.	35	109	28	21	07	200	43.10	<0.05
5	Imbedding of the of British Council six core skills in the curriculum is need of the day.	63	87	29	13	08	200	31.75	<0.05
6	First core skill Critical Thinking and problem solving (CTPS), improves the critical thinking and problem solving abilities of students.	52	118	12	15	03	200	36.25	<0.05
7	Second core skill Communication and Collaboration, improves the communication skills and team work spirit of students.	54	116	12	16	02	200	42.10	<0.05
8	Third core skill Creativity and Imagination, creates an ability among the students to work for something new.	53	107	17	19	04	200	39.75	<0.05
9	Fourth core skill Citizenship, enables an individual to help others. He / She knows the important of rights and responsibilities.	40	111	22	20	07	200	47.55	<0.05
10	Citizenship brought equality, peace and love in the society. The students-teachers will think for the sustainability of people and resources.	49	113	24	12	02	200	41.25	<0.05
11	Fifth Core Skills Digital Literacy, makes an individual as global citizen.	45	121	18	11	05	200	51.25	<0.05
12	Digital literacy played an outstanding role in COVID-19 situation all over the world.	65	132	01	01	01	200	49.50	<0.05
13	Those persons who have good ICT skills are remain most effective and useful.	56	127	09	06	02	200	36.10	<0.05
14	Sixth core skills Students leadership and personal development brings leadership qualities in students.	67	104	18	10	01	200	29.55	<0.05
15	British Council Connecting Classrooms Activities have good positive impacts on the students' academic performance.	39	138	15	08	00	200	51.25	<0.05
16	British Council Connecting Classrooms Activities have good positive impacts on the teachers' performance.	51	129	12	05	03	200	47.22	<0.05
17	British Council Connecting Classrooms Activities have good positive impacts on the whole school environment.	44	119	15	19	03	200	28.58	<0.05
18	Connecting classrooms activities improved the English language skills of teachers.	55	131	10	03	01	200	35.55	<0.05
19	Connecting classrooms activities develop	53	96	28	15	08	200	25.22	<0.05

S. No.	Statements	Strongly agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed	Strongly disagreed	Total	X ²	P value
	the ICT skills of teachers.								
20	The teachers are shifted from traditional teaching to activity based teaching.	43	118	23	11	05	200	40.10	<0.05
21	The teachers and students are getting positive attitudes towards their education due to this activities.	45	132	17	03	02	200	45.10	<0.05
22	Actually connecting classrooms activities is producing skillful students for the society.	58	119	15	05	03	200	38.50	<0.05
23	The connecting classrooms activities were interesting and better.	47	126	18	08	01	200	43.50	<0.05
24	The British Council has a good systematic approach towards teachers professional development.	50	137	10	02	01	200	41.75	<0.05
25	Directorate of Curriculum and teacher education (DCTE) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan also played a vital role in collaboration with the BC for Connecting Classrooms program.	70	120	09	01	00	200	53.50	<0.05

Significant $df=4$ $\chi^2 = 9.48$

6. Discussion

The Table 1 indicates that all the χ^2 values are highly significant which show that the responses of the majority of the teachers are tending towards agreement. On the basis of such facts and figures it is concluded that British Council Connecting Classrooms Core Skills activities improved the students-teachers' performance and whole school environment. Moreover, it is pointed out that British Council plays an important role in the professional development of teachers and uplift of the students. The study figured out that core skills activities are very important and the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa should work on it and include in the curriculum. Thus all the alternative hypotheses i.e. British Council plays a good role in promoting education in Pakistan, the core skills develop the critical thinking and creativity skills of the students, the core skills develop students' communication and collaboration skills, the core skills bring awareness among the students-teachers about the importance of digital literacy, the core skills make the students responsible citizens, they know the rights and responsibilities of good citizens and Core Skills training activities improve the students-teachers' performance and whole school environment are accepted.

7. Recommendation

The following recommendations were made:

1. British Council may increase the trainings program for government school teachers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.
2. The core skills may be embedded in the school curriculum.
3. Traditional way of teaching may be changed to activity based teaching methodology.
4. SLOs based activities may be adapted by the teachers.
5. Teachers may develop the critical thinking skills of the students.
6. More activities may provide to the students in and outside the class.

Online classes may be encouraged by the head of institutions and provide opportunities to students to communicate with international partners' schools.

8. Conclusions

The study concluded that core skills are very important skills for the students. The core skills really develop the critical thinking and problem solving skills of the students. Moreover, it develops the communication, creative and thinking skills of the students, the students may think in different angles. The students know the rights and responsibilities of their own. Citizenship makes the students an important citizens of the society. It also increases the leadership qualities of the students, the students know how to work for poor and helpless people. Core skills activities especially digital literacy brings awareness among the students towards computer

and information technology skills. It pointed out that core skills trainings enabled the teachers to teach according to the modern methods of teaching and need of the society. The teachers understood how to make activities for student for developing their core skills. A positive and concrete affect was seen in the students-teachers' performance and whole school environment.

Abbreviations

BC	British Council
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
CTPS	Critical Thinking & Problem Solving
COVID	Corona Virus Disease 2019
DCTE	Directorate of Curriculum & Teacher Education
ICT	Information Technology Communication

Author Contributions

Ihsan Ullah is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

I declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. Being a principal and solely author, I also declare that the information given in this disclosure is true and complete to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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