

Fostering Creativity at Higher Education Institutes: Pedagogical Approaches

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Abstract

This research paper examines the pedagogical approaches adopted by teachers in the undergraduate program at the University of Peshawar and their influence on creativity and critical thinking among students. Specifically, the study focuses on various themes and debates such as uniform books and dress, cognition, free and open environment, out-of-the-box thinking, pro-activeness, innovation, critique on sensitive issues, tolerance, and social-cultural change. Data was collected through ten focus group discussions involving 71 participants representing all academic faculties of the University. The findings reveal that the University currently employs a teacher-centered approach in classrooms, limiting students' freedom to ask questions and share their views. The study suggests that students exhibit limited thinking, less pro-activeness, and innovation. These findings provide valuable insights into the teaching practices at the University of Peshawar, highlighting areas that require attention and improvement to foster creativity and critical thinking among students.

Keywords: Pedagogy, Creativity, Higher Education Institutions, Critical Thinking, Tolerance

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1. Introduction

Higher education serves as a transformative journey, not just in acquiring knowledge but also in nurturing creativity (Shoaib, 2024c). While traditional views often emphasize the acquisition of skills and knowledge for employment, the true purpose of higher education extends beyond this (Shoaib, 2024b). It is about fostering creativity, critical thinking, and innovation, essential qualities for navigating an ever-changing world (Aziz, 2023). Learning through a teacher-centered approach does not encourage critical thinking (Shoaib, 2024a). This form of education makes machines for state factories (Arshad, Anwar, & Shoaib, 2024b). An educational institution is a training center where different kinds of machines are produced for performing different activities without using their mind and intellect (Arshad, Anwar, & Shoaib, 2024a). Students are the least important members of the process in teacher-centered learning (Zohrabi, et al., 2012). Teachers do motivate students to creativity (Anwar, Shoaib, Zaman, & Arshad, 2024). In a teacher-centered approach, teachers mostly use prescribed course books and reading material (Anwar, Shoaib, & Shahid, 2024). Students are recommended to study the same to get good grades and then good jobs (Ali, Zaman, & Shoaib, 2024; Shoaib, Usmani, & Abdullah, 2023). Learning under such conditions leads to competition among students (Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2023). As a result, students do

not share their knowledge with other students as they view that as their competitors (Acat & Dönmez, 2009).

Freire (1970) explains education is an act of banking wherein knowledge/information is a deposit in which students are the depositories and teachers are the depositors. The teachers issue communiqué instead of communicating, that students patiently receive, remember and repeat whenever demanded (Shoaib, Rasool, Anwar, & Ali, 2023). In famous work of Freire 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', he describes the education system as an institution where a student becomes a cataloguer and collector of the deposits received from their teachers. Students are far away from creativity, practical knowledge, and transformation in this misguided system of education (Shoaib, 2023b; Shoaib, Mustafa, & Hussain, 2023).

Teaching practice is based on the idea and reflective consideration of formative development (Shoaib, 2023a). Pedagogy by nature is an inventive exertion that requires knowledge of content, knowledge of learners, and knowledge of one own self (Ullah, Shoaib, Ali, & Ullah, 2022). It is formed by purposeful and instant reasoning, as pedagogical reasoning requires creativity, instinct, and expression (Alexander, 2001; Cuenca, 2010). Pedagogy may be seen as an art as Dewey (1963) interfaces experience with art and education, which expand the world where we live in. Pedagogy, like poetry, is converting media into the medium, like those artists who transform pigments (Shoaib, Tariq, Shahzadi, & Ali, 2022), clay flecks, or text into paintings and art pieces, with the same token teachers transform students into refining human beings as the pedagogue forms creativity in his/her students (Cuenca, 2010; Eisner, 2002).

In the culture of silence, people do not say anything, consequently, their ability of thinking and creativity diminish (Shoaib, Mustafa, & Hussain, 2022). The urge for change in society is suppressed and elements of transformation are sabotaged (Shoaib, Anwar, & Rasool, 2022). Power is in the hand of a few oppressors and they try to maintain the status quo in society. Freire compares this general concept of 'the culture of silence' to educational institutions, where the same approach is used to suppress learners' personal experiences and perceptions about realities (Taylor, 1993).

In the traditional way of education, knowledge is transmitted from teachers to learners through set patterns (Shoaib, Anwar, & Mustafa, 2022). This approach is based on passive learning and lacks the element of creativity (Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, & Abdullah, 2022). The Freire idea of liberating education means to develop learners' thinking and make them active participants in changing their social world (Saleh, 2013). Freire opposes the banking style of education, where there is no interaction between teacher and student, a lack of dialogue, and passive learning. Teaching can be supplemented with local examples using global methodologies (Mariam, Anwar, & Shoaib, 2022). Thus promoting innovation, creativity, and respect for diversity among diverse groups (Anwar, Shoaib, & Mustafa, 2022). According to Freire, teachers in a teacher-centered approach ignore some of the students, and eventually, they became oppressed. As the banking concept of education treats students as storage banks and filled with information in their memories so that they reproduce information when required (Shoaib & Ullah, 2021a). Students are convinced that teachers are always right and there is no chance of error in the teacher's perspective (Deke & Haimson 2006).

The role of a teacher is to build active students in the classroom and provide such setting that helps them to be active (Shoaib & Ullah, 2021b), where students should be appreciated for creativity (Shoaib, Rasool, & Anwar, 2021), encouraged to ask questions (Shoaib, Iqbal, & Tahira, 2021), actively participate in class discussion (Shoaib, Fatima, & Jamil, 2021), seek achievement and perfection with knowledge and experience (Shoaib, Ali, & Akbar, 2021), encouraging for

curricular and co-curricular activities (Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, & Shaukat, 2021), and promoting love and respect for all religion and beliefs (Mehta and Pandya, 2017).

Learning is an overall process of adjustment to the environment, it is not only a cognitive process but a cohesive performance of a person i.e. feeling, emotion (Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, Rasool, et al., 2021), behaving, perceiving and thinking (Shoaib, Ahmad, Ali, & Abdullah, 2021), creativity, decision-making and problem-solving approaches (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2021). The Learning process is predicted in four learning modes such as thinking, reflecting, experiencing and acting (Shoaib, 2021). Reflection and observation are the basis for learning experiences, and these experiences are refined in abstract concepts and new implications are drawn (Akyuz, Karli & Muderrisoglu, 2017. 16). Learning is a combination of reflection and experience (Anwar, Shoaib, & Zahra, 2021). As Dewey (1963) said that “People don’t learn from experience; they learn from reflecting on their experience” This theory explains the experiences and replication through skills like debriefing and reviewing that reassure the student of cognition and creativity. Moreover, debriefing should be a part of teaching practices in the classroom through reflection and conceptualization and it is a fundamental part of the learning cycle (Akyuz, Karli & Muderrisoglu, 2017).

This form of education leads students to the critical awareness that develops their knowledge by themselves. According to Freire (1970), Education strengthens the creativity of learners, exposing reality and the emergence and determination of critical intrusion of reality. This intrusion helps a student for a better understanding of the problematic issues of their lives (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). For this reason, the role of a teacher is to open the avenue of dialogue to learners in the classroom. This kind of education is based on the sharing of knowledge and problem posing techniques between teachers and learners. The stress is on the critical consciousness and creativity of learners to encourage active participation in the learning process (Nyirenda, 1996).

According to Freire, the education system is like banks, where educators deposit their knowledge into the empty minds of the learners. The learner's knowledge is like a donation from the learned people such as teachers. Therefore, the banking concept retains the difference between those who know (oppressors) and those who do not know (oppressed). This concept of education is not in favor of dialogue and discussion in educational institutions. Consequently, it fails to develop intellectual scholarship in students rather than puts down curiosity, critical thinking, creativity and analytical attitude in students and supports passive behavior (Nyirenda, 1996).

Mykrä (2015) introduces a Professional Competence Model, which explains meta-competencies as high-level competencies, such as communication, creativity, problem solving, learning, self-development, mental agility, and analysis, adoption of changes, forecasting learning, and reflection. Sharing ideas and co-creation with other professionals can be seen as a part of professional competence (Ahmad, Shoaib, & Shaukat, 2021). Sometimes sharing is challenging for teachers because the traditional culture of schools is highly individual enhancing learner motivation and engagement, with special needs and drop out of education (Ahmad, Ahmad, Shoaib, & Shaukat, 2021).

The report emphasizes counter-violent extremism by educating on diversity and global citizenship, participatory decision-making, the rule of law, and human rights. In recent years, the entire world has faced violent extremism that has exterminated many innocent people (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2020). These violent extremisms have social, political, ethnic, racial and religious bases that resist a tolerant and inclusive society (Anderlini, Cowick, & Holmes, 2017). Moreover, violent extremism on the one hand thwarts growth and development while on the other hand, it

hampers creativity and critical thinking in the name of counter-extremism (Shoaib & Shah, 2012; Shoaib & Ullah, 2019). Contrariwise, problem-posing and inclusive education foster the level of tolerance and respect for diversity (Shoaib, Shaukat, Khan, & Saeed, 2013). According to the UNDP (2016) socio-cultural understanding, tolerance and respect and accept diversity is included in 2030 sustainable development goals.

2. Material and Methods

The study was conducted at the University of Peshawar, the oldest university in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study is explanatory, which explains the tolerance of students and teaching practices at the university level. Bachelor level students were the respondents for the study. Qualitative data were collected to establish the relationship between two variables i.e., creativity and pedagogy. Qualitative data was collected through ten (10) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) from students of different academic departments of the university. The data was analyzed through the interpretive paradigm of research. Codification of FGDs is in the form of R012 where R stands for Respondent, the first two digits are for the FGD and the last digit shows the respondent number in the group discussion as (R012) illustrates that 01 is the first group discussion and 2 is the second respondent in the first discussion. The same codes are repeated for all themes/questions in the focus group discussion. Therefore, every question has the same code with a different thematic discussion.

3. The Results

3.1. Creativity and Critical/Rational Thinking:

Creativity and critical thinking are the most valuable features and essential responsibilities of universities and their teachers. For creativity, there should be an understanding of the concept and sense behind the things, the over line (content analysis) and underline (discourse analysis) meanings of the concepts, what is the real sense of the concept, understanding develops thinking ability in students, and this thinking ability spawn critical and analytical thinking of the students over the concepts. Creativity is the last part of this learning process, where students create new things, make new theories, establish new laws, or at least explain old things in new ways. Every student who is passing out from university should have something new, which shows that he/she did not waste his/her time and energy at the university. Students have their own definitions and explanations of the concepts they read in the classroom, and which are written in the old books. The paradigm shift from teacher-centered education to learner-centered is the idea of Freire, where the student is the center of the learning process. Student centered approach develops critical thinking in teachers as well as in students (Tijani, 2012). It also helps with knowledge production and reflective learning (Isah & Omori, 2018).

No uniform dress and textbooks: In the academic career, schools and colleges have a uniform dress and uniform reading in the form of textbooks. However, at the university level, such restrictions on dress and reading are left over. At university, one can wear anything thing with certain cultural and moral limitations and can read the topic and concepts from anywhere, which one thinks is easy for one's understand. This freedom from the uniform dress and textbooks is for the reason that at university level they are not bound and confined to already established patterns of behaviors and actions.

Teachers treat us like school and college kids. They give us a book and say "This is your textbook read it, and memorize it for the paper." I think this kind of teaching never creates critical thinking and creativity in students. (R-17)

The statement shows that students at the university level are much more mature and understand the changing and challenging situation which is why they need no uniform dress and textbook.

Every book is their textbook if recommended or even not recommended by the teacher. The traditional system of education encourages students to memorize textbooks and concentrate on examinations where they repeat the information. In general, the education system in developing countries is passive and dominating in nature, students' undue submission to teachers, racial and ethnic discrimination, lack of critical consciousness and compliance with oppression affect students' academic performance (Mehta and Pandya, 2017).

Free from physical restriction: Creativity and critical thinking are possible when one is physically free from all things. At schools and colleges, most setting arrangements, modes of teaching and classroom are fixed, while, at the university level setting arrangement is not fixed, one can set it anywhere in the classroom. Besides this, universities have several teaching practicums such as seminars, workshops, conferences, exhibitions etc. which make the student free from the strict classroom environment of learning to the open space understanding. This freedom from physical restriction helps the students to think critically and analytically on the issues and concept that leads to creativity. It also includes freedom from uniform dresses and readings.

All these are linked with each other and we have no time to think over it. We are pressured to have that much time and have to complete our entire task in this allotted period. At this time, we have to complete our course outlines, do presentations and assignments. A Large number of students in our class disturbs the teacher, student and the entire learning process. (R-16)

As shown in the statement the number of students in a classroom also affects the learning process. Research shows that students learn more in a physically and emotionally safe environment that includes safety from social exclusion, harassment and stereotype threats. Teachers should emphasize creating positive relationships, teach social and emotional skills, explicitly focus on understanding and appreciating differences, meaningful conflict resolution and challenge bias and exclusion (Scharf, 2016).

3.2.Mental Freedom:

Physical freedom is for the mental freedom of students. Mental freedom makes the students free from trivial fear of teachers and the learning environment. Students cannot actively participate in discussion and debate and even cannot learn and understand in a mentally restricted learning environment. The basic purpose of university teaching is to make students mentally and physically free for critical and rational thinking and creativity. Human beings are free to express their thoughts with reason and logic.

Course outline or syllabus is handed over to students as well as to teachers. We know that the teacher will teach us these topics without any amendments to the already prepared syllabus irrespective of our understanding. The same is replicated in the paper. In this situation, we are not mentally free to think and think critically as we always think about syllabus and exams. (R-34)

Reflexivity and critical thinking help the learners to develop their own thoughts, perceptions and reactions about the realities, that is, conflict and peace. Critical thinking assures progressive and reflective education, "This way of thinking still requires us to separate ourselves from reality and think about situations objectively, that is, *thinking about reality*" (Rothman, 2014).

3.3.Free and Open Environment:

Discussion and debate are possible only in a free and open learning environment. Where teachers and students have equal positions and no one is superior or inferior. Everyone in the classroom is considered equal as for as learning is concerned and is considered a potential teacher/learner in the

classroom. If students feel free then they can share, their inside thought and personal experiences with teachers and class fellows.

Critical thinking and creativity are possible when one fully understands the situation and has conceptual clarity in an open environment. We are very weak in experiments and practical work which is a hindrance to creativity. Teachers teach us just theories, having no connection with practical life. I think females feel more restricted than males while participating in an activity. (R-33)

Learner centered learning gives a free hand to students for active participation in the learning process. This approach empowers the students in deciding what how and when to learn. Besides this, the main objective of this approach is to support the learner in having his or her own learning experiences. The idea of this approach is taken from the social constructivist philosophy of teaching (Ahmed, 2013).

3.4.Out of the Box Thinking:

In the average class there are thirty students which means, thirty minds, they are always in the process of thinking. Discussion and debate allow students to think out of the box using those thirsty minds. They find out new avenues for problems they faced in daily life. Thinking ability increases with critical and analytical thinking. Through discussion in the classroom in the presence of the teacher, numerous explanations for a concept can be explored.

I think, for creativity and critical thinking one must know, and we have no such knowledge that prompts thinking. Even I do not think that teachers have enough knowledge to do new things and compel us for out of box thinking. (R36)

Critical pedagogy promotes reflective, critical and creative thinking among students that contributes to liberating education from traditional and passive learning. For real democracy and social change in educational institutes creates students with new and innovative ideas, critical thinkers and active questioners (Mehta and Pandya, 2017).

Pro-active: Critical thinking and creativity activate the students for pro-active behavior. Students are always ready for unexpected arguments from the other side; they are mentally prepared for new and different conditions. They can read other minds before they talk, and prepare themselves for counter-argument. In the discussion and debate, those students are successful and proactive in their actions and thoughts. The continued sessions of debates and discussion in the classroom develop the pro-activeness of the students.

Teachers do not stir students into creativity and critical thinking in class. Most of the students learn all things on their own. Unfortunately, the university's teacher is not playing an active part in creating a dynamic personality of a student. As teachers just deliver their lectures and nothing else, they do not work on the creativity and critical thinking of the students. (R-25)

Students in the group discussion were wretched regarding creativity and critical thinking, however, in the modern approach of education teacher discloses reality and asks a student to debate and discussion on the new realities. According to Freire (1970) reality is not static it is dynamic and changes with the change of time and the process of transformation.

Innovation: Knowledge of books and teachers is explored from continue reading and teaching. Knowledge of books is fixed and somehow dead. However, we are living in a real and alive environment where living knowledge is needed for understanding and life. When knowledge of books and the knowledge of teachers is challenged by students in the classroom, it is called critical analytical thinking. This dialogue is for the improvement of knowledge and puts some kind of innovation in it. It discusses the latest and living examples of the concepts, which were never

thought and discussed before, as this group of discussion and situation is different from others. Creativity and critical thinking bring innovative ideas to the subject. University-level teaching and studying are for bringing innovation in the already established knowledge. This is the place of innovation and research as the world is confronted with new things and problems every day, so this is the responsibility of higher education institutes to design the solution for new problems like the latest version of COVID-19.

Diverse books and researches give us new ways of thinking and then creativity, however, here in our class only notes and handouts are given. Students are asked to learn it by heart or understand it for the exam purpose only. Innovative ideas are not inculcated in the mind of students. Teachers give us one aspect of the topic and show one side of the picture. We have no option of critical thinking and critique on the topic. If we write something different from other sources, the teachers reject them. There is no room for creativity and innovation. (R-26)

The data shows that teachers due to any reason do not go for innovation and creativity as Freire called such a situation as the banking concept of education, where there is no interaction between teacher and student, lack of dialogue and passive learning. The teaching can be supplemented with local examples by using global methodologies. This promotes innovation, creativity and respect for diversity among diverse groups (Isah & Omori, 2018).

3.5. Critique of the Sensitive Issue:

One of the most important aspects of critical thinking and creativity is a critique of the sensitive issue. In class and particularly in the university classroom everything can be discussed, criticized and analyzed. Students at the university level are scholars and they should be encouraged to critically evaluate the issues. Creativity is then possible when the students are free to discuss sensitive issues as well. They can critically evaluate, the old tested theory and theorists, practical application of the religion, narratives of the state etc. It means there is no sacred cow for the students, which is out of critical thinking and evaluation in the classroom.

Critical thinking and creativity start when students themselves think about different and sensitive issues and problems, but good teachers refine them. In our class, most of the teachers try to avoid critical and sensitive issues of the country related to religion and the armed forces. (R-82)

As mentioned above that in the class teachers are not in favor of innovation and critical thinking and do not try to discuss and comment on sensitive issues like religion and state secret affairs. Although violent extremism includes measures to protect the safety of individuals and their property, the prevention of violent extremism needs to unfold the issues related to the secret services of the country. Development and peace building can be possible when everyone is answerable and accountable to the public (UNDP, 2016).

Tolerance: Critical thinking brings tolerance among students. Critical thinkers critically evaluate other perspectives with critical and analytical tools. This evaluation brings tolerance between both parties. For critical thinkers, things are not fixed and finally, everything is subject to change. There is an aspect that is different from others, in everyone's thought and discussion. Therefore, no one is useless, as one has a unique position. Tolerance prevails when one thinks that the other thoughts and behavior may also be correct. Critical thinking starts with the assumption that everyone has his/her idea and can be right in his/her perspective. It may be possible that one has a different perspective from the others, but it does not mean that the other is wrong. In critical thinking, creativity is possible where tolerance is there, and tolerance is possible where there is creativity and vice versa. Creative people accept other different and opposing views with open hearts, as they

do not follow the old and patterned behavior very rigidly. Therefore, critical, rational thinking and creativity are very essential for tolerance in students, as they would be open to critique and change.

Philosophy course in International Relations degree opens new avenues of critical thinking, helps us in changing our opinion, and results in out of the box thinking.

When the minds of students and teachers are open, then they can analyze and discuss the issue with more clarity, it also helps in creativity, tolerance and acceptance of other opposing opinions. I think some ideas of teachers and course subjects are helpful for critical thinking and creativity. (R-81)

Students develop critical thinking and consciousness in critical pedagogy that helps to solve their problematic issues, and improve their living conditions and at large create a more tolerant and equitable and just society. Critical pedagogy challenges all forms of exploitation, oppression and domination with the main objective to free the oppressed and relegated people (Freire, 1970; Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011).

3.6.Social Change:

The only permanent thing in the world is change, and everything is subjected to change, however, the pace of change is different in different circumstances. As Iqbal says, “*Taghur ko hai sabat*” (*the only permanent thing is change*). In this perspective, critical thinking and creativity are positive ways for bringing social change in society through trained students. In the classroom, students are being trained in critical thinking, creativity and tolerance. Social change brings development and constructive changes when most of the stakeholders agree upon the means and goals of the project. This agreement is only possible when everyone tolerates each other and has a creative idea. Creativity and critical thinking pave the way to social change in society.

Critical thinking and creativity are developing day by day, before, we just memorized and wrote in the paper. Now if the teacher teaches and we do not understand even then we can ask questions from the teachers. Before the fifth semester, most of the subjects were university requirements and now all the subjects are statistics related, so now we are developing our own conceptual clarity on the subject, which helps us in developing critical thinking and creativity. Now we can compare one subject theory with other statistics-related subjects. (R-47).

The core idea of learning lies in action followed by reflection and is expressed through reactions. Learning is a continuous process that enhances the ability and capability of learners to change their world. Freire thought that an authoritarian kind of education like the banking model does not produce critical minds that change and challenge the oppressor’s world. This form of education represses the freedom and emancipation of the learners. So in this way, this process as Freire called learning or literacy used by political institutions for people-power. Reflection and dialogue are some of the determinants for change that leads towards change political and social change (Akyuz, Karli & Muderrisoglu, 2017).

4. Conclusion

University teachers do not encourage students to creativity and critical and analytical thinking on the issues related to the course and general themes. Most teachers follow specific books and reading material for a long time and consider them as textbooks and students should follow that book only. The overall classroom environment is not supportive of critical thinking and creativity. Students are not mentally free in the classroom; teachers always try to mentally engage the students in different activities. Students are not free and open to giving an opinion on any issue, they think thousands of times before stepping into a discussion or asking questions. Students are intentionally kept in a fearful and tense situation that they may not dare to ask a question or talk with the teacher

openly. Most of the students do not think out of the box and they do not go for innovation. Teachers do not enable the students to think out of the box and to be proactive in their lives. They are not ready for new situations and cannot handle peculiar circumstances. Students do not challenge teachers' knowledge and by the same token teachers do not allow students to challenge them. Students' tolerance level decreases at university as there is no creativity and critical thinking. The social structure of the society can be changed through critical thinking which is not supported by the teacher.

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