Challenges in Pedagogical Partnership Focused on an Urdu Language Course

Aneeqa Khalid
Lahore University of Management Sciences

CHALLENGES IN PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP FOCUSED ON AN URDU LANGUAGE COURSE

Aneeqa Khalid, Research Assistant, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan

Introduction

Pedagogical partnership is a reciprocal approach to teaching and learning to improve the quality of education. Partnership not only allows students to take some responsibility for teaching but also provides an opportunity to faculty to re-envisage themselves as learners. The concept has gained significant attention in recent years due to its potential to enhance teaching and learning (Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten, 2014). Through collaboration between a faculty partner and a student partner, the partnership aims to enhance the teaching and learning process and outcomes.

As a student, I have experienced the hierarchy in the education system of Pakistan; therefore, my encounter with the novel concept of pedagogical partnerships was challenging. In this reflective essay, I will share the challenges I faced as a student partner working with an Urdu language instructor in redesigning a language course and how I tried to overcome those challenges for collaborative learning.

Partnership Details

In Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), LUMS Learning Institute (LLI) was set up recently to support learning excellence through student, faculty, and departmental engagement. Every semester (Fall, Spring, Summer), LLI hosts various pedagogical partnerships in which students act as collaborators and active contributors with the goal to support learning, teaching, and research excellence. I completed my minor degree in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, as Urdu language holds significance for me. Due to my interest and academic knowledge, I enthusiastically opted for pedagogical partnership in revamping a course in Urdu titled "The Art of Reading and Writing" offered at LUMS. The course focuses on introducing the basic knowledge of reading and writing in Urdu language to the students who have no prior knowledge or face difficulty in reading and writing Urdu. Initially, interviews were conducted to evaluate the level of students' understanding about the language before enrolment in the course. Later, for administrative reasons, the course was open for enrollment to all the undergraduate students of any year.

My partnership focused on revamping the course to a level where it responds to the needs of both basic- and advanced-level students. My role in the partnership was to analyze the content already taught to the students and to collect data to be added or replaced by the content available. Since I did Intermediate (Higher Secondary Level) in which I had Urdu as a compulsory subject, I was familiar with poetry, idioms, and dialogues in Urdu in detail. Moreover, my minor degree enabled me to analyze extensively prose and essays of various writers, well-known for playing an essential role in the development of Urdu language. Based on my prior knowledge and familiarity with the language, I consulted all the resources I thought should be taught to the bachelor's level students and would increase the difficulty level. Moreover, I proposed the stories

that I found had developed my likeness for Urdu language. For analysis of the content, I designed a questionnaire, which was emailed to all the students who had taken the course with the instructor since 2019. Based on their opinion about the difficulty level of the stories and the stories they thought should be in the course, the changes were made accordingly. One of the difficulties faced during the process was reaching out to the students for their opinion about the course content, so we were able to get 12 responses only. Another challenge I faced was presenting the material to the faculty partner because of the power dynamics.

Challenges

Initially, it was difficult for me to comprehend the concept of pedagogical partnership. In our culture, a teacher is given the utmost respect and hence is seemingly never wrong. So, challenging the pedagogy of the instructor was against my notions and beliefs, which were derived culturally. I regularly attended the mid-point meeting with LLI team where all the student partners came together to share their issues and challenges. It was interesting for me to note that the other student partners were facing the same issues and while forming an ingroup, we were able to discuss various ways in which the status quo of the faulty partner should be challenged. So, connecting with the student partners facing the same issues helped me embrace the concept. The key concepts discussed in the meeting with LLI were trusting (اعتماد) your student partner, consulting your partner for suggestions (باہمی مشاورت), and allowing various perspectives (نقطہ نظر). Since my first language is Urdu and L2 is English, I looked for dictionary meanings of English words and then I consulted لغت (Urdu Dictionary) for equivalence of the words used to better understand the concept.

Moreover, it was equally difficult for me to communicate the concept of partnership to my faculty partner, who has not much knowledge of the English Language. Together we broke down key terms like collaboration, safe space, etc., and tried explaining them in Urdu language in order to better understand what exactly we were looking forward to in our partnership. We came up with words like موازنہ, which means the analysis of the content. Since my faculty partner was collecting data, we would both would go through the material and then set up a meeting to discuss the relevance of the content shared. We found رائے captures the meaning of listening to another person's opinion and suggestion. The exercise of finding words allowed us to create a welcoming environment where the faculty partner would trust my work and would listen to a student's opinions for improvement in his course. My faculty partner was also happy to learn terms in English to better understand the language.

Therefore, understanding what pedagogical partnership is and taking the instructor on board with this same vision, while challenging my personal beliefs, was difficult. To overcome these barriers, we reached a conclusion of translating and equating certain words like trust into اعتماد, which means believing in the ability of student partner, *point of view and suggestion into* رائے which means that opening up to various perspectives and considering other's suggestions and perspectives into نقطہ نظر, meaning how everyone regards thing differently. Urdu has complicated morphology and has been influenced by other languages including Turkish, Arabic, English, Persian etc. (Bashir, Javed, Arshad, Gadekallu, Shahzad & Beg, 2022), so finding a

single word to explain and translate English words was challenge that we overcame through the faculty partner's command over language.

Pedagogical partnership demands creating a shared space for both the faculty partner and the student partner where the former must let go some of his/her power in terms of allowing the student partner to share his/her experience in the pedagogy. On the other hand, the student partner faces difficulty in voicing his/her thoughts and concerns in front of the teacher who is always considered as supreme after God and the parents. For allowing myself to 'suggest' something to the faculty partner, I used repertoires I gained through my MPhil degree in Education Leadership and Management to build my stance based on research and evidence. Using research and my degree knowledge, I tried feeling somewhat on equal ground with my faculty partner whose books were taught in PhD curriculum at UK.

Another major challenge I faced was the dearth of research in teaching methods for Urdu language. Because Urdu is a low-resourced language (Shafi, Nawab & Rayson, 2023), instead of adding various components required to teach a language, we focused on scaling up the difficulty level of already included material. For instance, poetry of contemporary poets (Mir Taqi Mir, Mirza Ghalib and Allama Iqbal) was part of the course. To make the course responsive to the needs of both basic to advanced level students, the poetry of modern poets was added, including Majeed Amjad, Nasir Qazmi etc. This transformation was possible due to research and collaboration from both partners involved. I did a literature review about what a student partner role is in pedagogical partnership. In initial meetings, I explained to my faculty partner my expectations based on the literature, which included creating an environment for collaboration as perspectives of students are an integral part of educational practice (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

What I found unique about my partnership was that all the terms used to describe what pedagogical partnership is during our meeting with LUMS LLI officials and with other partners were in English. The opportunity to work with a language professor allowed us to come up with a set of words in Urdu language, including اعتماد، رائے، نقطہ نظر, which helped us create an ingroup in understanding the concept. Moreover, my faculty partner's command over the language and my developing interest for the language helped us work in developing our own vocabulary to understand the concept. This vocabulary includes literal translation and contextualized meanings of English words. For instance, there is no equivalence for 'safe space' in Urdu. However, to understand the concept, the whole context was required, which included allowing me as a student partner to share my opinions about the course and allowing me to share the dissenting views about the content without causing any offense. Such an approach of understanding and contextualizing the novel concept of pedagogical partnership can be incorporated for better understanding it in specific language context.

Conclusion

Pedagogical partnership is a valuable approach that allows both faculty partner and student partner to learn and work in collaboration for improved learning. However, the approach can be challenging in the culture where the teacher is highly regarded and challenging their pedagogy demands challenging student partner norms. As a student partner, I faced similar challenges, but through collaboration, practicing inclusivity, and drawing on educational knowledge, I was able to overcome the challenges I faced during partnership. The uniqueness of the partnership I had was that I, along with my faculty partner, developed pedagogical partnership vocabulary in Urdu language for a better understanding of the concept. Ultimately, through collective efforts, we challenged the conventional methods of teaching language courses and redesigned a course to cater to diverse group of the students ranging from beginners to advanced level learners of Urdu language.

References

Bashir, M. F., Javed, A. R., Arshad, M. U., Gadekallu, T. R., Shahzad, W., & Beg, M. O. (2022). Context aware emotion detection from low resource Urdu language using deep neural network. *Transactions on Asian and Low-Resource Language Information Processing*.

Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: A guide for faculty*. Jossey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, *32*(3), 465-491.

Shafi, J., Nawab, R. M. A., & Rayson, P. (2023). Semantic Tagging for the Urdu Language: Annotated Corpus and Multi-Target Classification Methods. *ACM Transactions on Asian and Low-Resource Language Information Processing*.