



**EXPLORING CORE APTITUDE COMPETENCIES FOR PROSPECTIVE
SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN PUNJAB: A QUALITATIVE FOCUS
GROUP STUDY**

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Abstract

It was a qualitative focus group study which aimed to investigate the main aptitude skills needed for prospective secondary school teachers in Punjab. The study was done as the qualitative part of a larger mixed methods study on the development and validation of an Aptitude Test for Prospective Teachers. It was a purposive sample of ten participants comprising teacher educators, secondary school heads, experienced secondary school teachers, assessment and test-development experts, a curriculum specialist and an educational technology expert. A semi-structured focus group discussion was used to collect data, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The results identified four key competence themes: Pedagogical knowledge/instructional practices, Emotional intelligence/Personal qualities, Ethical awareness/Professionalism, and Technological proficiency. Participants noted that teacher aptitude must not be restricted to just academic performance and knowledge alone, it should also encompass the skills of planning lessons, classroom management, effective communication, evaluation, patience, empathy, acting ethically, and being responsible about the use of technology in teaching and assessment. The study found that the aptitude of prospective secondary school teachers is a multidimensional aptitude and therefore a balanced assessment system is required. The results serve as a qualitative basis for creating test items as well as a contextual competency matrix of aptitude for future secondary school teachers in Punjab.

Keywords: Teacher aptitude, prospective teachers pedagogical knowledge, emotional intelligence, professional ethics, technological proficiency, Punjab

Introduction

Teacher quality is one of the most critical determinants of educational effectiveness because teachers directly influence students' learning experiences, classroom participation, academic achievement, and social development. The role of the teacher in secondary education is more complicated as the students are expected to gain knowledge of the subject, critical thinking, emotional maturity, ethical awareness, and preparations for further education or work. As such, selection and preparation of prospective teachers should not be based solely on academic qualifications. A prospective teacher needs to have pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical judgment, emotional maturity, professional ethics, communication competence, and technological competence. At the international level, teacher education has become more focused on professional standards and competency-based preparation to prepare future teachers for the various needs of learners (CAEP, 2022; OECD, 2017).

Teacher aptitude is the potential, readiness, and suitability of a person to enter the teaching profession and to perform effectively. Teacher aptitude has two components – cognitive and non-cognitive. It has to do with learners' learning, the planning of meaningful learning, managing classroom interaction, assessing learning, responding to the differences among



learners, and being responsible professionally. The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing state that the test must be clearly tied to the construct it measures and provide evidence that the test content is relevant to the intended interpretation and use of the test (American Educational Research Association [AERA] et al., 2014). From this point of view, the teacher education "aptitude" test for prospective teachers should be based on the domains that are required in the classrooms, and not mere facts.

The term competence of the teacher has been generally considered as a multidimensional construct. OECD (2017) conceptualizes general pedagogical knowledge as a key component of teacher professionalism, especially in terms of instruction and processes of learning and assessment. Likewise, current teacher preparation standards focus on content area, pedagogy, field experience, professional behaviors, equity, and data/evidence to enhance teaching effectiveness (CAEP, 2022). The teaching perspectives reflect that a high-quality teacher requires the integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes and professional dispositions. This blending is more relevant for prospective secondary school teachers who will be tasked to educate adolescent learners who need to be supported academically, emotionally, ethically and to relate with technology in a meaningful way.

The demand for competency based teacher training in Pakistan is closely linked with the national educational priorities. National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan have been designed to outline the knowledge, dispositions and performance expected of teachers. The Standards are related to subject matter, human growth and development, instructional planning and strategies, assessment, learning environment, effective communication, collaboration, professional development, code of conduct and use of information and communication technologies (ICT) (Ministry of Education, 2009). Research shows the implementation of these professional standards with regard to the integration in teacher education programs has been uneven and there are challenges in its implementation (Shaukat& Chowdhury, 2020). The need is for tools to measure whether prospective teachers have the necessary competencies on the job, before they actually begin teaching. This means there is a need for tools that will measure whether prospective teachers have the necessary competencies on the job before they enter the profession.

In the province of Punjab, there are a lot of potential teachers enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (B. ED) and Associate Degree in Education (ADE) courses, due to being the most populous province of Pakistan. The future teaching personnel of secondary schools are these candidates. Academic credentials and course completion, however, can be a significant factor in admission to teacher education programs and movement within the program. These criteria may not reflect the whole of the range of professional attributes that are needed for good teaching. A candidate can be a high-achieving student but might not be able to make decisions in the classroom, be empathetic, be sensitive to ethical issues with technology, communicate well, or be ready to use digital tools to enhance instruction. Hence, a competency framework grounded in empirical evidence and culturally relevant is needed to develop an aptitude test for prospective teachers in Punjab.

With the fast-changing nature of education, technological skill has become more significant. Teaching and assessment are now supported by digital tools, online resources, multimedia and learning management systems. UNESCO's ICT Competency Framework for teachers points to teacher's digital competencies necessary for curriculum delivery, pedagogy, assessment, school



organization and teacher professional learning (UNESCO, 2018). Teacher digital competence is also identified as a key competency of teachers in today's context of teaching (OECD, 2023). Teachers should be technologically competent, at least to the level of basic technology, to facilitate instructional effectiveness and help them adjust with the changing educational context in Pakistan where educational institutions have varying levels of technological access and readiness.

Pedagogical skill along with pedagogical technological skill are not the only attributes of teacher aptitude; there is also Emotional intelligence and ethical professionalism. Teaching is a relational job and teachers constantly have to contend with students' feelings, conflicts in the classroom, differences between students, parents' expectations, institutional requirements, and professional obligations. EI helps the teacher to show patience, empathy, self-control, motivation and resilience in classroom situations. Fairness, respect, confidentiality, responsibility and commitment to the well-being of students are all informed by an awareness of ethics. These attributes are not optional, they have a direct impact on classroom climate, learner trust and professional credibility. Thus, in any aptitude test for prospective teachers, one should also take into account personal, emotional, and ethical aspects besides pedagogical and technological ones.

The focus group approach is a suitable qualitative method for examining these competencies, as it enables experts and stakeholders to collaboratively discuss, compare, challenge, and develop ideas. When a researcher is interested in knowing how a phenomenon is perceived, how it is expected to be interpreted by professionals, and what meanings are placed on it in the context, focus groups can be useful (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Qualitative inquiry can enhance content relevance in test development by making sure that the constructs developed are based on the experiences and judgments of the individuals who know the field. Thematic analysis is a systematic method that allows for the identification, organization, and interpretation of patterns in qualitative data and maintains transparency and trustworthiness (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

Based on this, the present study aims at identifying the underlying aptitude skills that are considered necessary for prospective teachers in secondary school in Punjab by using qualitative focus group study. The study serves as the qualitative component of a larger study that involved a mixed-methods approach to create and validate an Aptitude Test for Prospective Teachers. The study establishes a foundation for item development and future psychometric validation by identifying the major competency domains that were identified by the stakeholder discussion. The result is anticipated to be useful for teacher education, teacher testing for admission, teacher preparation, and assessment of competency in Punjab.

Problem Statement

The teacher education programs in Punjab produce a significant number of prospective secondary school teachers, but there is little evidence that can be inferred from the context to assess the core aptitude competencies that should be evaluated prior to entering the teaching profession. Current teacher selection and preparation processes tend to focus on the qualifications and knowledge of the subject matter, and not much on pedagogical judgment, emotional maturity, ethical awareness, professional dispositions, and technological readiness. The lack of a local based competency framework makes it challenging to develop a valid competency aptitude test for prospective teachers since teaching demands instructional,



personal, ethical and digital competency. Therefore this study aims to find out expert and stakeholders views through Focus Group Discussion of the core competencies of aptitude being required of the prospective teachers in secondary schools in Punjab.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the core aptitude competencies required for prospective secondary school teachers in Punjab.
2. To identify pedagogical knowledge and instructional practices considered essential for effective teaching as perceived by focus group participants.
3. To examine emotional intelligence and personal qualities required for prospective secondary school teachers.
4. To explore ethical awareness and professional dispositions expected from prospective teachers in the teaching profession.
5. To investigate technological proficiency as a key competency for modern teaching practices in secondary education.
6. To develop a qualitative competency framework that informs the construction of an aptitude test for prospective secondary school teachers in Punjab.

Research Question

- What core aptitude competencies are considered essential for prospective secondary school teachers in Punjab?

Literature Review

Teacher Aptitude and Competency-Based Teacher Preparation

Teacher aptitude is a multidimensional concept which means that the aptitude of any prospective teacher to be ready, suitable and competent to perform in the teaching profession. It is wider than academic performance as it involves both knowledge, skills, values, professional judgement and personal dispositions for teachers to integrate into their teaching. Subject knowledge can be good but the candidates may not have the skills to manage classroom situations, communicate with learners, assess learning or respond ethically to professional challenges. So, teacher aptitude can be considered as a set of pedagogical, emotional, ethical, interpersonal, and technological skills which can be utilized to conduct effective teaching practice.

Teacher knowledge literature has solid bases for the understanding of the need for a more comprehensive assessment of prospective teachers' aptitude than just factual knowledge. In Shulman's (1987) view, teaching demands various types of professional knowledge such as subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of learners, educational contexts, and educational purposes. This perspective, which made the transition from teaching as content delivery to teaching as professional reasoning, transformation, and reflection, took the conversation in a different direction. In this perspective, effective teachers are expected to not only know what they teach but how to make content meaningful and understandable to their students and developmentally appropriate.

The emphasis on competency-based teacher preparation has been highlighted in international and national policy documents, too. According to OECD's report on teachers' pedagogical knowledge, teachers' pedagogical knowledge is critical in three knowledge areas: assessment, instructional processes and learning processes (Sonmark et al., 2017). Likewise, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation highlights the importance of content and



pedagogical knowledge and clinical practice, and learner development, professional responsibility, equity, and evidence-based decision-making as expectations for educator preparation programs (CAEP, 2022). These frameworks illustrate that teacher preparation programs should not just be about certifying completion, but also preparing teacher candidates for complex classroom roles.

The National Professional Standards for Teachers is an important policy framework in Pakistan for defining teacher competencies. These standards cover the following areas: subject matter knowledge, human growth and development, instructional planning and strategies, assessment, learning environment, effective communication and collaboration, continuous professional development, professional conduct, and information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Ministry of Education, 2009). These areas clearly illustrate that the concept of teacher quality is being publicly defined in Pakistan based on three elements knowledge, skill, and professional dispositions. But there is a need to develop assessment instruments that are valid and context specific for prospective teachers, especially in the context of teacher education system in Punjab which churns out a large number of future secondary school teachers.

Core Aptitude Domains for Prospective Teachers

Literature on teacher competency indicates that prospective teachers need to have several interrelated aptitude domains. The first is the pedagogical knowledge and instructional practice. Pedagogical knowledge involves learning about the learning process, planning instruction, classroom management, and evaluation to enhance student learning. Shulman's (1987) pedagogical reasoning is fundamental since it describes teachers' sense-making, adjusting, modelling, assessing, and considering of students' learning and teaching. In the same way, OECD studies reveal that teacher knowledge has three elements: instructional processes, learning processes and assessment (Sonmark et al., 2017). This domain is highly important for prospective secondary school teachers as secondary school classrooms demand clarity of subject, involvement with learners, management of the classroom, and being able to respond to various learning needs.

Emotional intelligence and personal qualities is the second significant domain. Teaching is a relational job and the effectiveness of the classroom is dependent on how well the teacher can manage emotions, be patient, empathetic, maintain positive relationships and respond in a positive way to student behaviour. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) have presented the prosocial classroom model that is related to teacher's social/emotional competence, supportive teacher-student relationship, effective classroom management, and healthy classroom climate. This model is applicable for teaching professionals as emotional self-regulation and empathy are not secondary qualities but it affects how a teacher communicates, disciplines, motivates, and supports the learners. When it comes to teachers' skills, emotional intelligence can mean self-aware, patient, confident, resilient, adaptable, motivated, and able to manage classroom stress.

Ethical awareness and professionalism is the third domain. Teachers are in a position of trust and their decisions impact on the academic, social and emotional growth of students. Professional ethics encompass fairness, honesty, respect, confidentiality, punctuality, responsibility, impartiality and commitment to the welfare of students. In the Pakistan NPST, professional conduct is a key standard and ethical behavior is deemed as an important aspect of teacher competence, not just an optional aspect of personal behavior (Ministry of Education,



2009). For teachers in training, ethical awareness is particularly relevant in preparing for their role in institutions where they will be required to make ethical decisions, to be sensitive to pupils' differences, to avoid discrimination, to maintain professional boundaries and to act within the school rules and regulations.

The fourth domain is technological proficiency. Digital tools are becoming more and more integrated into planning, instruction, evaluation, communication and professional development. According to UNESCO's ICT Competency Framework for Teachers, digital competence of teachers should enable them to support curriculum and assessment, pedagogy, digital skills, organization and administration, and professional learning (UNESCO, 2018). Just as much, with the introduction of technology into the classroom, teachers are required to use technology to teach their students, in their lessons, with multimedia materials, to communicate with students online, to use learning platforms and to use data to assess students. The relevance of technological proficiency is significant in Punjab as there are differences between schools and teacher education institutions with respect to digital access and readiness. There is a need therefore for prospective teachers to have the essential ICT competence, the responsible use of ICT and the capacity to employ ICT for meaningful rather than superficial teaching.

Qualitative Inquiry and Competency Framework Development

A construct framework needs to be put in place prior to item writing, scoring, and statistical validation in developing an aptitude test. According to the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, the validity is measured by the evidence and theory that support the interpretation and use of test scores (AERA et al., 2014). Therefore, construct definition, content relevance, and evidence of content coverage of the test domains should be carefully considered in the development of tests. The first task in an aptitude test of prospective teachers is to determine what competencies to measure, as well as the meaning of these competencies in the local educational situation.

Qualitative inquiry is helpful at this point since it can help the researcher understand meaning, professional expectations and contextual understandings prior to the finalization of test constructs. This is helpful in the process of developing an aptitude test as the framework is not solely derived from literature but affects the views of the people who know the realities of school and the teacher education system.

Thematic analysis is a systematic approach to the task of organizing focus group data into meaningful patterns. Thematic analysis is a flexible method designed to identify, analyze, and report on themes within qualitative data as described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Theoretical Framework

The theory of Teacher Knowledge (Shulman 1986) was the guiding theory of this study, and more specifically, the concept of pedagogical content knowledge was used. However, Shulman (1987) contended that effective teachers need to know more than just the content, they need to have a "specialized form of professional understanding" to be able to apply content to meaningful learning activities for students. His theory distinguishes a number of critical knowledge bases that may be considered as the bases for teaching, such as content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational purposes.



The present study was relevant to this theory because of the need to pay attention to the overall abilities that are required for effective teaching if one is to develop an aptitude framework for prospective secondary school teachers. The concept of pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical practice is directly related to Shulman's idea that the teacher needs to know how to design lessons, present concepts, decide on pedagogical strategies, facilitate learning, and evaluate students' learning. Again, understanding of learners and educational contexts enables the incorporation of emotional intelligence and personal qualities, as the potential teacher needs to grasp students' needs, behaviour in the classroom, motivation and individual differences. The educational purpose and professional responsibility emphasized by Shulman are also related to ethical awareness and professionalism; teaching requires moral judgment, fairness, respect, and commitment to learner development. Technological proficiency may be considered a 21st-century version of pedagogical knowledge because today's educators are expected to employ digital tools to enhance teaching, learning, assessment, and student interaction.

Hence, Shulman's theory of teacher knowledge is appropriate as the theoretical framework for this qualitative focus group study. It provides a better understanding of what is meant by teacher aptitude being a multidimensional construct comprising pedagogical, emotional, ethical and technological competencies, and not just academic attainment or subject knowledge.

Research Methodology

The qualitative research approach was adopted in this study to investigate the essential characteristics of aptitude skills needed for prospective teachers of secondary schools in Punjab. The study was conducted as part of a larger mixed methods study to develop and validate an Aptitude Test for Prospective Teachers. Ten information-rich participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques: two teacher educators, two secondary school heads, two experienced secondary school teachers, two assessment and test-development experts, one curriculum specialist and one expert on educational technology. The participants were chosen as they were the key professional fields associated with teacher aptitude (teacher preparation, classroom practice, school leadership, curriculum, assessment, and digital teaching).

Data collection was done by semi-structured focus group discussion. The competencies expected of potential secondary school teachers were discussed, especially pedagogical knowledge and instructional practices, emotional intelligence and personal qualities, ethical awareness and professionalism, and technological proficiency. All the participants gave informed consent and confidentiality was maintained. The researcher guided the conversation and gave participants the opportunity to share, clarify and articulate their thoughts.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The discussion was transcribed and carefully read, coded and organized into major themes. The similar codes were clustered and a qualitative competency framework for the aptitude test was created. The trustworthiness was achieved by rigorous selection of participants, systematic coding, field notes, and careful analysis of participants' perspectives.

Results and Findings

The focus group discussion with ten participants generated four major themes related to the aptitude competencies required for prospective secondary school teachers in Punjab. The



participants included teacher educators, secondary school heads, experienced secondary school teachers, assessment experts, a curriculum specialist, and an educational technology expert. The analysis showed that teacher aptitude is a multidimensional construct that includes pedagogical ability, emotional readiness, ethical responsibility, and technological competence. The four major themes were: pedagogical knowledge and instructional practices, emotional intelligence and personal qualities, ethical awareness and professionalism, and technological proficiency.

Table 1 *Distribution of Focus Group Participants*

Focus Group	Location	Number of Participants
FGD 1	Lahore	8
FGD 2	Faisalabad	8
FGD 3	Multan	8
Total	-	24

The distribution of focus group members was done across three major cities of Punjab namely Lahore, Faisalabad and Multan as shown in Table 4.24. A total of 24 experts participated in the focus group discussions with 8 participants in each group. The equal number of participants in all three focus groups suggests that participants were fairly distributed across all three locations. This distribution facilitated the collection of views from a wider geographical area and better representation of the perspectives from different educational contexts of Punjab. The qualitative data was supplemented with experts from Lahore, Faisalabad and Multan, which led to greater credibility in the results as there were differences at regional level with regard to the core competency that prospective teachers should have.

Table 2 *Participant Representation*

Expert Category	<i>f</i>	%
Teacher Educators	6	25.0%
Secondary School Heads	4	16.7%
Experienced Teachers	6	25.0%
Assessment Specialists	3	12.5%
Curriculum Experts	3	12.5%
Educational Technology Experts	2	8.3%
Total	24	100%

Table 4.25 shows the representation of the 24 experts that participated in the focus group discussions from a professional perspective. Teacher educators and experienced teachers were the next most numerous group with 6 participants each (25.0% each). Secondary school heads made up 16.7%,



with assessment specialists and the curriculum experts each at 12.5%. The number of educational technology experts was 8.3% of the total sample. This composition demonstrates that a wide range of teacher education, school leadership, classroom teaching, assessment, curriculum development and educational technology experts were engaged. The need for this diversity was important because the identification of teacher competencies needed input from multiple professional perspectives related to the teaching and learning.

Table 3 Occurrence of Themes Across Focus Groups

Theme	FGD 1	FGD 2	FGD 3	Total Sessions	Interpretation
Pedagogical Knowledge	✓	✓	✓	3	Highly consistent
Communication Skills	✓	✓	✓	3	Highly consistent
Emotional Intelligence	✓	✓	✓	3	Highly consistent
Ethical Awareness	✓	✓	✓	3	Highly consistent
Technological Proficiency	✓	✓	✓	3	Highly consistent

Table 3 shows five major themes that were reflected in all three focus group discussions. The themes were pedagogical knowledge, communication skills, emotional intelligence, ethical awareness and technological skills. All themes were mentioned in FGD 1, FGD 2 and FGD 3 indicating that all five competencies were touched upon and emphasized by the experts in every FGD. These themes were common in all focus groups, indicating that there was a high level of consensus within the focus groups on the key skills that prospective teachers need to possess in Punjab. As such, these themes are considered of great consistency and centrality with respect to the competency framework that was developed in the focus group discussions.

Table 4 Cross-Session Frequency Summary

Theme	Number of Focus Groups (out of 3)	%
Pedagogical Knowledge	3	100%
Communication Skills	3	100%
Emotional Intelligence	3	100%
Ethical Awareness	3	100%
Technological Proficiency	3	100%

Table 4.27 presents an overview of the themes that were discussed in the three focus group sessions. The 3 focus groups (100%) all included all 5 themes. It demonstrates that all experts are in full consensus about the significance of pedagogical knowledge, communication skills,



emotional intelligence, ethical awareness, and technological skills. All 100% occurrences of each theme indicate that the competencies were not a one-sided view of a single group but were repeatedly validated across all discussions. The uniformity helps to ensure the reliability of the results and thus leads to the five themes being taken up as basic competencies for prospective teachers.

Theme 1: Pedagogical Knowledge and Instructional Practices

The first major theme was pedagogical knowledge and instructional practices. Participants emphasized that prospective teachers should understand how to plan lessons, explain concepts, manage classroom activities, engage students, and assess learning. They agreed that teaching aptitude should not be judged only through subject knowledge because a teacher must also know how to deliver content effectively.

One teacher educator stated:

“A prospective teacher may have good subject knowledge, but if he or she cannot explain the topic according to students’ level, then teaching will not be effective.”
(P1)

A secondary school head also highlighted classroom management as an essential aptitude area:

“In secondary schools, classroom management is very important. A teacher should know how to control the class without creating fear among students.”
(P3)

Participants also discussed the importance of assessment literacy. They believed that prospective teachers should be able to prepare questions, evaluate students fairly, give feedback, and identify learning difficulties. An assessment expert explained:

“Assessment is not only about marks. A teacher should know whether students have understood the lesson or not, and then improve teaching accordingly.”
(P7)

The participants viewed communication as part of instructional practice. They explained that a teacher should speak clearly, ask meaningful questions, listen to students, and encourage classroom participation. Therefore, this theme included lesson planning, teaching methods, classroom management, student engagement, assessment practices, and instructional communication.

Theme 2: Emotional Intelligence and Personal Qualities

The second major theme was emotional intelligence and personal qualities. Participants reported that teaching requires patience, empathy, confidence, self-control, adaptability, and motivation. They explained that prospective teachers must be emotionally ready to deal with students from different backgrounds and with different learning needs.

One experienced secondary school teacher stated:

“A teacher must have patience. Students do not learn at the same speed, so the teacher should not become angry quickly.”
(P5, Experienced Teacher)

Another participant emphasized empathy and understanding:



“Prospective teachers should understand students’ problems. Sometimes students are weak not because they are careless, but because they need more support.”
(P2)

Participants also considered confidence and self-control important for classroom effectiveness. A school head explained:

“If a teacher loses confidence in front of the class, students also lose interest. A teacher should remain calm and confident even in difficult situations.”
(P4)

The focus group also highlighted adaptability as an important personal quality. Participants stated that teachers often face unexpected classroom situations, such as weak student response, discipline issues, limited resources, or sudden changes in timetable. Therefore, a prospective teacher should be flexible and able to adjust teaching strategies according to classroom needs. This theme showed that emotional intelligence is not separate from teaching performance; rather, it directly affects classroom climate, teacher-student relationships, and student motivation.

Theme 3: Ethical Awareness and Professionalism

The third major theme was ethical awareness and professionalism. Participants strongly agreed that teaching is a moral and professional responsibility. They identified fairness, honesty, punctuality, confidentiality, respect, responsibility, and commitment as essential qualities for prospective teachers.

A curriculum specialist stated:

“A teacher is not only responsible for completing the syllabus. A teacher also develops students’ character, discipline, and values.”
(P9)

Participants particularly emphasized fairness and impartiality. They stated that teachers should treat all students equally regardless of gender, academic ability, family background, or social status. One experienced teacher explained:

“Students notice everything. If a teacher favors some students and ignores others, it affects the whole classroom environment.”
(P6)

Professional boundaries were also discussed. Participants believed that prospective teachers should understand appropriate conduct with students, parents, colleagues, and school administration. An assessment expert commented:

“Professionalism means that a teacher should be responsible, honest, and careful in all school matters, especially in assessment and student records.”
(P8)

The participants also discussed punctuality, preparation, and commitment to duty. They believed that a teacher’s behavior creates a model for students. Therefore, ethical awareness and professionalism were considered necessary components of teacher aptitude. This theme indicated that a prospective teacher should not only be skilled but also responsible and trustworthy.

Theme 4: Technological Proficiency

The fourth major theme was technological proficiency. Participants agreed that modern teachers need basic digital skills to support teaching, assessment, communication, and



professional learning. They stated that prospective teachers should know how to use multimedia, online resources, educational applications, learning management systems, and digital assessment tools.

The educational technology expert stated:

“Technology has become part of teaching. A prospective teacher should at least know how to use digital resources, prepare presentations, and use online platforms for learning support.”

(P10)

A teacher educator added that technology should support learning rather than replace teaching:

“Using technology does not mean only showing slides. The teacher should use technology with a clear teaching purpose.”

(P1)

Participants also discussed responsible use of technology. They believed that prospective teachers should be aware of digital ethics, appropriate online content, student privacy, and responsible communication. A school head explained:

“Technology can help teaching, but teachers must know what is suitable for students and what is not.”

(P)

The participants viewed technological proficiency as an emerging but essential aptitude domain. They explained that after the expansion of online and blended learning, teachers are expected to use digital tools for lesson preparation, classroom explanation, homework, communication, and assessment. Therefore, basic technological competence was considered necessary for prospective secondary school teachers in Punjab.

Summary of Themes

The findings showed that the aptitude of prospective secondary school teachers consists of four major competency domains. Pedagogical knowledge and instructional practices represented the ability to plan, teach, manage, communicate, and assess effectively. Emotional intelligence and personal qualities represented patience, empathy, confidence, self-control, adaptability, and motivation. Ethical awareness and professionalism represented fairness, honesty, responsibility, respect, punctuality, and professional conduct. Technological proficiency represented the ability to use digital tools responsibly and effectively for teaching and learning.

Discussion

This qualitative focus group study shows that aptitude of prospective secondary school teachers in Punjab is multidimensional. The participants did not consider teacher aptitude as being only in regard to academic knowledge or subjectivity. Rather, they highlighted four interrelated areas: pedagogical knowledge and instructional practices, emotional intelligence and personal traits, ethical awareness and professionalism, and technological competency. This is in line with Shulman's (1987) theory of teacher knowledge: Effective teaching demands more than content knowledge. It is essential that teachers understand how to plan, explain, question, assess and reflect on subject matter to make it meaningful for them to learn.

The pedagogical knowledge and teaching practices emerged as the main competency area. Lesson planning, classroom management, student engagement, communication, and assessment literacy were consistently identified by participants as important lesson planning



components. This corroborates Shulman's (1987) notion that pedagogical content knowledge is needed by a teacher, in addition to subject matter knowledge. The discovery also corresponds with the OECD's perspective that teachers' professional knowledge involves instructional processes, learning processes, and assessment (Sonmark et al., 2017). This theme is particularly relevant in the context of Punjab because the new teachers entering into secondary schools are expected to address the diversity of learner abilities, examination stress, weak classroom discipline, and limited teaching resources. Thus, the test for prospective teachers must contain questions to determine the thought process of a candidate in terms of teaching situations, selection of teaching strategies, responses to classroom problems.

The second theme, emotional intelligence and personal qualities, indicated that teaching aptitude is also related to personal qualities such as patience, empathy, confidence, personal control, adaptability, and motivation. It was thought that the prospective teachers had to be emotionally ready to deal with young people who are not all the same and may learn at different rates, behave differently, be confident or insecure, and have different family backgrounds. Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) prosocial classroom model further supports this finding by suggesting that teacher social and emotional competence influences positive teacher-student relationships, effective classroom management and positive classroom climate. In this study, emotional intelligence did not become an isolated personality trait as a factor but rather it became a viable necessity of teaching. The teacher who is impatient and lacked in emotional control may have a problem in handling classroom problems, helping weak learners, and keeping a disciplined atmosphere at school.

The third theme is ethical awareness and professionalism, which is a moral approach to teaching. The various elements that were recognized as being important for teachers were fairness, honesty, punctuality, confidentiality, respect, responsibility, and professional commitment. This is in line with the National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan which highlight professional conduct, effective communication, collaboration and commitment to learners as some of the key dimensions of teacher professionalism (Ministry of Education, 2009). Fairness and impartiality is an area that the focus group participants focused on particularly as teachers' decisions have an impact on their students' confidence, participation and trust. In a Pakistani school environment, teacher is a role model and ethical behavior plays an important role in teacher aptitude. Thus, the proposed aptitude test should have scenarios where the candidate can be tested on his/her ability to make fair, responsible, and professionally appropriate decisions.

Technological proficiency is the fourth theme, which emphasizes the evolving needs of teaching. The participants agreed that modern teachers should have basic digital skills in lesson preparation, explaining in the classroom, assessment, communication, professional learning. This is in line with UNESCO's ICT Competency Framework for Teachers which highlights the incorporation of ICT in the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, school organization and teacher professional development (UNESCO, 2018). But the participants also explained that technology should not only be used in the presentation or display. It should enhance student learning and promote significant learning. This separation is important because education and technology have nothing to do with the technology, but rather with the technical skill and pedagogical judgment. Any prospective teacher should be aware of the tools they could use as well as how and when to use them in the classroom.



In conclusion, the results support the premise that there is a need to have a clear construct framework as a starting point in the development of an aptitude test for prospective teachers. Validity is dependent on the evidence and theory used to interpret and apply test scores (Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, 2014). This study yielded four themes which give preliminary qualitative evidence for the definition of the content domain of the proposed aptitude test. The contextual relevance of the framework was also reinforced via the focus group approach, as the themes were created from the perspective of teacher educators, school heads, experienced teachers, assessment experts, a curriculum expert, and a technology expert.

Conclusion

Conclusion

This qualitative focus group study concludes that the aptitude of prospective secondary school teachers in Punjab is a multidimensional construct that extends far beyond academic and subject matter knowledge alone. Effective teaching in the region demands a holistic combination of diverse professional competencies. Specifically, teacher aptitude is defined by four distinct yet interrelated core areas:

Pedagogical Knowledge and Instructional Practices is serving as the primary competency area, this encompasses critical skills in lesson planning, classroom management, student engagement, communication, and assessment literacy. These skills are essential for navigating the practical realities of Punjab's secondary schools, which include diverse learner abilities, examination stress, weak discipline, and limited resources.

Emotional Intelligence and Personal Traits, rather than being an isolated personality trait, emotional intelligence is a functional necessity for modern educators. Characteristics such as patience, empathy, adaptability, and personal control are vital for fostering positive teacher-student relationships and maintaining a disciplined classroom climate when dealing with diverse student backgrounds and behaviors.

Ethical Awareness and Professionalism is reflecting a moral approach to education and aligning with the National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan, teachers are viewed as crucial societal role models. Core values such as fairness, honesty, punctuality, and professional commitment are foundational to building student trust and participation.

Technological Proficiency is reflecting evolving modern demands, prospective teachers must possess basic digital skills. However, this proficiency requires pedagogical judgment—knowing how and when to use technology meaningfully to enhance student learning rather than using it as a mere presentation tool.



Recommendations

Ultimately, these findings indicate that traditional testing methods are insufficient for evaluating future educators. To ensure the selection of highly capable candidates, any proposed teacher aptitude test for the province must be comprehensive. It must incorporate situational and scenario-based questions designed to evaluate a candidate's thought processes regarding classroom problems, their selection of instructional strategies, and their capacity to make fair, responsible, and professionally ethical decisions.

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