

## Teacher Quality Improvement Policy Issue in Kurdistan Region-Iraq

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### Abstract

A key factor in good education is having good teachers. This is not the case everywhere in Kurdistan Region- Iraq which has many public and private schools. In fact, teacher quality improvement (TQI) has become a hot topic of discussion for policymakers and implementers. This paper focuses on TQI policy issue in Kurdistan Region- Iraq. It investigates the issue, identifying main problems and challenges to provide recommendations for solving the issue. Data was gathered from 25 policymakers and implementers. The data was then analyzed through N-Vivo software. Through a grounded-theory approach, the main issues facing TQI policy in KRI were identified in terms of ten concepts each of which covering a particular category of obstacles in the way of TQI in KRI. The concepts, or challenges, point to poor quality teachers, lack of funds and experts for education, shortage of teacher training opportunities, poor communication between the Ministries, and a weak curriculum.

**Key Words:** Teacher Improvement, Policy Issue, Policy Implementation, Grounded Theory, Issues and Challenges

### 1.Introduction

This study explores the main challenges facing Teacher Quality Improvement in Kurdistan Region- Iraq. K-12 schools in Kurdistan suffer from shortage of quality teachers; therefore, the current researcher wanted to find out the main challenges that have caused this problem. The researcher also aimed at investigating ways to solve this problem; therefore, the researcher focused on a grounded-theory approach to this issue by interviewing participants who have first-hand view of the problem. The scope of this study is focusing on teachers who work for the Ministry of Education; namely, primary, basic, and secondary school education. This paper consists of seven sections. Section one introduces the topic and problem statement. Section two provides a background to the study. Section three is a literature review of the topic. Section four is methodology overview. Section five details the findings. Section six is a conclusion of the main findings followed by recommendations in the final section which is section seven.

Education is the critical means for human development, and consequently for social, economic, political, cultural, and moral development of a society and nation. It is also the important passage for modernization, emancipation, and civility of a society. Adams (2002) argues that education in a broad sense improves the capabilities of individuals and the capacity of institutions, and becomes a catalyst for the closely interrelated economic, social, cultural, and demographic changes that become defined as national development. From his analysis, Adams asserts that evidence is substantial that schooling and other forms of education can, in a supporting environment, make major contributions to the complex processes of technology transfer, economic productivity, individual earnings, reduction of poverty, development of healthy families, creation and sharing of values, learning the responsibilities of citizenship, and enhancement of the quality of life. Due to this, education is universally upheld as one of the basic human rights (www.unesco.org, March 2017) because education is instrumental in the eradication of illiteracy and poverty and the democratization of society. In this regard, governments around the world have dedicated a substantial amount of their budget to ensure quality education for children and youth, and there are several world agencies, such as UNESCO and UNICEF, that monitor the situation of education globally.

## 2. Research Background

This research was conducted in Kurdistan Region – Iraq (KRI). Kurdistan, an autonomous region or sub-country in northern Iraq, has an unshaken belief on the beneficial outcomes of development theory, putting a great trust on education and training for rebuilding itself economically and socially.

In education since 2003, the Kurdistan region has made remarkable progress in all aspects of its education system, comparing favorably with neighboring countries. The total number of primary and secondary students in Kurdistan increased from 843,000 in 2003 to 1.70 million in 2012 (a 98 % overall increase) Most notably, since 2009, the net enrolment has improved for basic and secondary education from 91.6% and 20.3% respectively in the academic year 2003–2004 to 95.9% and 88.9% respectively, in the academic year 2010–2011. Nevertheless, about 18.4% of the population was illiterate in 2009. Additionally, a total of 1,327 new schools had been built during the duration of 2005–2012, an average growth of 5% per year. However, indicators of students per class as well as schools working multiple shifts demonstrate the need for further improvements, especially in both quality and quantity of facilities and the education provided. In fact, many public schools had no choice but to run additional shifts (two to three shifts) or share buildings with other schools. Consequently, to accommodate multiple shifts, public schools were forced to reduce instructional period from five hours to four hours per session, thus impairing the quality of education. Nevertheless, after passing high school, students can pursue their higher education in 13 public universities and 11 private universities available in Kurdistan, which has a total enrolment of 115,000 university students, most of whom go to the tuition-free public universities (Ministry of Planning of Kurdistan Regional Government, 2012).

This study investigates teacher quality improvement (TQI) policy issue in Kurdistan region. This issue is essential for a good education because teachers not only deliver knowledge but also raise the children who are the future generation. This issue encompasses both teachers and the government. It is a two-way responsibility. On the one hand, teachers must be knowledgeable and professional. On the other hand, they need to be provided for and supported by the government.

Educators have frequently surmised or hypothesized that the quality of education can never exceed the quality of teachers (MOE Malaysia, 2012). This implies that the quality of teachers is the most critical factor in determining and elevating the standard of education in a country; hence, to improve the standard of education is to improve the quality of teachers first. The main reason is that teachers are instrumental in the delivery process or instructional process of students' development holistically, encompassing the cognitive, affective, spiritual, and psychomotor aspects. They spent most of their times with students directly or indirectly, and thus they determine the scope and level of knowledge and competencies to be induced into students.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 The Policy Making Process

Hussin (2002) defines policy as a decision on governance made by either government agencies or private organizations for certain purposes such as pursuing development of society, addressing certain critical issues, maintaining the progress and sustainability of organizations, enhancing the welfare of people, regulating the discipline of people, or allocating resources and benefits to the people. Hallsworth, Parker, and Rutters (2011) assert that politics and policies in the United Kingdom and its former colonies are synonymous and integral to each other in public governance because political parties and many interest groups in society constantly interact with each other and affects public perceptions, values, and choices concerning what to be done to make things better. Good policies emerge from a combination of political maneuvering (mobilizing support and managing opposition, presenting a vision, setting strategic objectives) and technocratic enforcement (evidence of what works, robust policy design, and realistic implementation plans).

### 3.2 Policy Implementation Process

Policies “have their own life cycle” (Hussin, 2007, p. 19), generally consisting of three major phases: formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Formulation of public policies varies from government to government, some adopting the democratic participation of interest groups, while some others adopt the elite top-down approach in which top-level leaders or executives. In governments, the bureaucratic agencies of various types and levels are largely responsible for implementing policies formulated, and thus in this case, total comprehension of policy intent and content is critical for implementation. Policy implementation, according to O'Toole (2000), is “what develops between the establishment of an apparent intention on the part of government to do something, or stop doing something, and the ultimate impact in the world of action” (p. 266).

### 3.3 Vision 2020 of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)

After decades of political struggles since the 1920's, Kurdistan gained its autonomy as a self-ruling regional government in 1992 and was recognized as a formal political entity under the authority of the Iraqi Constitution of 2005. From then onwards, Kurdistan launched many development projects to improve its socio-economic infrastructure, funded by revenues derived largely from the oil and gas industry. The development plan report of the Ministry of Planning, Kurdistan Regional Government (2013) states:

The overall development vision of the Kurdistan Regional Government is a Kurdistan Region-Iraq where all the people enjoy the benefits of freedom, health, welfare, and economic security and opportunity (p. xii).

Literature on teacher professionalism and quality is abundant, especially by world organizations such as the UNESCO and OECD. The common trend today in many countries is the adoption of merit-based or performance-based policy as the way to improve teacher professionalism and quality. The assumption is that teachers as certified or licensed professionals must maintain their high merit in job and constantly upgrade their knowledge, skills, and job commitment. This is the professional ethic (Alyahmadi, 2011; Al-Abri, 2015).

Alyahmadi in his study states that the professional performance of teachers in schools has always been thought as to be a critical factor in the making of quality schools or excellent schools and in promoting students' academic achievement. A systematic teacher evaluation seems to be instrumental in enhancing teacher professionalism. Alyahmadi found that teacher evaluation in the Sultanate of Oman emphasized the developmental purpose of teacher evaluation. This emphasis increased the potential of evaluation to advance teaching and learning by promoting the professional development of the teacher. Moreover, decision making surrounding teacher career was much considered in teacher evaluation policy in the Sultanate. The study also revealed that: (i) the policy implementers were satisfied with the abundant resources; (ii) no pervasive social effect was observed as the results of the teacher evaluation policy; (iii) the Omani teacher evaluation system was characterized by authoritative and highly centralized administration; and (iv) the impact of teacher evaluation policy on teacher performance was minimal.

Teacher quality is related to teacher competency and satisfaction in service. Esmali Bari (2017) conducted a research on this issue in East Malaysia and he found that in general teacher competency is high among teachers in primary and secondary schools whether in urban or rural areas. The ten competency areas that all teachers must have were professional attribute, pedagogy, school administration, management of teaching and learning resources, classroom management, instruction plan and design, continuing self-improvement, usage of instructional technology, and awareness of educational and school goals. It was suggested that these competency areas should be included in the pre-service teacher training curriculum so that all teachers who graduated from all training centers possess a standard quality.

### 4. Methodology

The research was conducted using classic grounded theory (CGT). A significant characteristic of CGT is for the researcher to suspend preconceived notions about the topic and allow a theory to emerge from the data collected. Glaser (1998) stated that grounded theory is "the systematic generation of theory from data" (p. 12). Data can be collected from any source such as brief conversations, lengthy interviews, magazines, books, articles, documents, newspapers, videos, artwork, music, photographs, surveys, and personal observations (Birks & Mills, 2011; Glaser, 1998).

In the spirit of limiting preconceived notions, a preliminary literature review was not conducted. Thus, the subsequent literature review chapter is on the classic grounded theory. However, once a theory emerged, other pertinent literature was integrated into the theory. My decision to choose CGT was based on the premise of the theory emerging from the data. Unlike many generic qualitative research methods, CGT does not set out to verify a theory, but rather to develop a theory from collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). CGT discovers a theory about patterns of behavior that resolve an area of primary concern for the participants in the substantive area (Glaser, 1998). This seemed like a logical approach to research in order to understand what behaviors impact successful aging.

## 4.1 Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the rationales and aims used by the policy making officers in the Ministry of Education in designing the TQI policy issue?
2. What are the underlying problems and solution strategies for TQI policy issue?
3. What are the organization structure, mechanism, strategies, and resources needed for implementing TQI policy issue appropriately?
4. What are the kinds of competencies and dispositions of both the implementers and target groups involved TQI policy issue?
5. What are the constraints and challenges in implementing TQI policy issue?
6. What do the participants recommend for improving TQI policy issue in KRG?

### 4.2 Participants Selection

All the participants selected for this research were directly involved in either policymaking or policy implementation. Because the policy had two phases, both the policymakers and policy implementers had to be chosen and interviewed. The number of participants was 25. Several criteria were used for selection of the participants. The first criterion was degree of involvement by the participants in the two phases of TQI policy issue. The second criterion was position of the participants, whether a policymaker or a policy implementer, whether a top official such as a minister or a school director. The criterion for selection of education officers, teachers, and administrators is seniority of work experience. The purpose of selecting participants that are more experienced is to get more reliable and authentic information. In addition, they were also the “well-informed” (Yin, 2009, p. 108) participants as compared to junior ones.

## 4.3 Teacher Issue Policymakers and Implementers

Twenty-five policymakers and implementers were interviewed for teacher policy issue. Below is description of each interviewee:

**Policy maker #1** He is one of the most senior and experienced General Managers at the MOE, and he started his education journey from the teacher position and director of school and went up all the way to the General Manager in many areas of education, eventually he became the Minister's Advisor. He is well aware of all policies and educational movements and activities in all stages. He is also very helpful to the unskilled ministers as well to the ministry's staff as well with the people who are seeking to do research on education to improve the education system in Kurdistan.

**Policy maker #2** He is a dedicated scholar as well a senior teacher in Kurdistan. He left Kurdistan during 1990 and went to the UK. Through his education journey was able to get his PhD in Ethnomusicology and Sociology. He is involved with policy making at the higher education ministry level. He became professor the several universities Kurdistan such as Soran University, Sulaymani University, Salahaddin University, as well in some UK's universities. Eventually he became vice President of a large university, and member of the board at the Ministry of Higher Education.

**Policy maker #3** He is one of the top people in charge of educational policy making and implementation in Kurdistan Region, and has political background but no teaching background. However, at the moment he is like other previous MOEs that manage the entire education in Kurdistan without having expertise in the field. He is young and trying his best to be successful, but the education need experts and professionals in order to be able to make change and to create a healthy educational environment and to bring up and to raise healthy society.

**MOE Policy Implementer #4** She is one of the most senior Educators in the Ministry of Education in Iraq, and she is the Education Advisor for the ministry as well General Manager of Education. She holds many educational degrees and certificates, and participated in many seminars conferences, as well she is representing the Ministry of Education locally and internationally. She is also member of board of Policy Making at the Iraqi MOE.

**MOE Policy Implementer #5** He is a General Manager at the Iraqi MOE, and part of the policy making members. He also has long educational background starting with teaching skills to directors and all the way to General Manager at MOE.

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MOE Policy Implementer #6 He used to be the General Manager of Education at Salahaddin Province, and he has been serving for more than 40 years at the education field. He was retired at the end of 2017. He was supervising the entire schools and directorates in the Salahaddin City. As well he was board of Policy Making.

District Officer #7 He started his educational journey with teaching and school director, then division director at the MOE in Kurdistan Regional Government. He was hired as District School Director in Rwanz City-Erbil Kurdistan.

District Officer #8 He worked as a teacher for about 10 years, then he became Chief of School Supervisors at Rwanz district schools. He is in charge of the city center of Rwanz and all schools of more than 50 villages.

District Officer #9 He is "Chief of a Tribe" with no background in Education. However, he became Chairman of Education Committee at Salahaddin Province which is related to the Iraqi MOE. Interviewing officials like him was necessary to understand and present their views on education.

School head #10 He graduated from Baghdad University in 1968-69. He was teacher for 10 years, and assistant director as well director for Sulaymani district schools and then in 2007 he became school supervisor. In 1999, he became education advisor then he found new education system for Kurdistan which is the private sector. His school cooperates with Chouaifat International School system. He is also CEO of Frobels and owns all Chouaifat Schools in Hawler-KRG with agreement with Lebanese SABISS International School System. He with his partners were able to bring in new experiment to Kurdistan education system as well gave international educational opportunities for high talented kids of Kurdistan.

School head #11 He is a School Director at one of the villages at Rwanz District School, he is working hard to apply whatever he has of knowledge and ability to serve the students. He had some training and participation with some International NGOs and learned many skills and gained some new skills of managing the school as well to bring in community to cooperate with school system.

School head #12 He was born in 1956 in Arbil, Tazil, Kurdistan. In 1981, he became teacher and continuing till today in education process. First, he was hired as a teacher in Shaqlawa at the suburbs for 6 years, then he went to Xabat for couple years. After that he exchanged his position with another teacher and came back to the center of Hawler. After serving as a teacher for about 20 years, he became a school director for 15 years.

Senior School teacher #13 He is a senior school teacher of district school in Erbil and also director of the Photography Union in Erbil. Through his long education services and teaching career, he is trying to apply whatever he knows in order to educate our new generations in proper way.

Senior School teacher #14 He is one of the mid age teacher at the Makok School in Erbil City. He had strong passion of teaching and educating generations in proper way, but due to several reasons he wasn't so positive about the outcome of their education system.

Senior School teacher #15 She is Highly educated and well known in Kurdistan and Iraq, she graduated from the UK institutions as well she was the first founder of Private School System in Kurdistan. She established Cambridge Private Schools in Erbil, Duhok, and Sulaymani. She is also having her own educational organization as well cooperating with the UK Embassy, UNESCO and Iraqi MOE and the MOE of KRG.

Senior School teacher #16 She is graduated from the Institutes of fine Arts in Sulaymani, in Kurdistan Region, as well she became teacher in London-UK. She is Bank Director now in Kurdistan. Through her educational background in the UK, she was well aware of the Education System in Kurdistan as well expressed her feeling and awareness for the sake of change and improvement.

Senior School teacher #17 He is a senior school teacher in Erbil Province. He had good education background as well some training with International Educational Organizations through his education services and background. According to his statement he got most of his training from Baghdad the capital city of Iraq, that means during the regime every thing was centralized.

School Head #18 He is a school director in Baghdad for about 20 years, then he became General Manager of Education in Baghdad under the supervision of Ministry of Education in Iraq. He is also member of the policy making board at the MOE.

School Head #19 through her education journey, she worked as school head for 25 years as well member of City Council in Baghdad. She had good education background and holding bachelor degree in Education from Baghdad University. She is supervising the education committee at the City of Baghdad-Iraq.

School Head #20 he started his education journey with teaching for about 15 years, and then he became school leader.

Senior School Teacher #21 After his graduation from teaching institution, he started with teaching Job in Xanaqin City. Due to instability, he had to move to Erbil-KRG. Then he was appointed as Mayor of Soran City in Erbil-Kurdistan. Then he transferred his residency to Sweden, and got teaching job more than 15 years. Through his long experience in education and management as well his strong knowledge of education, we found that he will be one of the important selection for interview and to learn from his views and experiences.

Senior School Teacher #22 She is one of the most accomplished educator in Iraq's history, now she is special education advisor of the Ministry of Education in Baghdad-Iraq. She is well educated and has more than 40 years' experience in education. She is also member of the policy making board at the MOE-Baghdad-Iraq, and she was Ministry's representatives for many conferences abroad and locally.

Senior School Teacher #23 he is from the City of Samarra, he first started his education journey as teacher in Baghdad School District. He continues teaching and working hard to educate our generations properly for the sake of raising the new generations in a healthy way.

Senior School Teacher #24 she used to work at the MOE in Baghdad, she holds bachelor's in biology, and she was working as a teacher at private schools in Baghdad. Right now, she is working as educational expert at the Ministry of Education in Baghdad-Iraq and head of Educational Relations between the MOE and all other local and international Educational Organizations.

Senior School Teacher #25 Psychology expert, Director of Fine Arts Institutions at the Managerial Sector, he had worked at the educational field for 29 years. In 1991 for the first time he was hired at the Qaramukian village at the suburbs of Hawler as elementary school teacher. In 1995 I went back to the University to getting bachelor's in psychology. Now, he is working General Director of all Fine Arts Institutions in in Kurdistan Regional Government.

### 4.4 Data Collection Procedure

In this study, relatively a large amount of time and multiple methods for data collection were used to get a clearer and in-depth understanding of leadership behaviors, best practices and capitals in selected transformed schools. The researcher used in-depth semi-structure interviews. The interviews were considered as the main source of data collection.

### 4.5 Interviews

Interviews can help researchers to get in-depth information from participants through interviewing. Merriam (2009) categorized interview 'by structure' as structured (standardized), semi-structured and unstructured interviews (informal). The most used type of interview in qualitative research is a semi-structured interview (Merriam,2009; Packer, 2011). The purpose of the semi-structured interview is rapport development and to encourage the participant to speak (Packer, 2011). It includes a mixture of more or less structured questions with a flexibility in wording or order of questions (Merriam, 2009). It allows the researcher to probe or respond to the situation at hand (Merriam, 2009).

Consequently, for this study, semi-structured interviews were used to get an in-depth insight and understanding of policy making and implementation in the KRG. Interview protocols were developed and checked for their suitability by senior officers in the administration system. However, flexibility in questions remained throughout the interviewing process. Probing questions were used where required. Not only this but also interviews with the consent of the participants were recorded in order to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the response of participants. For this purpose, two quality tape recorders were used to minimize obstacle during the interview, and the researcher took notes during interview sessions. Then the recorded interviews were transcribed for analysis. The site and time of the interviews were decided on the basis of willingness and convenience of participants.

### 4.6 Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis are a simultaneous process in qualitative research that starts from the first day of data collection (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data collected through interviews consolidated, reduced and interpreted to make sense of them (Merriam, 2009). Since this research was done using grounded theory, the following

initial steps were taken during data collection and analysis:

1. Theoretical Coding: Theoretical codes conceptualize the relationship between substantive codes through the use of coding families by Glaser (1998).
2. Sorting and Theoretical Outline: Fundamental to creating a theoretical framework is sorting memos. The memos are sorted based on emerging theory and by the relationship between the concepts. The theoretical outline with the memos sorted into the outline was the first draft of the final write up. The next stage was to refine the write-up into a final product.
3. Writing: The goal was to discover an emergent theory to better understand how individuals manage issues and challenges of policymaking and implementation, and effectively communicate the theory in a final write-up.

## FINDINGS

### 5.1 Summary of the Coding Process

The researcher began with open coding, because of the exploratory nature of the study, every bit of data that seemed to be useful was selected (Merriam, 2009). The texts the selected codes were labelled keeping in mind the research questions and conceptual framework of the study. Then, the researcher proceeded to axial coding and reanalyzed all codes and aggregate similar codes together to form potential categories. The repetitive words used in codes were examined to form categories as well codes giving same meaning were collated together. The codes emerged from data through open coding constant comparison was used to find similarities and differences. The similar codes were combined to form concepts.

### 5.2 Concepts

Strauss and Corbin (1990) outline procedures and canons of grounded theory. There they state “concepts are the basic units of analysis. A theorist works with conceptualizations of data, not the actual data per se” (p. 7). Teacher improvement quality is relatively behind compared to the situation of teachers internationally and regionally. This is a big issue because teachers raise future generations and without satisfied and quality teachers there will be a gap in knowledge of the students. The main problem facing teachers in Kurdistan is lack of updated knowledge and teacher life. Government should provide a good life for teachers and engage them in continuous knowledge improvement. This can be done by enrolling them in steady trainings and workshops. Under TQI Policy issue, following are the ten concepts presented and discussed.

#### 5.2.1 Quality Teachers

This concept was a predominant concept in the Teacher Quality policy issue. All the teacher policymakers emphasized the importance of having good and quality teachers who have enough competency and updated knowledge to teach students in the best manner possible. The three policymakers first spoke about goals of any education policy which should be removing obstacles to positive education. Quality teachers are the ones able to do provide positive education to students. The policymakers spoke of a formula in which good teachers produce good students who build a good society because good teachers teach students human principles which are loving all human beings, living in peace, and being loyal to their homeland which is Kurdistan. Having quality teachers is not an easy task by the government and MOE. Not all schools have the same good quality teachers who usually work at highly reputable schools or private schools. Policymakers and implementers discussed the ways which can help improve quality teachers. They stated that the first step towards producing quality teachers and improving the performance of the existing teachers is by providing training and more training because in-service teachers can only improve through training. Training workshops by experts, foreign or local, are needed for improving teacher quality. The aim of every training course should be updating teachers’ knowledge, especially that of those teachers who have been in service for years. Another objective of teacher training courses should be improving teaching methods and approaches of teachers by applying the latest theoretical developments into practice.

The policymakers and implementers then discussed other way to improve teacher quality. One way is encouraging colleges and universities to better prepare teachers before graduation. This can solve the issue of poor teacher quality of the new graduates who can bring their new knowledge to schools and help other in-service teacher improve and vice-versa. Colleges and universities should focus more on practical methods of teaching such as hands-on methods, class activities, and extracurricular activities. They should also focus on psychology of teaching and learning to better prepare teachers for classrooms, dealing with student behavior and parental support because teacher and student behavior is an important aspect of successful education.

Another way to improve teacher quality strongly recommended by the policymakers and implementers was motivating teachers by providing incentives and rewards for good performance. Highly motivated teachers can perform highly, stated the policy implementers. Unfortunately, the current financial situation in KRI is not supportive in motivating teachers since the basic compensation for teachers which is salary is not given on time. This is a big issue for teachers and should be solved immediately.

### 5.2.2 Duty

The second common concept that emerged after the steps of data analysis was government duty and educational institutes duty. The policymakers repeated, during the interviews, that it the duty of the government to produce quality teachers. Government has to ensure that colleges are equipped with quality teachers to produce competent and knowledgeable teachers. It is the duty of the colleges not to only bring up good teachers but also graduate good leaders. To achieve this important goal, the government must have an organized system, up-to-date curriculum, good college teachers for educating students who then graduate to become teachers. A good organization structure for education-related departments of the government is necessary for successful education. Policy making and implementation should be organized bottom-up to give voice to lower-level government employees who are more aware of the education issues surrounding them. Another duty of the government and colleges is revisiting the curriculum to provide up-to-date knowledge and expertise to students. Moreover, government has a duty to be more selective in recruiting teachers by assessing their knowledge before recruiting them. Government and MOE should also continuously evaluate teachers for their performance and student achievement. In addition to the above duties of the government, colleges have a duty in recruiting teachers who really deserve a college teaching position because they bring up future K-12 teachers and other future college teachers.

### 5.2.3 Teacher Life

Good teachers are not born but rather produced at colleges and universities through good education. After the policymakers discussed the importance of having quality teachers for positive impact, and after talking about how to produce good teachers, they reiterated on economic factors that hinder good teaching. Among these factors, the factor that stood out the most was the issue of poor teacher life. Teachers in Kurdistan have poor salaries and poor living conditions. They stated that if teachers do not have good living conditions, they cannot focus on their jobs because they will be thinking about providing for their families. Having mentioned the duty of the government to produce good teachers, the policymakers stated that another duty of the government is to provide for teachers by giving them their salaries on time. All teachers need to be supported. The good teachers should be rewarded for their efforts. Providing for teachers is essential for successful education. Many teachers have gone on leave of absence from public schools and colleges which have reflected on those institutes in a negative way. Some teachers have moved to private schools and colleges because of low salary at public institutes.

### 5.2.4 School Capacity

Good teachers produce good students and a good society. It is government duty to enhance teacher education and provide a good life for teachers. Good teaching facilities are another reason for successful education. Without good buildings and learning equipment, teachers cannot deliver education in the manner in which it ought to be. This issue encompasses number of schools and quality of school buildings. Shortage of school buildings has been a long issue that has not been solved yet. In some areas in Kurdistan, there is only one school building with more three shifts. Students in these areas do not learn enough because they go to school for one third of the day. More schools need to be built to accommodate the increasing large number of students every year. When opening new schools, government should consider opening them equally in all geographical areas. Suburban towns and villages need more schools. School buildings need equipment as well. Instruments and tools such as computers, smart boards, iPads, books, etc., are all necessary for improving school capacity in KRI. In school buildings, the structure of classrooms needs to be redesigned in a way so as to help modern teaching methods.

### 5.2.5 Teacher Training

Producing good teachers and providing for them are important, however; keeping teachers in touch with the latest teaching standards and developments is not less important. In fact, continuous professional development for education staff and teachers is what keeps education effective. Teacher professional development is done through continuous teacher training workshops and seminars. It is duty of the government, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education to open teacher training centers and teacher programs. The need and importance of teacher training stems from the fact that there is always change in aspects of education. These aspects include teaching methods, approaches, new developments in science and management. Therefore, teachers must be equipped with the latest knowledge in their respective fields. The main solution for the poor education status in KRI as emphasized by the policy-makers and implementers was training, training and training. The interview participants reiterated this point more than often during their responses to most of the issues. In many places during the interviews, the questions asked by the researcher was about other policy issues but the response by the interviewees came to be about training. While it is calling for more training is something easy to ask, however, training should be strongly considered an implemented by MoE and MHE. It is a solution at the moment to solve many issues related to teacher quality. Solving other issues requires planning and time. Therefore, as a solution, training must be provided and mandated in all educational institutes. Teachers must respond to requests to participate in training courses at their institutes or in any other place, inside KRI or abroad. Making participation in training courses is necessary because as the policy makers and implementers stated education is taken for granted based on college degrees without improving on the existing knowledge by graduates. In other words, just being a graduate from a university guarantees qualifications to work as a teacher in schools, colleges, and universities. There should be criteria on how teachers are assessed before being given a position in schools or universities. They also need to be monitored and evaluated periodically by experts.

An issue inseparable to this concept is resistance to change by older teachers. Teachers who are graduates from 20 years ago, and have not updated their knowledge often resist new change. They teach information from their old textbooks and adhere to old standards. This issue must be addressed by the government by retiring those older teachers who resist change. This measure should be stretched to policymakers, implementers and officials who have been in charge of education in KRG for a long time and refuse to adapt to new standards.

### 5.2.6 Teachers' Disposition and Attitudes

While the policymakers and implementers criticized policymaking and implementation, at the same time, they reiterated their high commitment for serving because they viewed doing their job as a sacred mission. They stated that they did their job because it was their duty. They also stated that they have a high passion for their job. While blaming the two Ministries for poor organizational structure and management, they stated they use their knowledge and experience to serve the nation. This attitude and passion by the people in charge of policymaking and implementation is highly appreciated, however, there needs to be, as they stated, a good organization structure system to oversee the implementation. Although it is not to doubt what the interviewees stated but it is not uncommon to see teachers, managers, policymakers, and implementers not being good at their jobs. This was stated by the interviewees more than once. That is why they called for training all employees to better their knowledge and expertise. The issue is not to doubt their commitment but their qualifications at their positions because commitment without knowledge is not enough.

### 5.2.7 Impact of War

An external factor that has been a challenge in the way of policy implementation, according to the officials in both ministries, is the impact of war. It is a fact KRG was involved in the war on terror in the past four years. It started when ISIS attacked Kurdistan Region in 2014. It led to displacement of people in the middle and some northern areas of Iraq. The displaced people fled to Kurdistan Region and became an extra burden on the government which had to defend its borders. More than a million people were displaced to KRI. The KRG had to and still has to look after these people in terms of food, health services, education and accommodation. Most of the government spending went to the defense sector. People appreciated and enthusiastically participated in defending Kurdistan Region. The war on ISIS was declared ended with the return of Mosul to Iraqi government several months ago. While the war did in fact have a negative impact on the government performance, it is important that KRG have a good strategy to shift focus to the education sector by serving the people of the region because they were the first victims of the war.

### 5.2.8 Communication

Communication is one of the most important factors for the success of any objective. The concept of communication was common to most of the interview responses. The policymakers and implementers complained about lack or poor communication between the ministries, between top and lower officials, and the related agencies. For example, policymakers design and write policies but the implementers are not well informed about the new policies. The implementers often depend on their poor personal expertise to run duties. There is lack of communication between the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education. The former works independently or remotely of the latter. The two ministries are not updated about the needs of the society. Another responsible side to the issue is the lawmakers who are often not well informed of how the ministries perform. There is a lot of confusion about organization structure of the two concerned ministries in terms of communication. One reason for this bad communication is the implementation structure which is all top-down in public sector. Individuals at top positions make decisions and sign them without planning a good implementation procedure for the individuals who are responsible with the implementation. Instructions are not clear for implementation.

### 5.2.9 Lack of Experts and Funds

Another constraint the some of the policy implementers often pointed to was lack of experts. While they often referred to lack of funds as an obstacle, the policy implementers emphasized the seriousness of the issue of lack of experts. They said sometimes there are funds but there is lack of experts to implement the policies successfully. These two constraints are hindering the educational development in Kurdistan Region. For example, there are so called experts who still do not have enough computer skills which basic skills are and required in the 21st century. They stick to old syllabi, books and methods of instruction. For example, an instruction session for them is talking for short period of time then having the students do the talking for the rest of the session. They do not make use of technological advancements such as PowerPoint presentations, emails for communication, and other useful tools.

Lack of funds depends on economy which is not in a good state these days but can and should be taken into consideration once the economy and financial stability allow it. However, lack of experts is a serious but neglected problem. In Kurdistan region, the idea of having enough experts is taken for granted because top people in charge consider years of experience as a criterion for becoming experts. They do not pay attention to improving graduate programs to produce professionals. Rather, they just continue running day to day errands without any long-term planning. It is time educators and people in high positions at least developed training centers and workshops to prepare professionals for policymaking and implementation. Another solution for shortage of experts is bringing experts from other advanced countries to train KRG employees, teachers, policy makers, policy implementers, managers, general managers, and even the ministers.

### 5.2.10 Curriculum

Besides focusing on training in their responses, the second most important issue the policy makers and implementers emphasized was curriculum. Training was the stakeholders' short-term solution for teachers' poor and outdated knowledge, curriculum was the long-term solution for solving the issue of teacher quality improvement. The interviewees stated that there are many shortcomings with the curriculum in all departments and across all fields of study. They stated MOE and MHE cannot have knowledgeable graduates when they follow curricula and syllabi that date back to three decades and sometimes more than that. For example, a department such as law school has books that are outdated. The teachers do not have other resources other than those old books and materials. Another issue with the curriculum is its focus on theory rather than practical implications of those theories. These are the reasons why the interviewees repeatedly called for redesigning the curriculum to make modern and in line with curriculum in advanced countries where it is updated yearly. For example, a book printed in 1967 has many more editions, however, in Kurdistan, teachers may only have access to the first edition. Redesigning the curriculum requires a lot of effort and expertise, especially foreign expertise who have more awareness of the latest developments in science and arts. Therefore, it is necessary for the government to seriously consider forming a task force for redesigning the curriculum with the help and supervision of experts. Along with redesigning the curriculum, access to new educational resources, especially books, is very necessary. Even if the government has difficulty obtaining books in print, it can coordinate with foreign universities to give electronic access to their libraries so that teachers and students can benefit from them.

## 6. Conclusion

This study explored the issue of Teacher Quality Improvement (TQI) in Kurdistan Region- Iraq. The study aimed at pointing to the main challenges that hinder TQI in Kurdistan region. The study employed a grounded-theory approach to tackle the issue. Grounded-theory approach is arriving at findings through analysis of data from participants. Therefore, it is research that is grounded in data. After data was gathered via interviews with 25 policymakers and policy implementers, the data was analyzed via N-Vivo software. The data was classified into codes. The codes were analyzed, and ten concepts emerged. The concepts are the main points that summarize the challenges. The main findings strongly suggest immediate attention to the challenges. One of the most important formula that researcher found through the interviews was, "good teachers produce good students who build a good society."

## 7. Recommendations

In response to questions, policymakers and implementers mentioned important recommendations for improving teacher quality in KRI. Among the important points were the following:

1. Teachers need training to cope with up-to-date changes in science and fields of study. Many policymakers and implementers complained that most teachers depend on their prior knowledge which they obtained from college years.
2. Curriculum is an essential step for improving teacher quality. Both teachers and students benefit from curriculum, therefore, a good curriculum is necessary for both sides to have up to date knowledge.
3. More focus should be placed on hands-on and practical teaching methods. Theories are important but not as practical as hands on teaching. An important teaching approach which encompasses hand-on strategies is experiential learning and teaching.
4. Teachers need to be supported both financially and psychologically to ensure they devote all their focus and time to their practices.
5. Teachers and school leaders should be given more power and authority to make decisions that serve the interests of their schools and students.
6. Teachers should be motivated by the government through incentives and rewards.
7. Teachers should be evaluated periodically to ensure they have been keeping up with the latest developments in science and school behavior.

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