

## **A Phenomenological Study of Teachers' Challenges in Moving from Behaviourist to Humanistic Pedagogy in a Pakistani Private School**

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### **Abstract**

This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences and struggles of secondary school teachers in Pakistani private schools as they shift from behaviourist to humanistic pedagogy. A qualitative research design is used to collect data through semi-structured interviews with eight purposively selected teachers experiencing the transition to learner-centred pedagogy. Findings from thematic analysis revealed that this global shift in pedagogy is a quite complex process, initially perceived as a challenge by teachers but eventually leading to a significant transformation. Both external and internal factors, like rigid assessment policies, large class size, time limitations, parental involvement, lack of professional training, and shift from authoritative to facilitative, played a major role. Despite these barriers, this research highlights positive outcomes for students and teachers, improving students' engagement and confidence in class while boosting teachers' reflective practice and growth. The study concludes that achieving the required outcomes from a humanistic approach in Pakistani private schools requires systematic support and transformation, including professional training for teachers, improving rigid school policies, and gradually adopting a blended environment where traditional and modern teaching styles work together.

**Keywords:** Phenomenological study, Behaviourist pedagogy, Humanistic pedagogy, Teacher challenges, Private schools, Pakistan

### **Introduction**

Education systems across the globe have undergone a significant change in their pedagogical approaches, from behaviourist (teacher-centred) to Humanistic (learner-centred). Behaviourists emphasize rigid, structured instruction in which the teacher plays a dominant role, while Humanistic approaches emphasize personal growth, the self, and students' emotional well-being, giving them full freedom of choice.

In Pakistan, mostly private schools usually follow behaviourist principles, including rote learning, a strict classroom atmosphere fostering traditional teacher-student relationships, and a focus on completing the syllabus. However, due to technological development and the increasing demand for students' socio-emotional needs, there is a gradual urge towards a humanistic approach, including critical and reflective thinking. But this transition is not at all easy for teachers as they find it

challenging moving from an authoritative role to just a facilitator to students. It demands encouraging students' engagement and creating an emotional and supportive environment rather than a traditional discipline approach.

This transition is especially difficult in private schools in Pakistan because of large class sizes, strict assessment policy, and parental involvement that eventually affects the classroom pedagogies. Moreover, teachers are also comfortable with the traditional method of teaching due to a lack of professional training and the pressure of the existing curriculum. Furthermore, societal demand also prioritizes discipline and quick outcomes rather than a slow learner-centred approach.

### **Rationale**

The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges faced by teachers of private schools in transforming their pedagogy from a behaviourist to a humanistic approach. However, teachers face multiple challenges in adopting a humanistic approach in their classrooms due to institutional and societal pressure. Due to these problems, it is important to study in depth teachers' lived experiences during this pedagogical transition in Pakistani private schools. A phenomenological approach is particularly suitable for this research as it will help to determine in depth teachers' perceptions and internal struggles between these two pedagogies in the classroom. Moreover, this study aims to contribute to better educational changes as well as provide improved ways for policymakers, school leaders, and teachers.

### **Objective of the Study**

To explore the lived experiences and internal struggles of secondary school teachers as they transition from behaviorist to humanistic pedagogical practices within the context of Pakistani private schools.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do secondary school teachers in Pakistani private schools describe their lived experiences while moving from a behaviourist to a humanistic approach?
2. What are the challenges faced by teachers while adopting humanistic Pedagogy?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study highlights the ongoing transition in the pedagogical approaches in Pakistan's private school education. The teacher plays a central part in this transition, facing real struggles and challenges. By using phenomenology, this research will provide in-depth knowledge about the real context of transition and provide solutions and tools to enhance and run the teaching-learning process of the humanistic approach smoothly in the classroom. It will also help school leaders and policy makers to revise their practices, ensuring a supportive and socio-emotional growth for teachers as well as for students.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on teachers in private schools in Pakistan at the secondary level. It explores their lived experiences moving from behaviourist to humanistic pedagogy over the past 10 years, by applying a phenomenological method, such as in-depth interviews with 8 participants. It will focus on classroom experiences, challenges, factors, and techniques used by teachers, excluding public schools.

### **Limitations of the Study**

1. The research is restricted to private schools, so findings may not generalize to public schools.

2. Data is based on teachers' perception through interviews, which may involve recall bias.
3. It will not measure student outcomes, entirely depends on teachers' experiences.
4. The phenomenological approach limits the sample size.

### **Literature Review**

This study highlights a detailed overview of the literature related to the transition from behaviourist to humanistic pedagogy, exploring the challenges faced by teachers. It explores theoretical, conceptual, and other factors impacting the pressure in emphasizing the shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred approaches in private schools of Pakistan.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study supports these three learning theories: Behaviourism, Constructivism, and Humanism, which together explain the ongoing shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred pedagogy.

### **Behaviorist Theory**

This theory is associated with intellectuals such as B.F Skinner and John B. Watson, giving significance to observable behaviour and reinforcement. It basically represents the traditional method of teaching, where teachers play a dominant role in controlling and maintaining discipline in the classroom, but neglecting students' social and emotional needs (Hadi, 2024). This approach can still be seen in some of the private schools in Pakistan.

### **Constructivist Theory**

This theory is mainly associated with Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, who emphasize learning that is constructed through their own experiences and social interactions. This theory shifts the role of the teacher from authoritative to a facilitator who involves the learner in problem-solving and critical thinking. It gives insight into the gradual change of teaching practice from behaviourism to humanism (Khan, 2022).

### **Humanistic Theory**

This theory is associated with Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, emphasizing the overall development of learners, including emotional, social, and psychological aspects. This theory gives prime importance to students having full freedom and requires teachers to develop an environment where the learners are self-directed and supportive of their learning process. However, this pedagogical practice requires changes in teachers' traditional ways, leading to struggles in adopting it (Hadi, 2024).

These three theories together give us a better insight into the transition phase that is Behaviourism as existing practice, Constructivism being the transitional phase, and Humanism as the ultimate pedagogical approach. It makes us comprehend the struggle faced by teachers in moving from this ongoing shift, trying to adapt new teaching and learning practices in the classroom.

### **Transition from Behaviorist to Humanistic Pedagogy**

In an educational setting, there is a gradual shift from behaviorist to humanistic pedagogy, targeting mainly creativity and independent learning. Although this transformation is beneficial for students, it brings challenges for teachers as they need to balance between the traditional practice and the modern one, which leads to difficulty in implementation (Khan, 2022).

Due to technological development, there is sudden pressure on teachers to adapt their

pedagogical approach according to the needs of today's learner, integrating new technologies in their classroom. This transformation has, however, affected them, compromising their confidence in selecting teaching styles and adopting the latest pedagogies (Zhang & Liu, 2025).

### **Challenges in Applying Humanistic Pedagogy**

There are several challenges that are faced by teachers in shifting from teacher-centred to learner centred practice. It can be personal as well as internal and external factors that indirectly affect it. Many teachers are comfortable teaching the traditional method as they feel it is easy to maintain discipline in class. Moreover, one cause can be a lack of training as well that they are hesitated to adopt humanistic pedagogy in the classroom.

Organizational factors hugely influence the teachers by inflexible curriculum and rigid assessment policy that makes it difficult for them to apply a humanistic approach in the classroom (Ahmed & Qureshi, 2025). Educational Organization now adays pressurize teachers to implement a learner-centred approach in the classroom, but their aims and goals are based on standardized assessment and results-oriented policy that reflects a behaviorist approach (Hussain, 2024). However, research shows that there is a loophole between the policy and practice due to a lack of professional development for teachers, insufficient resources, and time constraints. To properly adapt a humanistic approach, it is necessary to align all the requirements that integrate curriculum, teaching style, and evaluation process (Frontiers in Education, 2025).

### **Importance in terms of the Pakistani Context**

In Pakistan, in-service and pre-service teachers both face challenges in adopting modern approaches due to societal and organizational pressures. Research conducted in Sialkot shows that pre-service teachers face difficulty during their practice period due to a lack of professional support and a significant gap between studied knowledge and classroom realities (Ali et al., 2025). Moreover, other local studies show that teachers still prefer traditional teaching practices in their classroom, which hinders to adopt learner centred practices (Aslam & Malik, 2022).

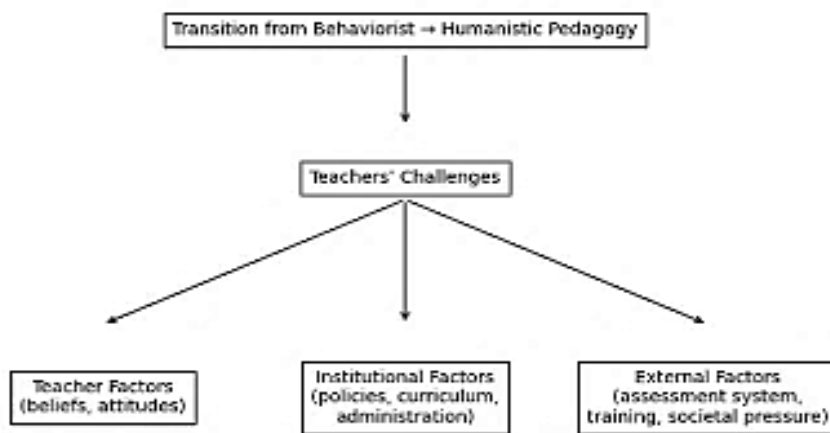
Although a global shift is seen towards Humanistic pedagogy, the change is still complex for teachers, especially in Pakistan, where contextual and systemic limitations restrict it. Despite research on this context, there is a gap, especially in private school teachers of Pakistan, using a phenomenological approach. Therefore, this research intends to highlight this gap by providing insight into teachers' struggles and strategies during this transition.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this research shows the relationship between pedagogical transition and teachers' challenges, influenced by internal and external factors. It basically highlights that the shift from behaviorist to humanistic approach will directly affect the challenges experienced by the teachers, including these mediating factors like teacher related, organizational related and external aspects.

- Teacher-related factors affect how educators perceive and implement new pedagogies.
- Institutional factors either support or constrain pedagogical transformation.
- External factors such as policy and assessment systems often reinforce traditional practices.

These interacting variables determine the scope and efficacy of educational transformation in private school classrooms.



## Methodology

### Research Design

This study implies a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore teachers lived experiences in transitioning from behaviourist to humanistic pedagogy in private schools in Pakistan. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenology explains the mutual meaning for several people of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon. Similarly, Neubauer et al. (2019) explain that phenomenological research is concerned with understanding how individuals experience a phenomenon and how they take those experiences into their own setting. In this background, it will enable the researcher to focus on in-depth experiences, perceptions, internal challenges, and strategies adopted by teachers during teaching practice.

### Population and Sampling

The study was conducted in private schools in Pakistan, with a primary focus on secondary education. These schools were selected because of their emphasis on moving towards modernization and adopting a humanistic approach, although they used to have a traditional method of teaching. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 8 participants from secondary private schools. The selected participants were chosen under these criteria:

- At least 10 years of experience in teaching.
- Currently working at the secondary level.
- Willing to participate in in-depth interviews.
- Experience in shifting from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach.

### Research Instruments

The main tool for data collection in this study was an in-depth, semi-structured interview. It comprised open-ended questions aligned with the objectives and conceptual framework of this study. A semi-structured interview helped to understand the personal perspective of participants, providing flexibility. Additionally, recent literature further highlights that qualitative methods provide rich, appropriate, and human-centred visions into intricate social phenomena, making them particularly suitable for exploratory studies (Lim, 2024). Questions were designed to give details about their personal as well as classroom and institutional challenges faced by them. Moreover, provided insight into the solutions while coping with these challenges.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection for this study was conducted by taking formal permission from the school authorities of the selected private schools. Selected participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their informed consent was obtained before the collection of the data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in a peaceful environment, ensuring a comfortable setting for approximately 45 minutes, and were audio recorded for easy and accurate transcription. The use of systematic qualitative procedures improves the trustworthiness and consistency of the study progression. (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Bhangu et al., 2023).

### **Ethical Consideration**

Ethical standards were completely followed throughout the study by keeping the identity of the participant and the school confidential throughout the research process. Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any stage. Data collected from the study were only used for academic purposes, and all the audio recordings and transcripts were destroyed after completion of the research to ensure ethical compliance. Recent guidelines underline that preserving transparency, participant protection, and responsible data management are crucial components of demanding qualitative research practice (Braun & Clarke, 2024; Lim, 2024).

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

This part of the study gives the analysis and findings of the study exploring teachers lived experience in transitioning from behaviourist to humanistic pedagogy in a Pakistani private school. The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight teachers, which are widely used in qualitative research to explore participants lived experiences in depth (John W. Creswell, 2014). Open coding from the attained data was done at the primary stage, and key themes were developed from the participants' narratives of their experiences. Ten major themes appeared from the analysis of the present data set comprising: Transition as a challenging yet transformative process, Transition of a teacher from authoritative to facilitator, Major hurdles from organizational restrictions, Classroom realities hindering implementation, parental and societal pressure, Positive modification and change in students behaviour, Effective pedagogical approaches, Enhancing teachers' confidence and professional growth, Need for systemic transformation and Gradual and appropriate execution of change.

### **Theme 1: Transition as Challenging yet Transformative Process**

The shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred pedagogy was initially difficult for teachers but rewarding at the end. It required a few amendments in teaching styles, perspectives, and classroom environment. Teachers highlighted that earlier they found it uncomfortable, as well as they were uncertain because it involved emphasizing improvising lesson plans, maintaining discipline in the classroom, and later the evaluation process also became time-consuming. Similarly, they reported that students were also hesitant to respond, but gradually they became comfortable with this and showed active engagement. Despite these hurdles, they also mentioned that sometimes students are more comfortable with their peers to share ideas despite being shy in front of the teacher, which encouraged the teachers to adopt the learner-centred approach more in their classrooms.

<b>Participant 1</b>	“Initially, students were hesitant... but they quickly became more collaborative and vocal.”
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<b>Participant 2</b>	“It wasn't easy to move from teacher-centred to learner-centred... it was rethinking lesson plans, classroom control, and even how to measure their success.”
<b>Participant 5</b>	“Students initially struggled... however, their active participation confirmed the value of learner-centred teaching.”
<b>Participant 8</b>	“The transition... was a challenge that consumed time and energy.”

### **Theme 2: Transition of a Teacher from Authoritative to Facilitator**

It was evident from the analysis that there was a huge change in teachers' identity from being dominant in the classroom towards being a supporter of students. Teachers reported hindrance when giving an explanation of the lesson, while engaging students, in that become quite difficult to manage the discipline of the class. They also reported that it was challenging to change the traditional mindset where they continuously had the habit of giving fewer chances to students for their active involvement. But over time, teachers adapted to this change by reflecting on their practices and initiated the new relationship between teacher and student as a more productive and collaborative one.

<b>Participant 5</b>	“Students initially struggled and were hesitant to share, and I found it difficult to step back from direct instructional explanation.”
<b>Participant 7</b>	“Managed anxiety by allotting time limits for student tasks.”
<b>Participant 8</b>	“Struggled with the urge to intervene and correct students, learning to let them learn from their own experience.”

### **Theme 3: Major hurdles from Organizational Restrictions**

It was analyzed that institutional factors are the most crucial ones in shifting from teacher-centered to learner-centered pedagogy, mainly the strict policy and assessment system of the organization. One of the teachers stated that the organization puts a lot of pressure on the students by evaluating them frequently, which limits the teaching time, as active engagement of students requires more time to finish the syllabus. There is one more factor reported by teachers, that there are too many responsibilities for teachers other than teaching, from the administration that restricts the teacher from giving more time to execute interactive lesson plans.

<b>Participant 1</b>	“Rigid assessment systems... force teachers to prioritize teaching to the test.”
<b>Participant 2</b>	“School policies... pressure teachers to cover the syllabus on time.”
<b>Participant 4</b>	“Pressure of school policies hinders a learner-centered class.”

### **Theme 4: Classroom Realities Hindering Implementation**

From the data, it was evident that teachers also face problems while teaching in the classroom, where the main factors are a large class size and limited time to complete the syllabus. One teacher stated that managing 35-40 students in a single classroom makes it difficult to use a learner-centered approach every time for the lesson. Additionally, it is also time-consuming when the lessons are done in a collaborative environment. It also requires strategies for maintaining discipline in class for implementing discussion-based and interactive lessons.

<b>Participant 2</b>	“Ample time is required for the group tasks.”
<b>Participant 3</b>	“Class size... makes it difficult for a single facilitator.”
<b>Participant 4</b>	“We may go back to a teacher-centred class due to syllabus completion.”
<b>Participant 8</b>	“Large classrooms are a humongous challenge.”

### Theme 5: Parental and Societal Pressure

Along with internal factors, there are some external pressures as well that play a crucial role in molding the teaching practice of teachers. One of the teachers reported that parents usually prefer the traditional teaching method as it gives them quick results for their child. Additionally, despite the benefits of a learner-centered approach, societal pressure still indicates more emphasis on rote learning and a disciplined classroom.

<b>Participant 1</b>	“Parental demands for immediate, measurable results...”
<b>Participant 2</b>	“Why aren’t you teaching? is a big question...”
<b>Participant 4</b>	“It is difficult to make parents understand that quick outcomes... is not possible.”

### Theme 6: Positive Modification and Change in Students' Behaviors

The analysis of the data indicates that although students were initially hesitant and uncomfortable during this transition phase, they gradually adapted well, showing active participation and involvement during the lesson. This also highlighted that students feel more connected with the lesson when they are responsible for their work. It also helps students to discover their inner personality by communicating with their peers independently. These findings showed that although adjustments take time, this learner-centered approach is helpful for the overall development of the child.

<b>Participant 1</b>	“Students became more collaborative and vocal.”
<b>Participant 2</b>	“Students were really happy... aware of their hidden personality traits.”
<b>Participant 4</b>	“Students feel more confident... share their ideas.”
<b>Participant 5</b>	“Increased willingness to speak and participate.”

### Theme 7: Effective Pedagogical Approaches

The data revealed that teachers suggested a variety of strategies that can facilitate a learner-centered approach, including group work, peer learning, inquiry-based, project-based, role plays, quizzes, and use of multimedia tools. Additionally, the teachers also reported that positive feedback and their self-assessment method promote deeper understanding in learning.

<b>Participant 1</b>	“Shifted my focus towards project-based learning.”
<b>Participant 2</b>	“Students enjoyed the task given in groups.”
<b>Participant 5</b>	“Interactive role plays, quizzes, and videos...”

### Theme 8: Enhancing Teachers' Confidence and Professional Growth

The shifting in pedagogy also contributed to teachers' professional development and confidence. One of the teachers stated that they needed to research and find out more about the new teaching style to implement effectively in the classroom, which eventually boosted confidence and groomed them as individuals. It was also beneficial in the classroom, as despite initial struggles, adopting new teaching practices fosters continuous professional growth and development.

<b>Participant 7</b>	“Increased research... boosted confidence.”
<b>Participant 8</b>	“New strategies provided better command in the classroom.”

### **Theme 9: Need for Systemic Transformation**

The data revealed that to make this shift smooth, it is really important for the organization to provide support by providing an environment where teachers are free to experiment and teach comfortably. There should be professional training for teachers, put less stress on completion of the syllabus, change rigid policies of assessment, and provide more resources to implement technology in classrooms. Additionally, organizations should reduce the workload of teachers so that they can give more time to make lessons incorporating critical thinking, collaboration, and assessing them accordingly.

<b>Participant 1</b>	“Providing continuous professional development...”
<b>Participant 2</b>	“Ease the system of assessing students.”
<b>Participant 3</b>	“Resources such as the internet, projectors...”
<b>Participant 5</b>	“Assessments must be aligned with skill-based learning.”

### **Theme 10: Gradual and Appropriate Execution of Change**

The analysis of data revealed that teachers stated that there should be a gradual change in pedagogical approach rather than directly shifting to it. One of the teachers stated that there should be a combined approach adopted in the classroom, incorporating both traditional and modern teaching styles. One of the teachers advised that instead of implementing all the things together, it is better to use small changes in the classroom so that more desirable outcomes can be seen. This directly reflects the need for appropriate context-based changes, particularly aligned with the Pakistani education system.

<b>Participant 5</b>	“Start by making small, consistent shifts...”
<b>Participant 7</b>	“20 minutes teaching, 15 minutes pair work.”
<b>Participant 8</b>	“Balance between teacher-centred and learner-centred.”

The analysis and findings revealed that shifting from behaviourist to humanistic pedagogy is complex and challenging, affected by internal and external organizational factors. Although teachers face significant challenges, this shift eventually leads to improved student involvement and enhanced teaching and learning outcomes. However, in the Pakistani context, there is a need for systematic support, slow implementation, and gradual adaptation, essential for adopting a learner-centred approach.

### **Result and Recommendations**

The findings of this study indicated that the shifting from behaviourist to humanistic pedagogy in a private school setting is an overall complicated and multi-dimensional phenomenon, consistently highlighting previous studies showing challenges to adopt a learner-centred approach in a transitional educational context. Several factors and pressures hindered teachers from adopting this approach, such as uncertainty, overwork load, classroom management, and a rigid evaluation system. This aligns with the findings of Zhang and Liu (2025), who noted that shifts in pedagogical approaches often impact teachers’ confidence and instructional decision-making. However, over time, teachers recognized the benefits of learner-centred approaches in enhancing engagement, which supports the humanistic perspective emphasizing student growth (Hadi, 2024). Although there was a change in the teacher’s role, now being a facilitator to students requires more effort for classroom management and to run the teaching-learning process smoothly in a traditional environment. In private schools, implementing a learner-centred approach is critical due to large class sizes and limited time to complete the syllabus. Additionally, organizational limitations are a major barrier to teachers adopting a humanistic approach, including rigid assessment policies and strict curriculum demands

that make it difficult for teachers. Moreover, parents are also responsible for making the transition difficult due to the pressure of immediate academic outcomes from students. Despite all challenges and struggles, the research highlighted a positive impact on students' behaviour, as they become more confident when learning in a collaborative learner-centred environment, which is essential for their holistic development. Additionally, due to this transition, teachers effectively use more pedagogical practices that enhance the learning of students, such as project-based and collaborative learning. It also contributed to teachers' professional growth by reflecting and transforming their teaching styles according to the needs of students. However, the study reveals the need and support from the educational organization by providing facilities and flexibility for teachers to adopt this approach gradually in their teaching process. Moreover, a blended teaching style would be perfect for a Pakistani background, supporting that educational change should be gradual and a sensitive phase. Based on the current findings of the participants, the following are the recommendations that can be suggested specifically in the Pakistani private schools to support the transition to humanistic pedagogy.

1. Educational organizations should provide teachers with continuous development and training programs to enhance the effectiveness of teachers while adopting learner-centred and modern practices.
2. Educational leaders should revise the traditional standardized evaluation policies to incorporate a skill-based and formative assessment method aligning with humanistic values.
3. Educational Administration should reduce extra non-teaching duties for teachers so that they can utilize time productively for designing interactive lesson plans.
4. Schools should promote awareness among parents regarding the long-term benefits of humanistic approaches to reduce external pressure for immediate, rote-learned results.
5. Schools should adopt a "blended" pedagogical approach that gradually integrates modern learner-centred styles with traditional methods to suit the specific societal and classroom realities of Pakistan.

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