

An Insight into the Instructional Practices of Girls' Single Teacher Schools

Mona Rafiq*
Nasser Ud Din**

Abstract

In rural areas of Pakistan, enrollment in schools remains low due to low population, therefore, students in most of the school from Zero to 5th class sit together in either one room or two and are taught by a single teacher. Teacher training institutes provide training of mono-grade teaching strategies. Teachers trained in mono-grade teaching practices, after qualifying Government job are posted in multi-grade setup of rural areas. They start learning on how to frame instructional practices of mono grade teaching to apply in multi grade set up. This qualitative study conducted in girls' primary schools explored the lived experiences of teachers in Single Teacher Schools. Participants were selected purposively therefore only those schools were taken which fulfill the need of the study. The researcher started to collect data and reached at saturation point on fifth school. Teachers are trying their best to achieve instructional objectives in such a challenging situation but handling multiple classes at the same time is impractical. It was found that teachers try their best to achieve instructional objectives in such a challenging situation but handling 5 to 7 classes at the same time is impractical. The strategies mentioned in literature like group learning, integrated syllabus are not used in these classes because students of primary level cannot learn without teachers' supervision. It is recommended to develop a strategy for these schools for effective learning and teaching.

Keywords: Instructional, mono-grade, multi-grade, practices, school, teaching.

* Ph.D Scholar, Secondary Teacher Education, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad. monaahsan7771@gmail.com

** Professor, Kohat University of Science and Technology naseerkust@yahoo.com, dr.naseeruddin@kust.edu.pk

Introduction

Girls' education is a worldwide issue. There is no doubt that in country like Pakistan women have to face socio-cultural hurdles to acquire education. This is the reason that female education has become a challenge like Asia, Africa (Noureen, 2011).

According to O, Neil (2021) In Pakistan, female primary education is in dire need of improvement, and so far, their number is not decreasing. A United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) for the East Asia and Pacific Region was launched in May 2002, under The Dakar Framework of Action, where some points were suggested to governments and policy makers to increase girls' education. This was suggested to build schools close to girls' homes to ease them prospect to get education. Considering the points suggested by UNGEI, Government of Pakistan started to open primary schools in each village irrespective of the fact that villages are very small, and schools are at very short distance. This strategy helped in improving girls' attendance. Mansoor (2011) stated that schools in low populated areas resulted in Single Teacher schools. Enrolment is low in these schools. As far as Pakistan is concerned, one of the reasons of Single teacher school besides low populated villages is schools are at very short distance. This adversely affected the strength of schools in a way that strength of a single school is divided into couple of schools. So, school strength hardly reached 30. Allocation of small budget for these schools remained hindrance for school. The strength of the students in each grade was 5 to 7 and in some cases below this. In this situation a policy was introduced that if the school strength reaches to, for example 35 then single teacher will be allocated and if strength increases from mentioned number, then one more teacher will be given. This policy was made for primary level for both urban and rural areas. As a result, in urban areas in case strength of the school is below then schools are merged to improve the strength of the school and availability of reasonable teachers at primary level. As far as rural areas, merger of schools is not practical because it results in drop out of the students especially girls. Teacher-student ratio rule is implemented in the light of rationalization policy for mono grade schools where teacher student ratio is 1:35 (strength of the students varies province to province). As Villages are very small due to which strength of the students hardly cross the 40 therefore a single teacher remains in a school to handle all classes from zero to 5. This is how single teacher schools came in existence, without any policy (ASER, 2011).

Single teacher school (STS) means multi grade classes where a teacher teaches to more than one grades at the same time. This phenomenon is in vogue both in developing and developed world like Sweden, UK etc. run STSs with multi grade teaching. There are 8,892 STSs in France (Winsome, 1996). As purpose of teaching is to develop personality of students therefore teachers have to perform different practices in classroom to achieve the objectives of teaching. The point to ponder is that teachers who are trained for mono grade teaching, how could they apply same practices of teaching for the situation where multiple classes sit in same room and teach simultaneously.

The purpose of this research was to describe the reality of instructional practices of Single Teacher schools in Pakistan because usually teachers are skilled to teach in mono grade schools while they are posted to the area which they experience first time and have no training and scenario is more complicated as compared to mono grade schools in which they are trained. According to ASER (2011) multi grade teaching is a means to meet Education for All (EFA) commitment and reach its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets by making it easy for children to access education at Primary level therefore it is highly appreciable to encourage and support multi grade teaching, especially for girls, and those in remote areas. Ambiguity lies yet that which instructional practices they apply in STSs. Therefore, purpose of the study was to explore instructional practices teachers adapt in STSs and to add more knowledge in the existing knowledge available about STSs. While going through previous research studies, it is found that there are still many areas which need to be unfolded about STSs. As Little (2001) asserted that a study must be done in a specific context and sufficient information must be provided about the status and condition of Single Teacher schools which will be helpful to understand the scenario of these schools.

Research Question: Which instructional practices are followed by the teachers of girls' STSs? The questions were relating to planning, delivery, and reflexes.

Review of Literature

Students from different grades sitting in same class and taught by sole teacher termed as multi grade class. Joubert (2009) mentions, Label of multi grade teaching is used where teacher arranges classes of more than one grades in same room, sitting together and teach these classes simultaneously. There are some countries where multi grade classes are preferred over single grade classes like Finland and Netherlands (Mulkeen

& Higgins, 2009). It exists in some countries by choice (Little, 2001) like the US, UK, Canada, China and other countries by necessity like Pakistan, India etc. (ASER, 2011).

In rural areas of the world, multi grade teaching is in practice due to economic and geographic necessity. As far as Pakistan is concerned multi grade classes are in practice in rural areas since many years as evidenced by one of the respondent of research study but rooted rapidly at Primary level, first time to achieve the targets of EFA and later due to SDGs. The same was mentioned by Little (2011) that multi grade schools are in existence in Africa due to teacher shortages chiefly in rural areas which are hard to reach and have low enrolments. This is also to ensure economical way to expand access to basic education and contributes to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Education for All (EFA) goals. In Pakistan multi grade schools are known as either two-teacher school or One/Single Teacher School and rarely three teacher school with multi grade setup specifically at Primary level in rural areas because of the low enrollment of students. There are some schools where strength is around 90 with two teachers. The challenges faced either by Single teacher school or two teachers with the strength of 90 are same.

In Pakistan, Single Teacher School has become regular feature of education system especially in developing countries in remote and rural areas. Difference lies that in developed countries the number of STSs is decreasing while in developing countries especially in Pakistan these schools still exist, and their number is neither increasing nor decreasing. Multi grade classes at any level of education from Primary to onward are always introduced due to the need of time (ASER, 2011). Major issue to the researcher is multi grade classes with a single teacher at Primary level with more than two and sometimes 5 to 6 grades.

According to Marshall (1985) there are 70% STSs in Finland and 80% STSs in Portugal. In these classes this is obligatory for teachers to teach number of classes their respective syllabus simultaneously without receiving training that how to deal, manage and maintain levels of learning that they confront in the classes. Combining one or two grades is manageable but combining all classes I-V is very hard for a teacher to be honest and be an effective teacher throughout the teaching.

Educational authorities consider multi grade schools temporary therefore statistical data either not available and if available then not authenticated. As mentioned by ASER (2011) in official records, there are no multi grade school in Pakistan.

Teachers perform different practices at school to achieve the objectives of instruction. These practices performed by teachers left an

impact on in the learning process of pupils. Teachers must have sufficient knowledge in different fields of teaching to be successful. Because the contents of what the pupils learn much depend on the teachers' knowledge and skills, it is of interest to understand more about the different competencies a teacher might have (Thombre, 2016). It is important to explore that how teachers handle situation in STSs and which instructional practices they apply in Single Teacher schools with multi grade classes.

The present study is different from the previous research studies because this is specifically in the context of Pakistan that these schools have become permanent feature in Pakistan since 2003. Even then there is no improvement in the condition of these schools and number is not decreasing. Considering the gap in previous studies on One Teacher schools, the present study got the deep insight about how a teacher teaches in a school where teacher has to teach 6 to 7 classes simultaneously. It is critical to understand what instructional practices teachers follow in OTSs while they are trained for mono grade practices.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was the exploration and description of instructional practices performed by teachers of Single Teacher schools during teaching, therefore the study adopted a phenomenological exploratory, descriptive approach type of qualitative research (Shank, 2002) because it allowed the participants through in-depth interviews and lesson observations to describe the phenomenon in their own words according to their experiences (Stephen, 2012) of teaching practice in STSs.

Data was collected by researcher as main entity. Researcher used semi structured interview and various steps of data analysis as given by different experts. Participants were not decided beforehand in qualitative study. Data collection procedure stops at saturation point. Researcher adopted all measures including bracketing, to ensure the outcomes are as close to what the participants mean as possible and in a more realistic and practical sense.

There are multi grade schools at primary level in rural areas of Pakistan with one, two or three teachers. Researcher's concern was with the teachers teaching in Single teacher schools and in view of the qualitative nature of the study, 5 female Single Teacher schools were purposefully selected for the study. Small samples are taken in qualitative study because results are not generalizable (Stephen, 2012). The researcher conducted the research in district Mansehra, KP which has the highest percentage of Single Teacher schools in Pakistan (AEPM, 2016).

Data Collection and Analysis

Semi structured interview and classroom observation were used to collect data. emphasized" the mutuality of (interviews and observations) as the central techniques of naturalistic investigation." When used together they assist in the verification of the data. The scheduled classroom observations were made of the teachers that had been interviewed. Researcher spent whole day from 08:00am to 1:00 pm in the school and observed the teacher's routine of full day for the authenticity of data and to reach saturation point. Each teacher was observed for three days.

Interviewees allowed to audio recording. Thematic technique was considered more suitable for analyzing the interviews and lesson observations of teachers teaching in STSs. Thorough reading and reviews of interviews were done for multiple times, questions were coded, themes/patterns that integrate the categories were emerged and reviewed in the light of research questions. Irrelevant themes were eliminated. Interviews and lesson observations were lined up in the light of themes. Finally write up of report of all data developed.

Results

Following themes were made from the highlights of the lived experiences of the Single Teacher Schools' teachers.

Theme 1: Lesson Planning

All the participants, teachers teaching in Single Teacher schools, were of the view that this is not practical to prepare written lesson plans for each grade on daily basis because if teacher has 6 grades in one class, this means teacher will have to prepare 30 lessons daily. Teachers are provided planned lessons in booklet form from the department of education which they mostly prefer to use for their guidance. They are given diaries too for the entry of daily routine which they do whenever get time or before the visit of District Education Officer (DEO).

As shared by respondents:

"I just make mind map of lesson to be taught next day." (R1&5)

"Having 9 years of teaching experience in multi grade classes makes it easy to sort mind map for all lessons to deliver." (R 2)

Theme 2: Lesson Implementation (stepwise delivery of lesson)

All the respondents replied that important steps of recapitulation and reviewing the lesson are not conducted. This is the reason that they cannot analyze the understanding level of the students. The reason of not attempting these steps is that they have to switch from one grade to another grade to complete the topic in a given period.

One respondent shared that:

If I am successful in teaching them relevant topic and make that clear to students, it is a big achievement in this critical situation. (R4)

Theme 3: Teaching methods:

Young teachers were in favor of using multiple teaching methods while those who have more than 15 years of experience stated that text-book method (traditional method) is easy for children as well as for teachers.

As shared by respondents:

If the purpose of teaching is the knowledge to be grabbed by every child then teacher does their best at any cost to make it understandable for children. (R1,3)

Theme 4: Use of Audio Visual (AV) aids and relevant material other than text book

Three young teachers were found using different AV aids whenever possible. Two teachers with more than 15 years of experience still use traditional method of teaching i-e text book method. They do not rely on AV aids or other relevant material.

As shared by respondents:

I use different AV aids along with text books especially for zero, KG and 1st class. We are provided different A V aids like cards, charts etc. from education department. (R2)

Students learn better from text books. It is time consuming to use other material along with text book.

Theme 5: Group Learning

Group learning is effective at a time teacher is busy in some activity other than curricular and cannot give time to students. This is practical for small activities like reading in groups or to note down answers collectively otherwise this is not effective.

Theme 6: Individual learning needs

Teachers are well aware of the importance of individual learning needs of the students. Two teachers (15 years of experience) do not consider individual learning needs of students but young teachers do consider during teaching. They are of the opinion that to be honest this is difficult because they have to finish the syllabus in time. So if teacher considers individual needs of students then she/he may not complete the syllabus. Teachers try their best for the betterment of students to pass the exam which is basic need. One of the respondents was very vigilant in identifying individual learning needs of her students.

As shared:

I consider learning needs e.g. there is a student who does not sit at his seat and keep on roaming in school. I let him do what he wants but when I find that he wants to study then I call him. If I do not care about their individual differences, then they stop coming to school and irritate their parents. I have to teach them in a way they like. (R2)

We have to consider individual learning needs of students in rural areas for improving the strength of school. (R4)

Theme 7: Special children

Three teachers have special children while two teachers never faced any special children.

As shared by respondent

Yes, I have two special children; one is blind and the other one is slow learner. We accommodate these children with parents' cooperation. (R3)

There are two polio students, one in class 3 another in class 2 and 1 deaf student in class 4. (R2)

Theme 8: Motivation

All the respondents were agreed to motivate the students in different ways.

Theme 9: Integration of curriculum

All the respondents started their carrier in Government job with multi grade teaching therefore they are used to teach integrated curriculum. Initially they faced difficulty but after some experience they can now easily manage integrated curriculum. It is also stated that there are very few topics which can be integrated. One of the major integration is of grammar which can easily be integrated and it really saves time. It was

asked to one of the respondent that you started your career from multi grade schools and government do not provide specific syllabus for these schools then “ever you thought to develop curriculum for these schools” because you are a gem for in this setup with such a huge experience. Her reply was that this is the responsibility of Education department. I am receiving my pay then why should I do this. My job is only two years more then I will take retirement so spending my life with ease.

As shared by respondent

I integrate some topics of KG and One class as well as some topics of Science of 4th and 5th class. (R1)

Generally, it is easy to integrate syllabus of KG and 1st and grammar portion of 4th and 5th. This is the reason that I seated them in a way I integrate the curriculum of the classes. (R2)

Theme 10: Support from DEO regarding curriculum

All respondents were unanimously agreed that there is no practical support from DEO relating to curriculum specifically for multi grade schools.

Theme 11: Completion of syllabus

All of them shared that although this is very tough job to complete the syllabus but they try their best to complete in any way. In case syllabus of any class is remaining then they teach important topics and left the rest. Syllabus of 5th class must be completed.

Theme 12: Demand for other teacher

Their demand for another teacher is not fulfilled in time. **Theme 13: Zero class (Montessori)**

Government has introduced Montessori class in Government schools. There is no fee in Government schools therefore parents send children in zero class but as they get mature they shift them to private school. It is also found that whenever there is no one to attend these children at home they drop them at school.

2 teachers (15 years' experience) do not give special attention to these children while young teachers who are trained with emerging methods of teaching teach these children through different Montessori apparatus provided by DEO. AV aids are provided for zero, KG and 1st class. In private schools Montessori level students have short time period of school but here parents send them at 8:30 am till 1:30 pm.

As shared by respondents

We are provided different AV aids for Zero, KG and 1st class. In private schools Montessori level students have short time period of school but here parents send them at 8:30 am till 1:30 pm. I keep them involved in oral activities with KG and 1st class. After 12:00 pm I do board activity with them and ask them to write on board. (R2)

*This zero class is good if parents send these children for a purpose. (R3)
Policy of zero class is good overall but this is an extra responsibility for teachers in Single Teacher schools. Point to notice is that parents send their children in zero class just to make their school routine. As they become mature about schooling then they shift them to private schools. (R1)*

Classroom observation

The respondent teachers interviewed were also observed in Class rooms for three days from 08:00 am to 1:30 pm.

Classroom observation was made in the light of the questions asked in interview. All 5 respondent teachers were responsible for teaching 7 grades Zero, KG, 1,2,3,4,5 simultaneously. None respondent had strength below 30. Respondent 4 (the school where no teacher had been allocated and teachers from different primary schools go there on their turn for fifteen days until the regular teacher will be allocated) had 25 students. All schools were two room building. 4 teachers had no other helper except gate keeper while one school had gate keeper and a female attendant with the teacher.

It was observed that teachers reached schools 10 minutes earlier. Assembly was conducted in same manner in all schools. Morning assembly was conducted in a routine with recitation of some Sura from Quran-e-Pak, Naat and National Anthem. Besides this, they revised 6 kalmas, basic concepts of grammar required at primary level i-e nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives and tenses, last ten suras of Quran-e-Pak on daily basis. Students moved to classrooms after assembly after checking their uniforms. Teachers were advised by DEO to emphasis on English, Mathematics, Urdu and Science because these are major subjects while rest of the subjects Islamiat, Pakistan Studies and General Knowledge supplement these major subjects. First period of Nazra was mentioned in time table on daily basis but practically it was on the teachers' discretion either to take Nazra period on daily basis or once in a week. 2nd period was of English then of Maths and then of Urdu and then of Science. None teacher prepared lesson plans. They follow daily routine for moving ahead on the basis what have taught yesterday. It was experienced that teachers

tried to finish the topics of each class but neither do recapitulation nor revision of the topics taught to evaluate students' understanding level. They had readymade lesson plans provided by DEO office to which they rarely give a look.

It was found that senior teachers emphasized on textbook method while young teachers apply multiple methods along with AV add to make the topic clear to the students. It was observed that although teachers try to teach each major subject to all classes but there was also wastage of time of students whenever teacher either got busy in administrative work or with other class. It is noticed that if students spent 5 hours in a school but they utilize hardly 2 hours in studies due to not getting full time and attention from the teacher. It was felt impractical to consider individual learning needs of the students because this is time consuming activity and requires full attention of teacher. Teacher has to ignore other students because she is sole operator of school.

It was also found that there is only a gate keeper to assist the teacher in all matters. In case teacher has to go on leave then she requested a teacher from nearby school with two teachers to send one teacher to school in her absence. The syllabus of Science and English has upgraded which cannot be taught by senior teachers due to having lowest qualification either SSC or HSSC with teacher training course (Primary Teacher Certificate) PTC.

It was observed that seating arrangement of students was done in any of three ways like each class was seated in each row or those classes sit adjacent whose syllabus was integrated or divided in two rooms. It was found that some teachers had special children like deaf, polio patient and Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). It was found that it all depends on teacher's will and strength that how she dealt with these special children.

It was seen in three days' observation that teachers gave at least two home works to all classes on daily basis. Some teachers checked homework copies whenever got time during class timings which is tough and some teachers had fixed time after 12:30 pm for copy checking along with other activities. They conduct test either oral or written of the topics completed either every week or after every fifteen days.

It was seen that all schools were noisy. Students were moving in class and talking to each other. If teacher is strict then students behaved disciplined in her presence but as she left the class, they start moving and talking to each other. In case teacher is lenient or has soft voice then there is no limit of in-disciplinary situation. Every teacher had appointed a monitor from 5th class but that was also one of them how can s/he had

control on classmates. There was also another reason of loud classes that students were continuously coming to teacher either for any confusion regarding the exercises or for checking class work or for drinking water or going to washroom. This practice distracted the students to whom teacher was teaching then and the teacher too. It was observed that teachers motivated the students by appreciating on their positive attitude, neat work and attempting good test. Some teachers even encouraged weak students for the better performance in future. A good thing was observed that young teachers created different activities for the students to keep them busy in positive things during break because there were no swings for them at schools. One of the teacher did lunch with students at break time. Students sat in circle and shared different stories with each other. According to student's teacher does lunch with them once or twice a week. Teacher's point of view was that as there are no swings for the students and has very small ground therefore I do this activity.

Every school had Zero class students. These students do not need proper admission. There is policy that if parents want to send their children age 5 or below they can. This will help to improve literacy level. It was observed that these students did not have books and copies. They came only with lunch. Teachers tried to involve them in oral activities only otherwise they remained free. It was seen that parents left them at school up to 09:00 am and they returned to home at 1:30 pm.

Discussion

The study was undertaken with the intention to explore instructional practices of teachers, teaching in Single Teacher Schools through their lived experiences. Conclusions of the study were made based on the findings of the study. Regarding the research questions, there was valuable information extracted from the semi structured interviews and classroom observations. The answers unveil the teaching styles of the Single Teacher Schools in rural context. It was clear that if there are no Single Teacher schools means no formal education at all for the habitants of rural areas. As mentioned in the report of ASER (2011) and Little (2001) that Single Teacher schools can play a significant role in providing learning opportunities to those for whom alternate to multi grade schooling is no school at all.

Considering the findings of the study, it is evident, though teachers do not prepare written lesson plans due to heavy workload even then they teach effectively. There is only issue in recapitulation and reviewing of lesson which is helpful to know the understanding level of the students.

Purpose of teaching is to develop the whole personality of a child. This is the reason that curriculum includes all the activities designed inside and outside the class/school. As far as these teachers are concerned, it is felt that teachers are just teaching to students to complete the syllabus in time. As stated in a study by Winsome (1996) Lesson planning is even difficult and time-taking in a one-level class where teacher has to prepare 1 or 2 lessons while in multi grade class teacher has to teach 6 subjects in 35 minutes concurrently and needs to prepare 6 lessons for single period.

AV aids are provided by DEOs for classes zero, KG and 1st but use depends on the determination of the teachers. Teachers are well aware about the importance of individual learning needs of the students. They tried their best to give due importance but sometimes they have to ignore because considering learning needs is time consuming while they have to perform multiple tasks single handedly. Besides this, there are also special children in some schools who cannot be ignored. The point is supported by Mulaudzi (2016). Teachers of Single teacher schools are weighted down with multiple tasks like teaching, planning, assessment and administration. DEOs are supportive only morally not practically. It was found during literature review that Mulkeen and Higgins (2009) mentioned one of the methods of teaching in multi grade setup was integration of curriculum while on the basis of experiences of these teachers of STSs it was concluded that integration of syllabus is not as much practical as different educationists and researchers emphasize on it. Integration of syllabus is basically practical in grammar part even then this is difficult to maintain difficult level same for different grades

Maximum numbers of primary schools are multi grade schools in rural area of KP. These schools are run since many years as witnessed by one respondent who had 19 years of teaching experience in multi grade schools and 5 years of teaching experience in Single Teacher School in rural context. As stated in ASER report (2011), multi grade teaching in Pakistan is not result of proactive approach but to cope up with inability of the system to cater to the education needs of the country.

The range of challenges and concerns, the teachers of Single Teachers Schools raised i.e. more planning and preparation, weak implementation of lesson planning, neglect of individual learner needs and remediation and lack of support are not new. Multi grade class is an excess of work and sometimes they only do what they can. Same challenges have been highlighted in different research studies (Matshoba, 2011). The teachers teaching in Single Teacher Schools face multiple challenges including mentioned above like they are sole operator of school with only gate

keeper. They have to handle multiple tasks simultaneously, have to handle more than one grades simultaneously.

It is found that DEOs arrange multiple trainings for the Primary school teachers. These are general trainings regarding normal teaching. There are no special trainings for the teachers of multi grade setup. Whatever these teachers practice and adapt all is done by them. There appears also to be a mismatch between teacher education and the real demands from teachers in multi grade situations. Same is also pointed out by Little (2001) that no special training is provided to teachers to teach multi grade classes set up.

Conclusion

The study concludes that, instructional practices of teachers teaching in Single Teacher schools can be improved if the challenges they face are addressed. It is realized from the above discussion that the severity of these challenges can be only realized if someone observes them while sitting inside school during school hours. The teachers of these Single Teacher Schools can perform in a way that improves instructional practices, improves student's learning and gains trust if parents in a way that parents will not drop out their children due to having single teacher at school.

Recommendations

It is recommended to develop independent strategy for Single Teacher Schools which will be helpful in improving teaching and learning process in these schools. There should be need based training for these teachers.

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