



RESEARCH PAPER

**Head Teachers', Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of Failing
Primary Rural Schools in Sheikhpura**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of head teachers, teachers, and parents about the reason of failing primary schools in Sheikhpura district. Using a purposive sampling technique, perceptions of 10 head teachers, 20 teachers, and 20 parents were collected through open-ended interviews. Using the constant comparative method, interviews were analyzed. Head teachers perceived that lack of facilities, teacher competence, and parental involvement were the main reasons of poor results of the schools. The teachers' perceived they were overburdened, involved in extra duties (such as election duty, Dengue safety, and polio vaccine supply duty to the children at homes), and the parents were not cooperative in sending their children to schools regularly and they did not give care and attention to them at home. Parents, however, thought teachers' were responsibility to teach their children to be successful. Some parents also talked about low teacher quality.

Introduction

The importance of Primary education in any education system cannot be falsified as it is the first step towards encouraging each child to grow at their pace, achieve the crucial life skills, and play their effective role in nation building. Primary education in Pakistan aims at developing each child's potential to the full, encourage a love of learning, and help children develop their skills that they will use all their lives. The constitution of Pakistan 1973 lays down the provision in Article 37 (b) that "The state of Pakistan shall remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory primary and secondary education within minimum possible period".

Keeping in view the importance of primary education, federal as well as provincial governments of Pakistan have been striving for providing quality education to primary school students and assisting them to achieve quality

education. All the previous educational policies as well as five year plans have focused on improving the quality of educational services to the students. Continuous efforts have been made to achieve the targets of universal primary education since 1973. Various efforts have been made for bringing improvement in primary education by increasing enrollment number, budget allocation, number of teachers, and various other basic needs. *Under the 18th amendment passed on April 8, 2010 by the National Assembly of Pakistan, education has been declared as provincial authority and provinces are autonomous to take remedial and radical steps towards implementing educational change.*

After the 18th amendment, the Government of the Punjab has taken various steps towards educational improvement of the schools, especially the primary schools. One of the major educational changes was to allow the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF)—an autonomous body to promote quality education—to start Public School Support Program (PSSP) and involve public and private sectors to play their role for improving quality standard and student success rate in grade 5 and 8 exams conducted by the Punjab Examination Commission (PEC) which is an autonomous body set up by the Government of the Punjab to assess and examine 2 to 5 million students each year. This PSSP was started based on the declining results of primary schools during the last decade. Hundreds of primary schools were declared as “failing” which showed zero to 25 percent results consecutively for three years. For the PSSP, the Government of the Punjab announced that 550 rupees per student will be given to those who adopt these failing schools for a stipulated time of two years which could be extended based on satisfactory performance. The teaching staff of these failing schools was shifted to other “successful” schools and those who adopted these failing schools were free to hire new teachers according to their needs and resources.

The University of Education Lahore adopted 44 primary schools located in rural area of district Sheikhpura under Public School Support Program (PSSP), appointed 170 teachers of varying age and qualification, with 1-35 teacher student ratio, and set up a monitoring mechanism for their continuous supervision. A vast majority of these teachers was less qualified (Bachelor and Intermediate) and inexperienced, and needed urgent professional development training to maintain minimum quality standards. Side by side, it was imperative to understand the reasons of poor results of these failing schools. The voices against poor teacher quality, results, and assessments raised by the head teachers, teachers, students, parents, and educationists have been echoed in the print and electronic media for years. The literature review of national and international studies, however, evidenced that the reasons of failure of schools include less qualified teachers, teacher’s poor content matter knowledge, poor teaching and assessment techniques, and lack of professional development training. Rehmani (2003), Christie and Khushk (2004), and Kouser, Azid, and Ali (2006; 2011) and found that the traditional teaching methods of teaching produce low quality of education in especially in lower grades. Memon (2007) criticized low teaching quality and poor use of student assessment techniques

as two wide-ranging problems of declining student performance. The World Bank (2006) considered inappropriate teaching methods of teachers as a major reason of poor grades of students in Pakistan. Ministry of Education (2009) endorsed that the modern assessment techniques are not used in schools.

The previous literature further tells that teachers generally use outdated teaching methods, the assessment takes place is sporadic and subjective, policy implementation is not successful and it provides little feedback to children for improvement (Lynd, 2007; MoE, 2009). Ali (2011) found that the reasons of failure of primary education system include memory-based assessment rather than testing analytical ability, endemic administrative issues in the conduct of examinations, and low teacher quality. Others found lack of financial resources, insufficient teaching staff and ineffective use of assessment techniques as indicators of low quality teaching (Ahmad, Rauf, Rashid, ur Rehman & Salam, 2013). Also, teachers' absence (Khan, 2010), lack of professional development opportunities (Rehman & Khan, 2011), insufficient educational services, especially in rural areas, and incompetent and untrained teachers (Zakar, Qureshi, Zakar, Aqil, & Manawar, 2013) found as main reasons of failure of students. However, the reasons of failing schools in rural areas, perhaps, have not been explored yet. This research project was an endeavor to fill this gap.

Material and Methods

A qualitative study was conducted to understand the reasons behind the failing schools. The overarching question was related to understanding the perceptions of head-teachers, teachers, and parents about the factors that contributed to system failure. For this purpose, perceptions of head teachers, teachers, and the parents of failing students were sought through unstructured interviews. Through purposive sampling technique, ten (10) head teachers, twenty (20) teachers, and 20 parents were selected for interviews. The sampled head teachers and teachers had been serving in the failing schools in Sheikhpura before the sampled 44 schools were adopted by the University of Education Lahore. The reason of selecting these teachers and head teachers was their previous affiliation and deeper understanding of the reasons behind failing schools. Twenty parents of the failing students were also accessed through the help of these head teachers. A semi-structured interview guide, with minor modifications depending upon the respondents, was developed for data collection from head teachers, teachers, and parents. Each Interview took approximately 20-25 minutes face to face interaction. All ethical considerations such as consent, and data confidentiality were followed. The data were transcribed, and analyzed using constant comparative method. The following themes emerged from the data.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the study have been describe below

Reasons of Failing Schools: Head Teachers' Perceptions

Initially, the data were analyzed based on head teachers' perceptions of the factors that contributed to poor results in the previous years. The detail description of the data is given below.

Insufficient Teaching Staff

A majority of the head teachers complained about insufficient staff in the schools and stated it as major reasons of failure of schools. In majority of the schools there was one teacher, other than the head teacher, who had to teach various subjects to all classes that hindered them to give proper attention to the individual needs of the students.

One head teacher (HT 4) said:

Imagine I had one teacher to teach 135 students from class 1 to 5. Do you think she could teach various subjects to all classes in a better way?

One head teacher (HT 2) responded:

Lack of teachers was the biggest hurdle in quality education. Single teacher cannot teach better to all classes with large number of students. Teaching was just one aspect. Assessment of student work was another; classroom management was still another and many more.

Poor infrastructure and Facilities

The head teachers complained about lack of physical facilities such as less number of classrooms, washrooms, and chairs or bench. The students had to sit in the floor and it increased classroom management issues. One head teacher (HT 1) stated:

My school was without boundary wall, passersby intruded our classes. Only one teacher had to teach various subjects to various classes in single room. In bad weathers such as rain or very hot weather it was not possible to continue teaching.

Another head teacher (HT 6) said:

Lack of facilities disturbed teaching and learning process. My school had only one class room and one washroom for 158 students. They (students) had to go their home, sometimes, for using washroom. It affected their education.

Poor Content Knowledge

Various head teachers thought their teachers possessed poor content knowledge of English Mathematics, and Science. They were of the view that

teachers' knowledge was limited to the textbook used for primary classes; they didn't not bother to read latest content about scientific advancements. They were also deficient in knowledge of teaching methodologies and used lecture method as a sole method of teaching. Due to these reasons, various concepts remained unclear to the students and they could not perform better in PEC exams. A head teacher (HT 1) stated:

Our teachers had little knowledge of the content of English and Mathematics. They did not have knowledge of assessment. They used only lecture method and did not know about other teaching methods. They did not know how to identify special weaknesses of the students to help them properly.

One head teacher (HT 7) stated:

I had aged teacher in my school who took teaching certificate decades earlier. He had poor knowledge in English and mathematics. He found the books difficult to teach.

Another head teacher (HT 8) stated:

The main reason of teacher's poor content knowledge was lack of their motivation to increase knowledge. They were less salaried and did private business to meet their expenses. I think there should have training programs and workshops for their motivation.

Talking about poor knowledge of pedagogy, one head teacher (HT 3) stated:

There were two teachers in my school who used to teach English and Mathematics to grade 5 but their knowledge was not updated. Students were not satisfied with their teaching and so the parents. They had never received training for being updated in content knowledge given in the books. Their knowledge in assessment and teaching methodologies was poor. But they never thought they were less effective.

Lack of Knowledge of Students' Needs

More than half of the head teachers perceived that teachers did not understand the individual needs of the students. They thought that "one size fits all" slogan was effective for all students. The teachers rarely focused on individual needs of the students and blamed students about their non seriousness in learning and ignored their role as a mentor, facilitator, and a guide. One head teacher (HT 8) stated:

It is important to know the individual needs of students. Some students have financial problems, others have family disputes, some students have to do a lot of household jobs to rear families, and some students need extra care and attention due to their psychological needs; it's important that teachers have knowledge of their students to help them grow.

Less Focus on Diagnostic Assessment

The head teachers perceived that teachers were less focused on identifying students learning needs through diagnostic assessment. They frequently conducted formative assessments but rarely used the achievement results of the students to diagnose specific problems of the students regarding their learning needs.

One head teacher (HT 9) was of the view that:

Teachers did not know what diagnostic assessment was. They did not identify weak areas of the students; they rarely gave extra time to those who needed.

Another head teacher (HT 1) stated:

Student achievement was not used for making future development of the students; our teachers conducted daily and weekly tests, but they did not use achievement score for making decisions that could positively affect student performance.

Parental Involvement

The head teachers perceived that a vast majority of the parents did not visit schools to get feedback about the educational attainments of their children. One head teacher (HT 5) said:

In rural areas, parents are less qualified and do not show interest in teaching to their children. When they were called in schools to discuss educational challenges of their children, they mostly did not visit schools. Their non seriousness encouraged their children to maintain bad performance which ultimately resulted in poor performance.

Almost all head teachers stated that parents' involvement was highly required if they wanted to see their children growing academically. In overall, the head teachers believed that the adopted schools will provide better results now because every school has multiple teachers and they don't have to perform extra duties, they are young female teachers, and there will be better check and balance system in these schools.

Reasons of Failing Schools: Teachers' Perceptions

Various reasons were perceived by the teachers regarding failing of the schools in the district. Some of major reasons of failure as perceived by the teachers are given below:

Overburdened Classes

Various teachers complained about overburdened classes. They were of the view that they had to teach various subject to multiple classes in single room which

affected their teaching quality and created classroom management problem. One teacher (T-3) stated:

It was very difficult to teach various subjects to multiple classes with more than 150 students in the school. I could not prepare lesson plans for each class. I could not check the homework of all students. I could not provide individual attention to all students. Therefore, I was used to select class monitors and assign them duty to help the students who needed individual attention. Sometimes it was successful and other times it was not. I suggested one teacher should be placed in each class but no one listened to me.

Another teacher (T-7) stated:

I had to teach five subjects to three classes daily which was not possible for me. So I taught only what was possible for me. If I tried to check homework, I could not teach then. If some individual problems arose and I tried to solve them, class time went wasted. I had requested to the administration to hire more teachers but in vain. So, honestly speaking, I could not do justice with my teaching. I was overburdened.

Involvement in Extra Duties

Majority of the teachers complained about their business in duties other than teaching that hindered them from performing regular duties. One teacher (T-5) said:

I was school in-charge and I had to perform the management related activities including budgeting and all the correspondence. Besides, various extra duties such as Dengue safety measures and involvement in local elections and frequent meetings in central office hindered me to perform teaching responsibilities effectively.

In the continuity of extra duties of teachers, one teacher (T-13) expressed her feeling in this way:

Sometimes I felt exhausted of so many duties such as Dengue issues and monitoring, and inspection. One teacher cannot do this all.

Another teacher (T-17) complained:

I had to teach various classes including performing extra duties. I could not pay individual attention to all students. I think teachers should be given less workload. There should be more teachers in schools to teach if the administration wants to get better results.

Furthermore a teacher (T 4) gave her opinion in this way:

Primary school teachers are less salaried, overburdened, loaded with extra responsibilities, involved in extracurricular activities. It was not easy to perform the best in such situation. Good results cannot be achieved in such situation.

Inappropriateness of Assessment System

Many teachers stated that the system of students' testing was not fair and there were wide gap between the teaching system and the assessment system. They stated that young kids felt under pressure in very controlled assessment environment. The paper pattern was also very difficult for students to follow. One teacher (T 12) said:

Students' mental level is not so high that is required to solve tests is high stakes exams such as PEC exams. Also, there are four different papers distributed to students and it affect their mental understanding. One feels her paper was difficult than her friend's. Young children should not be given such pressures. You just improve invigilation system and that's all.

One male teacher (T 18) stated:

PEX exams are very difficult. Students in villages have very less support from their parents to enhance their learning skills. I honestly believe that if the assembly members take these test, they will also fail. Just try these papers to test their knowledge.

Lack of Parental Interest in Teaching Learning Process

It was one common objection of the teachers that parents were very less interested in teaching and learning process of the schools. They blamed parents did not bother to participate in parent teacher meetings; the parents encouraged their children to take off from the schools for performing household jobs such as harvesting the crops, grazing to the animals, and running the businesses of their parents. Therefore, students could not perform well.

Reasons of Failing Schools: Parents' Perceptions

Parents' perceptions were also interesting as they used different lenses for the same issue. The detail of the findings is given below.

Teaching as the Responsibility of the Teachers

A majority of the parents were not willing to take the responsibility of the failure of their children. Parents thought that they sent their children to schools and fulfilled their duty. It was the responsibility of the teachers to help children succeed in examinations. One mother (P 2) stated:

I could not teach my child as I was not educated. Teachers should understand this thing. It was their responsibility to teacher children. Parents in villages are less educated.

Another mother (P 4) said:

"I am illiterate mother. So all I could do was to send him (her son) to a tuition center. I never asked my child to do business or do harvesting. So honestly I would say that teachers were responsible for failure of my child.

Poor Teacher Quality

This argument also came from the parents who were relatively educated that the teachers of these primary schools did not provide quality education to the students. One father (P 7) stated:

I found many language mistakes in the notebook of my child which were ignored by the teacher. I think she did not know the language mistakes otherwise she could correct them.

Another father (P 1) stated:

I think teachers were not able to apply different teaching methods while teaching English, math, and science. This math and science is not the same as we were taught at primary level: they are much advanced and the teachers must enhance their ability to teach the latest content effectively.

Weak Internal Assessment System

Majority of the parents stated that the internal system of examination was not effective as it did not prepare students to perform in the external exam in better way. One mother (P 3) stated:

The tests that are given to the students in internal exams are just based on memory, simple and easy, and taken from the beginning chapters of the book. So the students are not tested from the whole content. That's why they fail in external exam.

Another educated father (P 10) stated:

The internal examination system does not include all types of objective and subjective type items which are part of the external exam. Students are not taught how to solve different types of questions. Therefore, students cannot respond to such questions properly.

English as a Medium of Instruction is Problematic

Almost all parents complained that English language was a major problem of failure of their children. Therefore, they suggested that Urdu language should be used in primary classes. One mother (P-4) stated:

I am less qualified and cannot teach my child in English language. So I cannot help him in his all subjects.

Another father (P-10) stated:

The language used in the books is quite difficult for all students to understand. I think they can learn in Urdu much better. The books should be written in Urdu language.

Discussion

This study was conducted to understand head teachers', teachers', and parents' perceptions about failing schools in district Sheikhpura. The study found that head teachers thought that lack of facilities, teacher competence, and parental involvement were the main reasons of poor results of the schools. The results are compatible with other studies conducted by Ahmad and Malik (2011) and Rehmani (2003). The study also found that teachers perceived that they were overburdened, involved in extra duties (such as election duty, Dengue safety, and polio vaccine supply duty to the children at homes), and the parents were not cooperative in sending their children to schools regularly and they did not give care and attention to them at home. The findings of this study are also aligned with the previous findings of the study of Crystal (2005), Islam, Mushtaq, Alam, and Bukhari (2015).

The study found that parents thought they were relatively less educated and not responsible for their child's failure; rather, it was teachers' responsibility to teach their children to be successful. Some parents talked about low teacher quality. Based on these finding, it can be concluded that head teachers, teachers, and parents shared mixed perceptions, similar as well as different, regarding the reasons of failing schools. Similar results were found by a studies conducted by Ahmad and Malik (2011), Rehmani (2003). Christie and Afzaal (2005), Saeed and Mahmood (2002). Shah and Afzaal (2004) disclose that there has been an increase in the amount of the periodic of questions and only the selected material is tested again and again in our pubic examinations. This thing promotes the selective study because students can get good marks with the little efforts to understand less content of syllabus and no one is giving the attention towards this fact seriously. Our examination is mainly focus on the objectivity, simple, easy and direct approach question while neglecting comprehension, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating the learning material. In this situation, students withhold the rote memorization as exam trick.

Recommendations

Following recommendations have been given:

1. Number of teachers should be increased in primary schools.
2. Teacher profession development is required for increasing teacher quality.
3. Parents should understand their role in the education of their children. They should be involved in teacher and learning process of their children. For this, child labour laws may be strictly followed in the province.
4. Monitoring system of schools should be improved.

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