



RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring Teaching Strategies and Challenges of Traditional Classrooms faced by Teachers of Rural Areas of Muzaffargarh, Pakistan

¹Fatima Mujahid*, ²Maryam Fayyaz and ³Mehreen Zafar

1. Research Scholar, Department of English, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Research Scholar, Department of English, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Lecturer, Department of English, Ghazi University, Punjab, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author:** fk7510234@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Pakistan's traditional classrooms specifically in rural schools face numerous difficulties as a result of a lack of resources, large classroom obstacles, interference from external forces, and socioeconomic inequalities. Primary and Middle education is the main focus of this paper's investigation of the teaching methods and difficulties common in Pakistani traditional classrooms of rural schools. This study uses mixed-method analysis to grasp better the perspectives of teachers and administrators dealing with educational issues. A survey has been used to collect data from 70 female teachers of rural schools in district Muzaffargarh. The experience of those teachers varies from 7 years to more than 30 years. The results show how teachers still use old-school strategies for teaching, and how challenges like packed classrooms, limited textbook availability, and a lack of technology infrastructure affect their teaching style. However, other ongoing issues like teachers' competency still exist.

KEYWORDS Challenges, Rural Education, Teachers Training, Teaching Strategies, Traditional Classrooms

Introduction

Education has been one of the most important areas of human civilization since ancient times because a country's education is closely related to its future development. The rapid development of the times has also brought more advanced educational methods and concepts. Students want to learn from the textbooks and are attracted by the innovative knowledge. Pakistan is a developing country in the Southeast Asian region. Being a developing country, it has limited resources, even the government allocated a very limited amount of the total budget to the education sector. Educational institutions in cities are better in their performance and teaching strategies than the schools in rural areas of Pakistan (Memon, 2007). Learning at rural schools is characterized by numerous challenges. Impoverished and malnourished conditions of learners in rural areas are a result of poor families who are often unemployed and unable to provide basic necessities for the families. Physically weak students fail to grasp the learning contents with full concentration. Minimum parent's involvement in learning and their lack of interest for education resulted in low enrollment of the learners and high dropout of the students from the schools. The shortage of resources as diverse as human resources, building and learning aids also compromised the quality of learning in rural areas (Akbari, 2015). The education system in Pakistan suffers from multiple deficiencies, and shortcomings of different natures. Most of our schools particularly in rural areas do not have proper learning and physical facilities. Even the teachers face multiple difficulties for teaching students of primary level. So, teaching in rural area of Pakistan

presents unique challenges and requires innovative strategies to address these shortcomings. Teachers who teach in rural areas of Pakistan face different challenges like resource constraints (lack of material, inadequate infrastructure), socioeconomic barriers (poverty, child labor), cultural and social factors (gender disparities, language barriers), access, and transportation (Ashraf, 2019). So, this study explores the teaching strategies and challenges of traditional classroom teachers mainly government teachers and PEF school teachers in rural schools of Muzaffargarh district, Pakistan. A mixed method approach having qualitative and quantitative data is used. The findings of this research study will be of great value to both English language teachers and students. It will contribute to a new area of knowledge to explore for future researchers.

Literature Review

The Victorian Auditor-General report (2013), reveals that the provision of quality and accessible education to rural communities is a worldwide challenge. In Pakistani rural areas, different multicultural people have distinct cultures, values, and norms. So, teaching to multicultural students is a universal issue affecting both English learning students and teachers. The presence of local languages in these classrooms gives rise to a lot of obstacles that both teachers and students must contend with when communicating in English. At the primary level of education, overcrowded classrooms represent a significant challenge encountered by teachers. This hurdle is particularly detrimental in language classes as it restricts the level of engagement for each student in the learning process. Due to the sheer number of students in a single class, some learners may not receive the necessary opportunities to actively participate in classroom activities.

It has been suggested that an optimal language classroom should have a limited number of students, particularly ranging between 20 to 25 individuals (ACTFL, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). The locality of rural schools makes the development of technological infrastructures difficult to implement and costly. Rural school learners did not enjoy the infrastructural tools and facilities as learners in urban areas, which disparity causes unimpressive academic performance for learners at rural schools (Harder et al, 2009).

Teacher training also constituted a danger to teaching student teachers about place-based challenges in rural surroundings as the majority of students graduating from teacher training institutes are insufficiently taught and equipped to live and teach in rural regions. It can be observed that in many countries, improving teacher training and reforming the rural education curriculum has become a basic strategy for rural education reform. According to the Asian Development Bank (2015), rural and isolated Pakistani schools often lack skilled instructors. Most rural teachers continue to maintain tight control over the classroom, and lecturing consumes the majority of class time. Teachers in distant and rural regions lack proper training in integrating health, nutrition, safety, and psychological stimulation for early childhood development, resulting in a high rate of childhood stunting (UNICEF, 2016).

The country's literacy rate is about 59.13%, and the enrollment of elementary school students is 10.7 million boys and 8.6 million girls. In contrast, the dropout ratio is 3.6 million boys and 2.8 million girls at the age of 5 to 9 years (Government of Pakistan, 2022). Apart from this, the government focused on the professional qualifications of the teaching faculty. The elementary school level is the most crucial stage among all the stages of education. Apparently, in the world, the stakeholders and educationists mainly emphasize the professional teaching faculty and autonomous working environment to develop the teaching-learning process. However, it is challenging to nourish the students with academic skills in this early stage of learning, where the whole community is

involved in completing the process. With the rapid increase in the population of Pakistan, there are several challenges and issues that teachers face during classroom management, such as the lack of facilities, difficulties in administration, classroom management, workload, and parental involvement. The textbooks provide teaching practice for the teachers and learning activities for the students to build the teaching-learning process. In Pakistani rural areas, one of the most important challenges is the prevalence of ghost teachers. This problem is rooted in historical and systemic mismanagement and corruption, severely impacting the education quality in rural regions and contributing to high illiteracy rates and educational disparities. Additionally, inadequate funding from both the government and nonprofit organizations further hampers the development and maintenance of these schools. Cultural factors also play a significant role. In many rural communities, there is a reluctance to send girls to schools, particularly if the school is far from home. This results in a significant gender gap in education.

According to UNICEF (2016), economic pressures often require children to assist their families in agricultural work instead of attending school. Provinces of Pakistan particularly Punjab have made efforts to develop systems for better teacher training and support, data collection, and flexible school financing (EduDev Forum). These efforts have shown some progress in addressing teacher shortages and improving the overall educational infrastructure at the district level. In response to these challenges, there are important strategies that include community mobilization, efforts to encourage school enrollment, the establishment of Accelerated Learning Programs to help the children continue their lost education, and investment in building robust local governance structures to support schools effectively (UNICEF, 2016). To sum up, this study will focus on the challenges faced by the teachers in rural areas in general. This research will also focus on the strategies to overcome the challenges of the teaching process in rural areas of Pakistan. Therefore, this research addressed to answer the research questions: what are the strategies teachers commonly use in a traditional classroom specifically in the rural educational sector? How do the internal and external factors become a challenge for a teacher in a traditional classroom of the rural educational sector?

Material and Methods

Research Design

This study follows the mixed-method approach (Clark, 2016). According to Mackey and Bryfonski (2018), A problem can be examined from various complementary aspects by carefully combining the two approaches (qualitative and quantitative). The qualitative approach aims to collect non-numeric data like thematic analysis of individuals or groups (*Handbook of Health Research Methods: Investigation, Measurement and Analysis*, n.d.). While the quantitative Approach aims to collect data more precisely, the most common of collecting data from the quantitative approach is from a survey which is a procedure of collecting information from a group of people who fall in your area of interest, it can be through questioning or interviewing people or from collecting information from documents called questionnaire (*Handbook of Health Research Methods: Investigation, Measurement and Analysis*, n.d.)

This research data is based on Teachers of Government and PEF institutes of rural educational sectors of District Muzaffargarh, Punjab Pakistan.

Data Collection

Data for this research was obtained from 70 female teachers of primary and middle classes, the data was delimited to 5 governments, 2 PEF (Punjab Education Foundation),

and 1 semi-government institute of Rural areas of District Muzaffargarh, Pakistan. As for the data collection technique, a questionnaire was formed, including Quantitative aspects through closed questions and qualitative aspects through open-ended questions. The questionnaire was divided into four sections which first section was introductory where the main focus was on the experience of the teacher in that institute, the second section was about the Strategies that are used by the teachers while teaching in the classroom. The second section consists of 8 questions. The third section was about internal or external factors that became a challenge for the teacher in the classroom. The third section included 10 questions with 2 open-ended questions about first overcoming these challenges and second, the effect of extra duties on teaching. The last and fourth section of the questionnaire was an open-ended question about the suggestions for improving teaching and learning in traditional classrooms.

Thematic analysis is used for qualitative data as thematic analysis is a method used to analyze and interpret qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2016). For quantitative data, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is used to find the frequency of collected data as Pallant (2020) suggested that the reliable way to interpret quantitative data for researchers is SPSS.

Results and Discussion

All teachers were given a Paper Questionnaire to fill out. Closed-ended questions were analyzed through IBM SPSS, mainly the frequency of the data was analyzed. The demographic information was gathered.

Table 1
Experience

	N	%
<10 years	41	58.6%
>10 years	24	34.3%
>20 years	5	7.1%

The respondents were categorized into three sections for their experience, The first one was who had less than 10 years of experience which was 41 in number as most teachers had 7 years of experience while the PEF teachers had mostly 5 years of experience. Second was the number of teachers who have more than ten years of experience mostly from 13 to 15 years in numbers. In this study, 24 teachers had more than 10 years of experience. And lastly. Teachers with more than 20 years of experience which were 5 in number having 35 or 24 years of experience.

The second section of the questionnaire was about the strategies that teachers use in the classroom. This section consists of 8 questions, some findings are explained descriptively while some are explained demographically.

When asked about their teaching method 32 teachers selected the lecture-based method which is a common way of delivering a lesson in a traditional classroom. The least number of respondents i.e. 4 selected the individualized instruction method.

The demographic of the second question which was about student learning assessment is as follows:

Table 2
Assessing Student Learning

	N	%
Testing	36	51.4%
Quizzes	13	18.6%

Self-assessment	8	11.4%
Class-participation	13	18.6%

When asked how they assess students' learning, 36 teachers answered with the basic tool of testing. However, quizzes and class participation were responded to by the same number of teachers i.e. 13. The least number of responses were for self-assessment.

What strategy teachers use to engage students was the next question which was answered by 41 teachers that they use discussion to engage students making them respond to lessons which is delivered by teachers. 11 responded with Storytelling, 10 with reading the text, and 8 responded with the answer visual aids.

Table 3
Identifying struggling students

	N	%
Low grades	3	4.3%
Lack of participation	39	55.7%
Limited understanding of concepts	11	15.7%
Behavior issues	17	24.3%

According to this table, 39 teachers respond that lack of participation is the key factor for determining that a student is struggling academically. 17 responded that behavior issues of students can be an identifying factor while the least number of teachers i.e. 3 responded with low grades.

The next question was about the criteria teachers mostly use to determine if a student needs extra support academically. 28 teachers answered by attaching that student to a bright student while 19 answered by giving that student extra time individually. 14 teachers responded with parent-teacher communication, and 9 answered with let that student be.

While questioning about giving feedback to struggling students, 36 teachers responded with written feedback through a diary or a notebook. Verbal feedback or Peer feedback was answered by equal numbers of respondents which were 14. The least number of responses were of Self-assessment i.e. 6.

The next question was about the involvement of parents/guardians of struggling students which was answered by 39 teachers through Parent-teacher conferences, 29 answered it through progress reports, and 3 answered it through home visits.

Table 4
Assessing the understanding of struggling students

	N	%
Formative assessment	20	28.6%
Summative assessment	7	10.0%
testing	43	61.4%

43 teachers selected testing options for assessing struggling students, 20 selected formative assessment, and 7 selected summative assessment.

Table 5
Challenge in teaching

	N	%
Student communication	19	27.1%
Limited resources	22	31.4%
Classroom management	21	30.0%

Curriculum constraints	8	11.4%
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22 teachers selected limited resources as the biggest challenge in teaching, 21 selected classroom management which was the large classroom, 19 selected student communication, and 8 selected curriculum constraints as the biggest challenge in teaching.

The second question was an open-ended question about overcoming the challenges that teachers face in teaching. 32 out of 70 teachers answered this, whereas 15 teachers answered that by improving their strategies of teaching they can overcome teaching challenges. 8 teachers answered by using their assets, 6 answered by brainstorming, and 3 answered with a group studying they can overcome teaching challenges.

The next two questions were about student-related challenges and how teachers overcome those challenges, 29 teachers answered with students with a lack of interest, 20 answered with students with behavioral issues, 12 answered with students lacking prior knowledge, and 9 answered with students with special needs. However, to overcome that challenge 29 answered with parent or guardian involvement, 15 answered with resources and material, 14 answered with administrative support, and 12 answered with small-scale class.

Table 6
Personal and professional challenges

	N	%
Time management	25	35.7%
work-life balance	19	27.1%
Staying current with the best practices	9	12.9%
Managing stress and burnout	17	24.3%

The majority of 25 teachers answered that time management was the biggest challenge, 19 answered with work-life balance, 17 answered with managing stress and burnout and 9 answered with staying current with the best practices.

The recourse-related challenge was the next question, which 36 teachers answered with large class management, 15 answered with insufficient teaching materials, 11 answered with limited support staff, and 8 answered with limited access to technology.

Table 7
Interference of Government

	N	%
Yes	42	60.0%
No	28	40.0%
Do policy changes affect your teaching?		
	N	%
Rarely	2	2.9%
Occasionally	18	25.7%
Sometimes	29	41.4%
Often	12	17.1%
Frequently	9	12.9%
Do government initiatives affect your teaching?		
	N	%
Rarely	7	10.0%

Occasionally	20	28.6%
Sometimes	22	31.4%
Often	11	15.7%
Frequently	10	14.3%
How does government interruption affect student learning?		
	N	%
Reduced engagement	4	5.7%
Decreased motivation	14	20.0%
Limited access to resources	27	38.6%
Increased stress	23	32.9%
other	2	2.9%

The seventh question was open-ended, respondents who answered with 'yes' were further asked for the reason. 5 out of 42 teachers answered with time management. When asked about the effect of policy changes and government initiatives on their teaching majority answered with sometimes. The last question of section 3 was about government interruptions on student learning, and 27 teachers responded with limited access to resources. 23 responded with increased stress, 14 responded with decreased motivation, 4 responded with reduced engagement, and 2 responded with others but did not specify the name.

Section 4 was based on a single open-ended question about giving suggestions for improving teaching and learning in a school, 34 out of 70 teachers responded to that question with the following answers:

- 9 teachers answered with a positive environment and using technology in a classroom.
- 2 teachers suggested promoting active learning.
- 11 teachers suggested activity-based learning.
- 3 teachers suggested avoiding technology in a class.
- 3 teachers suggested promoting the right teacher training.
- 3 teachers suggested by digital classroom as well as small scale class.

Discussion

Mostly teachers with experience of 10 years or less than 10 years were energetic while answering the questions, they even filled out the open-ended questions. Teachers who have 20 years or more than 20 years of experience were mainly focusing on the traditional teaching strategy that is still applied in rural educational sectors and according to those teachers, a lack of student participation they chose the traditional way and are in favor of new improved approaches.

When asked about the strategy of their teaching, the majority of teachers agree on lecture-based teaching, they assess the students through testing which is the best way to analyze students' performance but has its limitations (*Assessing Student Performance: Exploring the Purpose and Limits of Testing.*, n.d.).

As per asking about strategy for engaging students, the majority of teachers prefer discussions but later on, they said about lack of student interest that defines that this strategy of there is not that useful. In rural areas most students belong to the lower

class or lower-middle class which makes it hard for the students only focus on their studies but economic and domestic pressure makes them stay back in education, keeping that in mind when asked about how they handle students who are academically weak majority response with attach them with bright students instead of giving that student extra time individually which also highlights the major flaw of traditional classroom that is large class where a single teacher is not able to give every student individual time. According to Ashraf (2019), parents' involvement plays a significant role in a pupil's academic progress. In this study, teachers also suggest that parent/guardian involvement is important for a student's better learning report. When asked about the assessment of struggling students, options were formative and summative assessments which were mostly teachers unaware of, that defines how appropriate teacher training is crucial.

Large classes and a lack of resources are the main challenges for teachers in the rural education sector as observed by this research. When asked about how they overcame basic challenges while teaching, most teachers did not answer, and given answers by the remaining teachers were vague or out of context.

As research is delimited to female teachers, when asked about their personal and professional challenges of teaching, the majority responded with time management due to their domestic duties as well.

Almost all teachers were hesitant when answering government-related questions. when asked about doing extra duties i.e. election duties affect their teachers, senior teachers responded with NO while the teachers who answered with Yes did not answer on how those duties affect their teaching. The last question which was open-ended majority did not answer and those who did mostly kept the same opinion, which defines how even they don't know how to improve teaching or learning in rural traditional classes.

Recommendation

This research suggests that teachers in a traditional classroom still use the old method of assessing students which is the traditional method of teaching or GTM. This approach is considered a low contribution to students' learning outcomes. This study could be a landmark for future researchers to explore sufficient teacher training programs that are approachable to all teachers in all subject areas. Also, this study elaborates on how large classes and insufficient resources could be the biggest obstacles for teachers to perform better in class. New, valid, long-lasting policies should address specified teaching challenges in rural schools. The tools and abilities required to apply successful teaching practices in settings with limited resources must be provided to educators through investments in professional development and teacher training programs. More research and collaboration among stakeholders—including educators, policymakers, and communities—are required to develop and implement evidence-based interventions to improve educational results in rural Pakistani areas. This study was conducted in primary and middle educational sectors and limited to female teachers only, therefore, future researchers recommended conducting the same survey at the secondary or university level while assessing the students' responses as well.

Conclusion

To improve teaching competency and effectiveness in rural classrooms, our research emphasizes the significance of reevaluating teaching methods. Teachers need to be prepared with cutting-edge teaching techniques that address rural students' particular

requirements and environments. To tackle this issue, extensive professional development initiatives that are geared toward rural teachers and prioritize the implementation of student-centered and participative teaching approaches are needed. Additionally, our results highlight the necessity of systemic changes meant to breathe new life into rural school systems. Investments in programs that support student-centered methods and cultural relevance in curriculum development and teacher preparation must be given top priority by policymakers. To create a supportive learning environment that promotes student success, there needs to be more cooperation between communities, schools, and other education partners.

Moving forward, we must acknowledge how urgent it is to change static classrooms into dynamic learning environments that provide teachers and students more power. We may work to create inclusive and equitable educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their location or socioeconomic background, by embracing innovative teaching practices and addressing the underlying issues in rural education.

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