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Managing Public Elementary School Classrooms in Lahore: Physical Facilities Related Challenges for Novice Teachers

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Abstract: *This study aimed to develop an understanding of the physical facility-related challenges that novice teachers in public elementary schools have faced during classroom management in their first three years. The semi-structured interview research design was employed, and the data was collected from a purposive sample of twenty novice public school teachers who had less than three years of experience. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the interview data. Most participants reported the absence of basic facilities such as small class sizes, rough and inadequate furniture, the absence of audio-visual aids, a shortage of electricity in the summer, and inadequate water and sanitation facilities in schools. Most novice teachers reported that teaching in the absence of these facilities was very difficult. It is suggested that the school education department should provide all the essential physical facilities in schools so that teachers can manage and teach effectively in their classrooms.*

Key Words: Classroom Management, Elementary Schools, Physical Facilities, Novice Teachers, Challenges, Furniture, Electricity

Introduction

Classroom management is one of the most essential parts of teaching and learning (Saleem, Muhammad, & Siddiqui, 2021). Classroom management is the process by which a teacher involves students in learning (Evertson & Weinstein, 2013). When a teacher creates an environment in which the teacher is well prepared for teaching, the students feel connected and involved in learning, and the teacher makes them learn easily, which is

effective classroom management (Burkman, 2012; Saleem, Muhammad, & Qureshi, 2021). When a teacher presents a lesson so that all students feel connected and involved in learning, a classroom is very well managed (Laslett & Smith, 2002).

Novice teachers experience challenges in classroom management since they are new to schools and face many new situations (Babadjanova, 2020; Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2021a). Since they are learning to

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teach and in the process of learning, they experience challenges; thus, this is the swing and swim time for novice teachers (Bakker & Bal, 2010).

Many factors are involved in classroom management, as suggested by research studies, such as administrative support by the principal, mentor, and non-teaching staff (Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2020b; Zahid, Muhammad, & Waqar, 2022). Furthermore, students' behaviours also affect the classroom management of teachers, as studies have identified that students' behavioural challenges are increasing in the twenty-first century (Nasir, Muhammad, & Bokhari, 2022; Naveed, Muhammad, & Siddiqui, 2022; Saeed, Muhammad, & Farooq, 2022). The students exhibit disruptive behaviours such as talking, making noise, telling lies, bullying, and being unwilling to learn are the most difficult behaviours for teachers to handle during classroom management (Ahmed, Faizi, & Akbar, 2020; Ashraf, Muhammad, & Bokhari, 2022; Butt & Khalid, 2015; Cakmak, Gunduz, & Emstad, 2019; Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2021b). In addition, adequate physical facilities in the classrooms, such as large classes, furniture, audio-video aids, electricity, and proper water and sanitation facility in the school (Adamu, Okereke, & Hamidu, 2022; Ahmad & Batool, 2020; Akareem & Hossain, 2016) also influence classroom management experiences of teachers.

The physical facility-related challenges are immense in public elementary schools in developing countries. In South Africa, most rural schools do not have adequate spacious classrooms. Many schools hold multiple classes in one room (Etale, Agnes, & Felicity, 2020). In Bangladesh and India, teachers have reported that schools do not have enough spacious classrooms; thus, they have to teach two classes in one room, they do not have proper furniture; and students have to sit on mats or floors to learn (Jahan, 2017; Obaydullah & Jahan, 2019). The students cannot concentrate on their studies because of uncomfortable classroom furniture and physical facilities

(Adamu et al., 2022; Nwosu & Uba, 2019). This highlights that a comfortable physical classroom environment contributes to learning and motivation towards learning, which helps teachers teach effectively (Baafi, 2020; Dahar, 2011).

Research Objectives

The following are the objectives of this study:

- 1) To identify the physical facilities-related challenges faced by novice elementary public school teachers.
- 2) To explore the ways novice elementary public school teachers managed their classes in the absence of those physical facilities.

Literature Review

Classroom management is the most important skill of novice teachers since teachers spend much of their time managing their classrooms (Clandinin et al., 2015; Wolff, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, 2021). In this process, they have to put in a lot of effort to provide a comfortable learning environment where all the students feel engaged and interested in learning (Egeberg, McConney, & Price, 2016; Flores, 2019). The teachers need to create an environment in class where all the students are able to understand the content, feel motivated to learn and enjoy learning in the classroom (Angula, 2019; Aus, Jögi, Poom-Valickis, Eisenschmidt, & Kikas, 2017). For this purpose, the teachers need to come prepared in the classroom, keep the students involved in learning, and create an interactive environment so that the students utilize their energies in learning new content and material (Gul, 2018; Iqbal, 2019).

Novice teachers are new to actual classroom settings, and they experience challenges in classroom management. They are teaching for the first time in an actual classroom with the complete responsibility to manage the classroom environment for effective teaching (Barkauskaitė & Meškauskienė, 2017; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Thus, they experience challenges in

managing the students' behavioural challenges, workload, and physical facilities-related challenges (Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2020a, 2021b; Wolff et al., 2021). Novice teachers characterize this time as swing and swim time, where each day they face a new situation in the classroom, and each day they learn something new, which helps them learn the art of classroom management (Awan, 2015; Byrne, 2017). During this initial time as novice teachers, they have to control their emotions whenever they feel devastated in managing their classrooms, especially managing student behaviours (Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2019).

Physical facilities in schools are considered the essential feature of a classroom, and students are unable to concentrate on learning in the absence of or inadequate physical facilities (Obaydullah & Jahan, 2019; Senom, Zakaria, & Ahmad Shah, 2013). Developing countries usually do not have adequate physical facilities in elementary schools (Saleem, Qureshi, & Zia, 2021; UNESCO, 2013). In the elementary schools of India, South Africa, Bangladesh, and Nigeria the absence of physical facilities like clean drinking water, big airy classrooms, comfortable furniture, and electricity are not available as required according to the strength of students in public elementary schools (Etale et al., 2020; Jahan, 2017; Obaydullah & Jahan, 2019; Perera & Hathaway, 2017).

Elementary schools in developing countries face tremendous physical facility challenges. A report published in 2016 in Pakistan revealed 29% of schools in Punjab, Pakistan, do not have enough classes (ASER, 2016), and in another study conducted in Sindh, it was found that the number of classes in each school is less than the required number (Mujahid & Noman, 2015). Multi-grade teaching is going on in the majority of schools in Pakistan (ASER, 2016; Malik, Elahi, & Shah, 2020). Similarly, in India, there is a shortage of classes, and because of this, the teachers are compelled to do multi-grade teaching, which affects students learning (Jahan, 2017). Similarly, in Bangladesh public schools, the

classes are small, and the students and teachers experience challenges in classrooms, and they cannot approach each student to help them in their studies (Obaydullah & Jahan, 2019). Moreover, comfortable furniture is essential for effective teaching and learning (Egeberg et al., 2016); however, in developing countries, comfortable furniture is not sufficient, and furniture maintenance is not done regularly (Egeberg et al., 2016). In most rural schools in India and Pakistan, students still sit on the mat to learn since no furniture is available (M Arshad, Haq, & Khan, 2020; Jahan, 2017). In addition, where furniture is available, it is not properly maintained and damaged chairs and tables are cornered in the school (M Arshad et al., 2020; Baafi, 2020; Etale et al., 2020).

Basic utilities such as water and sanitation in schools are not available in various schools in developing countries (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). The availability of clean drinking water and sanitation in 3% of schools in Tanzania and 17% in Senegal have the facility of clean drinking water in schools (World Bank, 2016). In Madagascar, there is one toilet for 1900 students, and 26% of schools do not have clean drinking water (Evans & Yuan, 2018). Whereas in Pakistan, 15% of schools do not have clean drinking water/sanitation facilities (Muhammad Arshad, Ahmed, & Tayyab, 2019; ASER, 2016; Mahmood & Gondal, 2017).

Methods

This study aimed to explore the physical facility-related challenges faced by novice teachers in elementary public schools in Lahore. For this purpose, the semi-structured interview research design was employed. Qualitative research is a lens that looks deeper into the experiences of those who have actually experienced the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In qualitative research, in-depth interviews are conducted with the participant to explore how they felt in a particular situation and how they gave meaning to their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In the constructivist approach, the experiences of each participant are considered significant and reported in the results of the study (Ary,

Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2018).

Through the purposive sampling technique, twenty novice elementary public school teachers who were teaching at elementary public schools in Lahore were selected as the sample for this study. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants in order to explore what kind of challenges they have experienced regarding physical facilities in classrooms, how they handled those challenges, how the behaviours of students affected them in the absence of physical facilities, and how they managed to teach in challenging physical facilities.

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze interview transcripts. The first author performed the following steps: (1) transcribed the interviews verbatim after recording them, (2) recorded nonverbal cues as well as contextual information during the interviews, (3) coded the transcripts according to predefined categories by reading them several times, (4) analyzed the codes to identify themes and patterns, and (5) reported the themes using quotes from participants to illustrate their experiences with physical facilities in public elementary classrooms (Saldana, 2011).

Findings

As a result of the interviews conducted with teachers in Lahore, we gained insight into the availability of physical facilities in their schools as well as their challenges. They provided valuable insight into the physical infrastructure, classroom space, furniture, audio-visual aids, and water and sanitation facilities. They revealed a mixed picture, with some schools possessing a majority of the necessary physical facilities while others faced significant deficiencies. Participants candidly discussed the challenges they faced due to the lack of adequate infrastructure, including small class sizes, inadequate furniture, overcrowding, and the lack of essential resources, such as electricity and audio-visual equipment. Teachers demonstrated resilience and resourcefulness by implementing strategies to

overcome these limitations and engage students effectively. Furthermore, participants highlighted the efforts made by principals and teachers to address these issues through written applications and coordination with education authorities. The details of these insights from the participants are provided in the following subsections:

Availability of Physical Facilities

Half of the participants reported that their school in Lahore has almost all the physical facilities provided by the education department. They mentioned having a school building, small class sizes, furniture, and water and sanitation facilities. As one of the participants stated, "We have 90% of the physical facilities in this school" (Teacher 4). However, some participants expressed that the furniture quality was not good. As one of the participants stated, "Basically, this school has all the physical facilities. We have classrooms, but their sizes are small, and we have furniture, although, of not very high quality, still, we have benches for students to sit and study" (Teacher 11).

Challenges due to Lack of Physical Facilities

Participants shared their experiences of facing challenges in their school due to the lack of physical facilities. They highlighted small class sizes, inadequate furniture, overcrowding, shortage of electricity, and a dearth of audio-visual aids. Clean drinking water was also mentioned as a challenge by a few participants. For example, a participant expressed,

If you ask me about the challenges of physical facilities, these are the challenges we are facing in this school: The sizes of classes are small, and classes are overcrowded. There is a shortage of furniture. Four students are sitting on a bench; it is very difficult for them to manage their sitting, particularly in the summers. We have board and water sanitation facilities available in our school. We have audio-visual aids, but at times when the teacher needs them, we find that another teacher is using them in

class. There is an extreme shortage of electricity in the summer, which is a very challenging situation for us to handle. (Teacher 2)

Classroom Space and Furniture

Participants mentioned challenges related to classroom space and furniture. They reported small class sizes, overcrowding, and insufficient student desks and benches. Uncomfortable furniture was also a common issue mentioned by participants. For example, a participant mentioned,

The class sizes are very small, and there are not enough classes in their school. The classes are not airy, and the furniture is not comfortable enough. There is an extreme shortage of electricity in the summer at their school. There is a dearth of audio-visual aids in the school. (Teacher 2)

Av AIDS, Water, and Sanitation Facilities

Participants expressed the lack of audio-visual aids in their school. They mentioned having only whiteboards in the classrooms. Some participants also highlighted the issue of clean, cold drinking water not being available in their school during certain hours. For example, a participant stated, The students do not have clean drinking water. There is no supply of water from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. The principal does not allow switching on the water cooler. She thinks that students gather around the cooler when it is on. The students are compelled to drink hot water. (Teacher 20)

Challenges in the absence of Physical Facilities

Participants explained the difficulties faced in managing classrooms without physical facilities. They emphasized the extreme shortage of electricity, uncomfortable furniture, and small class sizes. Students' complaints regarding heat, sweating, and suffocation in the classroom were also mentioned. For example, a participant specified, When electricity is not available due to warm weather, the students are not

interested in the study. Some students have sight problems and cannot study due to low vision. You know that in each class we have 30 to 40 students. The more they sit in the last rows, the more they have problems studying. Secondly, the furniture is very uncomfortable. The students complain about the furniture by saying they are tired of sitting on these benches and chairs. In the summer, the students will say, 'Miss, please let us sit on the floor. It is too hot to sit on the benches. When the weather is warm, the students feel suffocated in the classroom. (Teacher 2)

Overcoming Challenges in the Absence of Physical Facilities

Participants shared strategies they employed to manage classes without physical facilities. They involved students in activities like painting, storytelling, or board writing. Teachers asked students to bring water bottles and hand fans for comfort. Some teachers opened windows and engaged students in creative tasks to keep them occupied. For example, a participant stated, "As a solution to the absence of AV aids, I sometimes involve students in activities like painting, storytelling, and board writing" (Teacher 7).

Efforts by Teachers and Principals to address Physical Facility Issues

Some participants reported submitting written applications to the principal regarding physical facility issues. They mentioned that their principal coordinated with the education department to address these problems. However, solutions sometimes took a long time, and teachers were requested to teach effectively without facilities. One teacher reported, "We write an application and send it to the principal. The principal sends our application to the education department. The education department is responsible for solving these issues." Another teacher said, "Our principal has tried to solve these issues. But it takes a long time. We are ordered to teach effectively in the absence of these facilities (Teacher 11).

Discussion & Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that novice elementary public school teachers have experienced physical facility-related challenges like class sizes, poorly maintained furniture, and an extreme shortage of electricity during classroom management. These findings are consistent with studies conducted in India, Pakistan, South Africa, and Nigeria, which reported similar school issues. For example, in India, elementary school teachers reported that they do not have enough classrooms, an extreme furniture shortage, and students sit on mats in classrooms (Jahan, 2017). In addition, a report published in Pakistan in 2016 revealed that 29% of elementary schools in Punjab, Pakistan, do not have enough classes (ASER, 2016). Therefore, multi-grade teaching prevails in those schools (Malik et al., 2020). In Sindh, Pakistan, the study's findings revealed that there are not enough classes, and the classrooms are not maintained (Mujahid & Noman, 2015). The student dropout rate is high in public schools in Pakistan because of the absence of physical facilities like electricity and rough furniture (Farooq, 2013). Furthermore, a study conducted in South Africa provided evidence that there is a shortage of classrooms, the furniture is not maintained, and the teachers are compelled to teach multiple classes in one room (Etale et al., 2020). Similarly, in Nigeria, in schools where there is an absence of physical facilities, the

academic performance of students is negatively influenced (Adamu et al., 2022).

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the government should take responsibility for providing all necessary physical facilities in public schools. The physical facilities that were missing in the schools were well-maintained furniture, small classrooms, and a shortage of electricity in the summer. Teachers expressed that students were restless, irritated, and unwilling to study in the absence of electricity. Few were of the view that they and their students knew that they had to study in such a situation. Most teachers were trying to teach in the absence of these facilities, and a few teachers reported their principal tried to provide them with facilities when they would request physical facilities through written applications.

Several suggestions can be made based on the findings of this study: The school education department needs to prioritize the provision of proper physical facilities in all elementary public schools. A mechanism for maintenance should be established. Regular visits to schools by department officials visit each school to ensure the repair and upkeep of school buildings, and furniture can be beneficial. By implementing these suggestions, educational authorities can create a conducive learning environment that supports effective teaching and learning in elementary public schools in Lahore.

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