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Problems Faced by Students and Teachers in the Management of Overcrowded Classes in Pakistan

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Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the problems faced by teachers and students in the management of overcrowded classrooms in female public sector schools in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. The design of study was descriptive. Population consisted of teachers and students of four female public sector schools of Rawalpindi cantt. Sample was taken from 9th class which consisted of 120 students and 36 teachers. Questionnaire survey was used to collect data. Items of the questionnaire were developed on the basis of the problems of overcrowding in the classrooms and the strategies used by the teachers to overcome this situation. Rank-difference correlation coefficient ρ (Spearman rho) was used to rank the problems of over-crowded classes and the strategies used by the teachers to cope with those problems. The result of the study showed that there was much agreement between the views of students and teachers on the issue. According to the study conclusions, the main thing that place limitation on the interaction between students and teachers as well as on the quality of teaching and learning is *seating* Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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arrangement. It is recommended that new classrooms be built as well as more teachers be employed in public sector secondary schools. To cope with the problem of overcrowded classes, teachers are suggested to establish routines and conventions in class activities right from the beginning of the year. Adequate planning and implementation of lessons can also be useful for this purpose.

Key words: Overcrowded classrooms, Secondary schools, Class size.

Introduction

Education is becoming one of the defining enterprises of the 21st century with the emergence of globalization and increasing global competition. In the fast changing and competitive world, education and technology are the master keys for respectable survival and progress. Education is also considered a key to change and progress. Progress and prosperity of the country depends on the kind of education that is provided to the people. (Shami & Khwaja 2005, p.1). It is a recognized fact that without a minimum education level for the entire population of any country, a human centered development process cannot be sustained.

Secondary education is generally the final stage of compulsory education. It is a gateway to the opportunities and benefits of economic and social development. A quality secondary education helps young people realize their full human potential and take their place in society as productive, responsible and democratic citizens.

In Pakistan, students face many problems during their educational career especially in government/ public schools. One of the problems is overcrowded classes at secondary level which is the result of rapid population growth and lack of resources in the country. The number of students increases in the schools every year. It is observed that on the average, a single teacher teaches at least sixty students in a classroom which was basically meant for thirty students. The teacher is unable to recognize his students; the question of personal attention cannot even be imagined. The scene of multiple classes being taught in a single room by a single teacher is very common in Pakistani primary schools. Apart from the increase in population, another reason for over crowdedness is that education provided by government schools is cheaper as compared to the education provided by private sector schools. Therefore, parents cannot send their children to private schools due to their low socio-economic conditions.

How Does Class Size Make a Difference?

The classroom is the heart of any educational system. No curriculum planning is complete without implementation and evolution, both of which are mainly carried out in

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the classroom. Most of the class activities take place while students are seated. The seating arrangement is therefore too important to overcome the neglect being experienced by many secondary school children in the country. The seating arrangement can make or mar any lesson (Ijaiya, 1999).

According to Wiles (1978), students spend six to seven hours a day at school. Public classrooms should be 1200 square feet. This square footage is reduced dramatically to around 661 square feet after adding furniture, storage, desks, and pathways. If the classroom teacher is to attempt a diverse curriculum, an individualized approach to instruction or a more personal pattern of interaction with students, these efforts may be sabotaged prematurely by the subtle variable of personal space. Personal space has a direct impact on learning, and designers must take this into consideration when designing schools. Smith (2000) argues that

Class size at elementary, secondary and college levels has been the focus of educational research for five decades. Schools hold the responsibility of providing for students' various needs. Students' needs range from physical to emotional. In the classroom setting, students will need times for group interaction, but will need quiet times alone as well. This need will vary with the students in the classroom. Making space and allowances for that quiet time at any point during the day is helpful to many students. Structuring a learning environment that is conducive to various needs is essential.

Goettler-Sopko (1990) also points out that

Based on recent research studies, there is considerable agreement that smaller class sizes seem to result in higher achievement among students who are economically disadvantaged; students with lower academic ability seem to do better in smaller classes; class size may affect student attitudes more significantly than it affects achievement; a direct effect of large class size is to lower the morale and increase the stress of teachers; and there is typically little to be gained from reductions in class size that do not bring class size below 30.

Overcrowded classrooms put students at risk for a lower achievement rate than would likely be seen in smaller classrooms. The higher the student to teacher ratio, the less likely students are to be attentive. This also puts students with disabilities at a disadvantage because they may not get the individualized attention they need. Students who have to wait for help from a teacher would also suffer. This waiting period could lead to disruptive behavior or nonproductive activities, which in turn would lead to

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strains on the teacher's classroom management and the children's learning (Kathy et al., 2005).

Burnett (1995) states that overcrowding has a direct and often severe impact on the logistics of the school day, forcing changes in schedules and making disruptions and noise part of normal operating procedure. Teachers around the world face many obstacles when attempting to teach in overcrowded classes. Used interchangeably, overcrowded or large classrooms are those where the pupil-teacher ratios (PTR) exceed 40:1. Such classroom conditions are particularly acute in the developing world where class sizes often swell up and beyond 100 students. There are differing opinions about the causes of overcrowded classes in the developing world: reduction/elimination of school fees and/or rapid population growth. The reality, however, is that each of these factors have worked to increase class size, and thus affect the quality of education delivered in resource-poor schools (Benbow et al., 2007).

Studies on the effects of class size have been conducted since the 1920's. Results have often been mixed, with some methods of instruction favouring small classes and other methods being as or more effective in large classes. Large classes are as effective as small classes when the goals involve learning factual information and comprehending that information. When traditional achievement tests are used to measure learning, large classes compare well with smaller classes.

Earthman (2002) draws from his work that overcrowding have negative influence upon teachers and students. The over-crowding has effects on students learning as students in over-crowded classes do not score as high on achievement test as students in non-over crowded classrooms.

Corcoran (1988) reported that overcrowding resulted in a high rate of absenteeism among students and teachers. Teachers reported that over-crowding resulted in stressful and unpleasant working conditions. The results of studies on overcrowded classrooms show that teaching large classes has been found to adversely affect morale, motivation and self-esteem of teachers. Although many teachers could manage a class of almost any size successfully, this could often be at the expense of the teacher's own well being and the range of learning experiences offered to students. Many teachers of large classes feel they spend too much time on organising and managing class activities and not enough on meeting the needs of individual children. Large classes and overcrowded classrooms also have negative effects on students' behaviour and learning.

Objectives of the Study

Objectives of this study were: to obtain the views of teachers and students about over crowdedness in the classrooms; to explore the views of teachers and students about

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the strategies used by the teachers to overcome the overcrowding situation; to find out whether there is an agreement between the views of teachers and students on the problems and management of overcrowded classrooms.

In order to achieve these objectives, two null hypotheses were formulated for the present study i.e. 1. There is no correlation between the opinion of students and teacher regarding the problems of over-crowded classrooms, and 2. There is no correlation between the opinion of students and teacher regarding the strategies used by teachers to overcome overcrowded situation.

The study was delimited to the 9th class female public sector secondary schools of Rawalpindi cantt.

Method and Procedure

The present study was descriptive in nature. A questionnaire was used as a tool of research to investigate the seriousness of the problem. Questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A was about the problems of the over-crowded classes. Section B was based on the coping strategies used by the teachers. Both the students and teachers ranked those problems and strategies according to their views. To analyze the data, spearman rho (ρ) as a statistical technique was used. The formula is given below:

$$\rho = 1 - \frac{6\sum d^2}{N(N^2-1)}$$

Population

Population of this study consisted of all the students and teachers of female public sector secondary schools situated in Rawalpindi Cantt. Pakistan.

Sample

The sample consisted of 120 students and 36 teachers was selected randomly from three schools of Rawalpindi Cantt. The sample was taken from Govt. Girls high school, Tench Bhatta Rawalpindi, Govt. Liaquat Girls high school Rawalpindi, Government Girls high School No. 3 Westridge Rawalpindi.

Research Instrument

Questionnaire was used as research instrument. The tool was adapted from the research study of Ijaiya (1999). The title of his research was "Effects of over-crowded

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classrooms on teacher-student interactions". The original tool consisted of 13 statements on the problems related to over crowdedness and 7 coping strategies. It was adapted by adding five statements of problems regarding over-crowdedness and one coping strategy.

The adapted questionnaire, thus, had two sections. Section A consisted of eighteen statements which the respondents had to rank according to their views about the seriousness of the problem. Section B presented eight coping strategies which could be adopted by the teachers to combat the problem of over-crowdedness in the classroom. Respondents were required to identify the ones commonly used by the teachers.

Analysis of Data

Data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed by applying rank-difference correlation coefficient ρ (Spearman rho). The first question sought was to find out if there was any relationship between the ranking of the teachers and students with regard to the problems of over-crowded classrooms.

The second question sought the relationship between the ranking of the teachers and students with regard to the strategies used by teachers to cope with the problem of over-crowded classrooms.

Results

The result of first question showed a moderate positive correlation ($\rho = 0.56$) between the ranking of teachers and students. This result implied that both sides shared a consensus on the problems associated with over-crowded classrooms. Both the teachers and students ranked item 1, "noise making" as the most serious problems of the overcrowded classroom. The teachers' rankings showed item 3, "many pupils at the back do not participate much in lesson" and item 2, "securing students total attention is almost impossible" as receiving second and third place respectively. Students' on the other hand, ranked item 2, "securing students total attention is almost impossible" second and item 3, "many pupils at the back do not participate much in lesson" was ranked third. Students ranked item 6, "teachers question cannot spread round the class" as eighth but teachers ranked it as 18th. Item 18, "it is impossible to check notebooks on time" was ranked as eighth by the teachers and eighteenth by the students.

For 154 degrees of freedom ($df = n_1 + n_2 - 2$) coefficient of correlation is .159 at 0.05 level of significance. It is, therefore, clear that ρ of .56 is significant, and null hypothesis number 1 is rejected.

A high positive correlation ($\rho = 0.74$) was found between the ranking of both teachers and students with regard to coping strategies used by the teachers, thus implying that both sides had almost similar view of the frequently used teacher coping strategies.

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According to the teachers, the most common coping strategy is "standing in front of class all the time". This is followed by "teacher raising her voice" and "rearranging students from time to time so that those at the back come to the front for some part of the term" which was ranked second and third respectively both by teachers and students. "Sending disobedient student off the class" was found to be unpopular as a coping strategy for the problem of over-crowded classes. For the students, the most frequently used strategies by teachers are "standing in front of class all the time" and "teacher raising her voice". Results also showed that "class assignments are always collected to be marked after the lesson", and "punishment for those who disturb" received equal ranking from students.

For 154 degrees of freedom ($df=n_1+n_2-2$) coefficient of correlation is .159 at 0.05 level of significance. It is, therefore, clear that ρ of 0.74 is significant, and null hypothesis number 2 is rejected.

Discussion

It is concluded from the findings of the study that both the teachers and students identified the most serious and significant problem of overcrowded classes as "noise making", which indicates that it is a major problem. Any experienced teacher would agree that very little meaningful learning can take place in a noisy environment. It also shows that students don't pay attention to the ongoing lessons. Noise making is recognized as the barrier between effective communication and teaching.

Questioning is a main technique to assess students' knowledge. On the basis of questioning, it is determined whether objectives have been achieved or not. The finding showed that in over crowded classes, teacher's question cannot go round the class which seems to know that most of the students have less participated in evaluation process. Therefore, teacher could not be able to identify strength and weaknesses of his/her lesson. It also has some implications for curriculum development and implementation.

Some times teachers are forced to use lecture method because seating arrangement is very rigid in over crowded classes. It is also difficult for teachers to go round the class either for marking class assignment or to assist an individual, they have to glue to the front of class.

Results show *standing in the class all the time* is the most popular measure, followed by *raising the teacher's voice*. Teachers also *re-arrange the class time to time so that all the students come to the front for some time of the term*. Punishment for the students is the last option to be used in such classes. These findings indicate that teacher are indulge in using more positive strategies to cope with the over crowdedness

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in the classes. Negative techniques like *punishing the students* or *sending the students off the class* are less popular among the teachers.

Conclusions

From the results of the study, following conclusions are made:

1. There is an agreement between the views of both students and teachers about the problem of over crowdedness and the strategies to cope with the problem.
2. The most serious problems that arise out of over crowdedness are: noise making; securing students' attention during lesson; pupils at the back do not participate much in lesson; teachers question cannot go round the class; and it is impossible to check/return the notebooks on time.
3. The most common coping strategies used by teachers are: standing in front of class all the time; teacher raising her voice; rearranging the students time to time so that those sitting at the back come to the front for some period of time.

Recommendations

Results of the study indicate that the main thing that place limitation on the interaction between students and teachers as well as on the quality of teaching and learning is *seating arrangement*. It is, therefore, recommended that new classes may be built as well as more teachers be employed. A ratio of 1:35 teacher to the students is suggested. There is also a need to double the existing facilities in the schools. For the coping skills of the teachers, it is recommended to establish routines and conventions in class activities right from the beginning of the year. This would keep the students busy during the lessons. Adequate planning and implementation of lesson will also help the teachers to keep students busy throughout the lesson. To enhance their skills, teachers may also attend workshops and in-service training courses.

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