"Creating a Culturally Responsive Classroom: Constraints in Teaching"

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The Right to Education Act (RTE) of 2009 enabled a quantitative expansion of India's education system, bringing all eligible school-aged pupils into the official education system at the primary level (Class I-VIII) (Government of India, 2013). However, high dropout and low retention rates are major issues in government schools. It is not only the number of years of education that matters; the quality of education delivered at the school level is also critical (Jain and Prasad, 2018). The majority of study on Indian government schools has determined that the quality of education provided by the government is low (Bhattacharjee, 2019; Kundu, 2019; Khatua, & Chaudhary, 2019).

The role and quality of instructors is a critical element for the RTE's success. Teachers, according to the RTE, should be contemplative, empowered, professional practitioners who work within a constructivist framework (Wolfenden, 2015). Research conducted all throughout the world continuously demonstrates the importance of teachers in shaping student learning as well as the pupils' academic performance. Improving the quality of teaching and the process of teaching may be beneficial. One of the most efficient ways to raise student accomplishment levels However, there are several exceptions. There have been few studies that have looked at the Indian setting and identified the indicators that potentially have an impact on student learning outcomes and teacher efficacy.

Teachers' perceptions on what works in their classrooms are examined in the present research work as well as the different obstacles that limit their teaching talents and competencies, preventing them from adopting effective teaching strategies and procedures. The report includes a summary review of Indian education policies and literature; a section outlining the research's purpose in light of existing knowledge gaps; the methodology used and how it was adapted given the COVID 19 restrictions; the background of the field research site; and teachers' perspectives on constraints in teaching in their government schools. The paper continues with the challenges and policies that teachers confront.

The aim of this study, titled "Constraints of Teaching in Delhi Government Schools," was to bring to light how teachers make sense of their classrooms and the practices they implement in their classrooms for engaging students. The following findings, recommendations and implications for policy can be drawn from the data of this study.

Practices

A huge number of practices were shared by the teachers. It's important to remember that all of the teachers come from government schools. Despite the benefits of the Delhi government's reforms, they still had to deal with huge PTRs with children from low-income households, non-teaching responsibilities, and other restraints, as detailed above. In compared to many other ordinary schools, it is noteworthy that these teachers are able to motivate their students to attain success. As a result, it is critical to learn from the processes they have established.

Personal connection: Building a personal connection with the students is required for an healthypupil-teacher relationship and student motivation in classrooms. Socioemotional bonds between teachers and their students need to be strengthened in the classrooms for better engagement.

Happiness Curriculum: fosters a fearless environment, mindfulness, and learning without burden in the classes from nursery to grade VIII. It should be for all classes.

Peer learning, experiential learning, and activity-based learning: According to the teachers, these work best for engaging a diverse group of students in both Sarvodaya and Pratibha schools. Any of these work particularly well when stronger students help weaker students.

Mission Buniyaad: For poorer pupils, a summer school programme supports better learning levels and skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. It gives these pupils the opportunity to catch up to the rest of the class. However, this only works if students stay close to their schools during the holidays. Some teachers believe that this type of extra time should be built into the regular school day in order to reach all students.

Pragati books are DoE publications for new readers in which subject books are simplified in language and the content, and are supported by visuals and diagrams, and should be made available for students at all grades. Teachers found these incredibly helpful for weaker students and used them in mixed ability classes as well.

Most teachers disliked being forced to perform ability grouping and dividing children based on their abilities (Pratibha, Nishtha, and Neo-Nishtha). Students develop inferiority and superiority complexes as a result of this segregation, which creates a social and psychological reality for them. Teachers felt that a class with students of varying levels would allow them to use peer learning practises and that the students would learn from one another.

Teacher training

Teachers shared their views on all different forms of training and how this had contributed (or not) to the practices they applied in the classrooms. It seems that most teachers valued pre-service much less than in-service training, as the former was seen as not sufficiently relevant to their daily reality. It's also clear that teachers learn most from each other.

Pre-service teacher education should be more practical, and the duration of the practise teaching/school experience programme for prospective trainee teachers should be enhanced. This will allow students to get a sense of what it's like to be in a classroom. For experienced teachers, in-service training should be organised in small groups. Teachers will be able to share practises and assist each other in resolving challenges, which will aid in customised learning.

Teacher training for large pupil-teacher ratio: Training is for ideal situations, and some of the activities cannot be done with a large PTR. The training should incorporate innovative teaching practices that can be conducted with a large number of students.

Mentor teachers and resource persons should be made aware of the socio-cultural realities of schools (such as Sarvodayas) situated in different localities in Delhi. Training materials cannot be generalised for all the schools of Delhi. They should also customise their training programmes to fulfil the needs of the teachers. This will help significantly in strengthening capacity.

Inclusion

As mentioned above, inclusive education is a crucial education policy. It goes beyond the inclusion of children with special needs (CWSN) and incorporates hard to reach children, especially those who have to work or who are from migrant families, as well as those from economically weaker sections of society and first-generation learners.

Facilitating training for teaching CWSN: The report shows that teachers' understanding of inclusion is confined to the education of CWSN in government schools. The teachers revealed that they have been trained (both in pre-service and in-service) about inclusion, only from the perspective of sensitisation and are not trained on how to teach these students along with the other students. Training for inclusion, such as capacity building workshops, should be incorporated and should include cross-disability (special educator for MR, specific learning disabilities, etc.) training for regular teachers and should not only be for special educators. This will help in constructing inclusive spaces within schools.

Recruitment of special educators and increasing teaching time: The teachers shared that often there are only two special educators available for the whole school. More special educators are required in the schools to allow more time for special needs children to get specialised help.

Increased collaboration among special educators and teachers: Weekly meetings between special educators and teachers help in teaching children with special needs and should be promoted so that ordinary teachers can ask for advice and are better able to support children with special needs.

Parent-teacher collaboration for hard-to-reach students: The teachers have reported that parental engagement of hard-to-reach students (e.g. from migrant families, child labour or those facing gender issues) is pertinent for active student engagement in classrooms. For effective parent-teacher collaboration, the needs of parents and families have to be taken into account, for example, by offering flexible meeting times or encouraging teachers to visit homes.

Revision and extra time: Timely revision and extra time with teachers in smaller groups or one-on-one sessions are pertinent for gaining a conceptual understanding for academically weaker students.

Peer learning with stronger students is incredibly helpful.

Barriers

Despite the excellent practices described in this research, teachers faced barriers applying some of what they said worked. The main reasons are listed below.

Time constraints: Non-academic duties assigned to government school teachers, according to the majority of teachers, obstruct the teaching-learning process and make it difficult for teachers to complete the syllabus. Many teachers stated that they had to skip important sessions during test time owing to non-academic responsibilities. In comparison to handwritten documents, the tablets handed to instructors can be utilised for record-keeping. As a result, it is suggested that more administrative personnel be hired. Administrative employees should be in charge of non-academic responsibilities, such as teaching and student teacher involvement. Teachers will be able to do so as a result of this.

Funding for infrastructure (both physical and academic facilities) should be promoted for school facilities, including special facilities for CWSN students (like ramps, extra classes, and assistive devices), smart board, transportation facilities, and lab facilities.

Teacher accountability should be enhanced for students' advancement and acquisition of numeracy and literacy skills up to grade IX due to the No Detention Policy.

Exams and critical thinking: The examination focus should shift from just scoring good marks to developing the children's critical thinking in the class. This way, teachers will focus on applying methods such as dialogic teaching, debates, discussions, symposiums, and presentations by students, rather than ending up cramming for the exam at the end of the school year.

Parental engagement can be enhanced through PTMs and SMCs: Parental volunteering should be encouraged in the school to build active parent-teacher collaboration. This should include capacity building workshops for parents and teachers (including special educators). This will also help in reducing dropouts (especially for hard to reach children).

The teachers' voices demonstrate that clear goals, the ability to convert these goals into effective curriculum and pedagogy, and a focus on supporting the creation of meaningful learning opportunities are all required at the macro level. In a nutshell, educational opportunity necessitates a successful system or the correct 'environment,' which includes organizations, resources, and regulations, to enable great learning. As a result, the final recommendation is to include teachers' perspectives in policymaking.

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