

Teacher Assessment in the Secondary schools of Afghanistan with Reference to Some Parameters of Pedagogical Practices

Noorajan Atif¹, Satish Pathak²

¹Research Scholar, ²Professor

^{1,2}Department of Education (CASE), Faculty of Education and Psychology, The MS University of Baroda, Vadodara, India

ABSTRACT

Nowadays teacher performance assessment in education has become significant with a view to enhance the quality of education. It is evident that this thrust area would lead to quality and excellence in education. It is realized that the most arguable point about teacher assessment is the improvement of students' performance and learning outcomes. One of the very debatable issues about quality teaching is that to what extent a teacher is able to provide a positive learning environment inside the classroom. Similarly, a qualified teacher is also assumed to create good learning conditions by employing effective pedagogy.

The available studies on Afghan teacher teaching skills (Afghanistan National Education for All (EFA) Review Report, 2015; National Education Strategic Plan (NESP), Ministry of Education, 2016; Education Sector Analysis Report Draft, 2016 and Mansory, 2010) indicate that the vast majority of Afghan school teachers employ traditional pedagogy which cannot help learners to advance their 'critical thinking' ability and become 'autonomous' learners (Barron and Darling-Hammond, 2008). The above conceptual background and reviewed report of Afghanistan have inspired the authors to assess the teachers' performance in the secondary schools of Afghanistan with reference to some parameters of pedagogical practices. The present paper depicts the observed existing pedagogical practices through a series of classroom observation and attempted to suggest some ideas to overcome the challenges of the teachers.

Keywords: Parameters of pedagogical practices, Teacher assessment

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INTRODUCTION

Literature highlights a number of competencies that a qualified teacher should own to be successful in his/her professional career. A wide consensus regarding competent teacher is that he/she should have good content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, problem-solving ability, sensitivity towards students' learning needs, professional beliefs and attitudes towards his/her teaching-learning experience, decision making and some other social skills for effective teaching. One can see the reflection of all the above competencies in terms of certain parameters of quality education if they would be assessed systematically. This perhaps emphasizes the notion of teacher performance assessment to ensure the quality of education. Nowadays teacher performance assessment in education has become significant with a view to enhance the quality of education. Research trends also show that the performance assessment practices in education largely focused on performance appraisal of teachers worldwide. It is evident that this thrust area would lead to quality and excellence in education. It is realized that the most arguable point about teacher assessment is the improvement of students' performance and learning outcomes. In other words, teacher quality should be measured with respect to his/her professionalism and its effect on learners' outcomes as a result of his/her teaching experience in the classroom (OECD, 2009). One of the very debatable issues about quality teaching is that to what extent a teacher can provide a positive learning environment inside the classroom. Positive climate in terms of quality of students learning and achievement, giving full support and consideration to every individual in the class, inculcating high standard humanistic behavior in students, creating an attitude of cooperation and healthy relationship among learners, as well as the school community, and providing the opportunities for the students to learn by their own (National Institute of Education, Maldives, 2014).

Corresponding Author: Satish Pathak, Professor, Department of Education (CASE), Faculty of Education and Psychology, The MS University of Baroda, Vadodara, India, e-mail: dean.edupsy@msubaroda.ac.in

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Similarly, a qualified teacher is also assumed to create good learning conditions by employing a variety of effective teaching models and strategies in his/her classroom. Particularly, the inquiry-based and problem-solving approaches are supposed to improve learners' cognitive ability in terms of critical thinking, system thinking and making a decision. These types of activities can help students challenge the debate and let them to investigate different aspects of the topic and to make a decision finally by their own (WWF-UK, 2010).

As it is defined by UNICEF (2014), pedagogy is what a teacher needs to know and the skills a teacher should be able to command. The available studies on Afghan teacher teaching skills (Afghanistan National Education for All (EFA) Review Report, 2015; National Education Strategic Plan (NESP), Ministry of Education, 2016; Education Sector Analysis Report Draft, 2016 and Mansory, 2010) indicate that the vast majority of Afghan school teachers employ traditional pedagogy which cannot help learners to advance their 'critical thinking' ability and become 'autonomous' learners (Barron and Darling-Hammond, 2008). According to Mayer (2002), a meaningful learning occurs when students learn by using their cognitive process to solve a real problem. Problem-solving is

coming up with a way of achieving a new learning goal which a learner has never achieved before. The above elaborated conceptual background and reviewed report of Afghanistan has inspired the authors to assess the teachers' performance in the secondary schools of Afghanistan with reference to some parameters of pedagogical practices. The present paper depicts the observed existing pedagogical practices through a series of classroom observation and attempted to suggest some ideas to overcome the challenges of the teachers.

ABOUT THE STUDY

The present study has been conducted on Afghan secondary school teachers. The overarching aim of this study was to assess the pedagogical practices of the Afghan teachers in secondary schools with reference to some of its parameters viz. teaching-learning process, curriculum, and teaching materials and students' evaluation. The data has been gathered from, purposively selected 26 schools in 13 districts of Paktia province. Paktia is a province in which many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) namely; UNESCO, UNICEF, CARE International, World Bank, Afghan Women Educational Center (AWEC) along with government have conducted a huge number of capacity building programs for the school teachers. The 'Classroom Observation Schedule' was prepared and used for assessing specific classroom behaviors of the teachers under their pedagogical practices. Totally 26 classes have been observed in the selected 26 schools. The study has attempted to get the answers to the following research questions:

- What type of pedagogical practices do the Afghan secondary school teachers employ in their classrooms?
- To what extent their pedagogical practices are suitable and help well in achieving the learning objectives expected in the curriculum?
- Do the pedagogical practices ensure quality learning?

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

To assess the teachers and their pedagogical practices in Afghan secondary schools, the authors have developed a 'Classroom Observation Schedule', which covered entirely 56 items under three major sub-titles viz. aspects related to teaching-learning, aspects related to curriculum and teaching materials and aspects related to students' evaluation. The analysis and interpretation of different items under each sub-title have been described verbally and graphically as under:

Analysis of the Aspects related to Teaching-learning

Under this sub-title total 32 items were set in the observation schedule indicating aspects related to teaching-learning. For every single aspect assessment choices were given to be tick marked as; 3 = effective, 2 = somewhat effective, 1 = ineffective and N/O not observed. To facilitate the analysis of the stated 32 items, they were clubbed together into six groups based on interrelationship.

It was revealed that out of all 26 observed teachers, 5 teachers (i.e., 19%) carried out the activities related to the very first stage of the session effectively. This stage includes checking students' homework, giving time to think, recall and discuss the previous lesson, linking the previous lesson with the new one and warming up activities. Secondly, 9 teachers (i.e., 34.6%) teachers did it somewhat effectively while 12 teachers (i.e., 46%) were found to be ineffective. With regard to student-centered teaching-learning activities in terms of individual group/pair

work classroom discussion and their participation in classroom activities, it has been observed that 6 teachers (i.e., 23%) designed such type learning activities for their classes effectively. Eight teachers' (i.e., 30.7%) classes were observed somewhat effective and 12 (i.e., 46%) other teachers conducted these type of activities in an ineffective way or missing at all. The third criteria for teacher assessment were set as to what extent he/she tries to engage students in critical thinking and problem-solving activities. The findings specify that 8 (i.e., 30.7%) teachers used some techniques to promote students critical thinking abilities. In the same case 11 (i.e., 42%) other teachers tried somewhat effective to engage students in these type of activities, while 7 (i.e., 26.9%) teachers were identified ineffective. With respect to students' freedom in the classroom to ask questions and their participation in learning activities, the study found that 12 (i.e., 46 %) teachers provided a positive classroom climate effectively. In this respect, 13 (i.e., 50%) teachers were assessed somewhat effective and 1 (i.e., 3.8 %) teacher was assessed to be ineffective. Another related aspect was providing opportunities to the students to apply the new knowledge into practice. Here, 4 (i.e., 15 %) teachers found effective, 12 (i.e., 46 %) were found somewhat effective and 10 (i.e. 38 %) teachers assessed ineffective. The last (i.e., sixth) item was about lesson plan for every single teaching session. The findings revealed that only 3 (i.e., 11 %) teachers had already prepared a lesson plan for their classes, 9 (i.e., 34.6 %) others had somewhat, that is may be an outline of what they were teaching in the classrooms. Besides, 14 (i.e., 53.8 %) other teachers did not have any written lesson plan. Graph 1 shows the graphical presentation of all six criteria and the related interpretation discussed above.

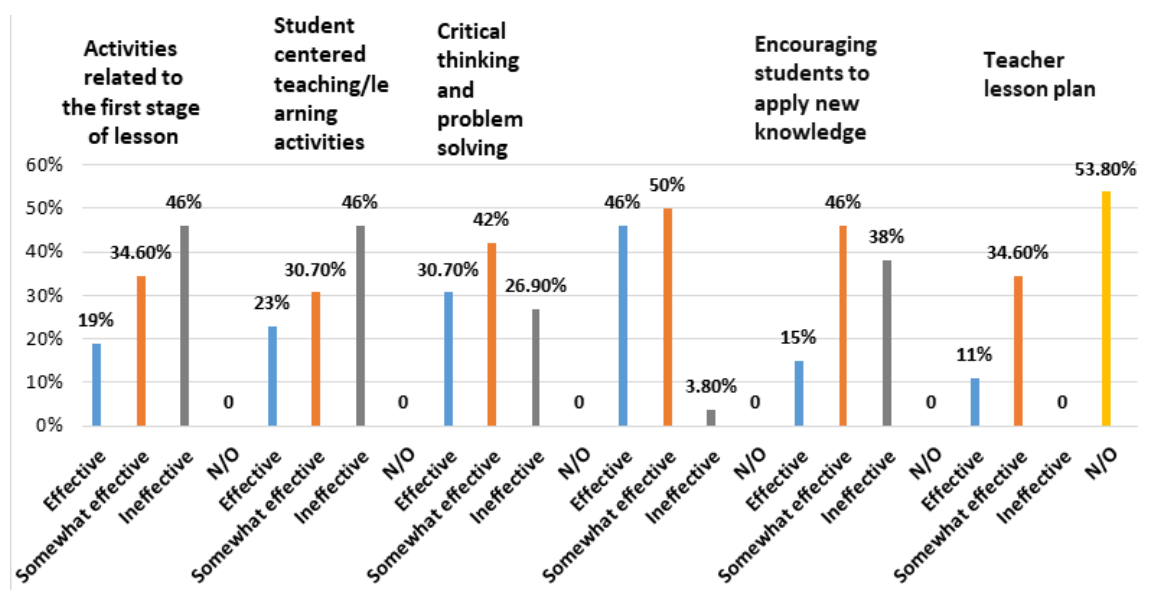
Analysis of the Aspects-related to Curriculum and Teaching-learning Materials

In this part of the observation schedule, there were only two aspects out of thirteen, which were directly related to the teachers' performance. The first aspect is related to teachers' ability regarding the preparation of teaching-learning materials (TLMs) appropriate to the level and learning needs of the students as well as suitable to achieve the expected learning goals/objectives. The findings reveal that only 2 (i.e., 7.6 %) teachers attended their classrooms with already prepared TLMs except for their course books. The rather significant number 24 (i.e., 92 %) teachers did not use any supplementary TLMs in their classrooms except the textbooks. The second criteria were to assess teachers' competence in using TLMs in the classroom. It has been observed that 17 (i.e., 57.6 %) teachers delivered the materials they had planned to present in the classroom, but it cannot be claimed that they conveyed the information or knowledge in an effective way in the sense that the majority of these teachers employed lecture method only. Additionally, 6 (i.e., 23%) teachers were observed that they delivered the expected materials somewhat in a single session while 3 (i.e., 11 %) others failed for what they should have delivered in the classroom. Graph 2 explains the analysis graphically.

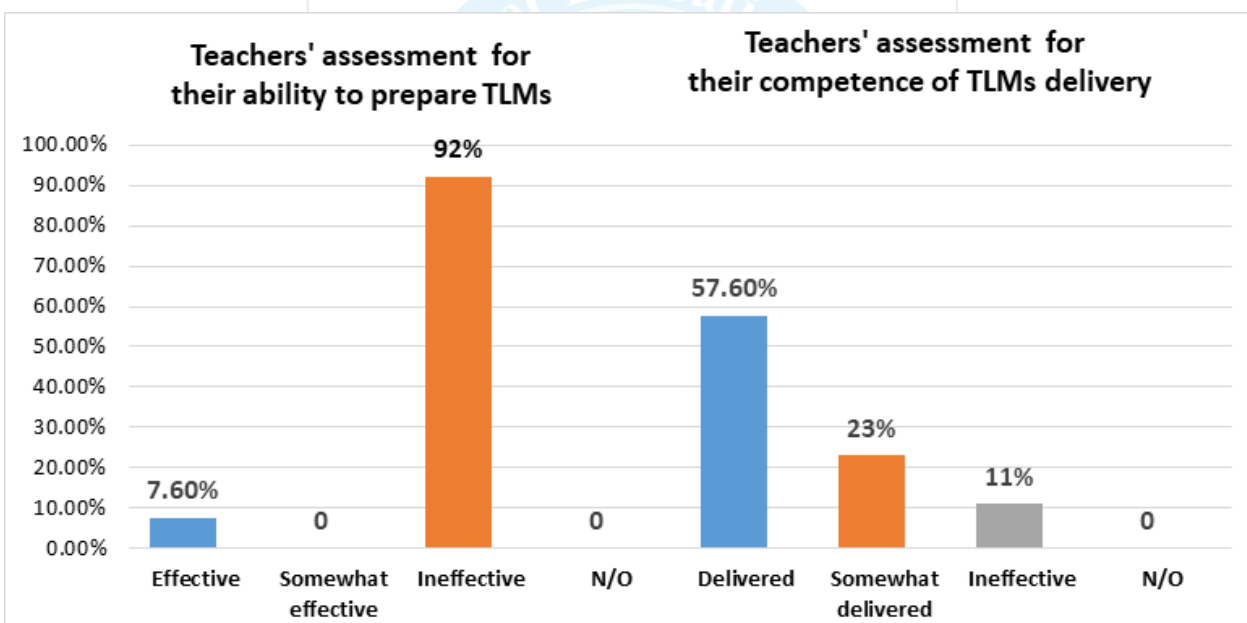
Analysis of the Aspects-related to Students' Evaluation

Two major aspects were assessed under this part of the classroom observation schedule. The first aspect was the students' evaluation based on three learning domains (affective, cognitive, and psychomotor). The findings indicate that only 3 (i.e., 11 %) teachers assessed students' understanding of materials based on these three learning domains. Eighteen (i.e., 69 %) teachers were observed





Graph 1: Analysis related to teaching-learning



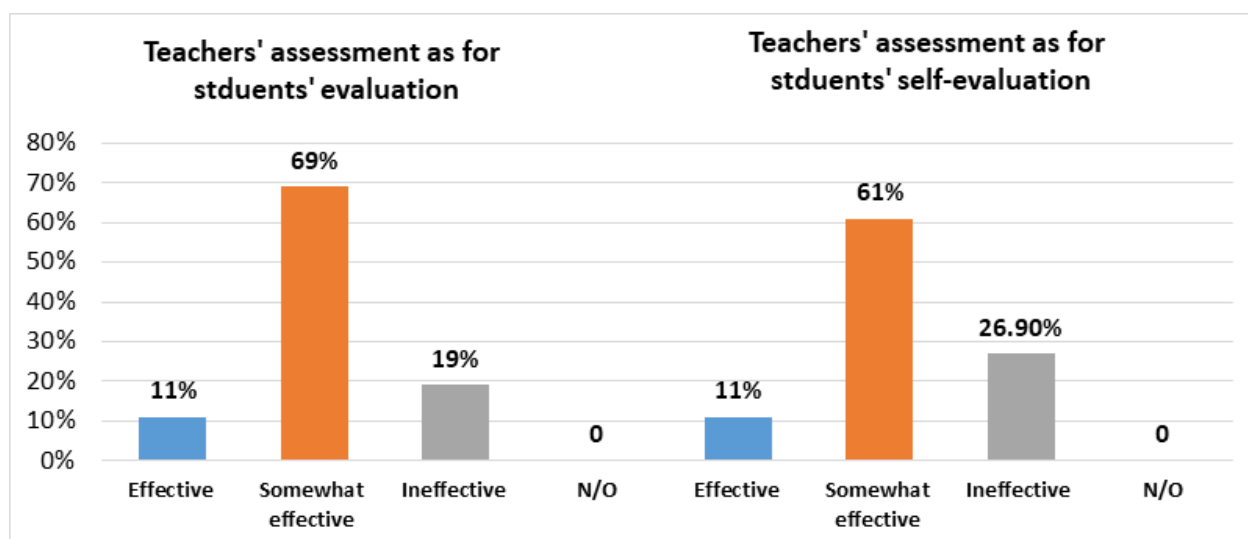
Graph 2: Analysis related to teaching-learning materials

somewhat effective in doing so, while 5 (i.e., 19 %) teachers were found ineffective. The second aspect was about providing a good climate and encouraging students for self-evaluation based on the three learning domains. It has been found that the same number of teachers 3 (i.e., 11 %) encouraged their students for self-evaluation, 16 (i.e., 61 %) teachers were found somewhat effective in doing so and 7 (i.e., 26.9 %) teachers were found ineffective. Graph 3 shows the analysis graphically.

CONCLUSION

In regard to the analyzed data and the graphical presentations made, it is quite significant that most Afghan school teachers employ traditional pedagogical methods (teacher-centered) in their classrooms. The findings in all three major aspects of

pedagogical practices demonstrate that Afghan teachers face a number of serious challenges in their career, especially in classroom practices. It has been observed that nearly all of the teachers had poor competence in general and particular subjects' pedagogy. For this obvious reason, they had to use the only teaching method "lecture" in their classrooms. Particularly, careful planning and preparing learning materials including electronic resources and its effective transition were noted as a big challenge for them. The only procedure they adopted for TLMs' delivery was following the already fixed content order in the textbooks. Another terrible truth is their failure as teachers to engage students in activities that help them promote their cognitive skills. Also, the majority of the teachers found not effective in students' evaluation, which is only the major evidence to see the impact of their teaching-learning process. Hence to come up with a solution to the above



Graph 3: Analysis related to students' evaluation

stated lacking on the part of the teachers, continuous short term in-service professional development programs can help teachers to overcome the challenges they are facing within their professional career (Crowther et al. 2002). Particularly, school administrations are responsible for the opportunities that they should provide for the teachers to enhance their professional competencies. Moreover, constant follow up assessment and feedback is required to improve teachers' classroom performance (OECD, 2009).

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