



Use and Utility of Teacher Guides for Primary School Teachers in Punjab

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p>History <i>Revised format: February 2019</i> <i>Available Online: March 2019</i></p> <hr/> <p>Keywords <i>Teacher Guides, Utility, Use of Teaching Guide</i></p> <hr/> <p>JEL Classification: A20, A21, A22</p>	<p>This study is aimed at soliciting public primary school teachers' viewpoints on use and utility of teacher guides, an initiative of government of the Punjab. Data were collected through focus group discussions of male and female teachers from District Sargodha. Teachers were asked to discuss need, importance and use of teacher guide and to suggest ways to improve. Focus group discussions were audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed for extracting themes. It was found that teachers acknowledged the need and importance of teacher guide for better teaching. It was noted from their discussion that teachers used Guides for lesson planning and activities but use of teacher guide was not optimal. Some of the teachers were using it in best possible way, while majority were using it occasionally. They highlighted difficulties and challenges like high workload, language of teacher guides and lack of learning material required for suggested activities. They suggested revising guides for language, removing inconsistencies with respect to schedule of guide and academic calendar. They also suggested lower workload of teachers by recruiting new teachers, providing teachers with training to use guides and making monitoring and supervision more rigorous.</p>

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1. Introduction

Quality of teaching and learning in public primary schools in general and in the subjects of English, Mathematics and Science in particular has been a concern of the government of the Punjab. Various initiatives have been introduced and experimented to increase the pedagogical competence of working teachers. Recently renamed as Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development (QAED), the Directorate of Staff Development (DSD) formerly known as Education Extension center was established in 1959 for the professional development of working teachers in Punjab. DSD has been involved in in-service teacher training programs to improve teachers' competence. In 2012, a Continuous Professional Development Program was launched in Punjab initially in 12 districts and then in all the 36 districts.

In order to support the PSTs (PSTs) in implementing the National Curriculum 2009, the Government of Punjab took an initiative, with financial support from international donors (DSD, 2012), regarding provision of teacher guides. The task of development of teacher guides was entrusted upon the DSD. The DSD engaged experts from public and private schools for the preparation of teacher guides in the subject of Urdu, English, Mathematics and

Science.

The Government of Punjab, provided teachers' guides in the subjects Urdu, English and mathematics (Grades 1 to III) and in subjects English, mathematics and science (grades IV & V). Success of any initiative in classrooms depends heavily upon the teachers who teach these classes. Any initiative that does not match with its implementers' views and beliefs is liable to failure and teachers are not an exception to it. Keeping in view the importance of PSTs views and beliefs as far as the success of teacher's guides' initiative is concerned; it is not only important but necessary to develop deeper insights into teachers' views and beliefs regarding use and utility of the guides in primary classrooms.

There is ample research based evidence for use and utility of teacher guides in various contexts. Teacher's guides are manuals full of ideas and notes about how to organize instruction in the classrooms (Harmer, 2007). The teacher's guides should be flexible so that these could be adapted in varying contexts and should satisfy the teachers' needs (Cunningsworth, 1995). The teacher's guides need also to provide explicit ways for planning instruction and how various values that are included in the curriculum best match with the teachers own teaching beliefs and practices. These guides should also provide guidance on the age and level of the learners who may benefit from it (Cunningsworth & Kusel, 1991). The teachers can maximize the benefit of teacher's guides if they facilitate teachers in designing and implementing formative assessments in order to monitor the progress of learners (Zabihi and Tabataba'ian, 2011).

Motivation is a key to learner, hence teacher's guides should be organized in such a way that can develop motivation among teachers to teach and among learners to learn (Cunningsworth & Kusel, 1991). Further the teacher's guide should split the concepts into smaller portions keeping in view the attention span of young learners and to avoid any instances of boredom (Chastain, 1988). For the successful implementation of teacher's guides, it is important that the guides should be easy to understand, written in a language which is native to its users, and should forward simple and clear suggestions regarding various tasks. The teachers guides which are developed according to the teachers and learners needs has a potential to be implemented by the practitioners (Hemsley, 1997). The teacher's guides can play an important role in forming the classrooms practices of teachers, especially the beginners and who are teaching in a second language as a medium of instruction (Cunningsworth & Kusel, 1991).

The use of teacher's guides varies by the teacher. Some teachers try to follow the guides in true letter and spirit, some take only guideline and then plan their own instruction keeping in view their local needs and there are some who hardly bother to look at them (Barr & Sadow, 1989 and Durkin, 1984). The availability and use of teacher's guides become more important in the contexts where people join the teaching workforce without prior teacher training (Gearing, 1999) and in many countries where teacher training is missing, these guides are the only source for pedagogical guidance (Richards, 1993).

According to Cunningsworth and Kusel (1991) there are five functions i.e. 1) describe general goals and methodology, 2) develop teachers' capacity, 3) develop an understanding regarding course materials' structure 4) guidance on practical use of the suggested material and 5) provide lingo-cultural information. A teacher's guide has a potential to help the teacher for innovating new tasks, assessments and methodologies (Cunningsworth, 1995). Teachers generally plan for instruction in advance, though this planning can vary from teacher to teacher and context to context. Some teachers prepare a well sequenced written plan, the other may prepare a mental sketch. It can vary in complexity from teacher to teacher (Jensen, 2001).

This study has been conducted in the context public school of Punjab, Pakistan. In public schools textbook remains the only teaching source for a large majority of PSTs. It is a common practice to ask the student to read aloud from the textbook in languages followed by questions from the teacher's side. The only exception, perhaps, is mathematics, where demonstration, drill and practice are commonly used as a method of teaching. These practices make learning experience dull and boring. A teacher who plans a lesson in advance can make learning meaningful and interesting for all the learners. Since lesson planning is concerned with what to teach, how to teach and how to assess, therefore, it has remained part of pre-service teacher training programs, but has hardly been practiced by the PSTs. Some senior teachers claim that they have plans in their mental bank, hence they can teach by using their memory and wisdom (Jones 1998). In public primary schools of Punjab, six classes (Nursery to V) are accommodated. A large majority of the schools have access to very limited human and physical resources. Most of the primary schools have two classrooms (there are many without functional classrooms), and on average 3 teachers. The schools do not have access to any type of teaching and learning aids except shared white/black boards and textbook.

The teacher's guides initiative brought a change in the schools since the teachers had one more teaching aid with them which could have been more helpful. Since the teacher's guides talk about teaching and learning process and its outcome, therefore, the teachers who wish to help their children can better prepare themselves. Teacher's guides have the potential to make teachers autonomous learners as they learn self-reliance in their presence (Hemsley, 1997). On the other hand, Breen and Candlin (1987) mentioned that teacher's guide can be viewed as a week servant of textbooks.

Human action and behavior is determined by some of the personality traits which are not visible. These hidden traits include attitudes, beliefs, self efficacy, self concept and many more (Pajares 1992). Ford (1994) defined beliefs as, "group of norms or opinions which were formed in the individual through his experiences and the overlapping of thoughts during the learning processes". As Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) claimed, "teachers make decisions about classroom instruction in light of theoretical beliefs they hold about teaching and learning. Teachers' beliefs influence their goals, procedures, materials, classroom interaction patterns, their roles, their students, and the schools they work in".

Specific objective of the study was to solicit PSTs' perspectives on need, importance, use and usefulness of teacher guide provided to them by government of the Punjab. Since Government of the Punjab has spent a huge amount on provision of teacher guide to all PSTs to improve teaching learning process in Government primary schools, therefore it is importance to research into what teachers say about use and utility of these guides.

2. Research Methodology

It was a qualitative inquiry employing focus group discussion technique for data collection. Fifty male and fifty female PSTs were selected from ten cluster centers of district Sargodha. Two groups of five male and five female teachers were selected from each of the ten cluster centers. It constituted twenty groups comprising five teachers each. All the twenty groups were engaged in focus group discussions one by one. They were asked to discuss need, importance, nature and extent of their use, challenges and difficulties in use and ways to improve teacher guides. All the sessions were audio recorded with the permission of the subjects. All the recorded discussions were transcribed, responses were coded and themes were extracted by discourse analysis.

2.1 Focus Group Discussions

In order to know the views of PSTs regarding use and utility of Teacher's guides focus group discussions were conducted. In all twenty groups (10 each for male and female teachers) were formed to discuss following.

1. Why teacher's guides are needed for PSTs?
2. What is the importance of teacher's Guides for PSTs?
3. How do they use and how often do they use teacher's guides while teaching in their classes?
4. What steps School Education Department should take to ensure maximum use of teacher's guides by PSTs?
5. What difficulties and challenges do they face in using teacher's guides?
6. Do they have any suggestions for the improvement of teacher's guides?

3. Findings

Teachers' responses during focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed to extract themes of discussions. The findings are presented below for each question.

3.1 Need of teacher guide

In response to the first question regarding need of teacher's guides for PSTs, the teachers communicated that the guides are needed in order to improve effectiveness of the teaching and learning process by providing model lesson plans. One of the teachers said that "teachers can teach better by preparing for teaching with the help of teacher's guides as it enables them to understand the structure and composition of effective lesson plan". The other points emerged during discussion included:

1. Teacher's guides can help teachers to plan and prepare for teaching more effectively. Teachers' responses included:
 - a) "Teacher guides provide teachers with guidance about methods of teaching"
 - b) "teachers guide enables teachers to learn how to teach"
 - c) "Teacher can devise their strategy for teaching to follow on next day"
 - d) "It guide us how to teach "
 - e) "It guides teachers how to teach, what to teach and order of teaching"

- f) “Teacher can make lesson easy by using teacher’s guide”
- g) “It has provided teacher with a framework to follow “
- 2. Teacher’s guides provide teacher ready to use lesson plans.
- 3. “Lesson plans in teacher guides are SLO based therefore SLO are achieved more effectively. Further animations and pictures are helpful in explaining and making concepts clear”.
- 4. One of the teachers was of the view that “teacher’s guides save teacher’s time in preparing lesson”

3.2 Importance of teacher’s guides

The second question for the focus group discussion was, what is the importance of teacher’s guides for PSTs. It has been found that all the teachers believed that teacher’s guides are important for the PSTs since:

- a) The “guides include lesson plans which enable teachers to prepare for teaching, assessing students learning and assigning home work”.
- b) Teachers can develop new activities and tasks for the students by reflecting how the activities suggested by the guides have worked in the classrooms.
- c) The guides provide student centered activities which may be used by the teachers in order to engage the learners.

3.3 Extent of use of teacher’s guides

The analysis of the data has revealed that the use of teacher’s guide vary by teachers. Around half of the teachers responded that they hardly use teacher’s guides, whereas around one quarter mentioned that they often used and another quarter of teachers mentioned that they use these guides on daily basis. Some teachers mentioned that they use the teacher’s guides to the extent of suggested student activities. It simply means that a large majority of the respondents occasionally use the guides provided to them by the Government of Punjab. This finding is surprising especially the DSD has been supporting and monitoring the use of teacher’s guides by the teacher through their district and cluster level monitoring and support staff.

3.4 Nature of use of teacher’s guides

In response to question, “How do you use teacher’s guides while teaching?” the teachers responded that:

- 1. They “follow whole process as given in teacher guides and guided by DTE”.
- 2. A few teachers reported that “they compared text book and teacher’s guides to decide how to teach and what to teach and which aspect of teacher guide needed to be followed. They chose activities from the guides”.

3.5 Suggestions to ensure use of teacher guides.

The following suggestion for the effective use of teacher’s guides were forwarded by the respondents:

- 1) Align teaching calendar with the lesson plans given in the teacher’s guides
- 2) Align lesson plans with the SLOs given in the textbook
- 3) There should be rigorous monitoring mechanism in place for the implementation of teacher’s guides initiative
- 4) Increase number of teachers so that there is a one to one class and teacher ratio so that teachers have some breathing space to look at the teacher’s guides. The workload needs to be rationalized.
- 5) Teachers should be provided proper training for the use of teacher’s guides.

3.6 Difficulties in using teacher guides

The PSTs highlighted the following difficulties they face while using teacher’s guides;

- 1) Extra ordinary workload of PSTs due teacher shortage.
- 2) Unavailability of resources mentioned in the teacher guide.
- 3) Lack of training to use teacher’s guides.
- 4) Shortage of teacher’s guides for newly inducted teachers.

3.7 Suggestions to improve teacher guides

In response to the question, “How to improve teacher guide?” the teachers suggested that simple language should be used in the teacher’s guides. The PSTs’ representatives should be engaged in development of teacher guides.

Student activities suggested in the teacher's guides should be developed keeping in view the resource availability at the schools.

4. Discussion and Recommendations

Teacher's guides is an important tool in the hands of teachers to make their teaching effective. Teacher's guides is especially recommended for teachers with training needs and nonnative English speaking teachers (Gearing; 1999 Richards; 1993; Colman, 1986). Public PSTs of Punjab were provided with teachers' guides to enable them implement new curriculum successfully. Teachers' recruitment policy of government of the Punjab also allowed untrained teachers to be recruited. Initiative of teachers guides also aimed at supporting novice untrained teachers to teach effectively at primary school level. Effectiveness of teachers' guide depend upon nature and extent of use by the teachers. Present study revealed that use of teachers' guides by the teachers was not optimal and nature of use also varied among the teachers. These findings were in consonance with findings of previous research studies like Sadow (1989), Moulton (1994) and Durkin (1984). Keeping in view teachers' responses on teacher guides provided to them by government of the Punjab and Literature on nature and composition of teacher guides (Cunningsworth and Kusel 1991; Jones, 1998; Hemsley, 1997; Romiszowski, 1968), it can be claimed that composition and content of teacher guide under discussion are up to the mark and useful. Teachers Guides provided teachers with lesson plans based on student learning outcomes, composed of elaborated content and activities supportive to achieve the learning outcomes. It is a Universal Phenomenon that no initiative can be implemented without proper monitoring, training and motivation. Teachers suggested rigorous monitoring, guidance and training for teachers' motivation.

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