

Surveying the diversity among primary classrooms in Punjab

Tauseef Ahmad¹, Dr. Afaf Manzoor²

Abstract

There is a dearth of research literature about classroom diversity in Pakistan. On the other side many countries have successfully recognized the basis of classroom diversity and have started to implement differentiated instructions to address these diversities. Pakistan is lacking far behind in this regard because without recognizing the basis of classroom diversity it can't move to the next level which is introducing and implementing differentiated instructions. Keeping in view the above-mentioned facts, this study was intended to explore the concrete basis of diversity among the children studying in the primary schools of Punjab. For this purpose, whole province of Punjab was chosen as the locale of the study. Convenience sampling technique was used throughout this process. On the basis of 608 responses, data was analyzed and findings, conclusion and recommendations were given.

Keywords: Classroom diversity, Primary schools

Introduction

Classroom diversity can be defined as differences among students on the bases of culture, religion, socio-economic status, gender, color, creed, nationality, disability, language, race and various other factors(Mannix & Neale, 2005; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023; Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). These innumerable heterogeneities create a classroom culture which have many perspectives, ideas and experiences(Chapman & King, 2005; Dixon et al., 2014). This versatile classroom culture promotes respect for individual differences, tolerance and working together.

In today's interconnected world it is most important for students to learn about diversity and respect and appreciate it to succeed. Classroom diversity will ultimately increase academic competence, creativity, empathy and cultural competence Because in diverse classrooms students are known, respected and facilitated to achieve learning objectives. In diverse classrooms the teachers don't have any option except how to respond to this academic diversity. In order to address such diversities, the teachers will have to make routines that attend rather than ignore the learner diversities(Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2023). Such routines may be referred to as "differentiating" curriculum and instruction(Tomlinson, 2001). Differentiation is the integration of all elements of the classroom, including the learning environment, curriculum, assessment, instruction, and classroom leadership and management (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013).

Teachers play an important role in the integration of these five elements. Teachers need to understand the nature and differences of students to accommodate them in the instructional process (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). This is challenging for teachers who lack a comprehensive understanding of the process or who are not competent in teaching multiple groups at once (Dixon et al., 2014).

¹ Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Special Education, University of Education Lahore. tauseefahmed268@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor (Special Education), University of Education Lahore. afaf.manzoor@yahoo.com

Contrary to this, homogeneous environment will restrict student's learning on social and cultural grounds. The Incheon Declaration (2015) on inclusion and equity aims to provide everyone equal opportunities in education but in order to achieve this goal first one will have to recognize and respect classroom diversity. There are many researches on inclusion and diversity but most of them are in western cultural context and inclusive practices can't be simply imported from one culture to another. Many researchers have shown that teaching culture is influenced by many individual and cultural factors (Kaur & Noman, 2015; Ryan et al., 2007). Keeping in view these findings it is necessary to plan and implement inclusive practices by considering cultural context (Sternberg et al., 2006).

Pakistani society is composed on various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups which mean it is a diverse society. In this context, Stephen P. Cohen aptly remarks that 'Pakistan is one of the world's most ethnically and linguistically complex states'.

Islam is the religion of a large majority of the Pakistanis. According to Pakistan bureau of statistics, "PBS" 2023, approximately up to 96.28% of the population consists on Muslims and only 3.72% belongs to other religions. Among those 3.72% minorities, 1.60% are Hindus, 1.59% are Christians, 0.25% are from scheduled cast, 0.22% are qadianies and 0.07% are others. The majority Muslim population is also divided in various sects like sunies and Shias. Historically, Pakistan was a pathway to many invaders which has given birth to many ethnic groups. The interaction between the invaders and the locals led to the formation of a language called Urdu. Besides all this, the locals kept their local traditions and values alive. The major ethnic groups in Pakistan are, Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, balochies, saraikies, Hindkohans, Chitralies and many smaller groups. Although, Urdu is the national language of Pakistan but yet there is no single language that is spoken throughout the country.

According to Britannica.com (2010), regional languages have a strong influence in their respective regions. However, some languages have presence in some other regions as well. Each of the four provinces is named after their main dominating sub-culture and languages such as Sindhi in Sindh, Balochi in Baluchistan, Pushto in Khyber Pakhtoon Khawa and Punjabi in Punjab. On the other hand, soviet invasion in Afghanistan and war on terror caused a large-scale migration from Afghanistan to Pakistan. It is estimated that Pakistan hosted up to 30 million afghan refugees during Afghan war. Majority of them has settled in Pakistan since then. Although, due to poor registration procedure and data management it is hard to find the exact number of afghan refugees but a recent survey conducted by the government of Pakistan and united nations refugee agency found 1.3 million afghan refugees residing in Pakistan. Besides, environmental catastrophes like 2005 earthquake, 2010 floods and army operations against terrorists contributed to internal displacement of a large population. Besides, according to world bank (2016), 39.3% population of Pakistan is living below the poverty line and 62.3% population is uneducated. According to world health organization, 15% of world's total population is having some disability but due to ambiguous criteria and untrained staff the proportion of disabled population in Pakistani censuses are found very low. For example, national census 1998 found disabled population at 2.49%, 2017 census found 0.5% and 2023 census found it just above 1%.

All above facts indicate the bases of diversity in Pakistani society but when it comes to recognition of classroom diversity and inclusion, all above factors are vanished and disability is recognized as the only base of classroom diversity and including students with disabilities in classrooms is considered inclusion. Which is a narrow and deteriorated definition of classroom diversity. Hence, this study is intended to find the basis of diversity in primary classrooms of Punjab Pakistan.

Objectives of the study

1. To explore the concrete basis of diversity in primary classrooms of Punjab, Pakistan.
2. To get insights of primary school teachers about classroom diversity.

Questions of the study

1. What are the concrete bases of classroom diversity in primary classrooms of the province of Punjab?
2. What the primary school teachers think about classroom diversity?

Methodology

This was a descriptive study. Descriptive research describes the situations or the phenomenon. It was a quantitative research by nature. In its quantitative form this type of study is called survey (Knupfer et al., 1996). On the basis of extensive literature review a bilingual questionnaire in Urdu and English languages was developed by the researchers. The questionnaire was kept bilingual to enhance its effectiveness. The questionnaire comprised on four sections. 1st section consisted on demographic information of the respondents, second section comprised on questions asking about the prevalence of various forms of classroom diversity, third section had questions about numeric presence of diverse students in classrooms and fourth section had questions to get teacher insights about classroom diversity. The questionnaire was validated by the 3 experts of the field of special education. Before the administration of questionnaire, In the light of expert's recommendations questions were modified and questionnaire was restructured. The primary school teachers of Punjab were the population of the study. Convenient sampling technique was used for data collection. Whole province of Punjab was the locale of the study so the questionnaire was converted in Google forms and circulated online through whatsapp and facebook. In education, online surveys are one of the preferred mode of data collection (Saleh & Bista, 2017). According to (Daikeler et al., 2020; Manfreda et al., 2008) online survey response rates are 11 to 12% lower than other modes of data collection but (Uhlig et al., 2014) suggests that online survey is cost-effective and time efficient when sample size is above than 300. So to get better responses the researchers personally contacted their references in the department of education scattered across the province of Punjab and requested them to help this questionnaire get filled. With researchers tiresome efforts 608 responses were collected. On the basis of data analysis, the findings and recommendations were given.

Analysis and findings of the study

Table 1

Demographic profile of the sample (N=608)

Demographic	<i>F</i>	%
Gender		
Male	302	49.7
Female	306	50.3
Age		
20-30 y	131	21.5
31-40 y	309	50.8
41-50 y	103	16.9
51-60 y	65	10.7
Experience		
0-5 y	79	13
6-10 y	272	44.7
11-15 y	109	17.9
16-20 y	48	7.9
21-25 y	32	5.3
26-30 y	68	11.2
Residence		
Rural	337	55.4
Urban	271	44.6
Divisions		
Rawalpindi	98	16.1
Gujranwala	6	1
Lahore	55	9
Faisalabad	84	13.8
Sahiwal	254	41.8

Multan	70	11.5
Bahawalpur	20	3.3
Dera Ghazi Khan	8	1.3
Sargodha	13	2.1

Table 2 various forms of classroom diversity

Sr. No	Statement	Percentages (%)	
		Yes	No
1	Do you have orphan children in your class?	82.7	17.3
2	Do you have children with disabilities in your class	21.1	78.9
3	Do you have children in your class whose mother language is other than Urdu & Punjabi	33.7	66.3
4	Do you have children in your class who belong to a different race such as Pashtuns, Sindhis, Saraikis, Muhajirs, Balochs, Paharis etc.	34.7	65.3
5	Do you have homeless children in your class, i.e., children of nomads	19.6	80.4
6	Do you have children from different color background in your class i.e., Black (Makrani or Black Asian	14.2	85.8
7	Do you have children from low income families “earning less than 30,000” in your class	95.4	4.6
8	Do you have children with different religions “other than	19.5	80.5

	Islam” in your class?		
9	Do you have students with different genders in your class other than male or female i.e., transgender	3.4	96.6
10	Do you have children from separated families in your class i.e., (separation or divorce between parents)?	65.8	34.2
11	Do you have students in your class whose parents are illiterate	94.6	5.4
12	Do you have gifted children in your class	60.2	39.8
13	Do you have students who have different culture than the majority	25.4	74.6
14	Do you have students from displaced families i.e., Afghani	11.6	88.4

Table 2 clearly shows that on the parameters mentioned above classroom diversity exist in all primary classrooms of Punjab. Dominant factors of classroom diversity were children from low income families found in “95.4%” classes, children from illiterate families were found in “94.6%” classes, orphan children found in “82.7%” classrooms, children from broken families were found in “65.8%” classrooms, children with gifted abilities were found in “60.2%” classes, 34.7% classes had children with different race such as pashtoons, balochies, paharies etc. Nonnative Urdu and Punjabi speaking children were found in 33.7% classes, 25.4% classrooms were having children with different culture, 21.1% teachers were having students with disabilities in their classes. Then there are some less prominent factors of classroom diversity like, in 19.6% classes homeless children were found, 19.5% classes were having children with different religion than Islam, in 14.2% class’s children with different color were present, 11.6% classrooms had students from displaced families and 3.4% classes had transgender children.

Table 3 numeric presence of diverse students

Variable profile of the sample (N=608)

Sr. No	Statement	Percentages (%)					M
		0	1	2	3	More than 3	
1	What is the number of students in your classroom having different race than the majority?	71.1	7.7	9	4.3	7.9	0.70
2	How many students are there in your classroom that has a disability?	77	16.8	4.1	1.3	0.8	0.32
3	How many children in your classroom have different religious background than the majority i.e., Islam?	79.3	8.2	5.9	2.8	3.8	0.44
4	How many students in your classroom are gifted or talented in a specific area?	42.3	16.9	23	7.4	10.4	1.27
5	What numbers of students are there in your classroom who have experienced homelessness or displacement?	68.3	11.7	9.7	3	7.4	0.70
6	How many students in your classroom have experienced trauma or adverse experiences like gender-based	89.8	5.4	3.5	0.7	0.7	0.17

	violence, sexual abuse						
7	What numbers of students are there in your classroom who have a different first language than Punjabi or Urdu? آپ	63.5	7.4	8.9	4.3	16	1.02
8	What numbers of students in your classroom have different culture traditions or customs than the majority?	72	8.4	10.9	2.5	6.3	0.63
9	If any student in your classroom experienced discrimination or prejudice based on identity, if yes then how many?	89.3	4.1	3.8	1.5	1.3	0.21
10	How many students are therein your classroom who are from separated families (separation or divorce between parents)?	41.8	23.2	20.7	5.4	8.9	1.16
11	What number of students do you have in your class who have different color?	58.7	8.7	12.5	6.6	13.5	1.07
12	How many orphan children do you have in your classroom?	24.2	22	28.9	12	12.8	1.67
13	How many students	2.3	3	8.4	9.9	76.5	3.55

	in your classroom belong to families earning less than 30,000?						
14	What numbers of students in your classroom have parents who are uneducated/illiterate?	1.8	1.8	8.1	15.3	73	3.56

Table 3 shows diversity frequencies and means. All types of diversities prevail in primary classrooms. But means of table 3 endorses the findings of table 2 which showed a large proportion of children from broken families, children from low income families, children from illiterate families, children with giftedness and orphan children. However, table 3 found that the children from non-urdu and Punjabi speaking families and children with different color are also in a significant number. Means of significant diversities are given respectively; children from illiterate families 3.56, children from low income families 3.55, orphan children 1.67, children with gifted abilities 1.27, children from broken families 1.16, children with different color 1.07 and nonnative Urdu and Punjabi speakers 1.02.

Table 4 teacher insights about classroom diversity

Sr.no	Statement	Percentages (%)	
		Yes	NO
1	Does diversity exist in your classroom?	46.2	53.8
2	I am happy to have diversity in my classroom	40.6	59.4
3	Do you think diversity influences learning in our regular classrooms?	77.1	22.9
4	I face difficulty in managing special needs of diverse children in classroom.	51	49
5	I need training to meet the diversified needs of the children in my	54.3	45.7

classroom.

Table 4 depicts the opinions of teachers about diversity. 46.2% teachers said that they have diversity in their classes. 40.6% teachers were happy to have diversity in their classes. 77.1% teachers were of the view that diversity influences learning in regular classrooms. 51% teachers told that they find it hard to meet the diverse needs of their students. 54.3% teachers told that they need training to meet the needs of diverse students.

Discussion

The research findings co-relate with studies conducted by(Mannix & Neale, 2005; Tomlinson, 2001; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023)and found many aspects of diversity among public primary school students. The dominating aspects were poverty, illiterate family background, broken families, nonnative Urdu and Punjabi languages, different color,orphanage and giftedness. Although, other factors also exist in reasonable proportions. These findings also support PROBE, (1999) that Usually children from lower economic status families join public schools and children from upper economic status family background join private schools. This variety of students definitely poses challenges for teachers. For example, (Archambault Jr, 1993) and (Westberg, 1993)found that teachers pay little attention to the advance needs of gifted children. Researches show that internationally a lot of attention is being paid to teachers response to increasing school diversity(Banks & Banks, 2019; Gorski & education, 2009; Sleeter, 2001).

It is heartening to see that almost all the teachers provided the data about classroom diversity but similar to Hook (2002) just 46.2% teachers accepted that diversity exist in their classes which is a significant number considering Pakistani context. Moreover, 40.6% teachers were having positive attitude to have diversity in their classes and studies found correlation between teacher's positive attitude and student's improved school performance. These findings provide a fertile ground to introduce pedagogical reforms. Because uniformity in teaching style for all learners fails many students (Tomlinson, 2001). 77.1% teachers are of the view that diversity influences learning in regular classrooms and 51% find it hard to deal with diverse needs of their students. It might be due to lack of training and resources but study conducted by (Procedia-Social &Sciences, 2011)found that primary school teachers negatively perceive their students from marginalized groups. Teacher's attitude is influenced by his/her family background and upbringing style(Cochran-Smith, 2005). On the base of these factors he perceives a student good or bad and then deals him/her accordingly. On the basis of their beliefs teachers form expectations about students' academic achievement and future behavior. Other researches point various factors to shape teachers attitude about their students like(Fantuzzo et al., 2012) are of the view that teacher consider student's socio-economic status while judging and communicating with them.(McKown & Weinstein, 2008)found that some teachers try to link poverty and student's minority status with low intelligence and discriminate them. 54.3% teachers admitted that they need training to deal with the challenges posed by classroom diversity. This finding supports the research conducted by (Hootstein, 1998)

Recommendations

Keeping in view the above-mentioned discussion following recommendations may prove fruitful;

- Education policies, curriculum development and teaching pedagogies should be reviewed to incorporate classroom diversity.
- Teacher training courses should be modified to sensitize and equip teachers to better deal with classroom diversity.
- In service teacher training courses should be enrich with latest trends and international practices.
- Topics related to diversity should be included in textbooks
- Regular workshops and seminars should be organized to spread awareness about diversity.
- Media campaign should be launched to highlight the issues related to diversity.

Glossary

Broken family: refers to a family where one parent is absent, usually due to divorce, death or desertion.

Culture: way of life of a group specially customs and beliefs.

Disability: “a physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and interactions”.

Gender: socially assigned roles for men and women.

Gifted children: children who possess significantly high abilities in one or more developmental areas than their age fellows.

Illiterate families: families which don't know how to read and write.

Language: “A language is a system of communication which consists of a set of sounds and written symbols which are used by the people of a particular country or region for talking or writing”.

Low-income family: a family earning less than 30,000 rupees per month.

Orphan: a child who's one or both parents died.

Person of color: a person who's skin pigmentation is different from the majority.

Race: “a group of persons related by common descent or heredity”.

Religion: “the service and worship of God or the supernatural”.

Reference

- Archambault Jr, F. X. (1993). Regular Classroom Practices with Gifted Students: Results of a National Survey of Classroom Teachers. Research Monograph 93102.
- Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. M. (2019). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Chapman, C., & King, R. (2005). *Differentiated assessment strategies: One tool doesn't fit all*. Corwin Press.
- Cochran-Smith, M. J. J. o. T. e. (2005). Studying teacher education: What we know and need to know. In (Vol. 56, pp. 301-306): Sage Publications Sage CA: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Daikeler, J., Bošnjak, M., Lozar Manfreda, K. J. J. o. S. S., & Methodology. (2020). Web versus other survey modes: an updated and extended meta-analysis comparing response rates. 8(3), 513-539.
- Dixon, F. A., Yssel, N., McConnell, J. M., & Hardin, T. J. J. f. t. E. o. t. G. (2014). Differentiated instruction, professional development, and teacher efficacy. 37(2), 111-127.
- Fantuzzo, J. W., LeBoeuf, W. A., Chen, C.-C., Rouse, H. L., & Culhane, D. P. J. E. R. (2012). The unique and combined effects of homelessness and school mobility on the educational outcomes of young children. 41(9), 393-402.
- Gorski, P. C. J. T., & education, t. (2009). What we're teaching teachers: An analysis of multicultural teacher education coursework syllabi. 25(2), 309-318.
- Hook, C. W. V. J. J. o. I. P. (2002). Preservice teachers perceived barriers to the implementation of a multicultural curriculum. 29(4), 254.
- Hootstein, E. (1998). Differentiation of instructional methodologies in subject-based curricula at the secondary level.
- Kaur, A., & Noman, M. J. T. Q. R. (2015). Exploring Classroom Practices in Collectivist Cultures Through the Lens of Hofstede's Model.
- Knupfer, N. N., McLellan, H. J. H. o. r. f. e. c., & technology. (1996). Descriptive research methodologies. 1196.
- Manfreda, K. L., Bosnjak, M., Berzelak, J., Haas, I., & Vehovar, V. J. I. j. o. m. r. (2008). Web surveys versus other survey modes: A meta-analysis comparing response rates. 50(1), 79-104.
- Mannix, E., & Neale, M. A. J. P. s. i. t. p. i. (2005). What differences make a difference? The promise and reality of diverse teams in organizations. 6(2), 31-55.
- McKown, C., & Weinstein, R. S. J. J. o. s. p. (2008). Teacher expectations, classroom context, and the achievement gap. 46(3), 235-261.
- Procedia-Social, N. J., & Sciences, B. (2011). Teachers' beliefs and expectations towards marginalized children in classroom setting: A qualitative analysis. 15, 850-853.

- Ryan, J., Louie, K. J. E. P., & Theory. (2007). False dichotomy? ‘Western’ and ‘Confucian’ concepts of scholarship and learning. 39(4), 404-417.
- Saleh, A., & Bista, K. J. O. S. (2017). Examining factors impacting online survey response rates in educational research: Perceptions of graduate students. 13(2), 63-74.
- Sleeter, C. E. J. J. o. t. e. (2001). Preparing teachers for culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of whiteness. 52(2), 94-106.
- Sternberg, R. J., Lipka, J., Newman, T., Wildfeuer, S., Grigorenko, E. L. J. G., & International, T. (2006). Triarchically-based instruction and assessment of sixth-grade mathematics in a Yup’ik cultural setting in Alaska. 21(2), 9-19.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2001). *How to differentiate instruction in mixed-ability classrooms*. Ascd.
- Tomlinson, C. A., & Imbeau, M. B. (2023). *Leading and managing a differentiated classroom*. Ascd.
- Tomlinson, C. A., & Jarvis, J. M. (2023). Differentiation: Making curriculum work for all students through responsive planning & instruction. In *Systems and models for developing programs for the gifted and talented* (pp. 599-628). Routledge.
- Tomlinson, C. A., & Moon, T. R. (2013). *Assessment and student success in a differentiated classroom*. Ascd.
- Uhlig, C. E., Seitz, B., Eter, N., Promesberger, J., & Busse, H. J. P. o. (2014). Efficiencies of Internet-based digital and paper-based scientific surveys and the estimated costs and time for different-sized cohorts. 9(10), e108441.
- Westberg, K. L. (1993). An Observational Study of Instructional and Curricular Practices Used with Gifted and Talented Students in Regular Classrooms. Research Monograph 93104.