

Teacher Workload and Its Effect on Classroom Teaching in Primary Schools in Dagana Dzongkhag.

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Abstract: This study examined the teaching workload of primary school teachers in Dagana Dzongkhag, Bhutan, and its implications for classroom teaching and learning. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining a structured survey with semi-structured interviews. The study involved 37 participants from seven primary schools and two Extended Classroom (ECR) schools. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative interview data were organized, coded, and interpreted thematically. The findings indicate that teachers carried substantial instructional and non-instructional responsibilities. Most teachers taught multiple sections and subjects, and 64.9% reported more than five non-instructional responsibilities. In addition, 45.9% taught between 21 and 25 hours per week, while 64.9% prepared lesson plans after school at home. Participants reported that inadequate staffing, multiple subject responsibilities, non-teaching duties, and multi-grade teaching reduced the time available for lesson preparation and student assessment. The study suggests that teacher deployment in primary schools should consider the number of sections, subjects, and non-instructional responsibilities in addition to pupil-teacher ratios. Strengthening non-teaching support and providing protected time for planning and assessment may contribute to improved teaching effectiveness.

Index term: *teacher workload; classroom teaching; primary education; teacher deployment; multi-grade teaching; Bhutan*

Introduction:

Teachers play a central role in supporting students' academic development and lifelong learning. Effective classroom teaching, however, depends not only on teachers' individual effort but also on the conditions in which they work. Johnson (2006) emphasizes that workplace conditions influence teacher effectiveness, professional growth, and retention. In the Bhutanese context, teachers' working conditions are particularly important because primary teachers may carry both instructional and non-instructional responsibilities.

Teacher workload is closely connected to the time available for lesson preparation, assessment, student support, and professional collaboration. Rhodes, as cited in Brundrett and Rhodes (2014), highlights the importance of professional development, supportive working environments, and meaningful feedback for teachers' effectiveness. Recent international evidence also shows that teaching and non-teaching duties compete for teachers' working time, including time needed for lesson preparation and assessment (OECD, 2020b). These issues make teacher workload an important area for investigation in Bhutanese primary schools.

In Bhutan, the availability of adequate instructional and human resources is especially relevant in primary schools, Extended Classrooms (ECRs), and other settings where teachers may be responsible for several subjects or grade levels. The National Education Framework (Royal Education Council, 2012) identifies improving students' learning outcomes as an important challenge for the education sector. A supportive school environment, adequate resources, and appropriate staffing can therefore help teachers devote sufficient time to classroom teaching and learning.

A major concern addressed by this study is the workload experienced by primary school teachers. Teachers may be required to manage classroom instruction alongside administrative, co-curricular, and other school responsibilities. In schools with limited staffing, these additional duties may reduce the time available for planning, assessment, and individual student support. The study therefore examines teachers' workload and considers how staffing and teacher deployment influence classroom teaching and learning.

Teachers' working environment becomes more comfortable in the presence of adequate resources both instructional and human. This will confirm effective classroom teaching and learning, especially children in disadvantaged communities and in lower

grades. Similarly, the presence of positive school culture like collaboration within teachers and principal to support each other in professional and personal needs would promote a better working environment.

The Research Problem

The workload for Bhutanese primary school teachers is heavy. Human resources like teaching and non-teaching staff in primary schools are inadequate. The inadequacy of staff is either controlled by the Ministry's policy or improper teacher deployment method. Teachers are not willing to work in an environment where they would have to shoulder multiple responsibilities. It demotivates teachers in the teaching profession and develops a feeling of low inspiration in their job. Teachers feel that teaching profession is a stressful job because of excessive workload and inadequate instructional time. According to Greenwood and Simpson (2010, p.1), "teachers around the world are asked to do many things in the course of their job". It is no different in Bhutan. Teachers in primary schools had to commit to both instructional and non-instructional responsibilities. This may result in ineffective classroom teaching and learning. It is seen that ECR Schools are managed by a teacher. Thus, Tashi Namgay (2016) stated that ECR and Community Schools are with one or two teacher teaching all the subjects. It is observed that teachers have limited time to assess students' tasks and prepare lesson plans for effective classroom teaching and learning.

Literature Review

Teacher Workload and Teaching Effectiveness

Teacher workload refers to the total amount of instructional and non-instructional duties assigned to teachers. Greenwood and Simpson (2010) note that teachers are increasingly expected to perform multiple responsibilities beyond classroom teaching. Excessive workload may reduce instructional effectiveness, increase stress, and lower job satisfaction.

Human Resources and Classroom Teaching

Adequate human resources contribute to improved teaching effectiveness. Studies have shown that sufficient teaching and support staff allow teachers to focus on lesson preparation, assessment, and learner support, resulting in improved educational outcomes.

Teacher-Pupil Ratio and Workload

Teacher deployment based solely on pupil-teacher ratio may not accurately reflect actual teaching workload. Primary school teachers often teach multiple subjects and classes, requiring deployment strategies that consider teaching responsibilities in addition to student enrolment.

Multi-grade Teaching and Teacher Workload

Multi-grade teaching is commonly used in remote schools to address teacher shortages. However, successful implementation requires specialized training, instructional resources, and support systems. Without these, teachers experience additional workload and instructional challenges.

The Research Question

What is the teaching workload of Bhutanese primary school teachers?

Sub-questions

- What is the workload status of the primary school teachers?
- How do adequate human resources help in classroom teaching?
- What is the significance of moderate workload in classroom teaching and learning?
- How does the teacher-pupil ratio influence classroom teaching and learning?

Materials and Methods

A mixed-methods design was used to examine teacher workload from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Quantitative data provided information on teaching hours, sections, subjects, lesson planning, assessment time, and non-instructional responsibilities. Qualitative interviews provided detailed accounts of teachers' experiences and perceptions. The two sources of evidence were analyzed separately and compared during interpretation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of teacher workload (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The mixed-methods design was selected because neither quantitative nor qualitative approaches alone could adequately address the complexity of teacher workload. Quantitative data provided measurable information regarding teaching hours, subjects taught, and responsibilities, while qualitative interviews offered detailed insights into teachers' experiences and perceptions. The integration of both methods enhanced the validity and comprehensiveness of the study findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Research Site

The qualitative component of the study drew on a phenomenological perspective because the study sought to understand teachers' lived experiences of workload. Participants were selected because they had direct experience of the phenomenon and could describe

their experiences. The study was conducted in selected primary schools and Extended Classrooms (ECRs) in Dagana Dzongkhag. Schools were selected to reflect differences in location, class levels, and school size.

The researcher has chosen Dagana Dzongkhag primary schools to collect data. For this study, the researcher had selected different schools looking at different aspects in terms of location from the dzongkhag headquarter, class level, and school size.

Study Sample Size and Participants

The participants were primary school teachers from selected schools in Dagana Dzongkhag. Five teachers from each of seven primary schools and two teachers from two ECR schools participated in the study, giving a total of 37 participants. The survey covered the same selected schools and ECRs. The sample from the primary schools represented approximately 30% of the population of 89 primary schools, while both ECRs in the selected setting were included.

Participants had served in their current schools for at least one year, and the study also sought teachers with at least three years of teaching experience. Teachers from different school settings and genders were included to capture a range of experiences. The two ECR participants provided specific perspectives on the workload associated with multi-grade teaching and school management responsibilities in ECR settings.

	Populations	Sample size	30%
Primary schools	89	35	30/100x89
Extended classroom	2	2	30/100x2

The considerations for selection of participants were teachers who served at least one year in the present school. A teacher with a minimum of three years and above teaching experiences was selected. Teacher-participants from primary schools, and ECR School were involved in the study. Further, for better reliability and accuracy in terms of data collection, mixed genders participants were selected.

The inclusion of only two Extended Classroom (ECR) participants reflects the limited number of ECR teachers available in the selected study area. Although the ECR sample size is small, these participants provided valuable insights into the unique workload challenges associated with multi-grade teaching and school management responsibilities in ECR settings

Data Collection Tools

Qualitative

In this method, data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study. According to Creswell (2007), information is collected through unstructured or semi-structured interviews, observations, documents, and visual materials. In this study, semi-structured interview method was used for data collection. At the time of gathering data, a detailed interview was conducted.

Quantitative (Survey)

A structured questionnaire was administered to primary school teachers and principals. The questionnaire used a Likert-type response format and collected information about teachers' workload, including teaching hours, subjects taught, lesson planning, student assessment, and non-instructional responsibilities. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were also conducted, recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed for qualitative analysis.

The study used concurrent approach by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently. The survey questionnaire is based on Likert scale. The data was collected using survey questionnaire using a Likert scale format; 1 strongly disagree (SD), 2 disagree (D), 3 neither disagree nor agree (NDA), 4 agree (A), strongly agree (SA), and 5 not applicable (NA). In this study, face to face interview was conducted besides administering survey questionnaire. The interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed.

Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative and qualitative data were first analyzed separately and were then compared during interpretation. Quantitative data were entered and analyzed in Microsoft Excel using frequencies, percentages, tables, and graphs. Qualitative interview data were transcribed, organized, coded, and interpreted thematically. The analysis focused on recurring patterns related to workload, staffing, planning, assessment, non-instructional duties, teacher deployment, and multi-grade teaching.

Qualitative Data Analysis Procedure

The interview data were analyzed using Creswell's (2003) generic steps for analyzing data. Data were organized and prepared for analysis after transcribing into notes from the interviews. Data were read in order to obtain a general sense of information and to reflect on its overall meaning. Detail analysis was carried out with coding process and derived descriptions involving detail rendering of information about people, places, and events in the setting.

Quantitative Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected from the field were analyzed by recording and computing in the statistical computer program EXCEL. The data were computed in the form of frequency, table, and graphs.

Methods and Procedures

Pre-Data Collection

Before commencement of data collection, the researcher sought written approval from the District Education office, Dagana (Appendix B). Finally, all selected school Principals' permission seeking letter and participants' consent form was developed. Consent forms were developed incorporating points suggested by Creswell (2003); A) the right to participate voluntarily and also to withdraw at any point of the interview, B) the purpose of the study was made known to the participants. C) Before the interview, signature of participants was collected in the consent form.

During Data Collection

Participants were made free to choose a place where they may feel comfortable. The interview session was made informal. Participants were assured that their identity will not be disclosed. Throughout the research, confidentiality was maintained with regard to any information that might cause problems. Participants' views were respected. If they were uncomfortable with the interview questions, they were given the option to withdraw from the interview. Participants were also given the right to leave any questions without responding. Interviews were conducted in a safe place during free periods.

Post-Data Collection

After the interview, any information provided through the transcribed interview was kept secure and made available only to the persons concerned. All the documents will be destroyed after the exceeding validation period of five years. Any statement participants thought was sensitive was deleted. Participants were assured that their names would not be reflected at any case in the study.

Data Display

Data display organized, compressed and assembled information. There are many different ways of displaying data in graphs, charts, networks, diagrams of different types. Any appropriate ways were used in the data analysis to draw and verify conclusions.

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Data Presentation

The study presents survey questionnaire on seven themes. The survey questionnaires were administered to 30% of the sample of 35 teachers from primary schools and two extended classrooms ECR(s) under Dagana Dzongkhag. Quantitative data were triangulated with qualitative data gathered through interviews.

Graphic Presentation

The survey questionnaire theme on teachers' workload was sought to find primary school teachers' workload under Dagana Dzongkhag. This theme was further divided into eight different sub-variables. The sub-variables are presented in separate graphs. Class Strength

The variable on class strength was formulated to find the maximum number of students in a class that teachers taught in primary schools under this dzongkhag (see figure 1).

The data showed that 2.7% of the primary teachers under this dzongkhag had class strength of 1 to 9 students. Teachers having class strength of 10 to 20 students were 43.2%. Teachers who had

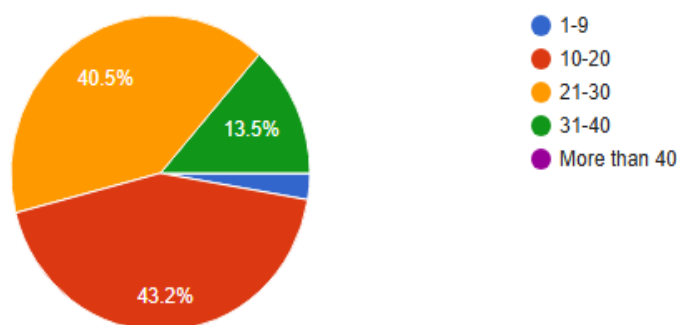


Figure 1. Reported Class Strength Among Primary School Teachers

the class strength of 21 to 30 students were 40.5%. Teachers having class strength of 31 to 40 were 13.5% and none of the teachers had more than 40 students in the class.

By looking at the findings, the maximum number of primary schools under Dagana Dzongkhag had class strength of 10 to 20 students. As per the finding, primary school teachers in the dzongkhag had comfortable class size. Based on the study finding, effective classroom teaching and learning occurred in primary schools. Class size is one of the factors for effective classroom teaching. When there is less number of students in a class, more effective classroom teaching and learning happens.

Different Sections Teachers Taught Daily

This sub-variable was to find the number of sections teachers taught daily and workload of the teacher in the school (see figure 2).

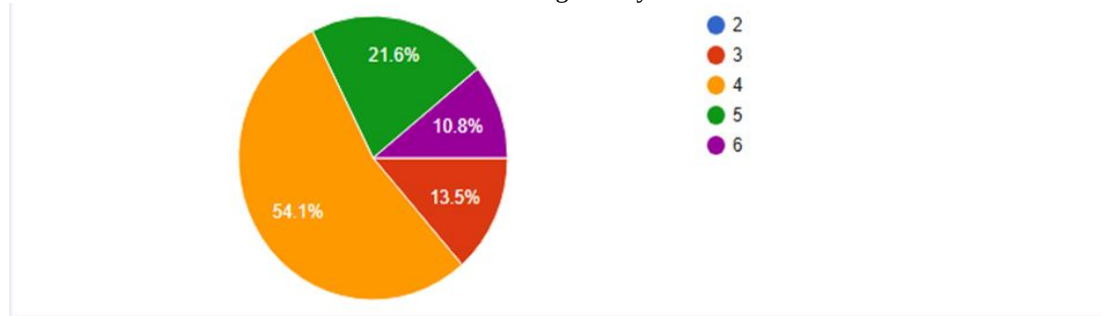


Figure 2. Number of Class Sections Taught Daily by Teachers

The different scores of each scale on a number of different sections taught by teachers were shown in percent. The study showed that primary school teachers who taught two different sections were 0% while 13.5% of teachers taught three different sections. Teachers who taught four different sections were 54.1%. Teachers who taught five different sections were 21.6%. Teachers who taught six different sections were 10.8%. The findings showed that maximum number of primary school teachers taught four to five different sections. Teachers who taught four different sections and five different sections had a negligible difference of 32.5%. However, there are school situations where teachers had to teach six different sections, as findings showed 10.8%. Teachers teaching four to five subjects daily would compromise the quality of teaching. Teaching requires sufficient time for lesson planning and preparation. Teachers need a manageable number of sections to assess students' tasks. Fewer students to handle, more effective teacher can teach students.

Non-Instructional Responsibilities

The variable on non-instructional responsibilities of teachers was sought to find the number of non-instructional responsibilities of primary school teachers besides academic responsibilities under Dagana Dzongkhag (see figure 3).

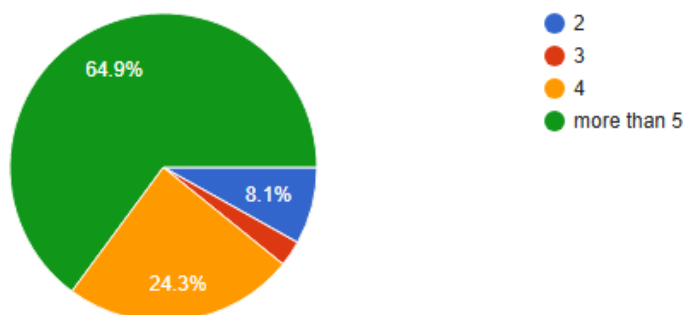


Figure 3. Number of Non-Instructional Responsibilities Reported by Teachers

A range of scales was formulated to find primary school teachers' non-instructional responsibilities. Teachers having two non-instructional responsibilities were 8.1%. Teachers having three non-instructional responsibilities were 2.7%. Teachers having four non-instructional responsibilities were 24.3%. Teachers having more than five non-instructional responsibilities were also 64.9%. By looking at the findings, the majority of primary school teachers under Dagana Dzongkhag were overloaded due to non-instructional responsibilities in the school. Maximum number of teachers had four to five non-instructional responsibilities besides their regular academic responsibilities. Non-academic responsibilities are equally important as academic responsibilities in the school. However, it compromises effective classroom teaching and learning because of losing focus on the main task. The finding supports Greenwood and Simpson (2010), who argued that excessive non-instructional duties reduce teachers' capacity to focus on effective classroom instruction and increase occupational stress.

Different Subjects Taught Daily

The variable on different subjects teachers taught was sought to find the number of different subjects taught by primary school teachers under this Dzongkhag.

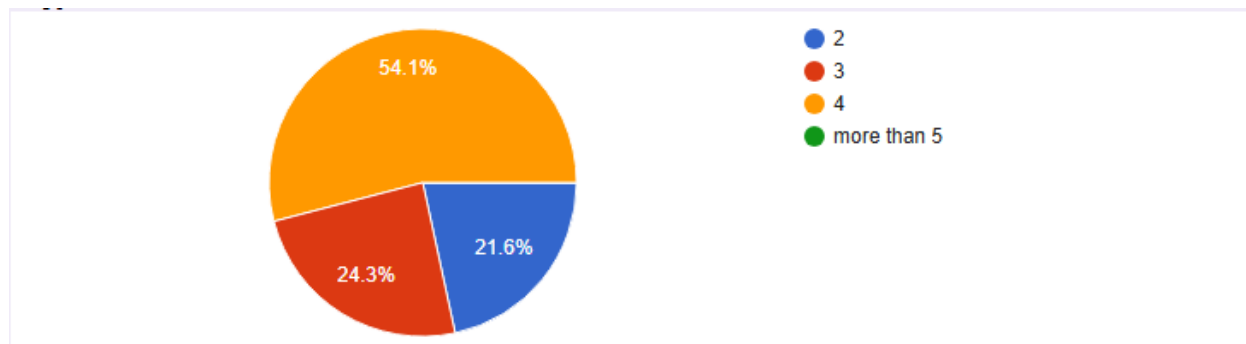


Figure 4. Number of Different Subjects Taught Daily by Teachers

The study participants responded within four different ranges of scales on subjects taught by teachers. Teachers teaching two different subjects were 21.6% while 24.3% of the teachers taught three different subjects. The data showed 54.1% of teachers taught four different subjects. Primary school teachers in this dzongkhag who taught five different subjects were 0%.

Looking at the data presentation, majority of teachers taught three to four different subjects daily. A teacher teaching three to four different subjects daily would pose a challenge to planning for all the subjects. Classroom teaching without proper planning and preparation cannot result in effective teaching and learning. In order to achieve desired learning outcome, an adequate amount of time is required for proper lesson planning and preparation.

Total Teaching Hours in a Week

The variable on teachers' teaching hours in a week was sought to find out the total classroom teaching hours in a week of primary school teachers under Dagana Dzongkhag (see figure 5).

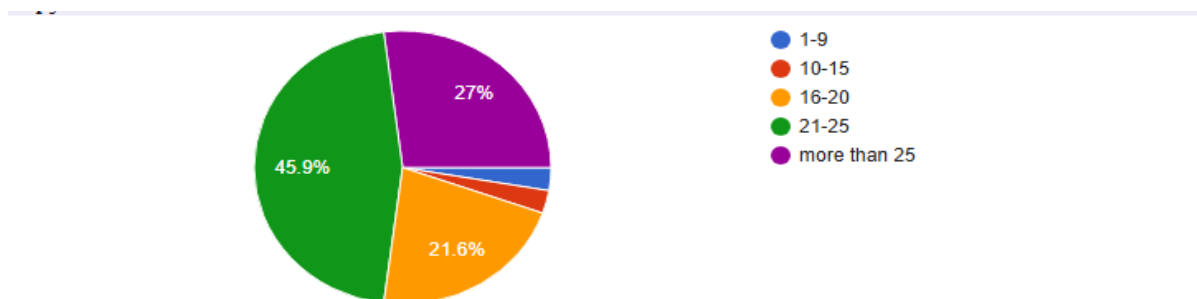


Figure 5. Total Weekly Teaching Hours Reported by Teachers

This variable was formulated to find out the primary school teachers' teaching hours in a week. Participants teaching 16 to 20 hours in a week were 21%. Teachers teaching 21 to 25 hours in a week were 45.9% and teachers who taught more than 25 hours in a week were 27% in the survey study.

Looking at the findings, primary school teachers were teaching 21 to 25 hours in a week. The other two scales 16 to 20 hours and more than 25 hours in a week were almost equal. Looking at each score, on an average teachers work 21 to 25 hours particularly in teaching in a week. Primary school teachers were teaching more than the mandated teaching hours of the Education Ministry.

Daily Lesson Plans Prepared

The variable on the preparation of daily lesson plan was sought to find out the number of lesson plans prepared daily by primary teachers in the school (see figure 6).

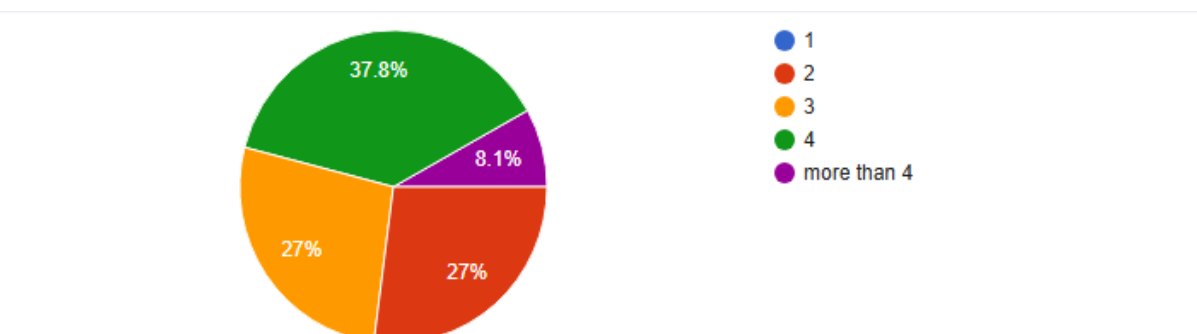


Figure 6. Number of Daily Lesson Plans Prepared by Teachers

Five different scales were prepared to find out the number of lesson plans prepared daily by primary school teachers. 0% of the teachers prepared one lesson plan, while teachers who prepared two lesson plans daily were 27%. Teachers who prepared three

lesson plans daily were 27% and teachers who prepared four lesson plans daily were 37.8%. Teachers who prepared more than four lesson plans daily were 8.1%.

The findings showed that on an average primary school teachers prepared two to three detailed lesson plans daily. By looking at the lesson plan preparation of 45-50 minutes duration, teachers spent at least one to two hours daily. The effectiveness of classroom teaching would significantly depend on how teachers get adequate time to prepare their lesson plans. Lesson plan guides teachers for effective classroom teaching and learning.

Lesson Plan Preparation Time

The variable on lesson plan preparation time of teachers was sought to find out when teachers prepare lesson plans (see figure 7).

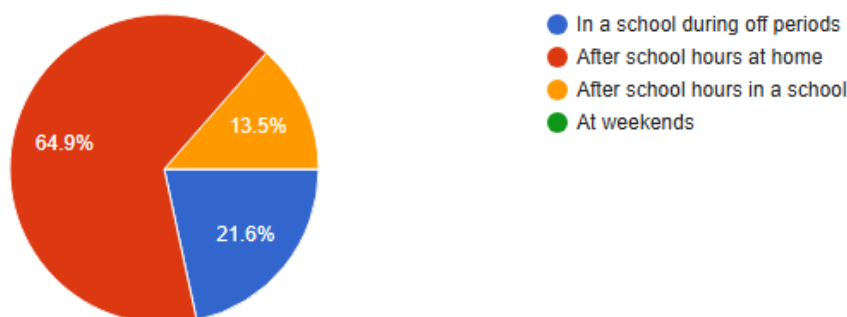


Figure 7. *Timing of Lesson Plan Preparation Reported by Teachers*

The researcher prepared four different possible time teachers usually used to prepare their lesson plans. Teachers who prepared lesson plans in school during off periods were 21.6%. Teachers who prepared lesson plans after school hours at home were 64.9%. Teachers who prepared lesson plans after school hours in school were 13.5%. None of the teachers prepared lesson plans on weekends.

By looking at the findings, primary school teachers under Dagana Dzongkhag had limited time to prepare lesson plans during school hours. The highest data showed that 64.9% of the teachers prepared lesson plans after school hours at home. The primary school teachers were engaged throughout the week doing school's work.

Students' work assessing time

The variable on teachers' time to assess students' work was sought to find out when teachers assessed students' task (see figure 8).

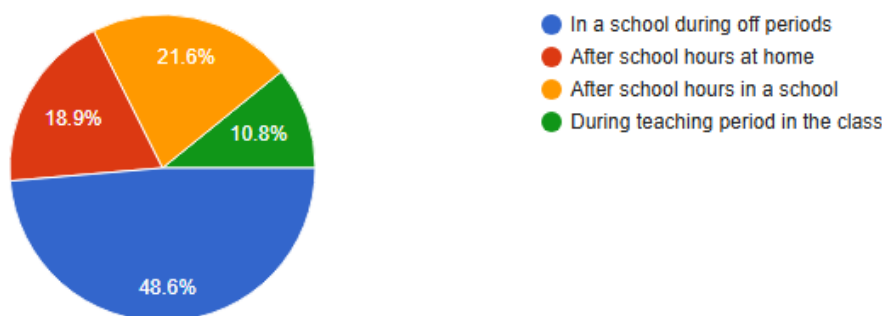


Figure 8. *Timing of Student Assessment Work Reported by Teachers*

To find primary school teachers' time to assess students' task, the researcher formulated four different possible times that teachers usually assessed students' tasks. Teachers who assessed students' work in school during off periods were 48.6%. Teachers who assessed after school hours at home were 18.9%. Teachers who assessed students' work after school hours in the school were 21.6%. Participants who assessed students' task during teaching periods in the class were 10.8%.

Looking at the findings, maximum number of teachers assessed students' task during off periods in the school. However, teachers in primary schools got minimum periods for planning and students' task assessment. Teachers had to teach three to four different subjects. It is learned that teachers had no sufficient time for quality assessment. Quality students' task assessment is an effective classroom teaching and learning process.

Workload of Extended Classroom

The variable on the workload of extended classroom teachers was sought to find out the teachers' working environment in ECR in Dagana Dzongkhag. There were two ECRs, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Student Enrollment by Extended Classroom (ECR) and Grade Level

	PP	I	II	III	Total
ECR A	7	5	2	1	15
ECR B	7	7	15	8	37

The findings showed the working scenario of 2 ECRs under Dagana Dzongkhag. The maximum number of students was in ECR B with 37 students. The minimum number of students was in ECR A with 15 students. By looking at the class size, it was comfortable in classroom teaching but teacher(s) had to teach different subjects daily. Besides classroom teaching, ECR teacher(s) had to do other non-teaching work in the school.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The researcher presents interview data from teachers of primary schools. The interview data were transcribed and coded under different themes. Participants and schools are coded under different codes. Teacher participants as 'T' (Teacher=T), schools as 'S' (School=S). The interview data analysis was used in the survey data findings for comparison of two data. The study followed colour coding, memoing and developing a proposition for data analysis.

Participants' Perspectives on Teachers' Workload

The research question was formulated to find out the perspectives on teachers' workload in the school and its effect on classroom teaching and learning. There were common perspectives shared on the teachers' workload in the school.

The participants described workload of teachers as an important aspect of students' academic achievement. The workload status of primary school teachers is typically quite high, encompassing various tasks that go beyond direct classroom teaching. Here are some key aspects of their workload: 1. More instructional hours. 2. Considerable time spent on planning and preparation. 3. Assessment and grading can be time intensive particularly with larger class size. 4. Teachers need to play multiple roles since students are small and young. The participants expressed that it was important for teachers to be assigned with less responsibilities, especially non-teaching roles for effective classroom teaching and learning. It was understood that excessive workload is the source of developing stress and inefficiency of a person.

Further, to study in detail, the researcher inquired specific questions on teachers' workload and its effect on classroom teaching and learning.

Adequate Human Resources and Its Effect on Classroom Teaching

The question on human resources was formulated to find out the human resources conditions and its effect on classroom teaching and learning. It was learnt that adequate teachers and other supporting staff are crucial in achieving the school goals. Participants generally agreed that adequate human resources play a vital role in improving classroom teaching and learning. With enough teaching staff, teachers experience reduced workload, fewer subject responsibilities, and less pressure from multiple duties. This allows them to focus more effectively on their primary responsibility of teaching, prepare lessons better, and provide higher quality instruction. Participants also noted that sufficient staffing creates a smoother and more flexible teaching-learning process, enables teachers to pay greater attention to individual students' learning needs, and makes learning more engaging and enjoyable for students. Overall, adequate human resources were viewed as essential for enhancing teaching effectiveness, reducing teacher burden, and improving the overall quality of education. Teachers' focus on classroom teaching is lost in the process of doing multiple tasks.

The primary school teachers had to teach all curriculum with limited experience. It is found necessary to focus on maximum two subjects. Teachers teaching all subjects affect the quality of classroom teaching and learning. Schools face the challenge of having competent and experienced subject teacher. Participants generally highlighted that a moderate workload is essential for effective classroom teaching and learning. They noted that manageable workloads help create a positive and supportive learning environment, allowing teachers sufficient time to prepare lessons, assess students' work, and deliver lessons effectively. Participants also emphasized that a moderate workload improves the quality of teaching and learning, enhances classroom management, supports efficient time management, and contributes to teachers' well-being and motivation. Overall, the responses suggest that maintaining a balanced workload enables teachers to perform more effectively and fosters better learning outcomes for students.

The study informed that primary school teachers' experienced heavy teaching workload following pupil-teacher ratio deployment. Instead, participants suggested deploying teachers based on number of sections and subjects in the school. This can address subject teacher shortage and teaching workload in primary schools. An interviewee shared:

We have seven teachers and eighty-four students. As per pupil-teacher ratio, it seems that we have excess teachers. But the level of class ranges from class PP to VI, seven teachers are not enough. We have to look into the number of subjects to teach.

Looking at the responses, Primary schools require non-teaching staff to share non-teaching responsibilities, particularly in-charges. Primary teachers' teaching hours were divided doing non-instructional responsibilities. According to the existing teacher deployment policy, primary schools in the dzongkhag had sufficient teachers, however, in reality the study found an acute shortage of teachers. This finding is consistent with Rhodes (2014), who emphasized that adequate staffing and supportive working environments enable teachers to provide quality instruction and individualized attention to learners.

Non-Teaching Responsibilities

The study revealed that primary teachers were asked to carry multiple responsibilities in the school. A multiple of tasks diverts the focus from classroom teaching. The interviewee shared, “I am library in-charge; games and sports coordinator, club coordinator, house master, literary in-charge and cultural coordinator. Besides teaching, other non-instructional responsibilities disturb classroom teaching”. It was found that a teacher with multiple tasks develops anxiety. Eventually, the quality of classroom teaching is compromised.

Classroom Responsibilities

Primary school teachers in the dzongkhag taught five to six different subjects daily. The participant responded that “teachers in our school have a heavy workload. This year we have minimum five different subjects to be taught by a teacher daily. We are not able to prepare lesson plans for all the subjects taught”. Teachers teaching more subjects have more plans to prepare and more students’ task assessment. Classroom teaching without proper lesson planning cannot be considered effective teaching and learning.

The study participants informed that primary school teachers taught 21 periods of 45-50 minutes in a week. The participants expressed that excessive workload leads to mental stress and frustration in the teaching profession.

Based on the interview responses, primary school teachers were overloaded. Teachers had to teach four to five different subjects every day. Moreover, teachers had non-instructional responsibilities to perform in the school. Participants expressed a feeling of anxiety due to excessive workload in school. Teachers under heavy work pressure impinged on classroom teaching. The finding supports Greenwood and Simpson (2010), who argued that excessive non-instructional duties reduce teachers’ capacity to focus on effective classroom instruction and increase occupational stress.

Teacher Deployment Trend

Teachers are deployed based on the pupil-teacher ratio policy. It is the common method to deploy teachers in schools. The present pupil-teacher ratio in the Bhutanese Education System is 1:25. The participants expressed the challenges associated with pupil-teacher ratio deployment policy as it leads to teachers being overburdened in the school. It was learnt that teachers were deployed based on a number of students in the school. The participants said that the present teacher deployment policy added to teachers’ workload. It has also been learnt that the problem associated with high pupil-teacher ratio adds to teaching workload. The participants explained that primary schools with classes ranging from PP to VI had minimum seven sections. There are 27 subjects to teach. A participant further responded:

I am teaching four subjects. The number of students is only 25. If you follow pupil-teacher ratio, it is not a big problem to teach. But, when it comes to real ground, a teacher teaching four different subjects is challenging to provide quality teaching.

The participants responded that the high pupil-teacher ratio added to the workload of teachers in primary school. It was also felt that teachers’ excessive workload compromised the quality of classroom teaching and learning. A teacher interviewee explained:

The pupil-teacher ratio policy may be feasible in a higher level of schools. It does not work in primary schools. Sometimes in a school, we have 60 students in seven sections. There are 27 subjects to be taught. According to pupil-teacher ratio, the school gets two to three teachers as per TRE. The workload of the teacher is heavy in such a situation.

Looking at the findings, Primary teachers in the dzongkhag had heavy teaching workload. Teachers compromised the quality lesson planning and students’ tasks assessments. Proper lesson planning and preparations are most important for effective classroom teaching and learning. The findings suggest that teacher deployment based solely on pupil-teacher ratio may not adequately reflect actual teaching workload in primary schools. Similar observations have been reported in studies examining teacher allocation and workload management in developing education systems.

Multi-Grade Teaching and Workload of Teachers

Multi-grade teaching approach added to the workload of primary school teachers. All Extended Classrooms (ECRs) and Community Schools adopted the multi-grade approach. The majority of study participants responded that multi-grade approach is challenging in Bhutanese school system. Participants said that multi-grade was a method to solve teacher shortage in remote schools. However, the objective of multi-grade approach can be different. An Interviewee responded, “Since a teacher can teach different grades in a single classroom, it helps to solve teacher shortage. But, quality of classroom teaching is compromised”. According to interview participants, multi-grade teachers were not well trained. Teachers failed to teach effectively when different grades were combined together. This finding coincides with Yangzom (1994, as cited in Royal Education Council, 2016), which states that “there was a short supply of trained multi grade teachers throughout Bhutan” (p. [page not provided in source manuscript]).

Participants responded that multi-grade approach is not feasible in the Bhutanese Primary schools. It is merely an addition to teachers’ workload. Student participant responded, “This teaching learning system is a problem for us. When we are in one class there are lots of disturbances. For example, when a teacher teaches one class, the other class disturbs”. It was also learnt that multi-grade approach added workload of teachers and caused inefficiency in classroom teaching and learning. Looking at responses from the field interviewees, multi-grade approach involved challenges such as lack of trained teachers, heavy planning and preparation and lack of facilities for effective teaching. According to Yangzom (1994, as cited in Royal Education Council, 2016), “Effective multi-grade teaching requires trained and motivated teachers, access to... learning materials, and a stimulating environment” (p. [page not provided in source manuscript]). Thus, teachers who teach multi-grade classes without adequate ideas and skills hinder classroom teaching and learning.

Findings and Discussion

The study on teachers’ workload was sought to find out Primary school teachers’ workload, both teaching and non-instructional responsibilities. The main question includes sub-variables such as (1) number of students in a class (2) number of different sections teacher taught (3) different subjects teacher taught daily (4) total hours teacher taught in a week (5) number of lesson plans prepared daily (6) teacher’s lesson preparation time and (7) time spent by teachers on students’ work assessment.

The Primary school teachers had a minimum of four to five non-instructional responsibilities apart from classroom teaching responsibilities. The total teaching hours in a week for a teacher showed the highest score of 20 to 25 hours. From these findings, it can be concluded that Primary teachers had to teach a minimum of five periods every day. By looking at academic and non-academic

responsibilities of primary teachers, the teachers were overloaded. In light of the study participants' responses, it can be strongly stated that teachers had more non-instructional responsibilities that can certainly lead to low students' academic performance. The sub variable on lesson plans preparation time showed that 64.9% of the participants prepared their lesson plans after school hours. 13.5% of teachers prepared lesson plan during off period. Primary school teachers had no leisure time for recreational activities. The tight schedule and hectic life added a feeling of stress and frustration towards the teaching profession. Teachers in frustrated mind cannot teach effectively in the class.

The interview question on teachers' workload was employed to study detailed situation in primary schools. Interview participants shared a number of responsibilities that they had to perform in the school. A study participant shared, "I am library in-charge; games and sports coordinator, club coordinator, house master literary coordinator and cultural coordinator. Besides teaching duties, I have to do non-instructional responsibilities in the school". In addition, participants expressed the impact of excessive workload like stress and frustration in the teaching profession. Teachers experiencing stress and frustration because of unfavorable working conditions has huge negative impact on student's academic performance. In this regard, a wide range of studies suggests that pupils of teachers with high job satisfaction and lower stress are more likely to perform better academically than their peers whose teachers are not able to sustain their commitment. Participants expressed that they were stressed due to heavy teaching work as well as non-teaching responsibilities.

The extended classroom (ECR) findings showed that every ECR in Dagana Dzongkhag had Pre-primary (PP) class, except for one ECR. The Ministry of Education (MoE) policy states that PP class should be taught in mono grade system. However, ECR had to combine class PP with class I and II since there was only two teacher. In this situation, the teacher had to refer nine different manuals and textbooks. Effective classroom teaching cannot be expected in such an environment. Pre-primary (PP) students are new to formal schooling system and subjects such as English and Mathematics are taught in a foreign language. Classes I to II students may find same difficulties when taught in multi-grade approach. Therefore, the study showed that teachers' excessive workload impact classroom teaching.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in selected primary schools and Extended Classrooms within Dagana Dzongkhag; therefore, the findings should not be generalized to all Bhutanese schools without caution. Second, only two ECR teachers participated because only two ECRs were included in the study setting. Third, the quantitative analysis was primarily descriptive and did not test statistical relationships between workload and student achievement. Finally, some findings were based on self-reported perceptions and may therefore be influenced by respondents' individual experiences or recall.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Ministry of Education and Skills Development

1. Review the current teacher deployment policy by considering the number of subjects and sections taught in addition to pupil-teacher ratio.
2. Increase teaching and non-teaching staff in primary schools and Extended Classrooms.
3. Provide professional development opportunities related to workload management and multi-grade teaching.

Recommendations for School Leaders

1. Distribute non-instructional responsibilities more equitably among staff.
2. Provide adequate time during school hours for lesson planning and student assessment.
3. Strengthen collaborative professional support systems within schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Conduct similar studies in other dzongkhags to compare workload experiences.
2. Include larger samples of ECR teachers.
3. Examine the relationship between teacher workload and student achievement using advanced statistical methods.

Conclusion

The study concludes that primary school teachers in the selected schools experienced substantial workload arising from both instructional and non-instructional responsibilities. Teachers reported teaching multiple subjects and sections, carrying several additional responsibilities, preparing lesson plans outside regular school hours, and having limited time for student assessment. These conditions may constrain the time available for effective planning, assessment, and classroom support. The findings suggest that teacher deployment in primary schools should consider the number of sections and subjects taught, in addition to pupil-teacher ratios. The study also highlights the need for adequate non-teaching support, protected time for lesson planning and assessment, and appropriate support for teachers working in multi-grade settings. These measures may help create more manageable working conditions and support effective classroom teaching and learning.

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