Reflections on a Qualitative Study on Teacher's Perceptions about no Detention System in Elementary Education in India

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Abstract:

The paper highlights the reflections on the preliminary stage of a qualitative study on teacher's perception about no detention system in elementary education in India. The present pilot study emanates from the vibrant issue attracting the focus from all spheres of the society. It focuses to explore the perception of teachers about no detention of children in relation to curriculum, evaluation, teaching and learning. The teachers have been chosen because they play significant role for implementation of the system on the one hand and have concern about the career and welfare of their students on the other hand. They are the ones, who are deeply and directly associated with the working theory of no detention of children, though their voices are sub-altered while making such changes. The study, therefore, tries to bring out the voices of teachers that may depict practical implications. The following paper is a reflection on planning stage, data collection stage, analysis stage and placing the study as a qualitative research followed by conclusion.

Keywords: *No-detention, Pilot-study, Reflections, Teacher's perceptions*

1. Introduction

The contemporary system wide change in education system like no detention of children in elementary education in India is the most debated issue and has evoked mixed reaction from all spheres of the society whether it is public, parents, experts or teachers (CABE, 2012). No doubt the system has been implemented with a vision to reduce dropout, to motivate children, and to prevent them from frustration that occurs due to early failure (CABE, 39 Session, 1983; MHRD Annual Report, 1983; Delhi School Education Act, 1973; Order No. D.E. 23 (383)/Sch. Br./08/1943-1952 dated 26.06.2008 and RTE Act, 2009), it has been criticised on many grounds (CABE 59th Session, 2012; The Economic Times, 2012; Mihika Basu, 2013). Keeping in view, this paper on 'No Detention System in Elementary Education' dealing with two parts, empirical work preceded by conceptual framework. The paper describes the reflections on planning stage, data collection stage, analysis stage and placing the study as qualitative research followed by conclusion as follows:

2. Planning Stage

In order to design this pilot study, a tighter design has been followed as suggested by Miles and Huberman, 1994 for the beginner researcher. The study has been designed in five themes i.e. conceptual framework, research questions, defining the case, bounding the territory, sampling and instrumentation. The study started with understanding what does conceptual framework mean, how to frame it and how does it contribute in a research. Conceptual framework plays an ontological or epistemological role. It explains 'how things are' (ontological role) and 'how things work' (epistemological role) to provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Jabareen, 2009). Concept framework explicates the relationship among the variables through graphical representation. It can be theory driven or commonsensical (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Based on the understanding, the conceptual framework for this study was designed. As there is no pre-existing framework, the below formulated framework in figure No. 1 represents implicit understanding of the belief about the No Detention system which got formed from the review of policies and empirical research studies, experience as a practitioner teacher, and the logical understanding about the education system. It took a lot of time and several iterations to finalise the process of developing it. It gave clarity to the thoughts and made the process of research design more focussed. After conceptual framework, the research questions were developed. Miles and Huberman say research question helps in making the theoretical assumptions more explicit. One should frame central research question that asks for an exploration of central phenomenon of the study and then sub-questions which are more specific (Creswell, 2013). The process also followed the tips for writing good qualitative research questions from internet such as begin with 'how' or what and fill the blank to frame the central question. "How would _____ (participants) describe _____ (Central phenomenon)? (Marian, 2004; Maxwell, 2005; Kathryn, 2012).
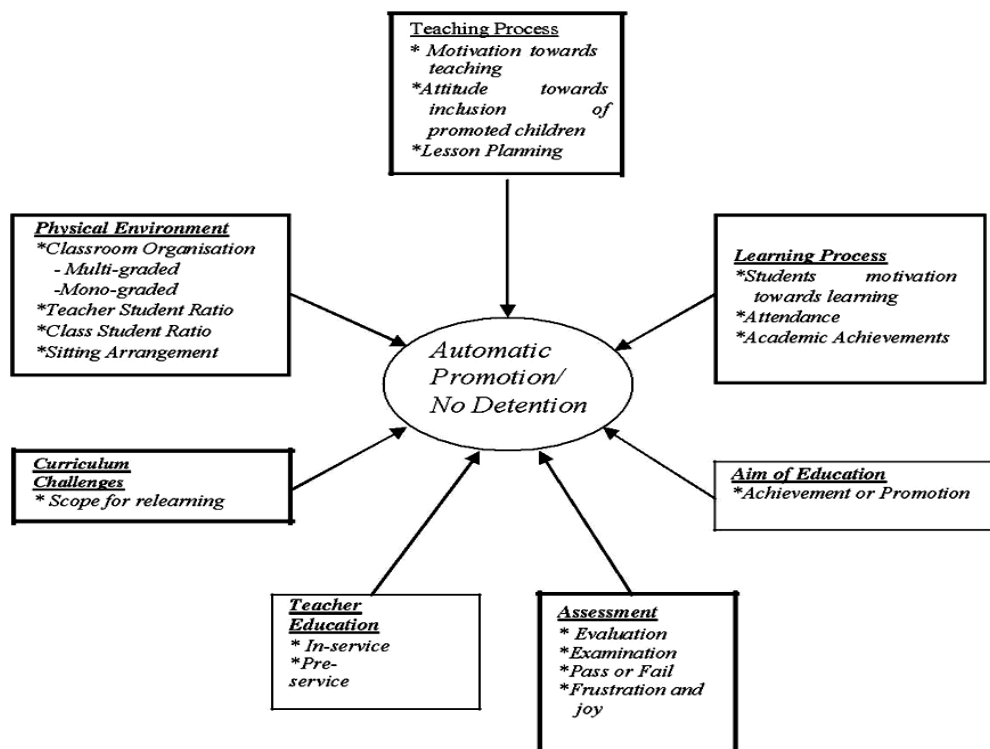

Figure 1
Conceptual Model

As the central phenomenon is 'No Detention of Children,' one central research question was framed. While framing sub questions, it was realised that studying all the aspects was not feasible at this stage due to time constraint. Therefore, the highlighted variables were focussed and the sub research questions were framed to study their relationship with no detention of children that has been presented as follows:

How do teachers perceive no detention of children? ------------- *Central research question*

- How do teachers perceive no detention as compared to previous detention system and its relation with curriculum?
- How do teachers perceive no detention as compared to previous detention system and its relation with evaluation?
  Sub questions

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- How do teachers perceive no detention as compared to previous detention system and its relation with teaching?
- How do teachers perceive no detention as compared to previous detention system and its relation with learning?

Here, it has been found that established relationship in the conceptual framework got explicit in research questions for which the answers were looked for.

Third stage of research design followed by developing research question is *Defining the case: Bounding the territory.* The context of no detention is very wide. Conceptual boundary touches all the *domains of education* such as curriculum, teaching, learning, evaluation, teacher education, aim of education and organisational structure. It is visible in all the *physical locations* including all the states, all types of government, government aided and private schools. It implicates a wide range of *population* including students, teachers, parents, education administrators and whole society.

Studying everything bounded in the territory is not feasible keeping the time frame in mind. Therefore, the focus on four aspects (Curriculum, teaching, learning and evaluation), government schools of Delhi and on a population of elementary teachers were taken into consideration. Based on the 'focus' of study and time crunch, a **sample** of two teachers teaching in MCD Primary school of East Delhi was selected.

Last step for designing the research as stated by Miles and Huberman is **instrumentation**. Four steps defined before, clarifies what to find, from whom and why. But instrumentation helps in how to collect the data. It was decided to use 'interview method' a popular technique among qualitative research to understand the perceptions of participants. Despite its limitations, it provides the opportunity to unfold their experiences in front of the researcher. It was planned to tape record them and later transcribed it to analyse them. Before going into the field, a semi-structure interview guide was prepared to avoid data overloading, to focus on the desirable concepts and information there with, and to make the focus of analysis clearer. Conceptual framework, research questions, and focus of the study helped in framing the guide for interview. The tips for framing qualitative interview guide from the internet was also used to see open ended questions that allow the respondents to present their views which start with wh-family, avoid answer leading questions and use probing questions. Then, a sequence of the questions associated with one aspect as per the occurrence of phenomenon from past to present as suggested by Miles and Huberman was made. After finalising the guide, the tips for interviewing from internet before actually going into the field were observed. For example, do not begin interviewing right away, try to build rapport with the respondent, present yourself as learner, listen and express interest in what the respondent tells you, try to encourage respondent by saying 'yes,' 'ok,' 'right,' 'un-hun'; repeat the last words said by the respondent and then further probe.

3. Reflections on 'Field Experience'

A school in East Delhi was approached during the lunch break. All the teachers were in the principal's room. It gave the opportunity to meet the whole staff together. After briefing them there about the purpose of the research, the teachers were asked to voluntary to be a part of the study. Many teachers agreed to be a part of the study but it was confirmed later that the two teachers would participate in the study. So, the **access to the setting** was accessed easily but was quite apprehensive to the **access to information** because teachers agreed in front of the principal and was not sure of their real consent.

It was known that it might be a '*position of dominance*', a position giving no choice to teachers to decide for them to be a part of the study or not. To reduce this effect of dominance, a neutral, approachable role to acting and speaking was selected in ways which are non-threatening as discussed

by (Bryman & Burgerss, 1999). Starting with humble words for an interview, I presented myself as a *'learner'* (Wax, 1960). After gaining the *'trust'* of respondent by making sure that their identity will not be disclosed, the information will be used entirely for the research work, and the process of interview was started. The respondents shared their experiences and presented their views without fear. Moreover, one teacher even denied for recording her voice and the interview followed accordingly to the ease of the respondent.

Initially, it was observed that it had been over **empathised** with the problems attached with no detention that were faced by the teachers. It was found in first two or three questions taking over the role of teacher, which was put before. It was noticed when the recording was heard. It has been found that that I was speaking most of time, completing the sentences stated by the teacher. But it is realised soon after 2-3 questions in the field itself and got it rectified. It was tried to be a good listener thereafter. It was experienced to wait on long pauses and getting the answers with lots of intra personal discussion.

A few problems were anticipated, but some of them became illusory. However, a few others that didn't anticipate also appear. Initially, apprehensiveness of the sample selection, developing rapport & trust with interviewer, getting time and interest of the teachers for the research were certain issues, but it was found everything went on smoothly. Teachers volunteered, easily answered and shared their views without fear, gave enough time and showed their interest till end.

However, a few others came at later stage but not anticipated. It was observed that the questions were explained to the teachers in Hindi while these were put before them in English. When the questions were explained, I found myself as directing them answer. It was realised at the time of hearing the recording during the process of interview. For example in place of asking the teacher, "which system she will prefer to teach in?", based on her previous dialoguing, it was concluded, " fir to aap pehele wale system mein hi padana pasand karogi".

It was also found that some of the forthcoming questions were answered by the teachers before; while answering the previous questions. It created confusion, should these be left or restated to them. Sometimes, these were skipped. It was felt, probably that interview guide needed to be reformed while going for a larger study.

It was found that interview went off well when it was recorded with one teacher but became difficult when another teacher denied for recording through tape-recorder and then the interview was based on writing the notes. It was observed that a very little content was written and lost lot of data. It also broke the continuity of the interview. It was realised that it would lose the interest, but the teacher was so self-motivated that she kept answering.

It took more than an hour on one interview, it was felt bad sometimes because students were idling and were kept to sit quietly. I was questioning myself how ethical is it to do so. Lastly, the uninvited teacher who came during the interview and started sharing her experience was politely refused to intervene as realised that her thoughts were suppressing the thoughts of actual respondent teacher. It was requested to the uninvited teacher politely that she would be contacted later to consider her views for the research work. Inspite of the request, that teacher didn't leave the place of interview and kept sharing her experiences.

One of the hypotheses that were taken into the field study could not be answered properly as teachers lacked the concrete information or understanding about it. For example, teachers lacked to vision the relation between teaching and no detention of children. Hence, they articulated limitedly on this issue.

4. Data Analysis

After data collection, it had to be analysed. Early steps in analysis by Miles and Huberman guided how to handle the data that was gathered from the field. Two types of raw data, one in the form of tape recording and another hand written were analysed. Firstly, transcribing the tape recording and rewriting the written raw data to fill the details based on the memory was initiated. This task was done on the very same day to avoid the decay of memory. After this, the summarization of the write-ups based on research questions separately was performed. Then, the similarities and differences in the opinions in both the summaries were looked for and finally presented the analysis explaining the implicit relationship of no detention with curriculum, evaluation, teaching and learning separately in practice.

Analyses of both the interviews reveal that the teachers neither find nor feel for change in *teaching*. One of them supported the argument by saying that there have been two groups of children even before and after the change in policy. One that is studious and another, no matter of efforts, they don't study. Therefore, she uses the same teaching technique that she used to use before. Another teacher presented her argument saying every teacher has a style of teaching and it is difficult to alter it.

No change in *curriculum* was noticed by both the teachers after No detention of children. However, they raised the problems associate with it. One of the teacher said that the present curriculum does not provide the scope for teaching those students who has not learnt the previous concepts. There is no implementation of remedial teaching though it was proposed. Another teacher said there are suggestions for the teachers with each chapter, which direct us to recapitulate the similar concepts taught in previous grades but recapitulation and teaching the concepts again are two different things. If we start teaching the previously unlearnt concept, we will never be able to complete the course.

Evaluation system has changed drastically from summative to continuous and comprehensive evaluation after no detention which include summative along with formative evaluation tools. I am using evaluation in place of assessment because students yet compared and are provided marks along with grades. They are prized for first, second and third positions, accordingly to both the respondent teachers. Both the teachers pointed out that the present evaluation system over-burdens for keeping records of each student that too monthly. According to one of the respondent teacher, it fulfils no purpose because it is neither feasible to keep the record of each individual within over crowded classes nor because of high truancy among the children nor due to administrative burden on the teachers. According to another teacher, we need to spread awareness first. Administrators don't know what does no detention mean and brings the policies, which goes against the system like prizing the children or giving marks along with grades on report cards.

Learning according to both the respondent teachers, has been affected by the new system. One of the respondent teachers has directly affected the parents, who don't value the education much, and as a result their children are most irregular. They take the children along to village for months, and then they don't understand a single work of classroom teaching. Another teacher argued that children who don't want to study got a clear chit for escaping from studies, and the ones who are studious; feel frustration because they feel injustice to them.

Study reveals teachers urge for change. According to one of the teachers, reforms in the promotional rules are essential. It should be based on attendance if not examination. Another teacher urges to bring changes in the system such as: remedial classes, bridge courses, small class size, something to reduce truancy, and more awareness among the parents, administrators, and the teachers.

5. Placing the study as Qualitative Research

The present study, aims to study the teachers' perception about no detention of children, deals with the phenomenon which is a social construct; and therefore gives importance to teachers' perception to understand the operational meaning given to the phenomenon by them. This shows vary epistemological stand point of the study is qualitative, not other way round, because it gives utmost

importance to actors interpretation and views the reality as socially constructed (Bryman, 1999). As the nature of problem stated in the study is qualitative, it can't be answered through quantitative techniques. The techniques used in the study are qualitative that flowed automatically from the problem of research or was adopted deliberately to get the answers to the problem.

When the present study was analysed on all the eight continuums that differentiate qualitative research from quantitative stated by (Bryman, 1999), it was found that the study falls more on qualitative end. *Role of qualitative research* in the present study has been used as a means to explore teachers' interpretations. The *relationship between me and the respondent* was fairly close due to the technique (semi-structured interview) used to collect the data. However, it was not that close as in ethnographic studies though it was invariably longer than survey interviews. To view the phenomenon from the teachers' perspective there was an urge to get close to them, therefore I played an *insider's role* like Blumer suggests. The aim of the present study is to see the operational concept of no detention; therefore the conducted study is not trying to confirm any theory, rather it is trying to *evolve* an understanding out of practice. But it does not mean that I went into the field with no prior understanding about the phenomenon. Various policies and empirical studies on no detention of students and on adjoining concepts like evaluation, and graded and non graded systems were read. Based on the reading, he field was to gauge 'what was going on' in reality. A *semi structured technique* was used, one due to limited prior knowledge and second to gauge the experiences of teachers. Rigid or structured approach would have not provided the answers to the research questions. The sample size was too small to call it representative; therefore *scope of finding* is ideographic situated in specific school where the study was carried out. It cannot be nomothetic at all because of the dynamic nature of education system where the phenomenon operates. No generalisations can be made based on the analysis of just two interviews.

However, if the study had considered a large sample, it would have helped to map the strength, weaknesses or lapses in the operational theory to present a comprehensive educational theory which in further will guide the practice. "Educational theory does not sent out to explain what the world is like. Rather, as P.H. Hirst has maintained, its primary function is to guide educational practice" (Moore, 1974).

Guides through policy

Theory   *Practice*

Guides through research
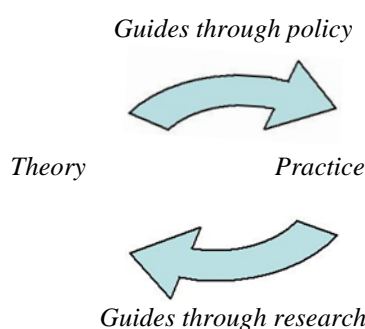
6. Concerns

It was realised that the problem of reactivity due to researcher and instrument cannot be neutralised. Every action influenced the reaction of participant starting from the introduction, briefing about the phenomenon, selection of teachers, style of questioning, reactions to teachers' responses, understanding about the phenomenon, interview guide that was prepared, selected questions in it, words used in it, the way those questions were presented and many other. Participants and researcher play a key role in the qualitative research. Concern lies with the typicality of eyes of the informants who provide the information and the researcher who process it. Semi structure interview method used in the study provides the information given by the participants about their behaviour, the concern lies how much we can trust on this information where participants report their own behaviour. Lastly, How much, is it possible for a researcher to view the things from somebody else's shoe?

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