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Active-Learning Pedagogies: Policy, Professional Development and Classroom Practices- A case study of two post-conflict contexts: Afghanistan and Somaliland

Case Study 1: Afghanistan

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Learning from a Child's Perspective

Research Assistants who spoke to children about school in Afghanistan reported the following about children:

'They like to play they love sports- volleyball, cricket, skipping.
They like reading and writing and group work.
They like cleanliness at school.
They like books, punctuality from teacher, and they like justice.
They find learning interesting when it is through story and proverb, question/answers, group work, poem competition amongst students, they like description of things, places and events, they like teachers, maths, geography, islamiyat and flowers.

And they dislike – conflict, harsh words, dirty place, lying, stealing, sitting idle, destruction of school teachers, damage to desks and chairs, punishment, absenteeism and late coming and failure.'

(From Focus Group Discussion with School Going Children in Afghanistan)

1. Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a landlocked country situated between the Middle East and South Asia. Positioned in a turbulent part of the world, Afghanistan is an ethnically diverse country primarily consisting of Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Baluch and Nuristani ethnic groups. Tribal or ethnic identity and affiliation is said to be very strong. The dominant languages are Pashto and Dari. Yet with all this ethnic diversity, the country is 99% Muslim, 80% of whom are Sunnis and 19% are Shia.[1] Multiple wars and ensuing political and social unrest has led a turbulent recent history.

Beginning with the Soviet invasion of 1979 and the decade-long war that followed, more than 4 million of the country's estimated 31 million inhabitants have sought refuge abroad, primarily in Pakistan and Iran. Many more were internally displaced as a result of the violence. The Soviet departure in 1989 did not offer any respite to the people of Afghanistan as fights between different militia and war lords continued. The rise of the Taliban in 1994 did not help the situation and its repressive tactics continued to impact lives of ordinary people. The fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001 allowed many refugees and internally-displace people (IDP's) to return home; however, the continued fighting strains daily life in much of the country. Normal activities of government, commerce and education continue to be disrupted as a result of decades of intermittent

[1] "Background Note: Afghanistan." (May 2007). U.S. State Department website: http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380 htm

war. Decades of fighting has devastated the country's meager physical infrastructure.[2] It is in the midst of this situation that Afghanistan finds itself trying to rebuild and develop.

The Education System in Afghanistan

Two distinct systems of education coexist in Afghanistan. The first is the more traditional religious system where mullahs, the religious heads, teach at madrasas which are religious schools associated with mosques. These madrasas primarily focus on teaching the precepts of Koran, reading, writing and mathematics. This network of madrasas has existed for centuries. The second system is a modern one with origins in a Western model of educational provision. It traces back to the end of the nineteenth century. As early as 1935, education was declared free and compulsory.[3] In 1964 constitutional reforms initiated by King Zahir Shah caused modern education to gain prominence in the country. These reforms promised free and compulsory education at all levels. The modern system consists of 6 years of primary education and 6 years of secondary education followed by higher education.[4]

Given its potential to influence people's thinking and way of life, the modern education system in Afghanistan was invariably targeted in successive wars and conflicts. Upon gaining power, each group brought about sweeping changes in the education system, often changing its face completely. Systemic reforms vacillated between extreme and conflicting ideologies of successive regimes, each leaving deep imprints on school and curricular practices. The education reforms initiated by the communist regime and the highly repressive measures undertaken by the Taliban are two examples.

Decades of civil war followed by the restrictive years of the Taliban regime left the Afghan education system in severe crisis, characterized by widespread physical destruction, collapse of systems and loss of human resources. Post civil war, the Taliban regime suppressed modern schooling practices, allowing only religious schools to function. Education of girls and women was banned. Approximately 80% of school buildings at all levels were damaged or destroyed with only two teacher training colleges remaining functional. A large number of qualified teachers left the country, stopped teaching or became teachers in refugee camps. Many were killed.

By the time the Taliban fell, the curriculum had not been revised for years and no modern teaching practices had been introduced. Regional structures were functioning autonomously without central coordination, and many teachers and administrators had not been paid for years.[5] In 2002, the GER (gross enrollment rate) was optimistically

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[2] Qazi, Abdullah. "General Information About Afghanistan." (January 9, 2007). Retrieved from the Afghanistan On-line website: http://www.afghan-web.com/facts html

[3] Blood, Peter R. "Afghanistan: A Country Study." Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress. (2001). Retrieved from the Country Studies website: http://countrystudies.us/afghanistan/71 htm

[4] "Structure of Education System." International Association of Universities (IAU), updated from UNESCO sources. (2002). http://www.hospitalityguild.com/Education/School_Systems/afghanistan.htm

[5] Afghanistan Comprehensive Needs Assessment in Education, Final Draft Report, 2002. The multi-donor CNA Mission was co-led by the ADB, Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority (AACA) and consisted of education specialists from different agencies.

estimated to be just 38% for boys and 3 % for girls of primary school age. [6]Millions of children were out of school, thousands were in refugee camps in Iran and Pakistan, and thousands more were internally displaced within the country.[7]

The presence of groups needing special attention further complicated the scenario. These included former child soldiers (estimated at 30,000), older girls, orphaned children, children of widows, and children in remote areas. The comprehensive multi-donor report found that "the number of children, youth and young adults whose education was disrupted or never begun, since 1990 can be conservatively estimated at eight to nine million" (p. 3). The newly formed government initiated the process of restoring basic services, including education in Afghanistan.

2. Educational Reform Discourse: Restoration and Reconstruction of Education in Afghanistan

After the fall of the Taliban, a number of players joined forces in reconstructing education services in Afghanistan. The Ministry of Education, UN Agencies, multilateral and bilateral donors, international NGOs, academic universities and education professionals came together in this endeavor. Many of these players possessed significant experience with education in post conflict scenarios. Some of the agencies had spent a number of years working in Afghanistan or in refugee camps in Iran or Pakistan during the difficult years of conflict. These agencies possessed considerable experience and understanding of the society, as well as knowledge about education systems and progressive pedagogies. The Ministry was the central agency to coordinate these actors in the reconstruction process and formulation of policies and programs for Afghanistan's education system.

The new Ministry was well aware that prolonged conflict had affected both the educational system and the society in different ways – some visible and others less readily apparent. The magnitude of the damage and destruction to school buildings was observable but it was difficult to map the extent of this in different provinces. The absence of girls from schools was observable but it was a challenge to count and verify their numbers. Millions of children were still in the refugee camps of Iran and Pakistan. A number of NGOs were operating community or home based schools; however, their numbers were unknown. Each of these observables had to be mapped and considered while planning out the reconstruction process.

There were also the less obvious effects of the conflict, particularly as they affected school processes and the human resource base – including teachers. The impact of years under Taliban control and Soviet occupation were difficult to quantify as they related to lost momentum and opportunity, stagnant curricula, poor educational materials, and – importantly – peoples' perceptions. All aspects of the system had steadily deteriorated and weakened. Precious time and opportunities to renew were lost. The system was

[6] Comprehensive Need Assessment in Education, Final Draft Report, July 2002. Developed by Multidonor CNA Mission Team.
[7] 3.5 million refugees were estimated in Iran and Pakistan and one million were internally displaced.

barely coping at a sub-optimal level. For educational reconstruction and reform to take place a comprehensive understanding of the complex realities on the ground had to be attained.

As a logical next step a number of studies to understand the situation were conducted by the government and different agencies. The sole aim of this research was to better understand various aspects of the situation. These efforts towards situation-analysis helped in comprehending some of the ground realities and needs in the education system. Specifically, these studies began to indicate the number of schools available and how many were needed, estimated the number of boys and girls in and out of school, identified the different kinds of schools that were functioning, quantified teachers in place and additional teachers needed, and assessed the status of administrative support and systems.

Almost all of these studies highlighted that there was a massive demand for education and that millions of children from diverse age groups and backgrounds wanted to enter schools. Correspondingly, the school system was found to be exceedingly skeletal and fragile, hardly in any position to respond to this demand. The issue of quality was also recognized and highlighted by these studies. The lack of learning materials and text books, the issue of differing teacher qualifications and the dominance of didactic-teaching learning methods were highlighted as weaknesses.

Summarizing the findings from various surveys and research, the situation analysis carried out by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) reported that most observed classes had only a black board and chalk as their learning material, and the use of any kind of supplementary material was extremely rare.[8] The teacher often did not understand the textbooks themselves. Not surprisingly the most commonly used teaching methods were repetition, rote learning, copying and memorizing the text. Very little or no student participation took place. No student-to-student interaction for learning was evident. Task-based learning or problem-solving activities such as discussions or classroom activities were hardly evident. In general, there was no promotion of analytical or critical thinking on the part of the students. Learning was conceived as entirely a matter of memorizing the content of the textbooks.

Although public statements, policies and, to some extent, actions by the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan demonstrated an acknowledgement of the enormous challenges to achieving quality education for all in Afghanistan, all actions undertaken by the central government were complicated by both the enormity of the problem and the limited influence and infrastructure with which they had to work. For example, in 2005, it was estimated that the country would require an additional 30,000 to 58,000 teachers to meet

[8] Teacher Education Program (TEP) Reaching Out to Teachers: A System to Achieve More Effective Teaching and Learning in Afghanistan. Concept Paper and Strategy Plan for Teacher Resource Teams (TRTs) and Teacher Resource Centres (TRC) Draft. Colin Alfred. (September, 2005).

the demand that was expected to rise up by 2007.[9] This meant that is was necessary to improve the pre-service teacher training; however, a more compelling need was to deploy large number of trained teachers quickly and train teachers that were already placed in the schools.

Between 2002 and 2005, a number of reviews and discussions were initiated to better understand the teacher education system and develop a blueprint for reforms (c.f., AIA, May 2002; Navarro, October 2002; CAII, December 2002; World Bank, March 2004; AREU, August 2004). Some of the discussions recognized every child's right to quality education. The relationship of teacher competencies to ensuring quality education was recognized as critical. At a UNICEF workshop in September 2003, participants called for a modern standards-based teacher education that would focus on teachers' actual performance in the classroom as a criterion of quality. The attention given to critical reflection and dialogue during this time helped foster ownership amongst the two ministries that shared the responsibility for teacher education: Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). It also laid the groundwork for different external agencies to coordinate and cooperate in the area of teacher education.

Commitment and Action: Policies and Programs

After extensive consultation, the Government of Afghanistan came out with a National Strategic Plan for Education in 2006.[10] The plan clearly articulated its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, as well as to the intermediate results of the London Compact goals as set out in the Interim Afghanistan Development Strategy (I-ANDS). The National Strategy Plan was a result of collective efforts of the Ministry, Afghan professionals in the system, experts, donors, and aid agencies, particularly UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP).

The National Plan was to be the guiding document for the entire education system. This work represented the thinking, discussion and consultation by Afghans at all levels within and outside the Ministry, including the provinces. The issue of teacher performance and quality in classrooms was a critical area highlighted in the plan. The National Plan emphatically pointed out that classroom processes are teacher dominated, with rote learning as a norm and very little individual attention. These methods do not effectively teach children to read and write, nor do they foster critical thinking and analytical skills.

[9] The Teacher Education Program: A National Teacher Quality Initiative Prepared for the National Conference on Education Quality, Ministry of Education, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Richard Navarro, Ph.D. TEP Manager, MoE, Kabul, Afghanistan. (3 – 5 September, 2005).

[10] The National Strategic Plan has been developed entirely within the Ministry of Education, with technical assistance from UNESCO/IIEP and other international advisers in the Ministry. Under a steering group of international and Afghan senior advisers, there were eight technical working groups comprised of Ministry staff, national technical advisers and members of the Academic Council. The Ministry's Planning Directorate provided secretariat function. Consultations were held with other Ministry staff in central and provincial offices and with other stakeholders in the Afghan community. The draft plan is now presented for consultation and comment by a wider community including our donor partners and other ministries. There will also be further consultation with and public exposure to the wider Afghan community.

The strategic plan called for a focus on improved pedagogical skills of teachers, and an upgrading of the content knowledge.

The plan recognized the need to balance good teacher training with the high demand for large numbers of teachers at the field level almost immediately.[11] Multiple factors were recognized as affecting the quality of teachers: their own qualification and content knowledge, the training and supervisory support they receive, and above all, their inconsistent and inadequate remuneration.

An impressive, all-embracing plan for teacher development was proposed in the strategy document. Recruitment, compensation and supervision were included along with pre-service teacher training, as well as plans for a massive in-service teacher development program that could be supported through a network of resource centres and distance education.

Where is Active Learning in this scenario?

There is very little by way of overt and explicit mention or clarification about active learning in the contemporary policy discourse in Afghanistan. The National Strategic Plan for Education in Afghanistan (2006) and the Concept Paper and Strategic Plan for Teacher Education (2005) do mention, inter alia, concerns of quality in pedagogic processes and teacher education. These documents do mention the traditional teacher-centered mode of classroom teaching as a problem to overcome. They acknowledge the need for each teacher's knowledge base to be deepened and speak of the need to acquaint teachers with new student-centered teaching-learning methods. There is an implicit admission about the limitations of didactic approaches to classroom teaching in which learners are merely passive recipients. There is a tacit but definite assumption in these documents that quality school processes can be better ensured if pedagogic approaches are more learner-centered, meaning that learning takes place when learners are active in exploration, inquiry, problem-solving and in which the teacher's role becomes that of a guide and facilitator.

3. Teacher Development: Responding to the Imperative

Responding to the immediate and phenomenal increase of enrollment with adequate number of teachers and schools has been the foremost task for the new government post-conflict. The task was complicated by the number of different types of schools teaching elementary education to children in Afghanistan. There are formal schools, community or home schools, accelerated bridge courses and madrasa-based religious schools. Teachers teaching in these diverse school options varied in their qualifications and training.

[11] The number of teachers employed by the Ministry has grown almost seven fold since 2001. Pupil numbers have shown similar growth rates, partly driven by girls (and women teachers) and refugees returning to the school system following the Taliban era. Other factors include the community perception of the importance of education to their children's future and the emphasis placed on this by the government and donors.

The presence of multiple actors in the education field further increased the complexity of the situation. Many of the community schools were part of NGO programs, these NGOs were responsible for their training and management. The religious schools, on the other hand, either functioned with an untrained teacher or were included in trainings conducted by NGOs. These diverse teachers and training programs had to be brought under a common training program. Given the urgency of the need, a large in-service teacher-training program seemed to be the most feasible option to the administrators.

In-service Teacher Training: The Roll out of InSeT

The National Teacher Education Program (TEP) was designed in close cooperation with international organizations and NGOs. The intent was designed to address teacher training needs in a comprehensive way. The main supporters of teacher education included USAID, DANIDA, World Bank, UNICEF, Germany, France, Aga Khan University, CARE, and IRC. The Teacher Education Program worked under the framework and regulations of the Teacher Education Department.

The TEP system was envisioned to provide training to existing teachers in the system in a regular way. Two modules of In-Service Training Modules (INSET I & INSET II) were developed as part of TEP. The initial round of INSET I teacher-training was the first step of a process to help unqualified teachers reach the "minimum qualification" established by the National Standards of Teaching Practice.[12] The InSet Module was developed through a highly participative process[13] by bringing in different government departments, donors, NGOs, university teachers, school teachers and international experts on a common platform. There were a series of discussions and debates, both formal and informal. The work done by NGOs such as UNICEF, CARE, and IRC during the conflict years was incorporated into the development process.

According to Teacher Education Department officials, InSet was meant to achieve three objectives. The first was to rapidly provide training to untrained teachers of varying educational levels. The second was to harmonize the various teacher training efforts of different players, and develop a unified training approach; post-conflict, the NGOs had to sign a protocol with the government and become partners in one coordinated effort. The final objective was to align the training inputs with teacher-training standards and ensure uniformity. From here they could begin the process of accreditation and harmonizing the highly varying teacher cadre.

Many of the players involved in developing InSet were well aware of active learning or child centered methods. These included donor agencies, UN agencies, NGOs and consultants, as well as Afghan professionals who had worked in other agencies or had been part of innovative and progressive education programs during emergencies.

[12] The eight National Standards were developed in 2004 by teams of Afghan teacher educators with support from UNICEF and Teachers' College Columbia as part of the new primary-school curriculum development project.

[13] Interviews with Mr. Rahamati (Director Teacher Education) and Mr. Wahidia (Deputy Director, Teacher Education).

Therefore, much of the debate and discussions highlighted the need for training teachers to utilize child centered methods in the classroom. As a result, one sees dominant evidence of active learning methods in the InSet Module. The INSET was to be rolled out through a cascade model.

The Cascade Model of Training and Teacher Support

The TEP model uses a cascade method of teacher training whereby master trainers are trained first. They then train teacher-trainers who are responsible for training the teachers. As of October 2006, 30 core trainers, 140 master trainers, 2183 teacher trainers and over 27,000 teachers (26,325 through MoE in nine provinces and over 1000 through NGOs in 15 provinces) had received pedagogical training through INSET I. The proposed design of TEP is a model in which Teacher Resource Centers are established in every district of the country (364 in total).

In addition to the teacher training component of TEP, the system plans outline a requirement for teacher resource teams in each district that is responsible for on-going supervision and evaluation of teachers' performance in the classroom.

p. 35, The National Strategy Plan

The InSeT Module[14] and Active Learning

The key focus of the manual is active learning in the context of the National Education Curriculum. The definition of active learning endorses the active participation of students, both physically and mentally, in learning. It is emphasized that tasks for children should have the right degree of complexity so that the child is able do the task but at the same time finds it challenging. Throughout the manual the '*different and changed*' role of the teacher in this method is highlighted, essentially emphasizing teachers must attend to individual needs, need to listen to the students and give them activities.

Spanning nine chapters, the manual includes chapters on essential aspects of active learning implementation. These include information relating to pedagogy, understanding the student, text and supporting material, classroom management, lesson plans, evaluation, diversity (although the term used is "variety"), new curriculum, new books and other educational issues. In the manual, learning is seen as combination of concept, skill and perception.

[14] Teacher Education Program for In-Service Teacher Training. TEP/InSet Study Material for Teachers. (April 2006). Ministry of Education, General Directorate of Teacher Education.

The influence of strong adherence to traditions, including the traditional way of learning, is also discernible throughout the manual, often contradicting the new pedagogy InSet is striving so hard to advance.

From interviews with administrators and teachers participating in the training process, it is apparent that the training focuses largely on teaching methods. Teachers are trained in lesson planning, preparation of teaching materials and teaching methods. These methods address the utility of strategies such as role play, group work, brainstorming, and drills for language subjects. Teachers are taught that they can employ these methods in all disciplines. While the training method is supposed to entail significant interaction and practice, teachers interviewed say that the training was largely carried out through lectures.[15]

However almost all the stakeholders feel that, considering the difficult circumstances in Afghanistan, the Teacher Development Program and development of InSet is a commendable effort. It has managed to respond to the pressing need of ensuring trained teachers in schools. InSet was developed through participatory processes and has introduced the concept of active learning nationwide. It has been instrumental in taking the first step towards changing the quality of the learning process in Afghan classrooms.

4. Reconstruction Process and Classroom Practices

The section below synthesizes data collected from a total of 31 schools; 21 MOE and 10 Community Based Schools (CBE) comprised the sample. Data were collected from the provinces of Logar and Perwan. A school observation schedule was implemented in all the schools.

Sixty-one classroom observations and an equal number of teacher interviews were conducted. Of these, 42 observations and teacher interviews were conducted in MOE schools and 19 in the Community Based CBE) schools. The CBE schools are now under the umbrella of the MOE.

The School Profile

All the MOE schools functioned in concrete buildings with only one exception. The small community schools were operational in mosques (6), community space (2) and homes (2). The MOE had a total of 443 teachers (317 males and 126 females), while the CBE schools had 58 teachers (18 males and 30 females).

MOE schools were relatively larger with a minimum of 7 classrooms to as many as 35 classrooms. The CBE schools were much smaller with between 3 to 6 classes.

In both of the schools, black board, chalk, textbooks, notebooks, and pencils constituted teaching material used. A few CBE schools do mention the availability of libraries,

[15] Interview with administrators in Teacher Education Department

crayons and some other material. CBE schools were also the only ones that had any displays of student or teacher work in the classroom.

The total enrollment in a typical CBE school falls in the range of 200 to 300 students, most of who are girls. Typical MOE schools have larger student populations ranging from 500 to as much as 1800. The table below shows the large enrollment in the MOE schools. Interestingly, there are about 74% boys in MOE schools versus 26% girls. Conversely, there are 88% girls in CBE schools.

Table: Student population and gender

Type of School	Boys	Girls	Total
MOE	13022 (74%)	4643 (26%)	17665
CBE	258 (12%)	1798 (88%)	2056

MOE – Ministry of Education, CBE – Community Based Education.

In terms of profiles of teachers observed, data from the interviews showed:

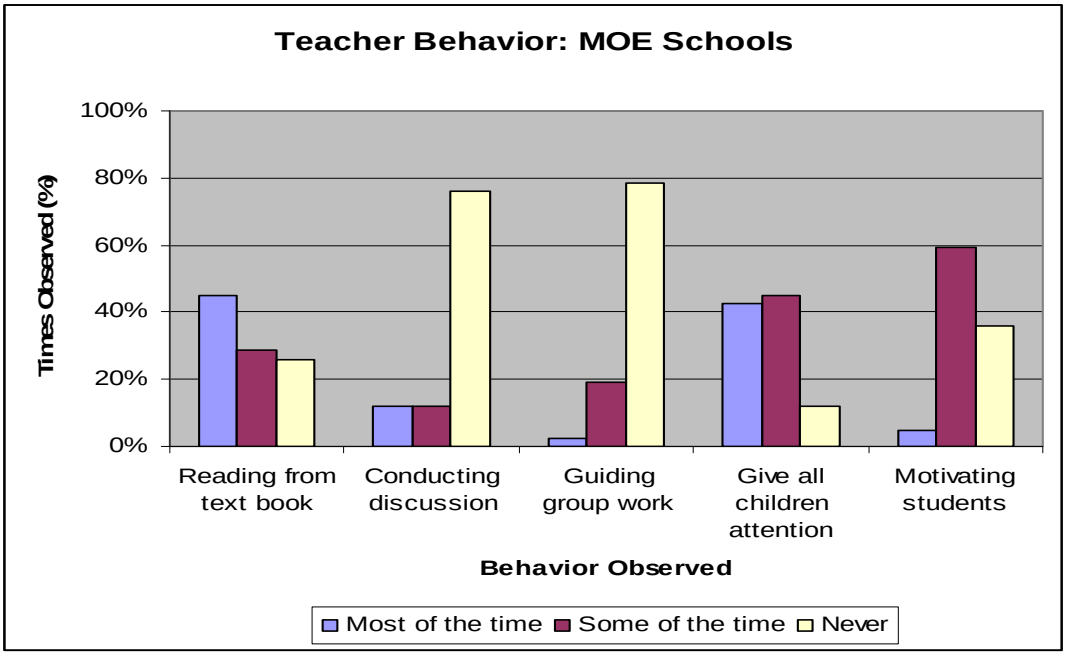
- 90% of teachers had attended secondary school through grade 12.
- Teaching experience varied; 50% of the teachers had 3 to 5 years of teaching experience, 26% had 5 to 10 years, and 24% had more than 10 years of experience.
- 43% of the teachers were women. Of the 42 MOE teachers, 16 were female teachers. Of the 19 CBE teachers, 10 were female teachers.
- None of the teachers had received any kind of traditional pre-service teacher training. Almost all teachers were trained using the in-service teacher training program TEP, and a little less than half had undertaken multiple in-service trainings.
- These multiple trainings were largely conducted by different international agencies, like UNICEF, CARE, and Swedish Committee. The duration of these trainings ranged from a few days to a couple weeks. Inputs on academic subjects and teaching methods formed the major part of the training. Some of the NGO trainings were on specific topics like health, peace and mine awareness, gender awareness, rights of women, psychology, management and material development. The training methods included lectures, group work, practical work and discussions. Teachers received materials, such as teacher's guides, supplementary materials, note books and pens at the trainings.

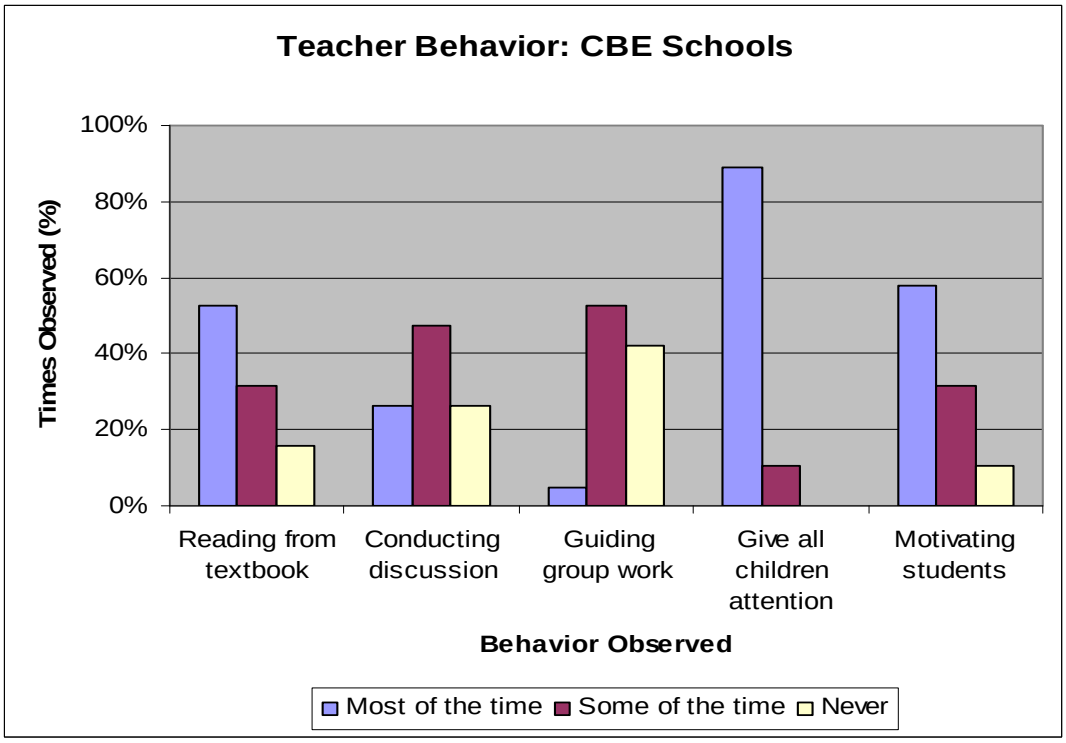
Trends from Classroom Observations

As described in the summary, classroom observations were done using the Classroom Observation Tool. The observations were comprised of three steps. First was open observation of the teaching-learning process. Second, based on the observation, research assistants rated 27 teacher behaviors and 23 student behaviors. Each behavior was identified as occurring 'most of the time', 'sometimes' or 'never.' Step three involved an analysis of dominant teacher-student behaviors. This was done by the principal investigator. The bar graphs below show a few key observations emerging from the class

room observations in both types of school. Overall results of classroom observations are summarized following the graphs.

Teacher Behavior in MOE and CBE Classrooms





(See appendices 1-3 for complete reporting of all observations.)

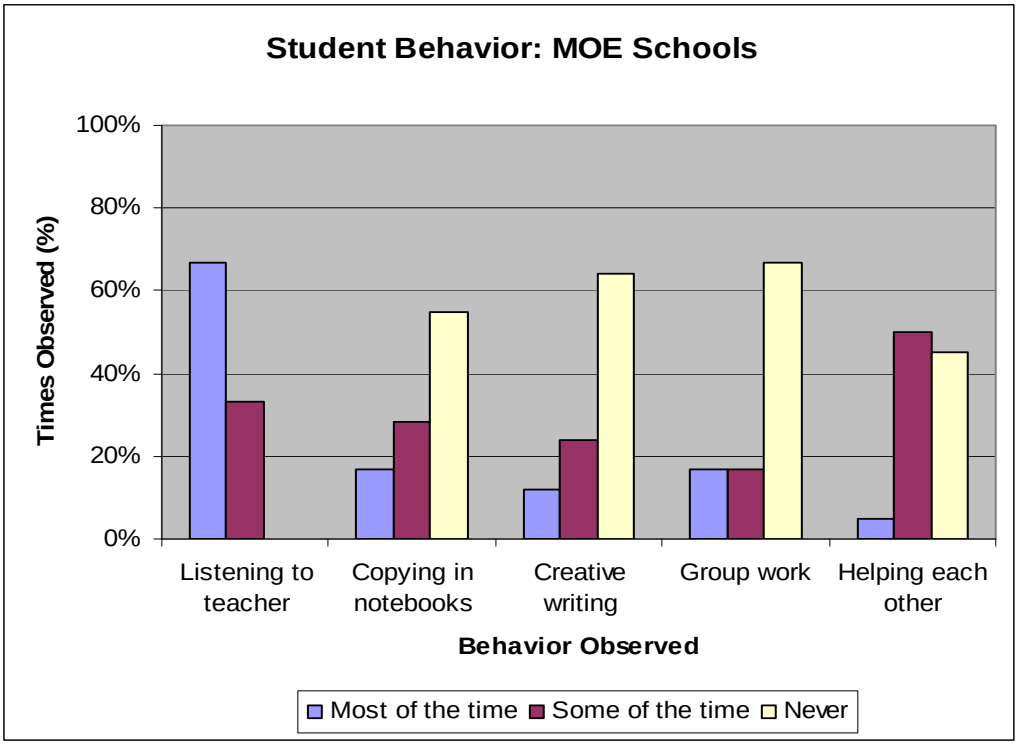
A majority of the teachers in MOE and CBE schools displayed a considerable degree of positive behaviors, including being friendly with the children, motivating them, moving around the classroom and giving feedback, while avoiding negative behavior like scolding and punishment.

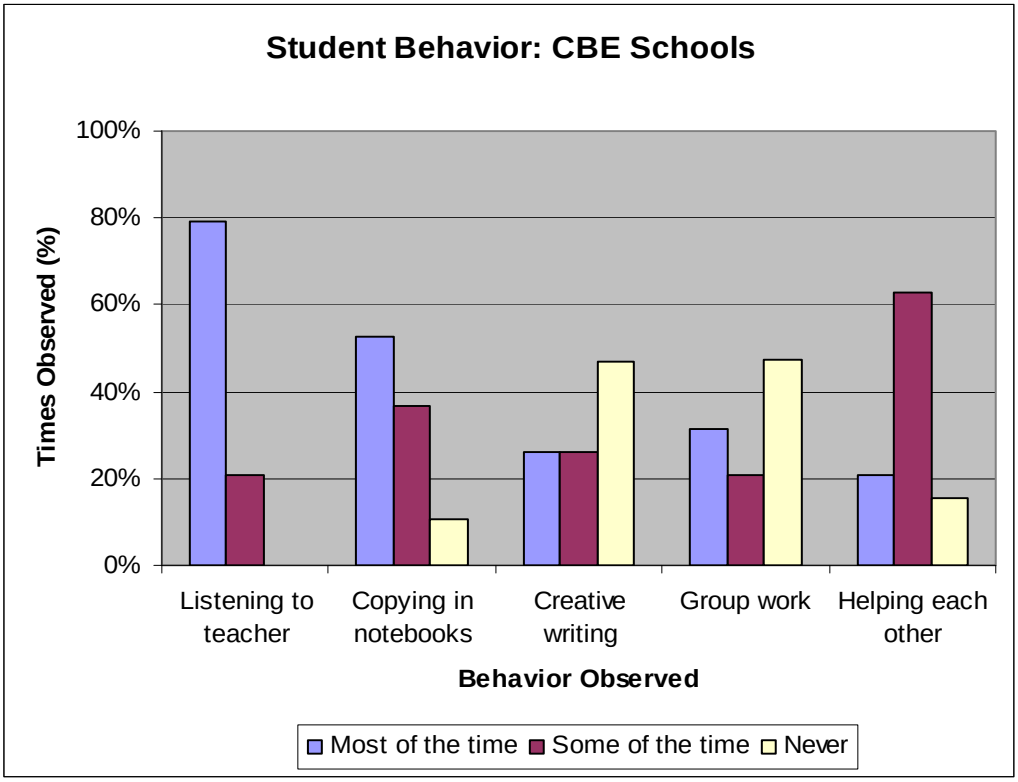
Again, in both MOE as well as CBE schools, 30% to 50% of teachers, 'most' and 'sometimes' occurring teacher behavior clustered around the traditional teaching behaviors that are largely textbook-centric. These behaviors include reading from the textbook, asking textbook related questions, asking children to read or recall textbook based information, and writing out key points from the text book on the back board.

The difference between the MOE teachers and CBE teachers is found in teaching behaviors that could be seen as promoting child centered teaching-learning. These behaviors included making learning resources available to the children, assigning work to children in groups or pairs, conducting a discussion, guiding group work, giving a learning task that requires information gathering and analysis, giving reasoning tasks to children and connecting the lesson topic to children's daily lives. The profiles show that less than 20% of MOE teachers were observed adopting these behaviors. On the other hand 40% to 60% of teachers in CBE Schools "sometimes" demonstrated behaviors that could be considered as promoting active learning.

Similarly CBE teachers seem to adopt teaching behaviors that connect the topic to students' daily life and previous knowledge relatively more often than the MOE teachers.

Student Behavior in MOE and CBE Classrooms





(See appendices 1-3 for complete reporting of all observations.)

Correspondingly, the profiles show that the "most" and "sometimes" observed student behaviors in both MOE and CBE schools are listening to the teacher, repeating after the teacher, providing information from the text book, copying in their note books. One can observe that the CBE students show a higher percentage on these behaviors than MOE students, indicating higher student involvement.

The frequency of student behaviors like narrating experiences or observations in a discussion, working in pairs, working in groups, and solving problems are found primarily in the "most" and "sometimes" observed categories in CBE schools within a range of 20 to 40% frequency. Although the frequency of this positive behavior is marginal, it is indicative of progress.

On the other hand, 65% to 70% of "never" observed children behaviors in MOE classroom observations were behaviors such as working together in groups, narrating observations or experiences in the discussion, asking questions of the teacher, creative writing activities, group discussion or offering each other feedback. The absence of creative writing opportunities, however, seems to be equally absent from both school settings

There is a marginal difference between MOE and CBE schools student behavior regarding answering teacher questions and asking questions to teachers. CBE school students are observed demonstrating these behaviors more often than the MOE students.

Teacher Perspective

When teachers were asked if they had been able to adopt the active learning method in their classroom and how often, overwhelmingly the response was that they were unable to use it as they would have wanted. (12 CBE teachers say they have been able to do so sometimes, 7 say they were unable to do so; amongst the MOE teachers, 30 said they were not able to and 6 said they did so sometimes.)

Attempts to elicit teachers' perception of child-centered methods indicate that the understanding of the concept is somewhat limited. The descriptions given by teachers which come closest to the concept of child-centered methods include working in groups, learning by doing, manual activities, question and answers, and using local resources. More often, however, perception of child-centered methods is limited to notions like, "teacher instructing and children doing," "different methods," and "children writing on the black board." Some teachers stated that they had not even heard the term.

It is evident from the classroom observations and teacher interviews that, by and large, child-centered or active learning teaching methods are not widely practiced. There are emerging signs that these practices are being adopted some of the time in CBE schools, but less so in the MOE schools. The CBE schools have long been implemented and supported by NGOs and considerable capacity building and some supervision has gone into these schools. It is therefore not surprising to see signs of active learning methods emerging more consistently in these schools. Apart from the training issue, the larger size of student population in MOE classrooms poses a challenge to adopting active learning methods.

Most teachers admitted that they have not been able to adopt active learning methods in their teaching style to the extent they would desire. Large numbers of students in the classrooms, poor availability of learning material and resources, and the issue of sub-optimal physical facilities in terms of school buildings and classrooms were cited as constraining factors to implementing active-learning teaching methods. The teachers also felt that they were not adequately prepared professionally and would appreciate more feedback and supervision.

To summarize, in spite of all the post conflict challenges and priorities, Afghanistan recognized the issue of quality in its schools and made considerable efforts to promote active learning in its teacher training. The field level observation does show that, although didactic methods still dominate the teaching learning patterns, there is emerging evidence of the learner centered methods being adopted, particularly in CBE schools.

5. Factors Affecting Implementation of Active Learning Pedagogy: Observations

Advancing active learning pedagogy is fraught with challenges in the most stable contexts, particularly in developing countries. The problems of low teacher capacity, high turn over rates, poor supervision, inadequate teaching and learning material, overcrowded classrooms, uneven policies, and learners facing complex difficulties that

disrupt their attendance and participation in school are all magnified in manifold ways in the context of post-conflict. Variables specific to fragile contexts compound the challenges faced by systems in more stable environments. The challenges that Afghanistan is facing in advancing active learning pedagogy are multi-faceted and will be discussed in the next section.

Moving a Pedagogic Agenda amidst Pressures of Reconstruction

The enormous demand for education among millions of war-weary citizens eager to see the benefits of peace became the highest priority for Afghanistan immediately after the fall of the Taliban. This meant that considerable attention and energies were focused on creating access, building and repairing schools, appointing, training and deploying teachers and re-establishing administrative structures. The complexity of these challenges was negotiated with skeletal human resources in an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear of insecurity.

Informed by various studies, the administrators acknowledged the need for making teaching and learning more child-centered, however, the reality of deploying a large number of teachers to the field immediately was a factor that could not be postponed, and one which superseded all other considerations. These pressures had implications on the quality of the teacher training and, although active learning pedagogy was integral to the teacher training program, it was difficult to devote substantial time and resources to it.

The cascade model of training had its own challenges and varied in quality. The challenge was felt more acutely as systems were still finding their feet; there were considerable administrative challenges associated with the transition from a central to provincial level. Often bureaucratic delays in the flow of funds led to a time lag between training of master trainers at the provincial level and the actual teacher training taking place. Given the pressures of development and roll out of the training package, monitoring suffered. Implementing teacher training at scale with the weakened systems and limited human resources negatively affected the quality of the teacher training at the ground level.

Apart from the problems within the system, from the administrative perspective, coordinating multiple players was another challenge. Provincial level politics, lack of cooperation and culture of obliging also affected the training process.

The most critical problem in ensuring adoption of InSet inputs by teachers, however, was harmonizing or aligning the very diverse teacher cadre, comprised of mullahs, those with primary level education, and trained teachers, into a coherent system. The challenges of salary structure, incentives, and issues of certification remain problematic. Under these conditions, convincing this diverse cadre to adopt active learning in classrooms remains a perpetual challenge.

Political and Cultural Dimensions

At the time of this study the political situation in Afghanistan had not completely stabilized. Incidents of violence and insecurity still prevailed. The government in Kabul had little control in some of the far flung provinces, which were characterized by conflicts amongst different groups. The historical struggles between different ethnic and tribal groups continued to echo in the background. News of violence, particularly against schools, teachers and students was periodically heard. The effectiveness and functionality of the education system in different parts of Afghanistan was difficult to gauge under these conditions.

Islam and Islamic culture defines the Afghan way of life. It is central to their being and all that they do, as is the adherence to the tribal culture. As such, there are definite beliefs on what is truth and knowledge, whose knowledge is the right knowledge, the place of elders and teachers in the society, respect and deference to others, what is fun for children and the appropriateness of it in classroom, and belief in equity and diversity among other cultural issues. These beliefs have deep implications on how active learning pedagogy is perceived, defined and assimilated. Principles of democracy, equality and reflection, which are the basis of active learning pedagogy, do not completely resonate with the current cultural beliefs in Afghan society. Hence, in spite of active learning being implemented in policy, teacher training and curriculum, it remains somewhat foreign because of the dominant cultural beliefs. At the classroom level, teachers and students, who are products of this context, find it difficult to adopt true behaviors of active learning methods. They therefore tend to continue practicing the accepted behavior norms of their cultural reality – thereby inhibiting the adoption of active learning with all of its nuances.

There is another dimension to this, and that is of the individual and collective identity. In this case, Islam and the tribal affinity gives Afghans one very dominant identity, but there is also a national identity, a collective identity which has faced tremendous crisis for a prolonged period. Differing ideologies have tried to govern the Afghan people, often forcing their point of view on them. There have been long years when people have been virtually isolated from the external world, or they have lived as refugees in a different country. The culture of reflection and self criticism, which normally happens in a robust democracy where politics, media, and civil society all contribute to a national debate, has been singularly absent in this case. Often one feels that Afghans vacillate between deep national pride and a feeling of victimization. Either side leaves very little scope for the candid reflection and self-correction needed to advance a reform like active learning pedagogy.

Adoption of active learning is linked to readiness of the society for change. Instances of curriculum reforms different from the given context are known to be rejected, often with a severe backlash. Afghanistan itself has a history of rejecting Soviet-led reforms in Afghan schooling. Therefore, the advancement of active learning needs to be a gradual process of evolution, finding spaces for acceptable changes and gradually moving on, more like the Piagetian model of assimilation and accommodation, always striving for equilibrium.

Conceptual Challenges

Active learning pedagogy requires the engagement of the learners in the learning process. The engagement is at cognitive and affective levels, and also includes promoting learners physical engagement in the learning process. The breadth of cognitive processes in which a learner can be engaged in an active learning approach are enormous (e.g., classification, logical reasoning). In an effort to simplify the conceptual underpinnings of active learning and tailor it to large-scale training programs for under-qualified teachers, active learning pedagogy too often becomes equated with 'activities' and 'group work' situations.

Under the complex circumstances of a situation like Afghanistan, such simplification could well be an appropriate entry point to help teachers and systems learn about active learning. However, both mastery of academic subjects (e.g. math, language, science) and understanding of various learners' cognitive process are essential to integrate active learning pedagogy in classrooms. There is, therefore, a need to consider and integrate both these elements in the long-term teacher training programs that are being planned.

Currently, however, some NGO trainers feel that the challenge lies in the content and approach of current trainings in advancing active learning.[16] It is often felt that the content level in the teacher training programs is higher than teachers' capacity to absorb the material. Sometimes they cannot differentiate between an ice breaker or an energizer and actual activities for learning. The training has too many concepts which teachers either do not understand or cause confusion. Teachers would appreciate it if the activities in the training session are backed with proper conclusions. Too many training sessions are conducted without follow up or supervision. Teachers absorb only some hands-on activities conducted in the training, and if teachers learn one method, they keep on doing it regardless whether it matches the topic or not. Group work is a good example of this.

An evaluation of InSet[17] recognized that, despite high satisfaction reported by the participants, the quality of the training was somewhat questionable. A number of weaknesses were highlighted. A few specific examples were that the level of teacher educators was not very different in knowledge and skills from participants; little attention was given to active learning principles and methods; and lecture and mechanical activities were highlighted while analysis was given much less consideration.

Moreover, because teachers were not used to analytic thinking skills they could not comprehend the concepts. Given their own backgrounds and the reality of Afghan life, many participants said that the TEP InSet1 content (such as active learning) was not applicable in Afghan schools.

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[16] From Interviews with trainers at IRC and CARE.
[17] TEP InSET Course Evaluation, Power Point presentation, Mohammad Javad Ahmadi

A number of small but critical issues have been brought out by the trainers. It is evident that teacher capacities and training inputs need to correspond and be appropriately sequenced. The issue of teacher qualification and remuneration is real. Teachers with low educational qualifications do not know or understand the content themselves; therefore they are not able to teach effectively in any method. Pre- and post-evaluations of teacher capacities need to inform the training programs for teachers.

Coordination among Multiple Stakeholders

It is indeed commendable that a number of stakeholders encompassing government officials, UN agencies, multilateral and bilateral agencies, international NGOs, universities, and local professionals have all come together in moving the reconstruction of education services in Afghanistan. It has indeed helped in working towards a common goal and assisted in maximizing the use of resources. However, balancing different stakeholders and interweaving their perspectives into a coherent strategy is a challenge.

NGOs, who were equal partners in this teacher training, presented a different set of problems. These non-state actors were accustomed to implementing their own training programs and had demonstrated expertise in doing so. NGOs had invested in their training packages and spent years during the conflict refining their approaches, training their staff, and monitoring specific results. When the new government was put in place, there was both reluctance and discomfort on the part of these agencies to implement the government training program InSet, as expressed by the administrators in the newly formed government.

Furthermore, the NGOs had their own plans and budgets for activities including training. They had difficulty in implementing InSet as it did not fit in their priorities. It was a significant challenge for the administration to bring diverse constituencies to the same table and coordinate all the players. Mandates of NGOs did not always correspond to the priorities of the Teacher Education Department. Complicating matters further was that each NGO had their own philosophies and implemented their own training packages. Furthermore, there is a strong possibility of donor-agenda dominating the discourse and this must be balanced. Too many simultaneous reforms amidst pressures of reconstruction, hurried advancement of some of the western models without the readiness at systemic and societal level could be detrimental. This is true in the case of active learning pedagogy as well.

6. Conclusion

Data from the literature review, classroom observations and interviews demonstrates that there is a commitment to pedagogical reform in Afghan classrooms. New techniques are being promoted and introduced in schools, policy has been formed to support this, and NGO and government actors are attempting a coordinated training package through InSet to promote pedagogical reform. However, a closer look at Afghanistan shows that while teachers might be starting to use new techniques in classrooms, the constraints to implementing an active learning approach seem to be winning out. Teachers are at best

using active learning techniques on a sporadic basis – and more often in NGO trained classrooms. Even when some of these techniques are displayed, there is little evidence that it is being implemented with attention to changes in learners' cognitive processes.

On the contrary, it seems that Afghanistan has been plagued by a series of difficult challenges that have prevented active-learning from really taking root in classrooms. The pressures of reconstruction of the system, a very low capacity floor of the teaching force, a desire to focus on access and efficiencies demanded through cascading training models have not served the active learning agenda well. In addition, the complex history of Afghanistan and its current cultural beliefs have made the very concept of active learning difficult to promote. While the desire to simplify complex conceptual underpinnings of active learning may be necessary in a difficult post-conflict environment, it needs to be followed by progressive and incremental inputs to teachers. Finally, the wide array of services and providers involved in the education system with donors, governments and NGOs all having considerable power in different realms has underscored a challenge unique to the high-donor interest, post-conflict state where central government is struggling to assert power.

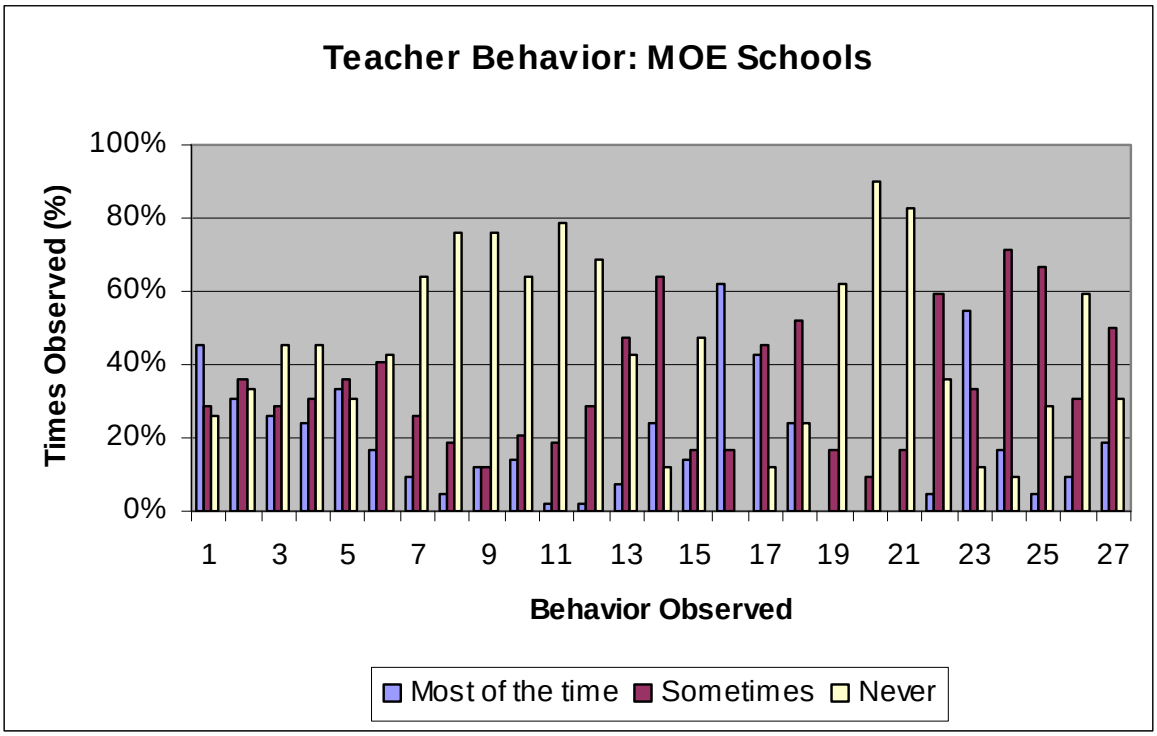
This reality underscores a need for donors, fledging governments in fragile states, and NGO actors to coordinate and consider carefully what can be achieved in the context of the enormous challenges post-conflict.

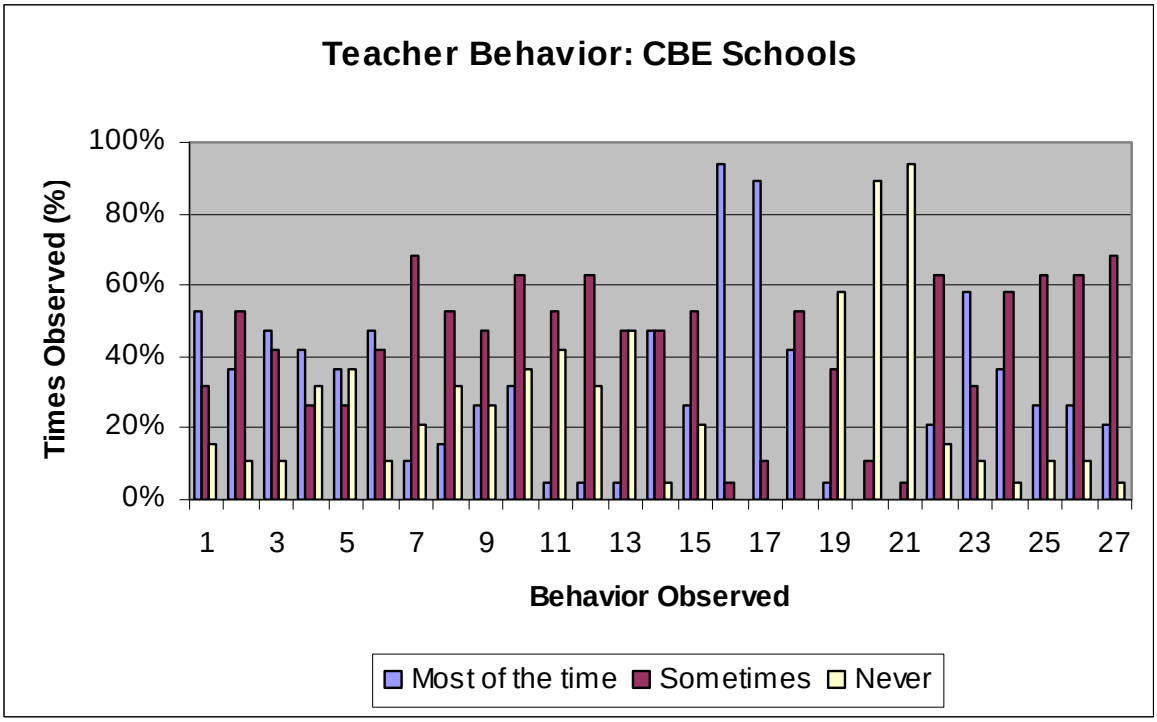
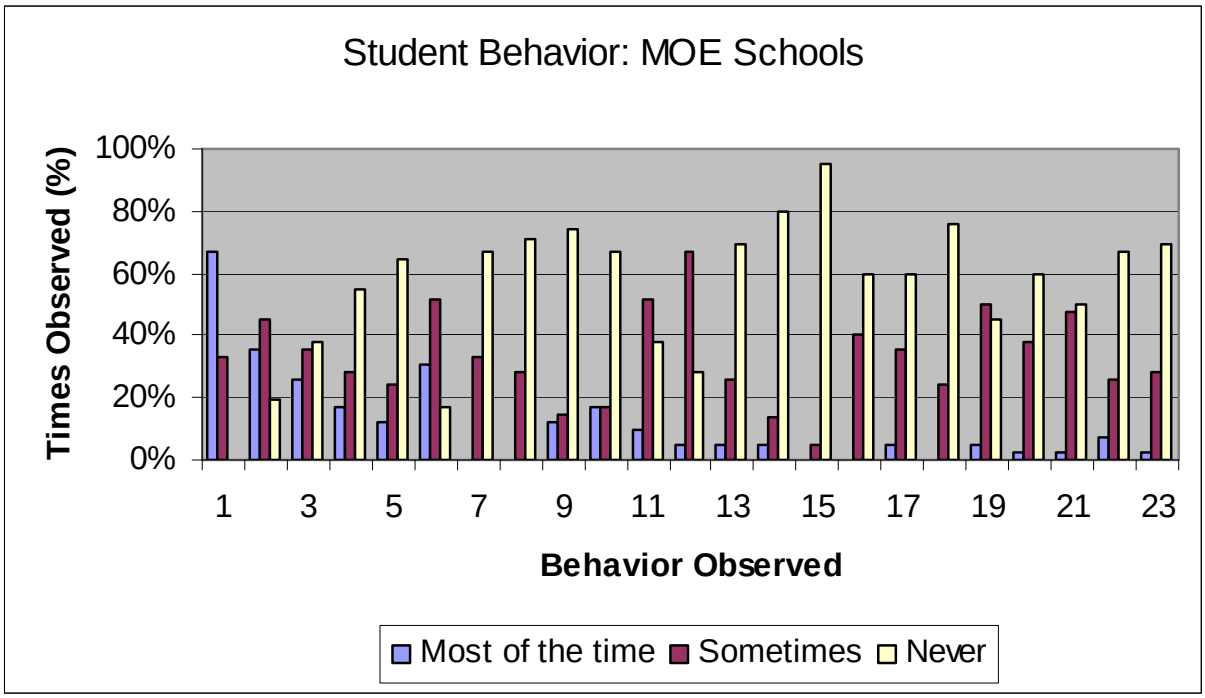
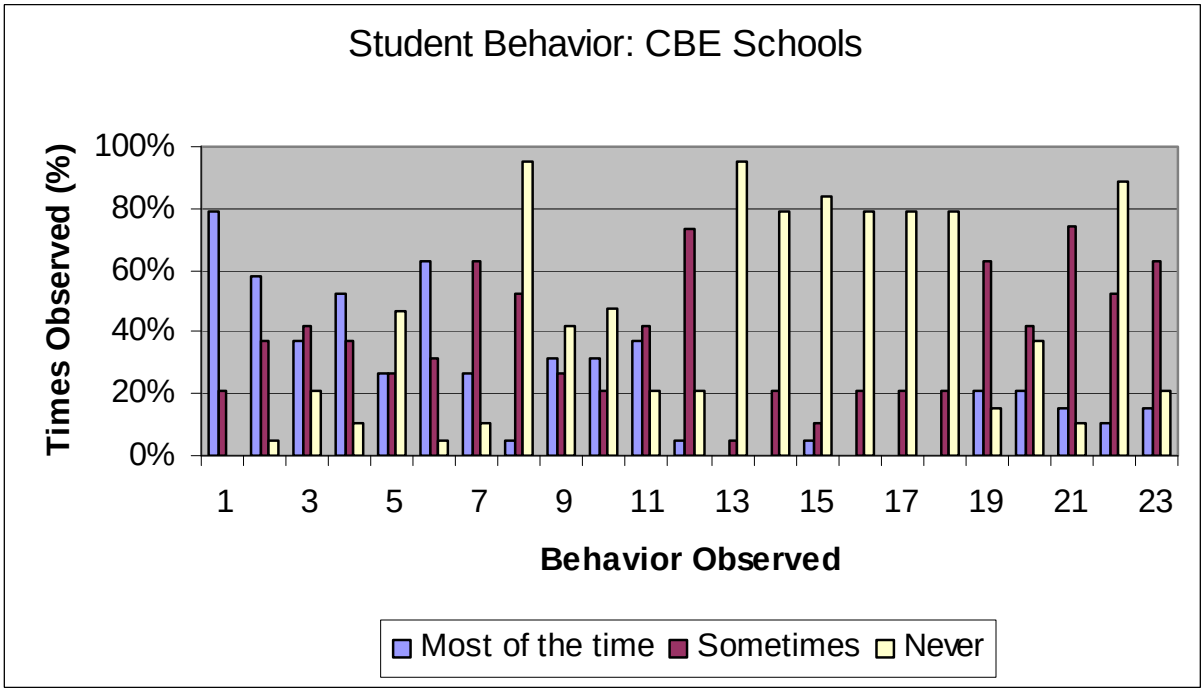
Appendix 1: List of observed teacher and student behavior
(Full graphs reporting classroom observations can be found below in appendices 2 and 3.)

	Teacher Behavior
1.	Reading from the text book
2.	Explaining information from the text book
3.	Lecturing
4.	Writing main point from the text book on the black board
5.	Reciting/Singing
6.	Correcting students' recitation/reading
7.	Asking text book related information
8.	Giving a learning task that needed information gathering and analysis
9.	Conducting a discussion
10.	Assigning tasks for group/pair work
11.	Guiding the group work
12.	Making learning resources available to children
13.	Giving suggestions/feedback on problems
14.	Consolidating the concept
	Teachers classroom management and disciplining behavior
15.	Doing her own task
16.	Being friendly with the students
17.	Giving attention to **all** children
18.	Interpreting student response
19.	Ignoring some of the students
20.	Scolding/being rude/insulting
21.	Physically punishing the students
22.	Encouraging student interaction
23.	Motivating students
24.	Moving around and observing students
25.	Listening to students and their opinion
26.	Involving students in setting the rules for the classroom
27.	Creating an atmosphere that gives students confidence to speak their minds

	Student Behavior
1.	Listening to the teacher
2.	Repeating after the teacher
3.	Recollecting facts/information from the text book
4.	Copying in their note books.
5.	Creative writing – observation, imagination.
6.	Answering the teacher's questions
7.	Asking questions to the teacher
8.	Narrating their observations or experiences in the discussion
9.	Working in pairs
10.	Working in groups
11.	Solves problems
12.	Arriving at conclusions
	Child behavior - social and discipline related
13.	Most students were confused
14.	Groups had problem in working together
15.	Quarreling or fighting amongst themselves
16.	Listless and distracted
17.	Talking amongst themselves
18.	Doing some other work
19.	Were helping each other
20.	Discussing with group members
21.	Listening to each other's views
22.	Working together
23.	Giving feedback to each other

Appendix 2: Graphed results of teacher observations in MOE and CBE schools





Appendix 3: Graphed results of student observations in MOE and CBE schools