

Children's Literature Festival

Beyond Texts and Test for Promoting a Culture of Multiple Narratives and Critical Thinking

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Abstract

Unfortunately, the school experience for a majority of children in Pakistan and elsewhere globally is devoid of imaginative methods of learning, trapped in the culture of 'textbooks and tests', which inhibit the habit of reading beyond prescribed texts, engagement in creative arts that motivate students to think, read and write for self-expression. Children's Literature Festival (CLF) Pakistan is a response precisely to such routine practices and blocks across all school systems; it is a citizen-led social movement an equalizer that mobilizes large numbers of children, educators and parents from all types of schools to remedy this situation. This paper looks at the impact of the CLF on students and teachers who attended the CLF and establishes that it had a significant effect on students' interest in reading, creative writing and creative arts. Ideas learnt at the CLF were replicated by schools through pre-planned group activities which resulted in a marked increase in students' participation in creative learning modes.

Key Words: children's literature festival, social movement, impact, critical thinking, reading, creative writing, creative arts

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1. Introduction

The Global Monitoring Report (2013-14) identified poor quality of education as a major reason for 250 million children globally 'not learning basic skills even though half of them have spent at least four years in school. The emphasis on access first has led to frenzy for enrollment while ignoring the most important aspect of learning outcomes. A shift from a narrative focused on access to one which accounts for access plus quality learning is vital to improve education opportunities for the 250 million children who are unable to read, write, or do basic mathematics. The country wide learning assessment by the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan 2013 informs us that 50% children enrolled in class 5 cannot read class 2 level story in local language and 57% children in class 5 cannot read class 2 level sentences in English or do basic two digit division. These dismal statistics can be attributed to the fact that the education system in Pakistan is devoid of a culture of engaging with children's learning challenges and promoting reading for comprehension, self-worth and learning for well-being.

Reading for imagination and creativity inspire children to think critically by encouraging them to expand their understanding of the self and the world. These activities fuel intellectual and cognitive development as well as creativity through the use of imagery and fantasy. Moreover, they help children to engage with the written word, to learn how to use writing and speech as a medium of expression. Reading aloud to children at an early age, enabling them to read books, to express themselves through creative writing and art as multi-sensory activities is necessary to help develop their ability to think critically and through myriad ways to tap into their creative potential.

Activity-based and interactive learning also offers a stimulating learning experience by teaching children transferrable skills like being able to work in groups, problem solving ability, conflict resolution, and advocacy. It takes learning to a completely different level where knowledge acquisition becomes an active, two-way process demanding complete engagement on the part of teachers as well as students.

Unfortunately, the school experience for a majority of children in Pakistan and elsewhere globally has shrinking space for promoting interactive methods of learning. While elite and some non-elite private schools may put an effort into making learning a rich and multi-sensory experience, the situation gets bleak as we move along the spectrum towards low cost private schools and public schools. Here, the focus is to be found on rote-learning extensive textbook content, as dreary as it may be, without any emphasis on reading for wonder, reflection and expression through writing, conversations, drama, or art. Hence, the development of child's critical thinking skills is blocked and the school experience becomes an encounter to cram textbooks to pass exams and move to the next grade.

Children's Literature Festival¹ (CLF) Pakistan is a response precisely to such blocks and divisions across school systems; it is a citizen-led social movement, an equalizer that mobilizes large numbers of children, educators and parents from all school systems to remedy this situation. CLF is a home grown response, an indigenously crafted footprint, a festival of ideas and creativity- which aims to popularize reading, writing and creative arts among teachers and school-going children of age 4-17 through activity-based learning techniques. Fifteen concurrent strands have been crafted which include, but are not limited to, story-telling sessions, read aloud and sing aloud sessions, theatre, poetry reading sessions, reading for radio, puppet/mime shows for sharing stories and messages on active citizenship, interactive sessions, panel discussions, book fairs and book launches are conducted over a two-day period. The idea is to get students, teachers, parents and school leaders on board to implement ideas and activities which they like at CLF in their own schools and communities. In 28 months eleven CLFs have been held in Pakistan in six major cities all four provinces with over 150,000 children in attendance. CLF in Pakistan's fractured conflict ridden spaces is seen as a healing and learning experience encouraging active citizenship for respecting diversity, peace and equal participation for all as a large scale program.

This paper looks specifically at the impact generated by Children's Literature Festival in schools across three major cities of Pakistan where the CLFs were held recently: Islamabad, Lahore, and Swat. A sample size of 76 public and private schools in the three cities is taken and impact is assessed against three indicators: interest in reading, creative writing and arts (drawing and painting, singing, dramatics, history and heritage projects). Impact assessment is qualitative in nature and consists of in-depth, structured interviews with students, teachers and school administration as evidence about the programs conducted.

Through a detailed qualitative analysis, this paper establishes that participation in Children's Literature Festival (CLF) has had a significant effect on students' interest in reading, creative writing and creative arts. Ideas learnt at the CLF were replicated by schools through pre-planned group activities which resulted in a marked increase in students' participation in creative arts. Section 2 discusses the conceptual background of CLF; section 3 describes the research design and the survey methodology while section 4 is a detailed discussion and analysis of the findings of this paper. Section 5 presents case studies of schools where CLFs were organized as an exciting template for optimized impact; followed by the conclusion on the impact of CLF on schools is given in section 6.

¹ <http://childrensliteraturefestival.com/>

2. Background

2.1 Reading Habits

The habit of reading has been on a decline in Pakistan since a decade now. While in 60s or 70s the demand for books was at its peak, today it has hit the rock bottom. Absence of indigenous literature for children (Haider, 2002), lack of accessible libraries and absence of encouragement to read from parents or teachers is creating a generation of children which is solely dependent on textbooks.

A National Reading survey, which was conducted 10 years ago, identified inaccessibility of supplementary books as the root cause for parents' and children's lack of reading habit. The survey report read, "Since the majority of the population is living at subsistence level, books may not be among their priorities. However, the survey results reveal that the non-availability of the supplementary reading material at their door steps is the major cause" (National Book Foundation, 1994). This gives us an insight into what is going on: while the supply side problems have created inaccessibility, the lack of supply in itself is not the only problem here- the lack of demand is an equally big factor. The absence of enthusiasm on the part of parents and schools to go a step further and invest in books has played an equally damaging role in the decline of children's reading habits.

Libraries play a vital role in encouraging the culture of reading in any society. In Pakistan, public libraries are fast becoming extinct in the urban areas of Pakistan. Old public libraries are in a deplorable condition and lack professional staff, organization, and reading materials and new libraries are not being erected. In rural areas the concept of public libraries is unheard of. With respect to public Libraries, the Library and Documentation Services section in the National Education Policy of 1998 stated: 'If public libraries are well-equipped, properly organized and managed by professionals, there will be a great refinement and improvement in the social, cultural, political and religious behavior of the people... in the successive policies and plans, this important factor could not invite the attention of the policy-makers and planners. It is, therefore, imperative to strengthen the information resources and increase their number by setting up new public libraries through legislative and other means' (Ministry of Education, 1998). But one whole decade failed to manifest into a tangible improvement in the libraries across the country. Consequently, the 2009 National Education Policy again highlights the need to address this issue and states: 'An overall policy shall be developed to increase library usage and improve the quality of library services in the country' (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Furthermore, the National Policy of Education 1998 also identified school libraries to be of crucial importance in imparting quality education. Simultaneously, it also admitted the failure of public sector in installing functional libraries in schools: 'According to the survey conducted in 1990, there are only 481 school libraries out of 150,000 schools with the meager collection of 980,800 volumes. In most of these schools libraries are kept beyond the reach of students due to non-availability of professional staff, proper space and environment' (Ministry of Education, 1998). After more than a decade, the school library development is still in its embryonic stage because policies like these have invariably failed to translate into something tangible, leaving the issue of lack of libraries and dysfunctional libraries in public schools unaddressed. As a result, 2009 National Education Policy once again emphasizes the need to look into this matter and states: 'In order to promote a reading culture among youth, libraries equipped with modern facilities, including internet connectivity for online library services shall be established in elementary, secondary and higher secondary schools in a phased manner' (Ministry of Education, 2009). Few public and low-cost private schools have a functional library and those which do have a dearth of good reading collection (Haider, 2002). This situation is usually attributed to a lack of funds and space and more importantly commitment. Under various large scale projects, libraries were promoted with rich books in public sector such as the Punjab Middle Schooling Project (PMSP)²; Sindh Primary Education Development Project (SPEDP)³ and the Education Project for Punjab School Library (German Debt Swap-I)⁴. In the latter alone, 9759 libraries were provided to all government middle schools. The project not only provided some wonderful books (fiction /non-fiction) but also provided addition of rooms and furniture. In spite of these large scale initiatives, functional libraries have become a domain of a minority of private schools and some public sector flagship programs.

The concern about decline in reading habits, low learning /literacy outcomes and the need to promote and use children's literature is not unique to Pakistan, it is a global concern. The need to encourage children and engage them in activities which would make them pursue reading for pleasure is growing worldwide. Literature festivals for children are held globally to engage them in book reading, both as a celebration and serious encounter. In the United States, Keene State College Children's Literature Festival⁵ and University of Central Missouri Children's Literature Festival⁶ are

² http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2001/02/17/000094946_01020605302243/Rendered/PDF/multi_page.pdf

³ http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2001/02/17/000094946_01020605302243/Rendered/PDF/multi_page.pdf

⁴ <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Library/Documents/Pakistan.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.keene.edu/clf/>

two of the biggest literature festivals for children. In the UK, Children's Bath Literature Festival⁷ and Cardiff Children's Literature Festival⁸ are held regularly. The Federation of Children's Book Groups⁹ in the UK also conducts literature festivals for children. In India, Bookaroo Festival¹⁰ is the biggest Children's Literature Festival. At the heart of all these festivals is the common theme of promoting reading, writing, and an interest in the creative expression for children.

2.2 Education System: Teaching practices, textbooks, and examination system

Education system of any country is pivotal in determining the culture of reading, writing and thinking in its people. The current education system in Pakistan is completely devoid of activity-based or interactive learning. Rather than being an active process of knowledge acquisition, learning is a passive process which revolves around rote memorizing dull and uninteresting textbook content (Dean, 2005). Few schools offer interactive and interesting means of learning and these few schools are saturated at the far end of the socio-economic spectrum. This means that only a small percentage of children in Pakistan are learning in an environment conducive to learning while the majority is attending schools where rote learning is the norm. The three biggest factors responsible for such dismal conditions are poor teaching practices, sub-standard textbooks, and textbook based examination system.

Teaching practices in a majority of Pakistani schools are highly inadequate for developing critical thinking skills and eagerness for knowledge among students. Highlighting the poor teaching practices in Pakistani classrooms Dean (2005) writes, "Teaching and learning in Pakistani classrooms is formulaic and boring as teachers transmit textbook knowledge and ensure its rote memorization. Minimal teacher-student interaction occurs, and even less is permitted amongst students. No citizenship skills are developed. Values, like knowledge, are transmitted through lectures rather than encouraging students to choose and develop their own. Such classrooms are not conducive to citizenship education." Kizilbash (1986) also criticized the teaching practices emphatically and wrote, "The existing teaching practice is contributing to the socialization of obedient, passive citizens who lack critical thinking, questioning, decision-making and problem solving skills, who are closed minded followers rather than responsible and independent citizens."

Similarly, the textbooks have also been written in such a way that they have failed to develop critical thinking and intellectual skills among students. Even though the latest curriculum

⁶ <http://guides.library.ucmo.edu/clf>

⁷ <http://bathfestivals.org.uk/childrens-literature/>

⁸ <http://www.cardiff.gov.uk/content.asp?nav=2,2869,6584>

⁹ <http://www.fcbg.org.uk/festival-of-childrens-literature/>

¹⁰ <http://www.bookaroo.in/>

stresses the 'need for analytical thinking and creative writing among learners' (National curriculum 2007/10), textbooks have failed to reflect the curriculum (Khattak, 2012). It requires considerable experience and skill to translate the curriculum into a textbook that covers the objectives; simultaneously takes into consideration the children's language proficiency and background knowledge and concurrently arranges the content in a logical sequence in a stimulating manner (Sarwar & Ranjhas, 2011). Textbooks have fallen short of the curriculum mainly because the people chosen to write textbooks do not possess the insight or experience needed to translate the profound aspects of curriculum into textbooks. The all-important self-assessment questions or activities, especially questions focused on higher order skills, have been invariably missing in the textbooks (Sarwar & Ranjhas, 2011).

The textbook-based assessment system is another bane of the education system. Assessments do not judge real competence or genuine educational accomplishment of the students. Instead, the Pakistani educational system encourages those who can best reproduce what they have learnt during lessons and fails those who are unable to do that. It seems as if the whole system of education revolves around examinations. Such types of assessment and evaluation are narrow in scope (Khan, 2006) and perpetuate the rote-learning system by giving little or no consideration to the child's understanding of the content and only demanding its reproduction.

Pupils who move from one grade to the next by reproducing rote-learnt content are likely to stop questioning and thinking on their own by the time they enter adulthood. In this scenario, it is unlikely that they would ever develop any long lasting transferrable skills like critical thinking, problem solving, conflict resolution, and advocacy which are pertinent to the needs of participatory citizenship locally as well as globally (UNESCO, 2013). To remedy this situation, EFA-GMR 2013 suggests incorporating an interdisciplinary approach involving hands-on, locally relevant educational activities alongside the regular classroom learning which can develop these transferrable skills (UNESCO, 2013).

3. Research Design and Methodology

This is a qualitative impact assessment and uses a mixed method study design to investigate the impact of Children's Literature Festival in schools. Impact is assessed against the following three variables: reading, writing, and creative arts. The two methods used in data collection are: questionnaire and case study.

Schools self selected themselves into the impact study. During the festival, all schools were given pledge forms. The research team visited those schools which filled the pledge forms indicating

their consent to let the research team visit their schools within a period of 3 months. The schools were also asked to mention those activities (if any) in the pledge forms which they found interesting/innovative and would like to replicate in their schools. Self-selection bias was limited and the sampled schools ranged from low-cost private schools to public schools and elite private schools.

A total of 76 schools took part in this impact study. Of these 76 schools, 10 were from Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), 61 from Urban Lahore, and 5 from Swat. Schools in ICT were surveyed based on their attendance of the CLF in May 2013 and schools in Urban Lahore were surveyed based on their attendance in October 2013 CLF. The surveys were conducted over a period of three months.

It is interesting to note here that 1 school in Urban Lahore and 5 schools in Swat were studied by going a step ahead. These are the schools which replicated not some segments of the CLF only but rather the entire event by organizing school based CLFs. Although this was something not envisaged at the outset of this study but it provided an invaluable insight into the impact that is being generated at the grass-roots level. Hence, these schools extended the scope and were studied more deeply using the case study method.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts: school administration questionnaire, teacher questionnaire, and student questionnaire. Questionnaires were filled by conducting structured interviews with the participants of the study. Since a baseline survey was not available, the impact was measured through data triangulation in which the participants were asked to evaluate the conditions before and after participation in the Children's Literature Festival (CLF). Details of the three questionnaires are as follows:

- 1) School questionnaire: This included basic information such as school type and enrolment levels and specific details like number of teachers and students who attended the CLF. Perhaps the most important piece of information obtained through this questionnaire included the management's observation on the difference in students and teachers after attending the CLF pertaining to reading, creative writing and creative arts.
- 2) Teacher's questionnaire: In each school, the group of teachers who attended the CLF was interviewed together. This questionnaire captured information on the teacher's qualifications, experience etc. as well as the grades and subject they currently teach. The most critical aspect of information derived from this questionnaire was the teachers' feedback on the impact CLF might have had on them.
- 3) Student's questionnaire: Students were asked about the grade they are enrolled in, the presence of a Library in their school, any supplementary material taught to them at school and the

activities they attended at the CLF. They were also inquired about the impact of the festival on their reading habits.

These three questionnaires were administered in order to ensure internal validity and to eliminate response bias on the part of school management or teachers. The questionnaires are attached in the annexure. The variables used in this analysis are described in Table 1¹¹. These include a wide range of student, school and teacher variables.

Most of the literature on the impact of Literature Festivals organized all over the world looks at the economic impact of those festivals (Edinburgh Festivals¹², Baltimore Book Festival¹³ and others). Although other literature festivals like the Karachi Literature Festival¹⁴ and the Lahore Literary Festival¹⁵ also take place in Pakistan, no systematic way has been designed as yet to measure their impact on schools. This study is unique in its own right as it assesses the impact of CLF on the schools.

3.1 Challenges faced during Data Collection:

The biggest challenge faced during data collection was a response bias on the part of the school administration. School principals or administrators sometimes tried to mold their answers to portray an image favorable for their school or what they thought was expected of them. Fortunately, this bias had already been controlled for in the research design by administering the survey in three parts- school administration, teachers and students.

Another challenge faced during the earlier stages of data collection was the presence of teachers nearby while students were being interviewed. This resulted in students trying to give answers that would please their teachers. However, this problem was also dealt with such that while one surveyor talked to the students, the other engaged the teacher during that time to prevent the latter from influencing the answers of the former.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Descriptive Statistics¹⁶

6 out of the 76 schools included in this study organized school based CLFs. As they went a step beyond, therefore they will be looked at separately and in depth in section 5. Of the remaining

¹¹ Attached in the annexure

¹² <http://www.eventscotland.org/funding-and-resources/downloads/get/56>

¹³ http://www.baltimorebookfestival.com/baltimorebookfestival/uploads/File/2012Report_ForwardAnalytics.pdf

¹⁴ <http://www.karachiliteraturefestival.org/>

¹⁵ <http://www.lahorelitfest.com/>

¹⁶ Illustrations are Annexed at the end.

70 schools, 17 % were Girls' Schools, 10% Boys' Schools and the remaining 73% were Co-ed Schools (see Figure 1). Also, Figure 2 indicates that 47% of the schools were private, 31% were low-cost private, and 21% were public schools.

Table 2 shows that when questioned about the presence of a library in the school, 87% of the schools' management confirmed that their school has a library while only 74% of the students affirmed it. One explanation for this difference in numbers is the management's response bias. Moreover, not all schools permitted access to the students for information required for the study. Thus, this missing information must also be considered here. 85% of the teachers and 75% of the students declared that supplementary material is taught in their school. 81% of the students said that their teachers refer them to library for reference material.

When asked about the impact of CLF on the school, 58% of the schools' management asserted that new activities directly inspired from it were started in their school. 58% agreed that they observed a difference in pedagogy of teachers who attended the CLF. When inquired about any difference in the students' reading habit and creative writing, 79% of the schools' management indicated that they observed an improvement in them. Furthermore, 82% stated that after attending the CLF, their students' potential, ideas and creativity increased in arts, including in the performing arts.

Furthermore, as shown in the Figure 3, 57%, 36% and 7% of the teachers surveyed had completed Masters, Bachelors and Twelfth Grade respectively. 38% of the teachers and 51% of the students had already attended activities similar to the ones they attended at the CLF. This was a check to validate the impact of the CLF.

73% of the teachers declared that the activities they attended at the festival were new for them and 82% said that they got ideas to implement in their school. 58% of the teachers had already replicated some of these ideas and activities at the time of the research while the remaining stated that they planned to execute these ideas later in the year. Moreover, 57% affirmed that there were visible pedagogical changes in them post CLF. A significant percentage of teachers interviewed (94%) said that CLF successfully promoted reading and literature. 69% of the teachers took steps to promote reading, 51% to promote creative writing and 69% to promote creative arts in their school after attending the festival.

Finally, more than half of the students surveyed agreed that their teachers' teaching methodology changed after the CLF. Most of them said that they have more freedom of expression in class and that learning is also more activity based now. In addition to this, when asked to do a self assessment, 94% of them said that their interest in reading increased after attending the CLF while 89% indicated an improvement in their creativity.

These findings support the hypothesis that exposure to multi sensory experiences can help alter the mundane system of textbook learning. Table 3 shows the 14 concurrent strands of the CLF Pakistan under which various activities related to reading, writing and creative arts take place.

4.2 Comparative Analysis Based on School Categories

Further probing into the data, a comparative analysis based on three different school categories was done to identify if any specific category reflects greater impact than the others. Results in Table 4 show that the management of 48% of the private, 69% of the low cost private and 64% of the public schools affirmed that new activities started in their school post CLF. Similarly, 48% of private schools' management as opposed to 74% of low-cost private's and 55% of the public schools' management stated that after the CLF they observed a change in the teaching technique and style of the teachers who attended the festival.

When asked about the impact on students, the results differed for these three categories again. 81% of private, 71% of low-cost private and 90% of public schools observed that their students developed more interest in reading after the CLF. Moreover, 78%, 73% and 90% of private, low-cost private and public schools respectively, stated that children were inspired to write more creatively after attending the CLF. Not only were the workshops on creative writing at the CLF helpful to them but they were also inspired to explore other areas of writing like poetry which was relatively new for most of them. When asked about improvement in creative arts which included not only drawing and painting but also performing arts like skits, the results were very promising. 80%, 82% and 89% of private, low-cost private and public schools respectively, said that their students' creativity had improved.

A similar analysis was done for information imparted by the teachers in all three categories of the schools. As Table 4 indicates, 94% of private schools, 69% of low cost private and 88% of the public school teachers stated that they refer their students to supplementary material other than the regular text book material. Also, 55%, 11% and 41% of teachers in private, low cost private and public schools respectively claimed that they have attended similar activities before the CLF. 77% of the private school teachers claimed that they got new ideas to implement in their school but only 56% had applied those ideas till the time of the research. Similarly, while 90% of the teachers in low cost private schools confirmed getting new ideas, only 52% implemented them. As for the public school teachers, 82% got new ideas and 71% had already incorporated them into their teaching. When asked to analyze the difference in their teaching style after the CLF, 58% private, 64% low cost private and 67% public school teachers indicated that their teaching style altered due to the festival. However, when students were asked if they noticed a pedagogical change in their teachers, 54% private, 57% low cost private and 65% of public school students stated that they did observe a

difference in them post CLF. Generally, a vast majority of teachers in all school systems agreed that CLF successfully promoted reading.

Overall, in private schools, 63%, 44% and 63% of the teachers took additional steps to promote reading, writing and creative arts respectively. On the other hand, 75% of the low cost private school teachers promoted reading, 50% promoted creative writing and 81% promoted creative arts in their school after the CLF. As for teachers in public schools, 71% promoted reading, 63% creative writing and 65% promoted creative arts in their school after the CLF.

As evident from Table 4, the opinion of students in all three school systems was similar with a majority in each school agreeing that their interest in reading and their creativity increased due to the CLF. This demonstrates that almost all students enjoyed the exposure given to them at the CLF and activity based learning not only grasps their attention but also helps improve their knowledge and creativity tapping into their hidden potential.

It is evident from the findings that all three types of school had some form of impact but it is significantly greater in the low cost private and public schools. This is probably because the private schools already engage their students in multi-sensory learning which is absent in public and low-cost private schools. Hence, CLF was a huge learning platform for them. For example, in several low cost private and public schools, usage of multimedia began and they also allowed their students more freedom of expression in their discussions. Additionally, some schools also doubled their library lessons and encouraged students to read by keeping a track of the number of books they read in a month and rewarding the student with the highest number of books read.

Comparing low cost private and public schools, impact in low cost private schools is slightly more given they have more resources for implementation as compared to the public schools. Nevertheless, the difference between these two is negligible and further investigation is required for a more in-depth comparison between the two types of schools. Hence, this study sets the ground for future research in this area.

4.3 Comparative Analysis based on Teacher Qualification

This analysis was conducted to identify whether a teacher's qualification affects his or her willingness to implement ideas learnt from activities like those at the CLF and to discover any possible trends. A total of 87 teachers from the 70 school surveyed participated in this study. From the data obtained, teachers were categorized into three groups according to the number of years of education they had completed. The categories were: Masters (for those who had completed Masters), Bachelors (for those who had completed Bachelors) and Twelfth (for those who had completed 12 years of Education).

As shown in Table 5 those teachers who have completed Masters and Bachelors are more likely to refer their students to supplementary material i.e. 85% and 86% respectively. On the other hand, only 50% of the teachers with education up to twelve years refer their students to supplementary material. Moreover, 51% of the teachers with Masters and 20% with Bachelors had attended activities similar to CLF while none of the teachers in the third category had attended any such activities and it was a unique experience for them.

Furthermore, when asked to do a self analysis, 89% of the teachers who had completed Masters Degree notified that they got new ideas from the CLF while 66% had also implemented those ideas at school. Also, 91% of the teachers with a Bachelors degree got new ideas from the CLF and 55% of them applied those ideas in their school. On the contrary, all teachers with twelve years of education said that they got new ideas from the CLF but only 25% actually executed them. 66%, 59% and 33% of the teachers with a Masters, Bachelors and twelve years of education respectively, declared that CLF altered the way they teach as they began using new techniques in class. On the other hand, irrespective of qualification, a significant majority of the teachers believed that CLF was successful in motivating children to read books.

Teachers were inquired if they took any steps to promote reading, creative writing and creative arts in their school. The results show that of those who had done Masters 66% promoted reading, 39% promoted creative writing and 72% promoted creative arts. Similarly, of the teachers who had done Bachelors 79% said they promoted reading, 50% promoted creative writing and 71% promoted creative arts in the school. Lastly, when probed, 50% of the teachers with twelve years of education said that they promoted reading while all of them stated that they took steps to promote creative writing and creative arts.

Looking at the findings of this analysis, it is apparent that irrespective of their qualification, teachers in all three categories declared that they *did* learn something from the CLF. However, an important observation is that teachers with a higher qualification are likely to take more ideas from activities like the CLF and show more willingness to incorporate these ideas into their teaching for the students' benefit. The difference in teaching methodology due to a difference in the teachers' qualification is something that has been observed by researchers in the past too. For example, Ackerman (2005), Saracho & Spodek (2007) and Whitebook (2003) state in their studies that the early-childhood educators with a bachelor's degree are found to be more responsive to children and to provide more activities that promote language development and emergent literacy than teachers without a bachelor's degree. However, others like Pianta & Hamre (2009) say "*it is the presence of that degree in combination with specialized training relating to classroom practice that results in quantifiable teacher-quality improvements*". Similar results were obtained in this study as it shows

that the impact of CLF was greater on teachers with a Bachelors degree than those with a Masters degree as the former initiated more activities inspired from the CLF at their school. Hence, given the mixed literature on this and the findings of this study, it would be safe to state that teacher's qualification is *one* of the variables that ensures better quality education for the children and therefore, does impact their learning too.

5. School Based CLFs- Going beyond the Pledges

5.1 A case of School Based Festivals in Swat

The first two school-based CLFs were organized in Kanju and Kabal in district Swat in Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa (KP) province in consultation with all government /security authorities to ensure safety of children. Given the deteriorating security conditions in the region, CLF continued to reinforce itself as learning and healing festival. Two Government Boys' schools hosted the CLF on 19th and 21st December 2013 inviting area public and private schools. 11 schools participated in the two CLFs from the neighborhood including two co-education schools. It was a surprise for the teachers /hosts to see girls actively participating at the CLFs, reminding of Malala's courageous imprint in Swat; her sisters are indeed as bold; and they were welcomed by the host schools¹⁷.

When inquired, the management of all the schools asserted that new activities were inspired from the CLF that they had attended in Peshawar (2012) and Lahore (2013). They had practiced those within the school timetable and noticed a pedagogical change in their teachers. More importantly, they all agreed that after participating in the event their students' reading, creative writing and creative arts improved. One of the school administrators observed: *"It was something very new for us and for the children."* Likewise, a student's father commented that when he was invited, he thought it would be like the other regular events that are organized in the school. However, when he attended the festival, he found the activities really interesting and ... that these were beyond his imagination. The findings and comments reflect that CLF was a truly unique experience for the entire community. Fortunately for these schools the funds were available from a unique program/project that is supporting school improvement for youth in areas affected by militancy. The CLFs cost approximately US \$ 500 each provided by the Social Welfare Academic and Training (SWAaT). SWAaT has also supported libraries, librarians, furniture and training in 9 high schools (5 boys and 4 girls) since 2012.

¹⁷ <http://childrensliteraturefestival.com/clf-swat-2013/>

The teachers also found the activities at the CLF unique, innovative, and inspiring. However, only 67% of them were able to replicate those activities till the time of the study. They believe that it was successful at promoting the habit of reading in students. They also notified that they took measures on their own to promote reading, creative writing and arts in their own schools. Some of these steps included story telling with expression, role playing for better understanding of a story, introducing arts competition in the school and giving students the freedom to express themselves.

When inquired, the students of all schools confirmed that CLF activities were replicated in their schools. They also observed difference in their teachers and informed that they are now reading with expressions, holding debating, painting competitions and other related activities inspired from the CLF. One of the students who participated in the CLF said: *"I really liked CLF and was able to attend several sessions. I learnt how to read with expression and the proper pronunciation of words."*

5.2 A Case of Sanjan Nagar School, Hima Campus – Lahore

'I like poems and stories. I enjoyed CLF very much.' - Kainat Khalid

'I liked CLF because we did many creative things there. We attended sessions on art and listened to stories.' - Shumail

'We were very happy that Children's Literature Festival was held in our school... I liked the traditional dances and puppets show the most.' - Mariyam Shehzadi

These are a few students' reflections on the school-based Children's Literature Festival that was held recently at the Sanjan Nagar School, in district Lahore. Sanjan Nagar is a public education trust which can be classified as a low-cost private school with high aspirations. It is the only school having an International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (IB-PYP) program for the poorest of students supported by the Sanjan Nagar Public Education Trust (SNPET). It is located in Youhannabad, a large Christian neighborhoods in Lahore. Being a minority neighborhood, the area is vulnerable and the schools here rarely get to benefit from the large-scale programs aimed at mainstreaming the schools through partnerships with the public sector.

Sanjan Nagar attended three Children's Literature Festivals held in Lahore and Islamabad in 2011 and 2013. The teachers and students actively participated in almost all the activities in these festivals including the expression and debating competition inspired by the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Bol k Lab Aazad Hain Teray* (Speak because you are lips are free) and sent numerous entries for the art competition as well. For them, the CLF is truly an equalizer and a 'learning, healing and feeling' festival. They felt happy and included.

While other schools in Lahore have replicated some aspects of the festival in their pedagogy and activity calendar, Sanjan Nagar has gone a step further. Such was the impact on the teachers and students that they took the initiative of replicating the entire festival in their school. They liked the ideas of skits and theatres, puppet show, read aloud and sing aloud sessions, creative writing workshops, mural art and art competition. What they liked the most was the indigenous aspect- story telling and poetry sessions in local languages.

The CLF was held at Sanjan Nagar School – Hima Campus on 31st January 2014 where five schools attended the program with 1300 children. The whole day at the Sanjan Nagar CLF was packed with interactive activities¹⁸ and a new critical thinking strand on “Implications of Heer Waris Shah for the 21st century schools” a sufi poet of the 18th century shifting the focus of a traditional interpretation of Heer as a love story to being a story about social change and challenge to existing social rituals and practices. This strand has since sparked a commitment by those present (students, teachers and parents) to hold six more sessions to pursue these ideas after gaining more knowledge and insights. Other sessions included story-telling sessions in Urdu, English and Punjabi, poetry interpretations, skits by Sanjan Nagar students, creative writing workshops, digital writing, mural making, and inter active sessions by celebrity authors, artists, actors, and young professionals many of whom are CLF ambassadors promoting the mission with vigor and commitment. Sanjan Nagar CLF also attracted a rich book fair with four publishing houses selling books and promoting membership of the National Book Foundation (NBF). NBF is a public sector initiative to promote reading and publications for young and old alike in the country.

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings of this first and nascent impact study that Children’s Literature Festival had a significant impact across all school systems, irrespective of whether they are public or private. Not only students, the teachers who attended the CLF were also inspired by the multi sensory experiences they were exposed to and most of them incorporated those activities in lesson planning to make learning more interesting for their students. Yet the findings also reflected that public and low-cost private schools experienced a greater impact than the elite private schools because for the former it was a unique experience. Moreover, when associated with teacher qualification, the findings depict that teachers with a Bachelors Degree are more likely to incorporate ideas learnt from CLF in their classrooms.

¹⁸ http://itacec.org/document/clf/Programe_2014_lhr_SanjanNagar.pdf

To some extent, it can be surmised that the Children's Literature Festival stands as a counterpoint to the current education system in Pakistan which, at best, offers a dull learning experience characterized by excessive rote learning of text books and frequent examinations. CLF is a social movement to address the lack of rigor and diversity in the education system and the missing element that is needed to make learning interesting, to make the children *want* to attend school and learn new things. CLF is multiplying around the country with a promise to offer a varied, inclusive, festive celebration of learning; an experience that truly heals wounds of stark and emaciated encounters in school and society and bridges class gaps where ALL children (4-18) share the same learning encounter without discrimination. CLF is bringing together all the schools across the socio-economic continuum- from the elite private schools to low-cost private and public sector schools, challenged/special schools and madrassahs - giving the message that experiential learning should not be a prerogative of the few. It is fast becoming a public space which is inviting children, teachers and parents to read, write and take part in activities which build confidence and let children explore and create their own strengths and social spaces – where learning outcomes follow reading with understanding.

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Annexure

Table 1: Description of Variables

Variable	Description of Variable
Year Established	School's year of establishment
School Type	School is All Girls', All Boys', Co-Education
School Category	School is Private, Low Cost Private, Public
Grades Taught	Classes taught in the School
Total Enrollment	Total number of students enrolled in the School
Library School	Presence of a Library in the school according to the School's management
Library School Time	Time reserved for the Library per week according to the School's management
Date School	Date of attending the CLF according to the School's management
Time Attended	Attended in Morning or Evening
Male Employed	Number of Male Teachers employed in School
Female Employed	Number of Female Teachers employed in School
Male Attended	Number of Male teachers who attended the CLF
Female Attended	Number of Female teachers who attended the CLF
Students	Number of Students who attended the CLF
New Activities	Binary variable indicating New Activities were started in school after attending the CLF
What New Activities	What New Activities were started in school after attending the CLF
Change in Teaching	Binary Variable indicating Change in Teaching observed in the teachers who attended the CLF
What Change	What was the Change in Teaching observed in the teachers who attended the CLF
Child's Reading Habit	Binary variable indicating improvement in Child's Reading Habit after attending the CLF according to the school's management
Child's Creative Writing	Binary variable indicating improvement in Child's Creative Writing after attending the CLF according to the school's management
Child's Creativity	Binary variable indicating increase in Child's creativity in Arts and performing arts after attending the CLF according to the school's

	management
Teacher Masters	Teacher has completed Masters
Teacher Bachelors	Teacher has completed Bachelors
Teacher Twelfth	Teacher has completed twelfth grade
Date Teacher	Date on which the teacher attended the CLF
Supplementary Teacher	Binary variable indicating teacher refers students to supplementary material other than the textbooks
Other Teacher	Binary Variables indicating other activities similar to CLF attended by the teacher
Teacher Activities	Activities attended by the Teacher at the CLF
New Activities Teacher	Binary Variable indicating the activities at CLF were new for the teacher
What New Activities Teacher	Activities at the CLF that were new for the teacher
Teacher Ideas	Binary Variable indicating the teacher got new ideas from the CLF to implement at school
What Teacher ideas	The new ideas the Teacher got from the CLF to implement at school
Teacher Replicate	Binary Variable indicating the teacher replicated the CLF activities at school
What Teacher Replicate	The CLF activities replicated by the Teacher
Teacher Change	Binary variable indicating teacher believes there is a change in their teaching method
What Teacher Change	The change in their teaching according to the teachers
Promote Reading	Binary Variable indicating the teacher thinks CLF Promoted reading successfully
Teacher Promote Reading	Binary variable indicating teacher promoted reading in school after CLF
Teacher Promote Creative Writing	Binary variable indicating teacher promoted Creative Writing in school after CLF
Teacher Promote Creative Arts	Binary variable indicating teacher promoted Creative Arts and Performing Arts in school after CLF
Library Student	Binary variable indicating the students say schools has a Library
Library Time Student	Time per week reserved for library in schools according to the student

Supplementary Student	Binary Variable indicating student confirms supplementary material is taught at school
Supplementary Library	Binary Variable indicating students confirm books are referred from the Library
Student Attended	The date student attended the CLF
Student Other	Binary Variable indicating student has previously attended other activities related to CLF
Student Activities	The CLF Activities student Attended
Student Implemented	Binary variable indicating student says CLF activities implemented at school
Student How Implemented	How were the CLF activities implemented at school according to the student
Student Change	Binary Variable indicating student says their teachers' teaching method changed after CLF
What Student Change	What change in teaching occurred after CLF according to the student
Student Reading	Binary Variable indicating students' interest in reading increased after CLF
Student Creativity	Binary Variable indicating students' creativity increased after CLF

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Total Number of Observations	Percentage Yes (%)	Percentage No (%)
Library School	70	87	13
New Activities	52	58	42
Change in Teaching	57	58	42
Child's Reading Habit	53	79	21
Child's Creative Writing	48	79	21
Child's Creativity	51	82	18
Supplementary Teacher	79	85	15
Other Teacher	82	38	62
New Activities Teacher	85	73	27
Teacher Ideas	85	82	18
Teacher Replicate	85	58	42
Teacher Change	84	57	43
Promote Reading	81	94	6
Teacher Promote Reading	77	69	31
Teacher Promote Creative Writing	63	51	49
Teacher Promote Creative Arts	68	69	31
Library Student	65	74	26
Supplementary Student	53	75	25
Supplementary Library	53	81	19
Student Other	53	51	49
Student Implemented	53	45	55
Student Change	53	51	49
Student Reading	53	94	6
Student Creativity	53	89	11

Table 3: Fourteen Concurrent Strands of CLF

14 Concurrent Strands of CLF
Read & Sing Aloud Stories and Songs
Theatre and Skits
Workshops on How to Illustrate a Book, Creative Writing & Expression
Digital Stories – ICTs; Workshops on Comics Production
Plenary Sessions on: Mother Tongue, Critical Thinking, Textbooks & Curriculum, Inclusion
Reclaiming Heritage & Diversity – Museums & Workshops
Active Citizenship – Charter of Compassion
Children’s Films
Puppet shows and cartoons
Multi-experience stalls
Bol Key Lab Azaad Hain Teray – speak for your lips are free
Open Expression for Children in Prose & Poetry –any language
Mural & Art Sessions
Book Launches
Book Fair & Learning Stalls of NGOs/Local Partners

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for School Based Comparison

Private School		
Variable	Percentage Yes (%)	Percentage No (%)
New Activities	48	52
Change in Teaching	48	52
Child's Reading Habit	81	19
Child's Creative Writing	78	22
Child's Creativity	80	20
Supplementary Teacher	94	6
Other Teacher	55	45
New Activities Teacher	67	33
Teacher Ideas	77	23
Teacher Replicate	56	44
Teacher Change	54	46
Promote Reading	92	8
Teacher Promote Reading	63	37
Teacher Promote Creative Writing	44	56
Teacher Promote Creative Arts	63	37
Student Other	56	44
Student Implemented	48	52
Student Change	44	56
Student Reading	96	4
Student Creativity	84	16
Low Cost Private School		
New Activities	69	31
Change in Teaching	74	26
Child's Reading Habit	71	29
Child's Creative Writing	73	27

Child's Creativity	82	18
Supplementary Teacher	69	31
Other Teacher	11	89
New Activities Teacher	72	28
Teacher Ideas	90	10
Teacher Replicate	52	48
Teacher Change	57	43
Promote Reading	93	7
Teacher Promote Reading	75	25
Teacher Promote Creative Writing	50	50
Teacher Promote Creative Arts	81	19
Student Other	53	47
Student Implemented	53	47
Student Change	60	40
Student Reading	93	7
Student Creativity	93	7
Public School		
New Activities	64	36
Change in Teaching	55	45
Child's Reading Habit	90	10
Child's Creative Writing	90	10
Child's Creativity	89	11
Supplementary Teacher	88	12
Other Teacher	41	59
New Activities Teacher	88	12
Teacher Ideas	82	18
Teacher Replicate	71	29
Teacher Change	65	35
Promote Reading	100	0
Teacher Promote Reading	71	29
Teacher Promote Creative Writing	63	37
Teacher Promote Creative Arts	65	35
Student Other	38	62

Student Implemented	31	69
Student Change	54	46
Student Reading	92	8
Student Creativity	92	8

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Qualification Based Comparison

Masters Completed		
Variable	Percentage Yes (%)	Percentage No (%)
Supplementary Teacher	85	15
Other Teacher	51	49
New Activities Teacher	71	29
Teacher Ideas	89	11
Teacher Replicate	66	34
Teacher Change	66	34
Promote Reading	94	6
Teacher Promote Reading	66	34
Teacher Promote Creative Writing	39	61
Teacher Promote Creative Arts	72	28
Bachelors Completed		
Supplementary Teacher	86	14
Other Teacher	20	80
New Activities Teacher	73	27
Teacher Ideas	91	9
Teacher Replicate	55	45
Teacher Change	59	41
Promote Reading	100	0
Teacher Promote Reading	79	21
Teacher Promote Creative Writing	50	50
Teacher Promote Creative Arts	79	21
Twelve Years of Education Completed		
Supplementary Teacher	50	50
Other Teacher	0	100
New Activities Teacher	100	0
Teacher Ideas	100	0
Teacher Replicate	25	75
Teacher Change	33	67

Promote Reading	100	0
Teacher Promote Reading	50	50
Teacher Promote Creative Writing	100	0
Teacher Promote Creative Arts	100	0

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of CLF Swat

Variable	Number of Observations	Percentage Yes (%)	Percentage No (%)
Library School	5	100	0
New Activities	5	100	0
Change in Teaching	5	100	0
Child's Reading Habit	5	100	0
Child's Creative Writing	5	100	0
Child's Creativity	5	100	0
Supplementary Teacher	3	100	0
Other Teacher	3	100	0
New Activities Teacher	3	100	0
Teacher Ideas	3	100	0
Teacher Replicate	3	67	33
Teacher Change	3	100	0
Promote Reading	3	100	0
Teacher Promote Reading	3	100	0
Teacher Promote Creative Writing	3	100	0
Teacher Promote Creative Arts	3	100	0
Library Student	4	100	0
Supplementary Student	4	100	0
Supplementary Library	4	100	0
Student Other	4	25	75
Student Implemented	4	100	0
Student Change	3	100	0
Student Reading	4	100	0
Student Creativity	4	100	0

Annexure 2

Figures of Descriptive Statistics

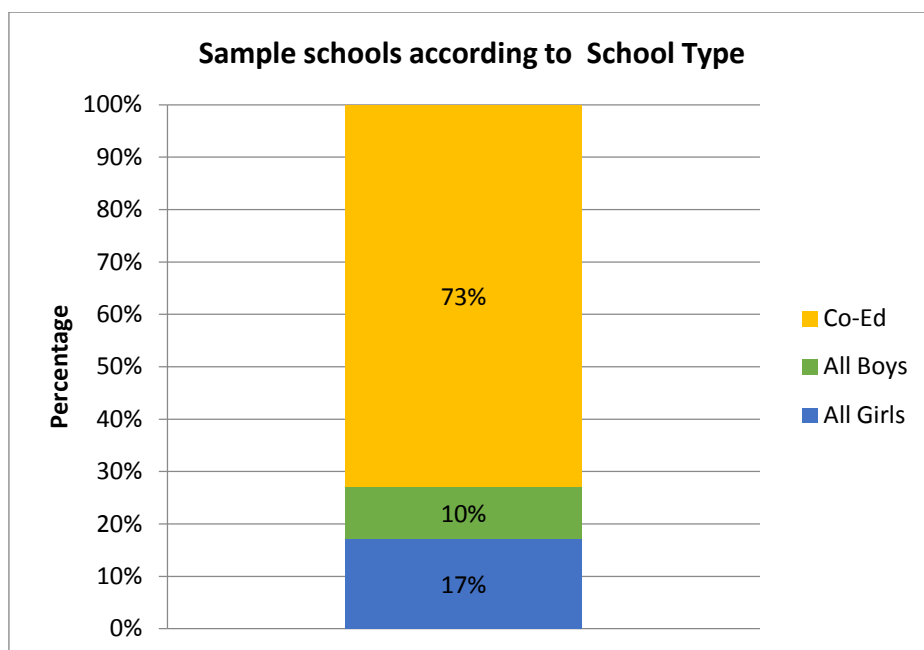


Figure 1

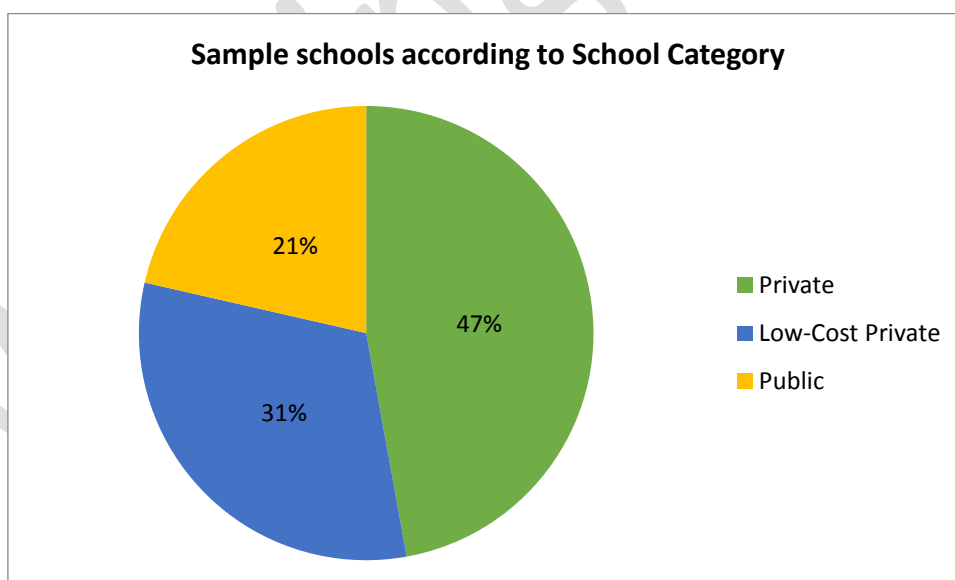


Figure 2

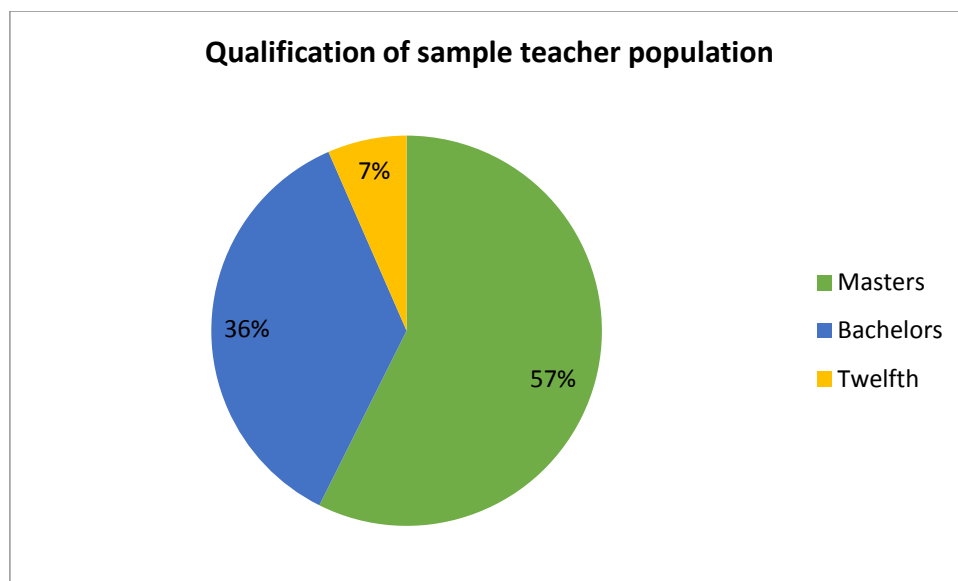


Figure 3