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SUSTAINABLE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT: EXPLORING THE EFFECT OF FOLLOW UP SUPPORT AS AN ELEMENT

ABSTRACT

A professional development program with built-in follow up support mechanism was offered during years 2004-06 in selected districts of Pakistan. The training reportedly had sustained impact on teachers' attitude toward teaching.

This paper investigates the role of follow up support as an element of sustainable teacher development, and the part of teachers' learning they could have implemented over the period after the end of project. Data was collected through classroom observations, interviews with these teachers and the head teachers of these schools, and analysis of lesson plans and reflective journals maintained by the teachers.

Findings affirm that the follow up support enabled the teachers for sustainable implementation of their learning. Follow-up support became more effective with other elements like collegial support, head teacher's encouragement and favourable school culture. It helped teachers to sustain their changed role after professional development.

Key words: Sustainable teacher development, Follow up support, On-job Workplace, In-service teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

A variety of teacher's professional development programs took place in previous years but review revealed that there has

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been no or a short-lived impact on teachers' teaching practices. To compensate this deficiency a professional development program conducted more recently has attempted to address the issue. This has been done through built in follow-up support strategy as an integral part of the training. This program strategy had a more lasting effect and brought a positive change in the teachers' style particularly, in their classroom teaching practices.

The purpose of this study was to find out the extent to which this follow-up support actually helped the teachers to retain the changed style in the classroom for a sustainable duration.

The case study was conducted on twenty primary school teachers who acquired training in the year 2004 and reportedly sustained their changed practices after completion of professional development program.

The main purpose of program was to help teachers become effective classroom practitioners in the content areas as well as in pedagogy. The program provided opportunities to the participants for enhancing their content knowledge, and improving their teaching skills and reflective practices, so as to become effective and reflective teachers.

The data was gathered through classroom observations, interviews and collection of some relevant documents.

Generally many professional development programs failed to contribute to school improvement due to lack of follow up support. Literature on staff development shows after attending professional development programs teachers need constant monitoring and follow up support to implement their learning from the training program.

Teachers are given training after training which costs a lot of money, time and energy but it does not reach the children improving their learning outcomes. Thus their learning does not bring about much change in their classroom practices and hence does not improve students' learning outcomes. This could be due to lack of follow up support.

As literature of professional development reveals that follow up support is equally essential as is professional development itself.

Teachers need opportunities in assessing their learning and making decisions to do things which they want to do. Teachers need internal support from their peers and head teachers, and also external support from the experts, workshops, seminars etc, to translate their learning into school improvement.

There are certain structures of follow up support in Pakistan such as supervision and inspection etc. Those structures are not effective in helping the teachers in their classroom practices. There is also no research available on follow up support, if any provided to the teachers after training in rural Sindh.

Therefore, it is necessary to identify what sort of follow up support would help the teachers in sustaining their practices, resulting in their school's improvement. Secondly, the findings are helpful for different organizations and authorities in designing future teacher training programs, and also in developing follow up support mechanisms in their schools. This paper will help teacher trainers in focusing on the kind of follow up support particularly needed for the teachers to sustain their changed practices.

BACKGROUND

Teacher development is a complex process. It has been found that teachers expect support in terms of empowerment, opportunities, appreciation, resources and follow-up support to help them change their practices. Many studies have emphasized on importance of follow up support and the role of school head in helping teachers to sustain their newly learnt practice and innovations (Edgerson & Kritson, 2006; Khoso 2007; Walsh, 2005; and Gimbel; 2003).

Successful teacher development depends upon a favorable context for learning and practical engagement in activities, and availability of differences in desire of teachers to refine their practices (Fullan & Horsley, 1987 cited in Nicholls, 1997; p.42).

Therefore teachers expect support regarding resources time, and need constructive feedback on their daily practices.

Professional development needs constant monitoring and follow up support. Teachers need continuous guidance and direction in order to make adaptation while maintaining program fidelity. They need to know that assistance is readily available if problems and expected difficulties develop and that occasional failures are tolerable (Cogan, 1975 cited in Guskey, 1995; p.59).

Literature suggests that teacher development requires consistency between teachers' needs and their education at a university as well as follow up support at the school where they teach. Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) also draw attention towards the importance of support to the teachers in their school context, and say that teachers need collaboration and collegiality among themselves to implement or develop instructional strategies. "Teachers need support in the real classroom situation while they are learning, especially, at the beginning of their journey to implement change" (Mohammad, 2002; p.293).

Learning to be proficient at something new and finding meaning in a new way of doing things both require and effort. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes change when they see change in their students' learning outcomes (Guskey, 2002). So teachers need time to implement their new learning, and it needs support and patience. "If the use of the new practices is to be sustained and changes are to endure, the individuals involved need to receive regular feedback on their efforts" (Guskey, 2002).

Further, Guskey suggests that change occurs mainly after implementation takes place and there is evidence of improved students' learning. So continued follow up, support and pressure after the initial training is crucial. Support coupled with pressure is essential for continuing educational improvements. Support is necessary to tolerate the anxieties and the failures, while implementation and pressure are essential to initiate and make the change happen because they encourage and motivate both being necessary in the change process.

Classroom observation is a useful collaboration activity. It is a functional follow up support, where trainers observe teachers while they are trying to implement their new learning. It is not a judgmental observation, rather it helps teachers to reflect and find out their strengths and weaknesses (O'Sullivan, 2002). The observers are the critical friends and coach who sit with the teachers before observation to help them with planning and other challenges. The trainers also sit with teachers after observation, ask questions about lesson and give constructive feedback and offer some suggestions.

Instructional practices are improved if a colleague or another person observes a teacher's classroom lessons and provides constructive feedback (Khan, 2003; p.13). She further adds that observation and feedback are very important strategies to develop teachers' performance. Constructive feedback increases self-awareness and self-awareness helps in self-development. Feedback serves as a catalyst to improve trainees' confidence. Teachers' reflective diaries are also important. This sort of self-assessment by trainees actually helps in sensing their current needs (Khan, 2003; p.13).

Although supervision of schools is conducted at different levels but the structure is complex. District officer, Assistant district officers, supervisors, learning coordinators and head teachers monitor the school activities from different angles and at different levels. However their task is almost limited to maintenance of record, verification of physical items in school and writing reports in the given formats. These reports once sent to district education office become meaningless for teachers because they have neither any access to the reports nor they are provided with constructive feedback on their classroom practices.

To bridge this gap one model of professional development with built-in follow up support was initiated for elementary school teachers, head teachers and administrators in the selected districts of Sindh and Balouchistan provinces under Education Sector Reforms Assistance (ESRA) program. This study was conducted in Hyderabad Sindh, one of the program target districts.

The field support trainers provided follow up support to the teachers at their workplace for fourteen weeks after workshop sessions conducted for four weeks. The workshops were based on six modules namely, Techniques for reflective practices, Techniques for teacher mentoring, Techniques for use of media in classroom, Techniques for instructions and assessment in language and social studies, Techniques for instructions and assessment in mathematics and science, and Techniques for instructions and assessment in English as foreign language.

The field support trainers provided academic support to teachers helping in lesson planning, designing of teaching activities and preparation of relevant instruction material. They provided feedback on their reflective diaries and after classroom observation in the post observation conference. The teachers had sufficient time of interaction, and opportunity to get professional support, hence motivated to implement their learning in the classroom because of available friendly support.

The intervention benefited the teachers directly as there was less fear of failure because of access to professional support. Frequent visit by the field trainers and monitoring staff encouraged the teachers to implement their learning which helped them acquire mastery over the innovative practices.

METHODOLOGY

This case study was conducted in qualitative and quantitative research paradigm. Twenty elementary school teachers and four head teachers were selected from different urban and rural areas of district Hyderabad Sindh through purposive sampling. All the teachers were trained in year 2004 along with follow up support program. The teachers were University graduates and had professional certificates such as PTC and CT, and a few had B. Ed. degree as well. They had not less than ten years of teaching experience. The head teachers of the same schools were also interviewed.

The data was gathered through classroom observations, pre-observation and post-observation conferences. Semi-structured interview tools were implemented for data collection

from teachers and head teachers. Qualitative notes were taken during classroom observation in addition to a checklist developed with some modification in teaching practices observation tool (Khosro, 2007). Anecdotal evidences including the teachers' reflective journals, lesson plans and students' work samples were collected for triangulation of the research findings.

RESULTS

The professional development program for in-service elementary school teachers was designed to provide them with need-based training with built-in post training, on-job and workplace follow up support. The support strategy was aimed at enabling the teachers to act as mentors and to become regular reflective practitioners for lifelong learning and to put an end to the isolated practices.

Classroom Environment

The classroom environment measured on basis of five variables; seating arrangement, group work, proper use of resources, maintenance of resources and teacher student interactions. (Table 1).

Table 1
Classroom Environment

Classroom Environment	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Nil
	1	2	3	4	5
Seating Arrangement	3	13	4		
Group work	2	9	8	1	
Proper use of resources	2	11	7		
Maintenance of Available resources	2	10	8		
Teacher-Student interactions	1	12	7		

Classroom Environment		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Excellent	2	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Good	11	55.0	55.0	65.0
	Fair	7	35.0	35.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

It was found that 55% were rated as good, 35% Fair and 10% as excellent. Poor classroom environment was recorded ignorable less than 1%

Teacher Collaboration

Teacher collaboration was an important focus of the program. The teachers mostly continued collective planning, sharing decisions and materials, asking for help and showing readiness for support to colleagues.

Table 2
Teacher Collaboration

Collaboration	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Nil
	1	2	3	4	5
Collective Planning	4	13	3		
Shared decisions	2	11	7	1	
Exchange of Material	2	16	2		
Asking for help	1	15	4		
Ready to help	1	13	6		

Teacher Collaboration		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Excellent	2	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Good	13	65.0	65.0	75.0
	Fair	4	20.0	20.0	95.0
	Poor	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

These collaborative activities were noted as good 65% , Fair by 20%, excellent by 10% and poor collaboration 5% only (Table 2).

Reflective Practices

Reflective practice plays an important role in continuing professional development and self improvement. Teachers were exposed to different reflective protocols during program and they experienced these practices during follow-up period as well.

Table 3
Reflective Practices

Maintenance of Reflective Journal	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Nil
	1	2	3	4	5
Use of reflection protocol	1	13	6		
PMI		14	6		
Guided Question	3	14	3		
Critical Incident	3	14	3		
Peer/Pair-Share		13	7		

Reflective Practices	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
Excellent	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
Good	14	70.0	70.0	75.0
Fair	5	25.0	25.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Thus these continuations of reflective practices were found at 70%, fair by 25%, and excellent by 5% teachers observed during this study (Table 3).

Lesson Planning

Lesson planning is essential for achievement of the desired objectives by teacher and measurement of students' performance.

Table 4

Lesson Planning

Lesson Planning		Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Nil
		1	2	3	4	5
	Frequency	2	16		2	
	Design	2	12	6		
	Sharing	1	13	6		
	Steps		8	12		
	Clarity		15	5		

Lesson Planning		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Excellent	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
	Good	13	65.0	65.0	70.0
	Fair	6	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Good lesson planning was observed for 65% teachers, another 30% also planned fairly, and 5% lesson plans were excellent (Table 4), in terms of frequency of planning, design, sharing, and proper steps of lesson plans and overall clarity of the plans.

Instructional Material Development

Teachers' competency in designing and development of instructional material was improved through practice and selection of material from different resources. It makes teaching and learning viable and interesting. This study explored this aspect and also the level of use by the teacher and student and their access to the material (Table-5).

Table 5
Instructional Material Development

Instructional Material Development		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Excellent	2	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Good	14	70.0	70.0	80.0
	Fair	3	15.0	15.0	95.0
	Poor	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Instructional Material Development		Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Nil
		1	2	3	4	5
	Designing	4	14	2		
	Development		18	2		
	Level of use by teacher	2	15	3		
	Level of use by students	4	13	3		
	Access		13	6	1	

Material development practices were found Good by 70%, Fair by 15%, excellent by 10% and poor by 5% of the all responses on the rating scale (Table 5).

Thus the data from study supports the idea that the program helped the teachers to play their role as mentors for professional support of the colleagues. It encouraged them to design, prepare and use new activities and new teaching methods. This changed the school culture and traditional mode of delivery into active practices.

The research participants declared that they had been reflecting on their teaching regularly and were able to define and discuss the types of reflection for example, considering plus minus and Interesting PMI aspects, guided question protocol and critical incident protocol of reflection.

All the teachers under this study were found to be maintaining a reflective journal for the purpose of self-improvement and their professional growth as they exhibited. Some reflective notes were observed on their lesson planning diaries as well.

These teachers well conceptualized the existing mode of teaching and assessment and suggested measures for its improvement. The teachers were able to plan and prepare mentoring strategies, activities and provide feedback to their colleagues in their areas of expertise.

The teachers were able to collect, select and design appropriate instructional material and developed skills for use of media in the classroom. They asserted that they have improved their instructional skills in teaching mathematics, science, social studies, Sindhi and English. Also they learnt to design innovate classroom activities for teaching and assessment of learning in these subject areas.

Teachers in multi-grade classes were observed integrating different disciplines skilfully. Teachers were found capable of lesson planning in languages and other subjects. They could design and plan assessment tools and strategies to evaluate the students' learning outcomes in the respective subjects.

Importance of low-cost and no-cost material in teaching and learning has a great deal in the view of these teachers. They made an appropriate use of such materials making the teaching sessions interesting for students' joyful learning.

During interviews the teachers particularly indicated benefits of the embedded follow up, which was provided first time. Teachers appreciated the design of program as well as facilitation made there. They found the activities demonstrated during workshop as quite relevant, appropriate and helpful for their role in the classroom.

All the teachers under study pointed out and accepted that their changed role was the result of follow up support provided by the field support staff for fourteen weeks. More than a half of

the number of the teachers has already participated in different in-service teacher training programs. But they believed that their learning lasted till the workshop sessions were over. They neither could share their learning with other colleagues before this program nor have applied any part of learning from it in the classrooms.

The teachers identified this follow up as friendly support at their workplace, enhancing their skills and encouraging for teaching through new ways they learnt. Although this was their first experience of being observed while teaching in the classroom but pre-observation discussions and shared plans have diminished the teachers' hesitation of being under observation.

The teachers believed that this follow up support enabled them to overcome their deficiencies. Further that involvement of other colleagues in the similar activities also encouraged them to practice different things in the classrooms easily.

Follow up support was provided to each teacher for fourteen weeks but the teachers of each school were trained in different phases of training, thus field support trainers used to visit the same school continuously to observe other newly returned teachers. Their presence and frequent visits to the school encouraged the teachers to continue practicing their new learning and ask for help when necessary. Although each teacher was observed and supported for fourteen weeks but they mentioned that the follow up support was given for two years continuously, because field support trainers and monitoring staff used to pay visits to schools during entire project period.

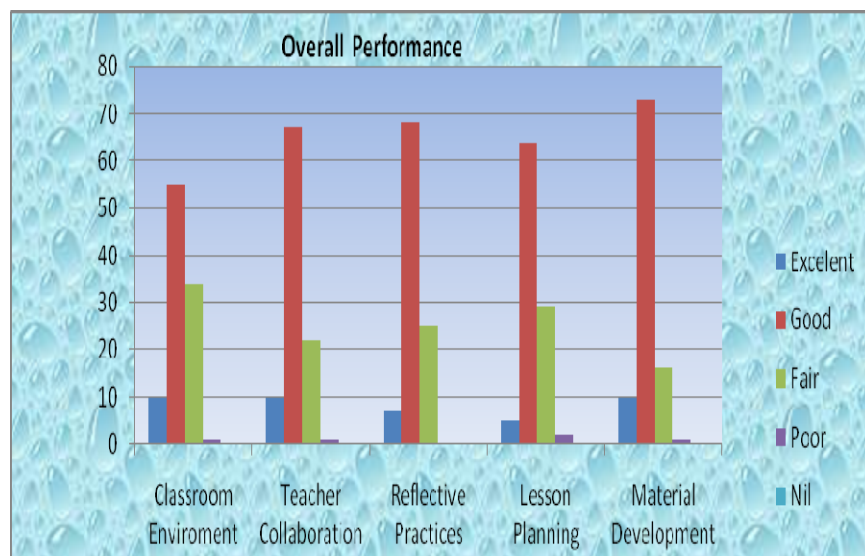
This eighteen week long professional development program for in-service elementary school teachers along with fourteen weeks built-in support at workplace involved all the teachers and schools. It emphasized on activity-based teaching and reflective practices. This was the first experience of follow up support in the district, which resulted in sustained teacher efforts for implementation of new learning.

Follow up support can make a lasting impact on the teachers. Sustained change in the classroom teaching practices

was an evidence of this claim. Now teachers tried to use the most of teaching techniques and strategies learnt during these workshops. They planned lesson well in advance, enriched each lesson with some activities and kept on looking for appropriate resources for conducting their classroom activities.

Table 6
Overall Performance Statistics

		Classroom Environment	Teacher Collaboration	Reflective Practices	Lesson Planning	Instructional Material Development
N	Valid	20	20	20	20	20
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.25	2.20	2.20	2.25	2.15
Median		2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
Mode		2	2	2	2	2
Std. Deviation		.639	.696	.523	.550	.671
Variance		.408	.484	.274	.303	.450



Overall data shows that the teachers observed after the professional development program have exhibited strong tendency towards implementation of their new learning (Table 6).

These changes can be credited to their exposure to the professional development program and its follow up mechanism. Teachers gave clear instructions before activities and successfully completed activities involving the whole class. The research participant teachers also put many questions for students' deeper understanding. They encouraged interactions among students through group work and whole class discussions on certain topics of children's interest.

As a result of follow up support program they were no more hesitant to be observed during teaching sessions. Purposeful use of available resources and skilful use of low-cost and no-cost material for teaching was observed to an appreciable extent.

They acquired classroom management skills and exhibited their responsibility in this regard. They assigned different roles and tasks to the students. They made unambiguous instructions, monitored students' progress on certain task and made effective use of time as well. The teachers listened to the students carefully and responded properly.

Among many supporting factors for sustainable change in teachers' attitude the follow up support stood first. Also providing uniform type of training to all colleagues in school and uniform follow up support mechanism were found to be helpful. Now the teachers do not face any resistance to bring about changes in their teaching sessions and conduct a variety of activities. It is due to common understanding among the colleagues and head teachers as a result of post training follow up support at their workplace.

CONCLUSION

Changing the teachers' classroom practices for enhanced students learning is at the heart of all professional development programs. Many factors influence teachers to implement their learning from workshops into the classrooms. This study reveals

that on-job workplace follow up support is the major influential element helping the teachers to put their learning into practice.

The collegial support, head teacher's encouragement and school culture also found to be important factors in presence of a follow up mechanism only. Hence implementation of teachers' learning in the classroom was possible because of available follow up support at classroom level which certainly benefited the students.

It was follow up support functioning to have other elements work favourably helping teachers sustain their changed role after that particular type of professional development program.

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