



Category: Research Article

Teachers’ Perceptions on their In-Service Professional Development Opportunities in Sri Lanka

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History <i>Published Online: 30 June, 2022</i></p> <p>Keywords Teacher Professional Development, In-Service Teacher Development</p> <p>Corresponding Author <i>Email:senevi@ssh.rjt.ac.lk</i></p>	<p>Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is a very important part in education system of the country. Because the education system need well developed, skillful, potential teachers to make valuable people for the future society. Therefore teachers need high quality Teacher Professional Development opportunities over there professional life. Unfortunately some developing countries unable to organize and provide such like Teacher Professional Development (TPD) programs overtime. This study attempted to investigate teachers’ perceptions on their Teacher Professional Development (TPD) opportunities and make suggestion to plan, organize and implement sustainable TPD programs in Sri Lanka. Case study method was used in study and data were collected by interviews. Findings of the study revealed in Sri Lankan education system not established proper in-service TPD policies as a result teachers are not provide sufficient TPD opportunities.</p>

1. Introduction

Professional development is defined as the process within which members of organizations are given the encouragement, resources and rewards necessary to develop their intellect and professional skills on a continuing basis, Evans & Nation [1]. For the Teacher Professional Development concept, many different terms are used by researchers and others involved in educational practices. Some of these are: teacher professional development; teacher professional learning, continuing teacher education, continuing professional development, ongoing career development, in-service teacher education, in-service teacher learning, in-service teacher training Lalitha [2]. Further, Villegas-Reimers [3] mentioned as; nowadays, most reforms of education that are designed and implemented include a main component of teacher professional development as one of the key elements of the changing process in education. Thus teachers’ roles have become complicated and broader in scope. Greenwood & Gaunt [4] compares a teacher of a class to a chief executive, needing both to understand the ‘business’ throughout and the socio-political environment in which it operates, and to be able to help people (the

students) to carry out their work effectively. Further, they have to work with children not only collectively, perhaps when explaining a goal or delivering information, but also individually, making judgments about how best to help each student on the basis of their subject knowledge and their knowledge of a students’ needs. Under such a situation, teachers should be given the opportunities to update their knowledge, skills and attitudes, because we are in a new era of teaching which is increasingly complex and demanding Fullan [5], Hargreaves [6].

Therefore, well designed, thoughtfully planned and adequately supported professional development is an essential component and an ingredient in the process of teacher professional development, Good JM. Weaver & Andrew [7].

The impact of classroom practice is depicted in the Figure 1. This figure shows the connections of effective professional teacher education in improving teacher quality which lead to changing classroom teaching practice. The final outcome is the improvement in student learning.

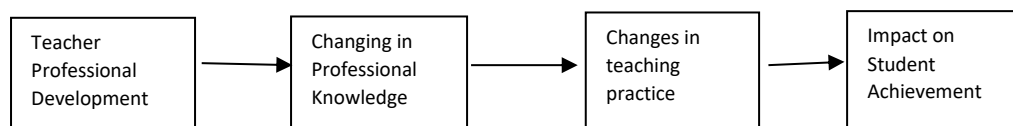


Figure 1: Teacher PD and impact on students’ outcomes :Source [8]

Educators and policymakers are increasingly looking to teacher professional learning as an important strategy for supporting the complex skills students need to be prepared for further education and work in the 21st century. Effective professional development (PD) is key to teachers learning and refining the pedagogies required teaching these skills Darling-Hammond [9].

However, Jenning, [10] observes that externally organized professional development programs may be employed in a 'top to bottom' approach, depicting the traditional and hierarchical order, and they therefore do not have a significant impact on teachers. This can happen because the external professional development providers are not closely in touch with the needs of the individual teachers and the particular schools.

1.1. Teacher professional development in Sri Lanka

Ministry of Education (MOE) [11] states that Sri Lanka has already considered professional development for teachers as an essential part of the education system because professional development enhances the quality of good teaching. Further, Hayman [12] pointed out that well organized professional development programs can enhance teachers' skills, knowledge and attitudes. Whereas, The Ministry of Education (MOE) of Sri Lanka has recognized, that "good teachers are keys to enhance the quality of education and therefore need to be providing avenues of professional advancement" [11 p. 22]. Furthermore, the MOE [11] report shows that; Sri Lanka has already realized teacher professional development as an obvious part of the education system in the country.

However, Sri Lankan teachers have only a few opportunities to participate in professional development activities in a year, Lalitha [2]. Furthermore, the opportunities for teachers to participate to this professional development programs depend on their teaching subject; for example, teachers who teach core subjects have more opportunities than teachers teaching other subjects (the core subjects in secondary schools are Mathematics, Science, Languages (Sinhalese, Tamil and English), and Social-Studies).

It is necessary then that the national policy makers in Sri Lankan education make relevant policies to develop a wider range of TPD opportunities. This study explores the effective strategies which will require enhancing current TPD programs in secondary schools, and it is anticipated that these findings will help to make national policies to develop effective and efficient TPD opportunities in the future. The findings and recommendations of the study will also be useful for planning, organizing and providing

suitable professional development programs to school teachers by the MOE or National Institute of Education (NIE).

Furthermore, there is potential for these teacher professional development programs to be developed to improve the professional standards and required interpersonal and other skills of school teachers; nonetheless the development of these programs is one of the many complicated issues within the education system in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this research inspired to investigate the current situation of TPD programs and teachers' perceptions on Teacher Development opportunities in ten selected secondary schools in two different Provinces in Sri Lanka

2. Research methodology

For this study, qualitative research approach has been employed and the research design was framed within an interpretive and case study research method. In this research, a case study method is believed to be appropriate because this study needs to investigate teacher perceptions on TPD programs in ten Government schools. Further, Anderson [13, p. 121] defines case study as "a specific phenomenon within its real-life context". In addition, Neill [14] also says that case study focuses on investigating the phenomena of a single case in-depth. Thus Purposive sampling method was used to select ten schools within Kandy and Nuwaraeliya administrative districts in Central Province accordingly researcher's convenience. In this investigation twenty teachers were randomly chosen from above mentioned ten schools. Furthermore, the data collection process employed in-depth interviews which were conducted with twenty school teachers who were chosen from a sample of ten Government schools.

Table 1: Sample of schools and teachers

Type of schools	Number of schools	Number of teachers
National	3	6
1 AB	1	2
1 C	6	12
Total	10	20

2.1 Objectives of the study

- To explore different types of TPD programs which provide to teachers in education system of Sri Lanka
- To examine the effective methods of TPD programs in the education system

- To evaluate teachers need and demand of their TPD
- To assess teachers suggestions to develop quality of TPD programs in the country

2.2 Limitations of the study

For this study ten schools were selected and 20 teachers of the schools were interviewed, therefore these findings should not to be generalized to all government teachers in the country. Further, only qualitative data was collected for this study.

3. Results and Discussion

Data were collected by interview and the collected qualitative data has been categorised into four codes (themes) as listed below.

1. Advantages and disadvantages of current TPD programs.
2. Teachers needs of TPD opportunities
3. Types and methods of TPD programs in Sri Lanka
4. Teachers suggestions for developments of TPD programs

Data were categorized and analysed manually by the Researcher.

3.1 Findings of the study

The findings show Sri Lankan teachers have less opportunities to develop their Professional development. Under such a situation TPD programs are ineffective and insufficient, as a result these TPD programs not support to develop students' outcomes. Among the sample 19 teachers (The majority of the teachers) mentioned that Sri Lankan education system do not have clear guidance and government policies, relevant to TPD programs and encouragement.

Hence, 80% participant of the selected sample believed that the TPD opportunities are not enough for teachers. Some participants were mentioned some teachers are not provided at least one TPD program per year, even some opportunities are depend on the subject, educational zones, subject directors of the education and allocation for the TPD programs. All teachers of the sample accepted the importance of TPD programs for teacher development, but they firmly criticized the current TPD programs in Sri Lanka. A participant said that, "at the end of the every year, in the December before finishing allocated money many TPD programs are organized by the Zonal Education Office (ZEO) and these are Ad-hock and ineffective opportunities'.

The present TPD programs are mainly organized and conducted by the Zonal Education Office (ZEO),

although ZEO was strongly criticized by the participated teachers. Some of the criticisms were made by the teachers and these are mentioned below, 5% participants complained about TPD programs, as these TPD programs are mostly used to introduce changes to the syllabuses, national reforms and subjects' knowledge for teachers. There is a limited opportunity for professional development. The next important reason is that unqualified human resources are used to conduct TPD programs; mainly these programs are organized by the ZEO and they do not have the expertise. Even the provincial offices do not have qualified resources to plan, organize and implement these programs. In addition teachers highlighted some disadvantages of TPD programs in Sri Lanka as; TPD programs did not consider teachers' and schools' individual needs, some TPD programs were organized at national level and held in the capital city of the country, which required teachers to travel long distances. In addition, different types of teachers gathered at the same center for TPD seminars or workshops, resulting in a loss of enthusiasm during the period of program.

4. Conclusion

The study investigated teachers' perceptions on their in-service TPD opportunities, in qualitative research approach, case study method is used to the research. Data were collected by applying individual interviews; according to the study all teachers of the sample believed that, their TPD programs are insufficient and less effective. Further Sri Lankan education system not formulated national policy and guidance for TPD programs, further in these TPD programs unqualified human resources were used by organizers. Some programs were held quite far from the teachers' working schools therefore they have to travel long distance to participate to TPD programs. Finally to enhance TPD programs in Sri Lanka the participant teachers made some suggestions for organizers of TPD programs in the education system.

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