

EVALUATION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: THE CASE OF EFL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this study was to evaluate the implementation of Continuous Professional Development program the case of EFL teachers. The study investigated the attitude of teachers towards CPD program, the role of CPD in terms of delivering new knowledge and experience, the leadership support in promoting CPD and the major impediments for the implementation of CPD. The subjects of the study were 18 EFL teachers from selected Secondary schools. In addition, high schools directors and supervisors were also involved in the study. The data was collected through four tools: reflective writing, focus group discussion, interview and document analysis. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively and case study method was employed. The findings of the study revealed that there is a great difference between the teachers' beliefs and actual experiences in the practice of CPD. The study suggested that lots of challenges impede the proper implementation of CPD. Among them are heavy work load, lack of appropriate training facilities to practice CPD, shortage of financial and expert support, poor management of the program and poor initiatives to implement knowledge and awareness gained in the CPD program. Hence, it is recommended that to enhance the practice of CPD activity, teachers should get plenty of training opportunities to experience their professional activity. Moreover, financial and expert support should be given due attention to improve the current status of CPD.*

KEY WORDS: Continuous professional development, evaluation, experience, leadership

INTRODUCTION

Teacher's professional learning activity is a lifelong process which is designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of teachers. It is the sum total of formal and informal learning experiences throughout over career from pre-service teacher education to retirement (Fullan, 1991). This process of growth and development provides opportunities for teachers to examine their assumptions about their role related with teaching strategies and develop a deeper understanding of their subject content and improve their students learning

Now a day, the quality of education has become one of the governing issues of many developing countries including Ethiopia. The continuous development of teachers through both pre-service and in-service training may be one of the various parameters which are required for the achievement of this goal. Due to this, teachers have to upgrade themselves by way of continuous learning. This can happen if teachers engage in continuous professional development program (CPD). In the contemporary context of educational reform in Ethiopia, the professional learning of teachers is recognized as a key component of building the capacity of teachers.

In Ethiopia, CPD program was proposed by Ministry of Education in 2003 by preparing guideline for the program. Different High School teachers were engaged in different activities of professional development program. When teachers' are engaged in CPD activities, they become more responsible for their teaching and through process these activities help them to promote their professional development. Moreover, when teachers are participating

in CPD activities the program must be meaningful to them. Unless the program is meaningful to teachers, they can't participate in CPD activities.

Although CPD has been found to be the most effective process and system of learning, the activities that have been done in schools were directly offered by Ministry of Education in a top-down way. Due to this, teachers were confined with more specific activities. However, if the activities designed more in bottom-up way, it will give an opportunity for teachers to engage in different activities more actively.

Regarding the practice of CPD a few local research works were conducted. Among these Hailesilassie's (2004) work is important. This study revealed that there were favorable school contexts for CPD program implementation but they were not used. Moreover, he also found out that the major CPD activities were English language improvement program (ELIP) and in-service summer degree programs; the process of CPD program lacks professional knowledge, shortage of time and budget. Afework (2007), in his study on selected primary schools of Tigray region confirmed that there was lack of awareness on the importance of CPD and there were no systematic mechanisms of addressing the major problems of the program. This author indicated also teachers and principals got involved in monitoring and evaluating the program. Zenebe (2007), in his study on secondary schools of Northern Showa Zone of Oromia Regional State found out that teachers did not get support from educational institutes and top officials. He also concluded that there were problems in assigning professional leaders in the schools to manage CPD.

In general, the major factors for the implementation of CPD program indicated by the above mentioned researchers are: lack of awareness, absence of incentives, financial and time constraints. However, the teachers' belief towards CPD, poor management and leadership support problem of the program, what new knowledge and experience the teachers get from the program and considering the program as additional activities were not considered by the above mentioned research works. Moreover, the study done before was general and did not indicate unique experiences of English teachers. In addition to this, the surveys were not intensive by their nature and have not probed into cases of English teachers. Professional development dilemmas, uncertainties and hopes can be generated more by involving teachers in qualitative narration of their lived experience. Considering this fact, this study bridges the gap between the knowledge and practice related to the implementation of CPD program by taking the experience of EFL teachers.

METHODOLOGY

The study followed purely qualitative research design approach. The reason for this fact is that, it is important to produce more in-depth information and it allowed the subjects to give much 'richer' answers to questions. Kruger (1994), as cited in Daniel (2008), notes that such methods create openness and allow subjects to discuss relevant issues, clarifying ambiguity or confusion. Moreover, regarding with CPD EFL teachers described their lived experience in detail. As a consequence of its underlying, paradigm, qualitative research is subjective, since qualitative research relies on the discourses of participants and involves small numbers of participants in the research process as a result of the process of gathering in depth information (Wallace 1993).

In this study, the data was gathered using methods of collecting qualitative data. These were written reflection, which was prepared in open ended question form, focus group discussion, interview and document analysis.

The written reflection questions were the principal method of data gathering that was employed for securing relevant information for the study. This allows the respondents to provide or share their lived experience with high elaboration or explanation. A focus group is a group of interacting individuals with some common interest or characteristics brought together by a moderator who uses the group and its interaction as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue (Merriam, 1998). The data collected through three instruments were analyzed qualitatively by integrating themes into systematic category. The information in a written reflection was integrated with the data obtained through focus group discussion, interview and document analysis. The purpose of integration is to provide readers with holistic picture of the experience being studied. To this end, the researcher followed the data analysis procedure based on the idea of Ritchie & Spencer (1994).

Theoretical Discussion

There is no one agreed upon definition for CPD. Due to this reason, different scholars define CPD in various ways. For example, Craft (1996) define CPD in the following way:

Continuing Professional Development is the systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and skill, and the development of personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties throughout one's working life.

According to the above definition one can realize that CPD is a continuous activity which is important for the overall development of professional duties. Through this activity a person can change and expand his/her knowledge and maintain the professional status

According to Day (1999), CPD is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their knowledge and skills. This may be essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice. An alternative definition given by Hampton et al (2004) is that,

CPD is a process or an activity that increases the skills, knowledge or understanding of teachers and their effectiveness in schools. Both definitions suggest that CPD is a process or an activity that increases teachers' competence for improved practice. But Day's definition is a little far ahead as it broadens the effect of CPD to include the overall development of teachers.

Continuous Professional Development Activities

Effective CPD activity recognizes that teachers have individual needs, different motivations for learning, and prior knowledge and experience that will impact on the type of learning they choose to engage in. Professional development for teachers is now recognized as a vital component to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Even though the number and type of CPD activities are very large in number, the major and commonly used ones are presented below.

Induction

All beginner teachers, after they complete their initial teacher education, are placed as teachers at appropriate level. However, the initial teacher education package is not by itself sufficient for a student becomes a professional teacher. Thus, teachers should go through on-going and systematic professional development (CPD) program so that they build their professional skills and demonstrate improved performance (MOE, 2004). According to the above mentioned idea, new beginners are expected to take induction course during their two years' work time. In order to provide the necessary induction program to those who are in need, schools should have an induction program which describe the roles and responsibilities of individuals involved in the program.

Mentoring

Mentoring practices are beneficial professional development activities for all teachers. According to Blandford (2000), “Mentoring” can have two levels of meaning. In its conventional sense, “mentoring” means the provision of professional support for beginning teachers, so that a solid foundation for continuous learning can be laid in teachers’ initial years of joining the life-long career. In a broader sense, “mentoring” is characterized by collegial support and professional sharing among all teachers, through which the whole school is transformed in to a dynamic learning community where continuous learning is the core business of every member of the community (MOE, 2003).

Coaching

Like mentoring, peer coaching allows teachers to build more collegial relationships, share their experiences, and assume more responsibility for the quality of teaching. Coaching programs usually involve teachers on the same professional level. Teachers observe each other’s classrooms and offer feedback on practices and behaviors.

Coaching is a process through which two or more professional collegial work together to reflect up on current practices and solve problems with in the work place (Robin, 1999 cited in Hampton et al, 2004)..

Action Research

According to MOE (2004) guideline, action research is recognized as a valuable method of enabling teachers to improve their practice by looking at what is happening in their teaching and their classrooms. In action research the teacher is the person as the practitioner who will use the decision. Action research is used to generate data to measure the effects of various teaching methods, help to make effective decisions, and assist teachers in learning new practices (Calhoun, 2002). Action research is the means that teachers learn from their practice and experience. The aim is to bring change or improvement of practices in the immediate environment. The main role and value of action research is the fact that it is a strategy through which teachers generate practical knowledge.

Professional Development Portfolio

According to MOE (2004) guideline, portfolio is a set of recorded materials that shows what an individual teacher has done, knows and can do during his/her practical work and can be used document growth and development, as a final means of assessing talents, skills and abilities of teachers and also to show teachers’ growth and development over time.

The above mentioned idea indicates that portfolio allows teachers to personalize their learning experiences in a format that allows for an opportunity to reflect on their programme of continuous professional development. Keeping professional development portfolio can be one of the activities to be performed by participants in CPD program. This activity may benefit professionals by building teachers professional confidence and by making them effective . Teachers after completing the relevant courses, doing the activities and engaging in professional discussion they are expected to write their reports and self -assessments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The attitude of the teachers towards CPD

The positive attitude of the teachers towards CPD activity has great role in the implementation of the program. This is because the actual practice of the program comes out from the outlook of the teachers regarding the

implementation of CPD. This theme, therefore, emerged from all teachers' reflections, where teachers described how they felt about CPD being as an English teacher and the role of CPD in terms of professional development and students learning outcome. Almost all of the teachers had reported their positive outlook towards the CPD program. In terms of professional development, almost all ELT teachers replied that-"it creates an opportunity to use active learning method," "it helps to work with other fellow professionals" and "it creates positive environment to share experience". In terms of learning outcome the respondent said that-"when we perform active learning method students are able to share their experience each other" and "the teacher knows where the students are and he/she arranges different mechanisms to tackle the existed problem. Regarding this, one teacher argued that:

CPD, for me as a teacher, is continuous professional development course training among teachers of a particular school... It takes right after the teachers' pre-service course... It is a compulsory course in which mainly focuses on teachers' professional development and students active learning... to bring about the expected behavioral changes of students (Teacher3).

As can be seen from the teachers' responses, teachers have positive attitude towards CPD program. This is in line with the argument of Hampton (2004) "positive attitude towards CPD is one of the supportive culture for the appropriate implementation of the program". According to Blandford (2000), a positive attitude towards CPD is important ingredient for appropriate CPD environment.

Leadership Support in Implementing CPD Program

The overall response of teachers indicated a weak performance of the principal (director) towards performing his/her responsibilities regarding the practice of CPD program. The teachers strongly agree that principals have great role in supporting, guiding, monitoring and evaluating teachers to enable them to enhance their professional development during the teaching and learning process. However, the teachers' response implies school principals are performing their duties in contrary to the above mentioned points. The teachers also added that most of the time the principals spent their time in administrative activities.

Regarding their role, one of the school principals answered in the following way.

I am highly responsible for all the school teaching and learning process in general and for teachers' professional development in particular... Unless the teachers are engaged in professional development activity it is very difficult to achieve the intended goal of students learning outcome... Since I dedicate most of my work time in negotiating students and teachers, moreover, discussing with parents I didn't give special attention for teachers' professional development (Director2).

According to the above reflection, the principal did not make the necessary effort to support teachers in different aspect of their professional development. Considering the CPD management program almost all teachers agreed that continuous professional development program will be more effective if all on-going activities are managed seriously. They also stress that this is necessary for all who involved in CPD activities. Considering the practical activity of the management of CPD one of the teachers says, "To do this, school principals are expected to establish a suitable mechanism for the proper management of the program". Management of CPD is the process of assessing the overall performance of teachers, regarding the practice of CPD, in the context of the individuals' practical activity and making plans for the individual future development in the context of the school improvement

plan (Bush, 1999). This process defines the professional aspect, knowledge, understanding and skills of teachers at each stage. One of the teachers replies that in their school he hasn't seen any management activity regarding the practice of CPD. The other also elaborates that he is not quite sure whether there is management body that runs the CPD activity or not.

Organizing induction course for new teachers

In this theme the teachers replied that entry in to the profession is a new moment for newly employed teachers. They also added that it is a time when they face great challenges and are in need of a well-established process of induction. One of the teachers elaborates that "I need support at the beginning of my teaching carriers." He also added that "it helps me to make transition from student teachers to full members of the school staff."

Induction course contribute to improve and develop the overall effectiveness of the teachers performance at the school level (Bush, 1999). The other teacher also replied that "the course also ensures what is expected from me and the necessary support to achieve those of my expectations." Induction course also ensures new teachers have the best start in their profession and to support them in effective practice (MOE, 2004). However, the respondents replied in their response that they haven't got the required support from the concerned bodies before they started their teaching profession. Due to this reason, most of the teachers' encountered problems while they are practicing their duties in the classroom. As the teachers said, most commonly the school director introduced them to a few teachers and sometimes with one or two class students. Therefore, lack of day –to-day professional support and mentoring for entry-level teachers will discourage them in every aspect of their activity.

Keeping and evaluating teachers' professional development portfolio

In this theme the question is mainly focused on the teachers practice in preparing portfolio. The first issue concerned here is how the teachers prepare their portfolio and in relation to this how the school directors as well as supervisors evaluate the practice of doing portfolio. Teachers said they prepare portfolio based on the CPD course book. They also added that the points that are included in their portfolio are directly taken from the course book and the writing activity would be carried on during their group discussion time.

According to the MOE (2004) guideline, portfolio is a set of recorded materials that shows what an individual teacher has done, knows and can do. Portfolio can be used to document growth and development as a final means of assessing talents, skills and abilities of teachers and also to show teachers growth and development over time. A teacher portfolio is a collection of achievements that the teacher has accomplished, both in the classroom and elsewhere (MOE, 2004). Usually portfolio is kept by teachers to reflect on their work, goals, and activities in and out of the classroom. However, the teachers' response indicates that their portfolio is focused on only the course material excluding the classroom activity. According to the school directors and supervisors response during their interview the only activity they are performing were collecting the teachers' portfolio and keeping in file, other than this there is no further evaluation.

Providing sustainable support for teachers

The theme emerged from the need for support obtained from school supervisors. Teachers said almost all teachers had some interest regarding to obtain support from the concerned bodies. The teachers also expresses that the support will build them in order to make them as effective and efficient teachers. But they did not find anybody who will support them. Teachers expressed that they expect more especially from the supervisors and to see the supervisors on a weekly basis. Considering the practical work of supervisors, the teachers elaborated that although there are supervisors, generally supervisors' time was very limited to deal with school directors only.

Complaints especially leveled against supervisors included their lack of well experience to assist them. These complain emerged from the two school supervisors were recruited in the profession very recently and they lack well experience.

Relatively few teachers reported they were able to see to meet with the supervisors at least twice a semester. Teachers said although supervisors had visit time on their program, they were generally discussed with the teachers for a short period of time. Teachers said supervisors were helpful only at the beginning of the semester, especially to check whether teachers started their work earlier /appropriately or not.

Providing training for EFL teachers

During the written reflection on this theme one of the teachers says “, the first step in any process of developing a profession in any field is the initial professional preparation or training of that person”. Almost all teachers agreed that training is a turning point in the practice CPD activity. The training would have direct relevance with the everyday work of the teachers’ (Blandford, 2000). Professional development happens when teachers, after their initial education, get involved in updating programs that keep them in touch with new development in their area (Spratt1994). By considering the role of the training, in their response the teachers elaborated that in practicing CPD training plays a vital role for the enhancement of teachers’ professional development and for the successful accomplishment of the given task. They also added that in CPD program activities the supervisors are expected to identify the training programme that will be carried out at the school level and they should also attend the training programs and they must evaluate the impact of training in the classroom. Almost all teachers agreed that the provision of training will improve the performance of teachers and reflects as a result on students’ performance. One of the teachers indicated that the supervisors are expected to help the school principals to carry out the training program by the educational experts. The other teacher also stresses that since the principals are considered as leaders of the school, he/she has the responsibility to manage the training program starting from identifying priorities of training and following up the training management and evaluation. Regarding to the idea of training ... *We get training on induction, how to prepare portfolio, how to nominate group facilitators and how the CPD program is conducted... However, since continuous professional development activity is a lifelong process we need sustainable training... Without having continuous and supportive training how can we adjust ourselves with the contemporary situation... Since we are teachers, we are expected to update our profession timely (Teacher 3).*

It is clear from the response of teachers, principals and supervisors that training was given to teachers on CPD program, but it was not adequate. According to Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) the following orientation must be given for teachers before the implementation of CPD:

Academic orientation; emphasizes on teachers subject expertise and sees the quality of the teachers own education at their professional strength; the ***practical orientation***, emphasizes the artistry and classroom technique of the teacher; the ***technical orientation*** emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationship in the classroom.

According to Blandford (2000), awareness is an important ingredient of appropriate CPD environment. Spratt (1994), recognizes strong points in training and development; among the reasons for professional development, he mentioned the following: the feeling that training courses can satisfy the needs of all teachers; it characterizes the pressing need to professionalize English (language) teaching; the growth of teacher confidence to develop autonomously and the promotion of lifelong- learning as the final objective of education.

Factors that impede the Implementation of CPD Program

Even though English language teachers seem to show a very positive attitude towards professional development where they are able to build on their previous training by learning new trends in the field, there are impediments that have been recognized on the way of teachers' professional development. The first and the most influential factors mentioned by the respondents are teachers workload (they are expected to teach 25-28 periods), shortage of teachers, lack of short term training(refreshment courses), lack of shared understanding among teachers (between those who experienced and new teachers), lack of teachers commitment and skill.

The second group of factors is related to the school environment and concerned bodies' continuous support. Respondents stated that the major factors that affect teachers to implement CPD activities include assigning teachers to involve in different additional activities (participating in different co-curricular activities, assigning teachers in unit-leader and engaging teachers in different committee works), budget problem for purchasing materials which are required for CPD activities, lack of encouragement and adequate support from the City Administration education office are some of the factors mentioned.

The third group of factors is related to the resources necessary for the practice of CPD activity. Respondents forwarded that the most serious factor that hinders the teacher from implementing CPD activity is shortage of CPD course materials. The course materials are very important during the group discussion. They mentioned that they are using only two course books for 8 members of the group. Since each member of the group is expected to list every discussion points, at least one text is required for each group members.

The Current Status of CPD Program in the Three High Schools

Considering the advantage of bottom-up process Blumenfeld (1998) stated that, "what teachers take away from professional development effort is based on their existing knowledge and beliefs. Rather than having information delivered to them, teachers need to examine their beliefs about subject matter, students learning and instruction in the light of innovation." According to Simon(2004), it is anticipated that there will be tangible benefits from providing bottom-up process approach in academic staff for both collaborative and individual reflection and review of current professional development objectives and practices in light of professional development outcomes- these include better insight in to what is required for optional students learning outcomes. The above mentioned scholars idea indicates that in teachers professional development decisions are based on the teachers existing knowledge and beliefs and not in those of the other academic leaders. It is teacher who decides to join action research one of the teachers replied:

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CONCLUSIONS

The feedback from the EFL teachers revealed that teachers have positive attitude towards CPD program. However, since there is no ample opportunity that engages them in the practice, there is a great difference between what the EFL teachers' belief and actual experience in continuous professional development program. According to the teachers' response, they know what they obtained from CPD activity and the CPD role to enhance learning outcome among the learners side. Learning how to teach, and working to become an effective teacher, is a lifelong process that needs the proper practice of continuous professional development program. However, apart from this, teachers consider professional development program as an additional duty of their daily work and they criticize the work load and shortage of time as a serious problem to engage themselves to CPD activities.

English language teachers are expected to enhance their knowledge by engaging themselves to CPD activities and recent changes in the field. This can be done by offering sustainable support from school administration as well as from supervisors. However, the continuous support is very poor and totally non-existence.

Besides having very limited knowledge to conduct action research, teachers are impeded by different factors to involve in conducting action research and to include their day- to- day classroom activity in their portfolio. This also hindered the EFL teachers so as to improve the existing problem that occurs in the teaching and learning process. According to the evidences of this study, various factors are affecting teachers' in practice of CPD activities besides in their actual teaching. Factors such as lack of commitment from the teachers' side to engage in CPD activities and negligence of the teachers about their professional duties attributed from supervisors' as well as from school directors. Other factors like: scarcity or absence of short term training opportunities, shortage of teachers leading to high workload, poor coordination and management of the program, lack of shared understanding and academic integrity between those who were experienced and those who are not experienced teachers, lack of adequate financial resource for the practice of CPD, poor support from the supervisors side were some of the major related factors hindering the practice of CPD activity.

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