

THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ENSURING TEACHER QUALITY

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ABSTRACT: *The positive impact of professional development of a teacher on a student's learning outcomes is an indisputable fact. Among the many factors that influence student achievement teacher quality has become one of the determining factors. Acknowledging this fact triggers questions such as what is teacher quality and how does professional development ensure qualitative teaching. The paper tries to explore the parameters of teacher quality and emphasizes the necessity of updating oneself regularly to meet the challenges of teaching profession. It further explores methods and means of acquiring professional development.*

KEYWORDS: Professional development, Impact on qualitative teaching, Means of acquiring professional development, Positive outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

The needs and requirements of a communication skills class room is constantly changing as per the requirements of the industry and society. To meet these mercurial demands and ensure qualitative teaching is a challenging task to the present English teacher. The challenge is intensified when the teacher has to shoulder the responsibility of shaping a student's career added to the academic achievement. Such dynamic classrooms need teachers who are equally dynamic and keen on professional development. Teacher quality alone is not the sole factor responsible for students acquiring communicative competence. There are other variables like parental involvement, peer pressure, self-motivation, medium of instruction during schooling, exposure to the language etc. However, teacher quality is definitely one of the strong influencing factors on learner's outcomes.

Successful teaching depends on many factors, including the level of instructional resources available, staffing levels, continuing professional development, and support from administrators and parents (Johnson, 1990).

The research conducted across the globe highlights the positive impact of the teacher quality on student's achievement. In Indian context of teaching English as a second language, a progressive shift from viewing teacher as deliverer of the text to teacher as a facilitator, some one who can actually motivate and facilitate language acquisition has begun. This transformation to realize its objective completely today we need teachers who raise up to the challenge of constantly updating themselves and promote qualitative teaching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers are key to success of students and many studies have been conducted to scale the relationship between teacher quality and student achievement. The impact of teacher quality on student achievement cannot be denied. However, what are the characteristics of effective teachers, what kind of training ensures qualitative teaching, what are the different means to ensure ongoing professional development are the key areas that need to be explored. A substantial amount of research has been conducted on the relationship between teachers and student achievement. Two hundred studies have shown that the only factor that can create student achievement is a knowledgeable, skillful teacher.

The Education for All Global Monitoring Report (EFA GMR) finds that, ‘what students achieve in school is heavily influenced by classroom practices and teacher’ skills...One of the most important requirements for sustained progress towards better quality in education is an improved learning environment, encompassing the physical school infrastructure, the learning process and the interaction between children and teachers’ (UNESCO GMR, 2010: 114–15).

The article “Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence” by Linda Darling-Hammond (1999), examined a fifty state survey on teacher policies, case analyses, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress. It specifically looked at teacher qualifications and how other school inputs are related to student achievement across all fifty states. Darling-Hammond found that teacher quality relates to increased student achievement, and that at the state level, teacher quality is more important than other factors such as class size and overall school spending.

The article “How Teacher Education Matters” (2000) looks at teacher preparation and training. It found that greater skills in actual teaching, not just subject matter, and greater exposure to on the job teacher training creates more confident and successful teachers. Therefore teachers who participate in more course work on teaching and learning are more likely to stay in the field of teaching.

The research conducted across the globe emphasizes the positive influence of teacher quality and qualifications on student’s achievement. Emulating the research happening in US and UK, Asian countries too have started significant research in this area.

In the Indian context, Minister of State for Human Resource Development, Dr. Shashi Tharoor, stated (on 20th August, 2013) that to improve the quality of school teachers, the Government of India has adopted a three-pronged strategy, which includes (i) the strengthening of Teacher Education Institutions, (ii) the revision of curriculum for teacher education in accordance with the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education 2009 and (iii) the laying down of minimum qualifications for Teacher Educators and their continuous professional development

The last strategy mentioned above suggests that the teacher quality and student achievement are strongly connected. Especially, for acquiring communication skills the student depends more on the teacher than a textbook. Hence, it is essential that teachers teaching communications skills to professional students should have certain qualities. This takes us to

the second phase of the paper to discuss what do we mean by teacher quality and what are the means to improve teacher quality.

Teacher Quality

What is teacher quality? Can we define teacher quality? What are the aspects of teacher quality. Finding answers to these questions is not an easy task as the answers have varied across time. Going back to 1900's we find that one popular criterion for teacher quality is high moral character. Teachers should personify virtue. With the changing times teachers are looked upon as transmitters of cultural and educational values. The ability to teach the prescribed syllabus and the methods they implement became part of research on second language acquisition.

Pursuing the idea of the teacher with technical skills, researchers in the next decades focused on observing teachers in their classrooms, at first to see how well they were implementing specific curricula and later to document specific teaching practices that seemed to be associated with gains in students' test scores (Brophy and Good, 1986).

The diversity in students needs today demand teachers to be multifaceted, constantly honing their skills. In nut shell, in today's context teacher quality define the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that teachers should demonstrate. If knowledge, skills and dispositions are the three aspects that determine a teacher quality the next question would be how can a teacher acquire this teacher quality and maintain it? Do we have any sure means to achieve this?

Teacher as a lifelong learner

Teacher as a lifelong learner seems to be the only way to ensure ongoing professional development. This continuous professional development is key to students achievement. Self motivation, willingness to learn, and constant practice are the characteristics of a successful language learner. An intellectually engaged teacher can inculcate these characteristics in students and guide the students better through the process of acquiring language.

Means of ensuring ongoing professional development

To ensure long term and ongoing professional development we as teachers have many opportunities like attending trainings, participating in workshops, presenting at seminars and conferences, updating oneself with the new techniques and practices, reading journals, conducting classroom research, discussing with colleagues, becoming member of teaching communities etc.

In service training sessions/ certification programs

One of the excellent ways for a language teacher to update oneself is in service teacher training. No matter how qualified and knowledgeable a teacher is he/she becomes stagnant if the desire to update one selves is lacking. It is mandatory for today's language teachers to not only develop knowledge of the subject but to also to assess themselves and develop skills for a flexible teaching style adapted to the needs of the students.

Training involves understanding of basic concepts and principles as a prerequisite for applying them to teaching and the ability to demonstrate practices and principles in the classroom (Jack c Ricahrds 2005)

This kind of teacher training is more useful than pre service training as the teachers would be fully aware of the realities and problems in second language teaching. They can select trainings that suit their purpose. The experience and expertise they already have in teaching can be further deepened and broadened. The expertise gained will be shared with colleagues and thus an ongoing professional environment can be ensured.

There are many useful training modules and certifications offered by renowned universities and institutes across the globe. For language teachers in India who would want to expand their teaching skills here is the list of training modules and certification courses:

CELTA: The Cambridge Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA) teaching award is an internationally recognized teaching qualification which follows a four-week curriculum designed by the University of Cambridge. Along with an internationally recognized certificate CELTA is apt for language teachers who wants to enhance their teaching style. The 4 week certificate program is available in New Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai.

Cambridge English Teacher further offers an In-service Certificate in English Language Teaching (ICELT) which is a highly practical course-based award that provides in-service teacher training and development for practicing English Language teachers. Cambridge English Teaching Awards such as [TKT: KAL](#), [TKT: CLIL](#) and the Delta Modules are also offered for language teachers who have completed ICELT.

EFLU: The English and Foreign Languages University offers on request the following programs:

- a. Training programmes in English Language for Educational Institutions/Corporate Houses
- b. Teacher training programmes in English Language Teaching for Educational Institutions.

Trainer Training Programmes for English Language Teaching.

ILSC: ILSC language schools with its campus in New Delhi offers teacher training programs which are certified by some of the most respected organizations in the ESL/EFL teaching field. TESOL Business Certificate Program is a comprehensive certificate which provides the teaching tools, techniques, and methodology to address the training needs of employees in the field of business. Diploma in English Language Teaching program enables the learners to bridge the gap between theory and practice of the methodology of teaching English and focuses on different aspects of teaching.

Regional English Language Office (RELO):

Based at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, India, the Regional English Language Office (RELO) supports the professional development of English language teachers. Added to the

Six week residential training program for secondary school teachers from the South and Central Asian countries , RELO offers semester -long E-teacher online courses hosted at U.S. universities. Additional teacher training workshops are also organized for practicing teachers.

Institutional support is crucial to the teachers in their process of professional development. Fortunately, many colleges and schools are recognizing the need of teacher training and its impact on student's outcome, They support the teachers to undergo such trainings and provide opportunities for collaborative learning. The mutual support structure where the institute supports the teacher's professional development and teachers contribute to the institutional development is highly beneficial to students..

Workshop and Seminar's

Workshops and Seminars serve as excellent platforms for ensuring professional development. The positive impact of these platforms on teachers learning is undeniable and collaborative learning and team teaching are the two positive consequences reaped out of them. Workshops are highly beneficial as they simulate a learning atmosphere similar to classrooms and the teachers can see for themselves the practical application of the ideas discussed. Exchanging ideas and sharing knowledge can be mutually rewarding. The teachers will apply the new ideas and techniques in the actual classrooms. A motivated and updated teacher tries to instill the same qualities in the learners. Hence, there will be a direct impact on the learner's outcome. Presenting papers at seminars and conferences provides scope for learning and becoming part of teaching communities.

Memberships:

Earlier the entire teaching learning process is an isolated process where the teacher, if any guidance required, can only turn to his/her colleagues. Fortunately for today's teachers the access to the network of community of teachers is provided through memberships. Becoming member of professional bodies and communities is immensely useful for a teacher's professional development. They provide access to the online journals and depending on the phase of the career and interest one can select groups to join. The communities and associations are spread across the globe and becoming part of them opens windows to many ideas and thoughts. Collaborative learning happens among the members where they can learn from each other experiences and insights. Language classrooms are dynamic in nature and the present day English teacher needs to be equally dynamic to meet the demands of the learners. Being member also had an added advantage of sharing learning materials and techniques. The members are also provided the opportunity to be part of the webinars and with a click away they are part of the English language teaching communities across the globe.

Many communities and associations are there to join offline and online such as IATEFL, ELTAI, NCTE, TESOL international association, Cambridge English Teacher, which provide excellent resource material and a wonderful platform to gain ideas and interact within the communities. Added to these there are en number of online communities which ensure ongoing professional development.

Teacher support groups

Teacher support groups are another wonderful means of collaborative learning. Though unofficially support groups are part of any institution where teachers often discuss and share aspects of subject they are teaching, teacher support groups should be made more systematic streamlined. In the place of vague discussions and probable ideas, a well-planned support group with clear goals and constructive agenda helps a lot in professional development of a teacher. The peer support and advice extended in such groups helps teachers in resolving issues smoothly and updating regularly. In a situation where a student needs guidance and a single teacher cannot completely handle she/he can take the help of the support groups to resolve. Hence, these support groups indirectly extend support to students and influence them.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier a teacher should be a lifelong learner. Learning is an ongoing process and doesn't have any stipulated time. Apart from the ways discussed above there are other means of updating oneself and constantly self-assessing oneself. Maintaining a teacher journal is an excellent way to assess and compare teaching styles, referring journals and browsing online articles regularly helps to keep in pace with changing methodologies and content. Language teaching is not static and problems and perspectives differ from country to country. What applies to a particular group of students may not apply to others. So selecting any relevant area(basing on the students' needs and requirements) that needs further exploration and conducting studies and surveys together as a team will be highly rewarding and improves qualitative teaching. Finally, I would like to emphasize that focusing on professional development not only helps in stepping up the career ladder but also personally rewarding and satisfactory when we realize that we played an important role in influencing a student's career.

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