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Professional Development Practices in the Elementary Schools of Vadodara city

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Abstract

The foremost task of a school is to develop the personality of children that enables them to meet the needs of the 21st century. The leadership of the principal in the school is considered as the heart and soul of qualitative improvements. The teachers are the focus of the teaching-learning process. Hence, the professional development of both teachers and principals is a prerequisite for achieving the desired goals of the school. The government of India has taken initiatives i.e., NISHTHA, INSET and DIKSHA to update the skills and competencies of elementary teachers and principals. The objective of the study was to identify the professional development needs of both teachers and principals and to examine different professional development practices of both teachers and principals in the elementary schools of Vadodara city. The research design was of survey type and a simple random sampling technique was used. The samples constituted 136 teachers and 28 principals of Vadodara municipal corporation elementary schools. The data were collected using questionnaires and analyzed through frequency and percentage. The findings revealed that the majority of principals and teachers were aware of the goals of professional development and wanted training in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as well as in different subjects i.e., English, Computer, Math, Science, Social Science, Hindi, and Environment Science. They attended one, two, or three professional development programs of varying durations, such as one day, two days, or seven days in a year, in order to upgrade their skills and expertise. The state government has taken many initiatives to support teachers' and principals' professional development. During the pandemic, the teachers and principals wanted



more training in online pedagogy than digital tools of learning and assessment. Most teachers and principals demanded more safety for female teachers. Most teachers and principals were satisfied with the professional development program in terms of expertise and skills of resource persons, the content presented, time management, and resources. They stated that the professional development programs had a positive impact on their job accomplishment.

Keywords: Professional Development, Elementary Teachers and Principals, Holistic Development.

Introduction

The development of a nation depends on its citizens and resources. The children are the future of a nation. Thus, the school has the duty of shaping the personality of children. The effective management of resources of a school is the stepping stone towards moulding the character and developing the personality of children. In order to achieve the goals of elementary education, teachers and principals are required to enlighten the intellectual sides of children's personality by providing quality education. Quality education depends on the skills and competencies of teachers and principals to manage classroom transactions. In order to equip teachers and principals with 21st-century skills to meet students' needs, ongoing and consistent professional development is needed. In the school context, professional development refers to upgrading the skills and competence of teachers and principals through facilitating various experiences to manage their professional roles effectively. Formal experience can be gained through attending seminars, workshops, and professional meetings and other experience comes from reading journal articles, and publications, and seeing professional documentaries amongst others. Professional development opportunities help teachers and principals to keep their knowledge and skills up to date.

Continuous Professional Development of Elementary Teachers and Principals: Need of the Hour

Elementary education is the foundation for the future holistic development of students. The teachers and principals of elementary

schools are responsible to deliver effective learning to meet established standards of education. National education policy (2020) stressed on promoting all-around development of children in schools. Here, teachers and principals must ensure the harmonious development of the physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, moral, and aesthetic sides of students' personalities. They have to train students to think analytically, make hypotheses to solve queries, be forward-thinking, and have positive attitude toward learning. This can only be possible if teachers and principals are aware of their professional roles and the means to attain it. Teachers and principals require continual assistance that is relevant to their classroom practices for adopting and sustaining school initiatives (Fullan, 2007). Continuous professional development provides teachers and principals with continuous self-improvement opportunities and learning the latest innovations and advances in their professions. It makes teachers and principals of elementary schools aware of the latest pedagogies regarding foundational literacy and numeracy, formative and adaptive assessment of learning outcomes, competency-based learning, and related pedagogies, such as experiential learning, arts-integrated, sports-integrated, and storytelling-based approaches (NEP, 2020).

Continuous professional development is required to keep the teacher up-to-date with the continuously changing practices, and student needs. It makes teachers become lifelong learners. Continuous professional development includes activities concerned

with classroom management, designing curriculum and unit planning, and pedagogy (Garet et al., 2001). It makes teachers aware of the databases for retrieving resources concerned with effective classroom transactions (Evers et al., 2016). All these activities help novice teachers to plan classes, manage student behavior, and work according to professional ethics (Daresh, 2002). All professional development should be based on nine aspects i.e., content knowledge and quality teaching, research basis, collaboration, diverse learning needs, student learning environments, family involvement, evaluation, data-driven design, and teacher learning (Hirsh, 2007). Hence, continuous professional development provides a plethora of learning experiences to teachers and principals that fulfill their professional requirements. It will improve the effectiveness of teachers (Goe, 2007). Quality professional development contributes to creating a positive school culture (Willemse et al., 2015). Thus, continuous professional development helps to improve the quality of education (Kelly, 2006; Desimone, 2009; Dadds, 2014). The school principals also get opportunities of online platforms to continuously enhance their own leadership and management skills and share best practices with each other. As continuous professional development helps teachers and principals remain current on best practices to enhance student academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). In the present era of knowledge explosion, the teachers and principals need to be well equipped with adequate knowledge and skills to deal with the needs of homogeneous as

well as heterogeneous groups of learners in the school. The teachers and principals need to be a lifelong-learners. Hence, continuous professional development is a means to update the skills and competence of teachers and principals periodically. It becomes helpful in promoting excellence in teaching and the quality of teachers and principals. It is helpful to enhance the capacity of teachers and principals to harness their talent and expertise. It enables teachers and principals to prepare children to meet their future challenges of life.

Hence, continuous professional development has been promoted through the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) with the support of Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. The government of India has taken initiatives i.e., National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement (NISTHA), and Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA) to build the capacities of teachers and school principals in the elementary stage. In addition to this, In-service Education for Teachers (INSET) initiative made under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Framework 2001 (revised in 2008 and 2011) made a provision for 20-day teacher training for in-service teachers in order to improve the quality of elementary education (NCFTE, 2010). These initiatives break out the intellectual isolation among elementary teachers and principals also. The Block Resource Centers (BRCs) and Cluster Resource Centers (CRCs) also help towards strengthening the skills of pedagogy (NCF, 2005). The coordinators of BRCs and CRCs

be trained by the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) to assess teachers' needs for support to function as reflective practitioners (NCFTE, 2010). The Institutes of Advanced Study in Education (IASE) take initiative to redesign the in-service training of teachers to make it more learner-based. These initiatives need to be followed up. In India, 2.7 million teachers were unprepared to deal with the challenges related to school closers and altered methods of teaching (UNESCO report 2020).

The current study aims to identify the professional development needs of teachers and principals of elementary schools of Vadodara city. It further studies the ongoing professional development practices in these elementary schools.

Method

A descriptive survey method was used. A sample of 136 teachers and 28 principals of the elementary schools run by Vadodara municipal corporation (VMC) was selected by a simple random sampling technique.

Material

Closed-ended questionnaires for teachers and principals was constructed to collect data in order to identify the professional development needs of teachers and principals and to examine the professional development practices of elementary schools.

Procedure

The data was collected from teachers and principals of Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC) Schools through a closed-ended questionnaires in online mode. The collected data were analyzed by using frequency, and percentage.

Result and Discussion

The study revealed that all principals and most teachers (98.5%) expressed the need for professional development training for their professional growth. The need for professional development training covered a wide range of areas including teaching subjects, information and communication technology (ICT), co-curricular activities, classroom management, pedagogy, assessment, and evaluation. The majority of teachers (59.6%) wanted professional development in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), while some teachers (19.9%) wanted training in teaching subjects, a few teachers (8.1%) wanted classroom management training, and some teachers expressed interest in co-curricular activities, pedagogy, assessment, and evaluation. It was also found that the majority of principals (85.7%) needed professional development in the field of information and communication technology, while some principals (7.1%) needed training in teaching subjects. Most teachers and principals needed professional development in information and communication technology, which might be due to less duration of ICT training. There is a lack of infrastructure support, time constraint to use the latest software (Badri et. al., 2016).

Teachers and principals require training in various subjects in order to expand and refresh their expertise. The study revealed that some teachers (33.8%) wanted training in the content of Computer, a few teachers (23.5%) wanted training in the content of English, some teachers (21.3%) also wanted training in the content of Science, and a very few teachers wanted training in the content of

Mathematics, Environment Science, Hindi, and Social Science. It was also found that in the case of principals, 35.7% of principals needed training in the content of Computer, 32.1 % of principals required training in the content of English, 14.3% of principals needed training in the content of Mathematics, 10.7% of principals required training in the content of Science, and very few principals (7.1%) required training in the content of Environment Science. The teachers and principals need training in a wide variety of subject areas, which may be attributed to the fact that curriculum revision necessitates updating content knowledge on a regular basis.

It is important in the present time that the teachers and principals of elementary schools should be aware of the goals of professional development. It was found that the majority of teachers (94.9%) and all principals were acquainted with the goals of professional development training. It was also found that many teachers (48.5%) and majority of principals (71.4%) attended training programs, some teachers (36.8%) and principals (10.7%) attended workshops, and a few teachers and principals attended conferences and seminars for their professional development. Further, the study revealed that the majority of teachers (98.5%) and all principals participated actively in school-based professional development activities, while a few teachers (1.5%) did not. The findings revealed that most teachers and principals were aware and participated in professional development programs on different platforms. Peer assistance, teacher professional meetings, teacher networks, and

administrative support may have made the active participation possible. This is consistent with the findings of Pickering et. al. (2007) who found shared practice, collaborative learning networks, and scholarly reflection on practice improve the knowledge of teachers.

In order to promote professional development for teachers and principals of elementary schools, the state government and central government have taken certain initiatives. The majority of teachers (67.6%) and some principals (39.3%) participated in state-sponsored professional development activities; some teachers (24.2%) and the majority of principals (53.6%) participated in DIET-sponsored activities; few teachers (1.5%) and principals (3.6%) participated in central-sponsored professional development activities, and only 6.6% teachers and 3.6% principals participated in professional development activities organized by schools. The majority of teachers (88.2%) and principals (82.1%) attended one professional development program in a year. At the same time, some teachers (10.3%) and principals (17.9%) attended two times and a very few teachers (1.5%) attended three times professional development programs in a year. It was also found that the majority of teachers (77.9%) and principals (96.4%) attended one-day professional development programs. Some teachers (22.1%) attended two days professional development program whereas a few principals (3.6%) attended seven days. Each teacher and principal participated in one or other professional development programs organized by the different organizing bodies, it may be due to proper implementation of

government policy initiatives at the grass-root level.

During the pandemic, all principals and the majority of teachers (94.9 %) attended professional development training, while a few teachers (5.1 %) did not. It was also found that all principals and the majority of teachers (97.1%) responded that the time duration for professional development activities was adequate, but just a few teachers (2.9%) stated that it was inadequate. The findings also revealed that all principals and the majority of teachers attended professional development training and satisfied with the activities, which might be the result of proper planning and effective execution of professional development programs.

It was also found that during the pandemic, the majority of teachers (49.3%) and principals (57.1%) wanted training in online pedagogy, while some teachers (28.7%) and principals (17.9%) wanted training in digital tools of learning and few teachers (13.2%) and principals (14.3%) wanted training in digital tool for assessment. It was also found that some teachers (8.8%) and principals (10.7%) wanted training in online pedagogy, digital tools of learning, and digital tools of assessment. This requirement may be due to the need for coping up with ICT integration in online classroom. Teachers' computer competence is a major factor of success towards integrating ICT in teaching (Bordbar, 2010).

According to all principals and the majority of teachers (98.5%) the resource persons conducting the professional development training were competent, while just a few

teachers (1.5%) responded that the resource persons were incompetent. All principals and the majority of teachers (97.8%) responded that resource persons of professional development training had adequate knowledge and skill. The content of resource persons was relevant to the present time, and adequate resources were provided during professional development training. All principals and the majority of teachers were satisfied with the work of the resource persons, which might be due to resource persons being skilled, experienced, well trained, and updated.

During professional development training, the majority of principals (64.3%) and teachers (58.8%) agreed that more safety is needed for female teachers. At the same time, some teachers (41.2%) and principals (35.7%) stated that the safety and security provided to female teachers was adequate. According to the majority of principals and teachers, female teachers require extra protection. which may be due to witnessing gender-based violence, and harassment. In primary school, there is teasing for sex difference (Evan at. el., 1986).

The majority of teachers (98.5%) and all principals were satisfied with the professional development training. It was also found that most teachers (99.3%) and principals (96.4%) stated that professional development training improved job accomplishment. Few teachers (0.7%) and principals (3.6%) stated that professional development training had no impact on job accomplishment. All principals stated through professional development training administrative skills were improved and the

majority of teachers (99.3%) stated that through professional development learning teaching skills were improved. The findings showed that continuous professional development has a positive impact on the job accomplishment of teachers and principals. These outcomes might be the consequence of well-organized activities with adequate facilities that bring challenging change in the knowledge, skills, attitude, and beliefs of principals and teachers. Professional development has a positive impact on curriculum transaction, pedagogy, as well as teachers' sense of commitment and their relationships with students (Talbert, 2010).

Conclusion

Continuous professional development is important to improve the job satisfaction of both teachers and principals of elementary urban corporation schools. The findings of the study are relevant to draw implications for professional development organizers at the macro level and micro level i.e., NCERT, SCERT, IASE, DIET, BRCs, and CRCs. It is important professional development programs be customized according to the professional needs of the teachers and principals of different elementary schools. The training in ICT is the need of the hour and teachers and principals need to be equipped with ICT skills to accomplish educational goals.

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