

A Comparative Study Of Impact Of Professional Development On Teachers Learning

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Abstract

This study explores the idea of significant use of CPD for teachers and reflects upon teachers' perception about professional development and how they feel about the use of CPD and it also discusses how effective professional development should be structured. Teachers find CPD effective as a useful and usable learning if it is initiated in context of their own practices and needs. They also consider CPD to be more effective if they are part of planning CPD in small groups according to their as well as their students' needs. They prefer professional development through peer visits, learning from colleagues, mentoring and coaching and taking professional courses to attending conferences and large PD sessions. They also recognize that effective CPD helps them become better teachers. Their preferred method is through mentoring, coaching and taking long term or short-term professional courses. The paper also recognizes the barriers and limitations teachers may have in bringing their professional learning into practical. The paper is suggestive of policy mechanism in schools to follow up. The paper also hints that background knowledge and training of teachers in different context may pose barriers to the effectiveness of professional development. This paper was written in context of teachers from one particular region. The data collection was also on a limited scale, this paper, therefore, does not reflect on how teachers in other countries and regions think, feel and reflect on the concept of CPD. This paper is suggestive of how effective CPD improves the quality of teaching and students' outcomes, however, there needs to be more research conducted for a clear system and policy in school for implementing meaningful structured CPD and also to consider other factors which may barricade the transformation of learning from professional development to real every day teaching.

Keywords: Professional development, Teacher learning. Training

Introduction

In recent times, it is widely accepted by educationists that improving the quality of teaching directly impacts the quality of learning students receive. Focusing on professional development of teachers in an education system plays a vital role in overall enhancement of teaching practices and students'

outcomes. The term CPD (activity of improving practicing teachers professional learning as continuing professional development) has become a very popular in recent years. Having systematic CPD in place for teachers is considered to be a major strength of schools and, also having a rigorous CPD structure in place is a requisite for schools for being nationally accredited (Ministry of Education, 2018). It is widely accepted that having CPD as part of the organizational culture is perhaps the best-known way of making it useful till date (Eraut, 2004; OECD, 2005; UNESCO, 2014).

Objective

The objective of the study remained around two following areas: explore teachers' views and ideas about professional development and its impact on teachers' learning. Focus on how approaches to CPD, focus, structure and methods; teachers' aspirations, prior learning and teaching beliefs; implicit and explicit barriers to professional learning impact the effectiveness of PD's received by teachers.

Researcher anticipated to recognize and explore key factors of influence on effective CPD in practice and ascertain the nature of its apparent impact in certain context. I am also hoping to recognize how teachers from two different schools learned differently from PD session received on the same topic.

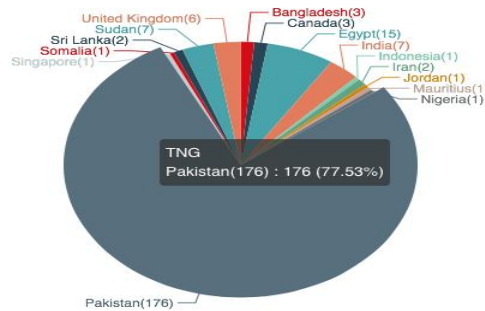
Research Context

The paper explores the importance of teachers' professional development and it also highlights how teachers think they learn better and makes an attempt to understand the impact of PD's received by teachers in their classroom teaching. Firstly, paper highlights about the aims and the rationale of choosing this topic; afterwards, a context of school is established through reflection on data. It also explores literature review, which identifies the themes of teachers' views and attitudes, approaches to effective professional development, barriers and hindrance to effective learning and research perspectives of professional development. It also reveals the gaps in teachers' training in context of two different countries. After the literature review, there are details on ethical considerations and research methods used. In the end, the paper uses the analysis of findings to draw conclusions and engages in critical discussion. Findings were suggestive of implications for organizational leadership and school culture. The findings also triggered a discussion on the barriers in the effective implementation of PD structure and educational change.

School Background

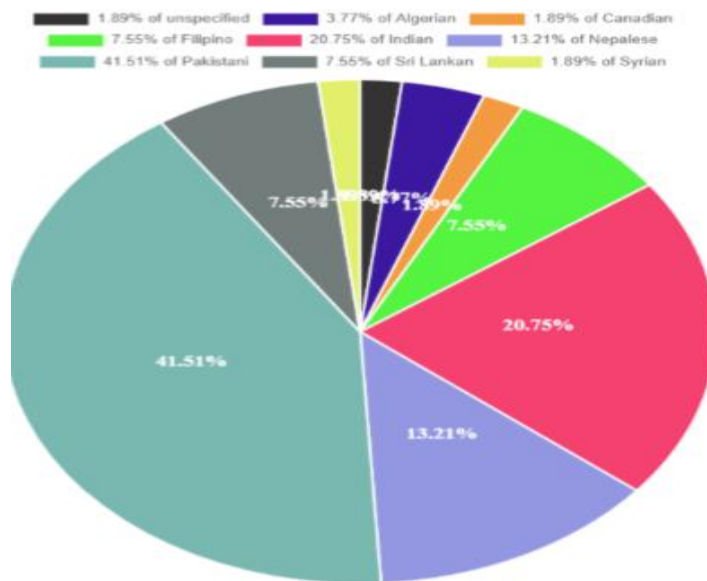
The graph (Fig:1) below represents students' population in school chosen as subject of research. The graph below identifies a clear dominance of Pakistani students in school population.

Figure 1: Percentage of students' distribution in school according to nationalities.



Teaching in all these schools including the school in context have limited approaches towards teaching, apparently because most of the teachers have been trained in Pakistan and their teaching experience is also from Pakistan. The graph below reflects on the teachers' community in school.

Figure 2: Percentage of teachers' distribution in school according to nationalities



Literature Review

An extensive study into available literature was conducted and key findings emerged from the literature review are as follows:

- CPD plays significant role in teachers' development, it takes places in many forms and teachers understand the importance of CPD in their professional experiences.
- CPD should be structured around teachers' needs; it helps promote the ownership of professional learning. Teacher's needs stem from students needs; effective CPD is likely to improve the learning outcomes of students also.
- CPD should be conducted as broad extended program featuring all possible approaches,

conventional and non-conventional, to teachers' learning.

- School leadership and presence of well-defined rigorous systems to ensure the proper implementation of CPD contribute significantly to the effectiveness of CPD.
- Effective professional development addressed through multiple approaches initiates sustainable educational change in schools.
- CPD program should be structured around how best teachers learn and what should be the focus of their learning.
- Collaborative learning in continuing professional development enhances the professional learning effectively.
- It is significant to correlate schools needs and teachers' needs to maximize the benefits of CPD.
- Teacher's background knowledge, previous trainings, past experience and teaching beliefs are critical factors to be taken into account for promoting a new professional learning.

Reviewing the literature helped me highlight different perspectives of CPD. The literature review broadly focuses on accepted definitions, context, approaches and scope of CPD. The review also attempts to explore the meaning and impact of the purpose and process of how educational organizations approach the concept of CPD, what makes CPD more effective and useful for teachers as well as for organization.

Method

This study followed BERA (British Education Research Association) guidelines for ethical considerations and following instruments were used for data collection.

i. Interviews: Interviews based on open-ended questions with head teachers, principals and teachers were conducted involving all levels of hierarchy in school.

ii. Questionnaires: Educators inside as well as outside school were accessed through electronic mails. A total of 160 invitations were sent out and 132 responses were received. Questionnaires were also open ended and educators expressed their views on effective CPD in a clear manner. The target was to understand how teachers feel about CPD and its role in their professional life and how professional development sessions in other organizations had been helping teachers to become more effective as teachers, and also how it had impacted their classroom practices.

iii. Classroom Observations: The third method used was classroom observations. Researcher observed 20 classrooms in subject school, which is referred as school A and 20 classrooms in another school with a particular note of what teachers had learned from the PD sessions they had already received. The PD was on fundamental 5 (Cain, S., & Laird, M., 2011), teachers from both schools had received more than two professional development sessions about the same topic. The sole aim was to assess the impact of this training in context of the research question: How it has changed their classroom practices?

Since these observations were not meant to ascertain the usefulness of fundamental 5. That is the reason, discussion or analysis of Fundamental 5 is not included in this research. The whole point of these observations was to ascertain how far the professional development has changed the attitude

and role of the teacher in class. Fundamental 5 is a suggested way of creating a strong lesson. According to Cain, S., & Laird, M., (2011) a powerful lesson has five elements listed as below:

Table A: Fundamental 5 for a powerful lesson (Adapted from Cain, S., & Laird, M., 2011)

1. Frame the lesson (Planning and Preparation)
2. Power Zone
3. Purposeful Talk in Small Group
4. Formative Assessment (Recognize & Reinforce)
5. Writing Critically

Discussion & Analysis

The following section carries out a discussion on the research methodology and findings.

i. Discussion & Evaluation: Methodology

Methods used in research had been effective. They could clearly steer the focus of research towards a conclusion that how teachers in a certain region and in certain schools perceive professional development and its effectiveness and how they make an effort to implement their learning in their classroom. However, it was assumed that method No. 2, which was sending questionnaires to teachers inside as well as outside my school, had some implications as the participation in the method was lower than expectations. The third method, which was classroom observation, also proved to be quite reflective as it gives a clear picture of how many factors in one school can hinder the implementation of teachers' learning from professional development in their classrooms as compared to other school. It also suggested a discussion on the barriers in implementation of professional learning of teachers.

Results

a. Finding from Interviews

Reviewing the data from first two methods i.e. interviews and questionnaires reveals that teachers had clear understanding what CPD looks like and what it is meant by this term. Teachers used the terms such as "better teaching methods" for CPD. They described CPD as workshops, seminars, courses and activities to promote teachers' development. They also emphasized during the interviews that PD should be structured around their needs. Some of them talked about students' needs also. But majority of them focused on teachers' needs in their interviews.

For instance, responding to the question regarding what should the CPD sessions be about, one of the teachers said,

"I would want that school conducts a survey first and asks us what do we want as our PD needs, not others taking decisions for us. I know better as a teacher what I need to learn. There are many areas where I want to improve but our opinion is not taken".

These views by teachers can be analyzed in context of research by Timperley and Alton-Lee, (2008) which has evidenced that an effective and powerful PD structure can be brought into practice by providing ownership of professional learning according to the needs of individuals and schools. Many other authors (Bubb & Earley, et al., 2007) also have attempted to draw a positive relationship between effective CPD and students' learning outcomes. Research by Stoll et al., (2012) suggests that teachers' needs for professional development are basically driven by needs of their students, therefore, benefitting teachers through effective CPD around their needs will benefit students also.

Another perspective to CPD in this context asserts that providing professional learning according to the needs of teachers promotes ownership of the new learning as a result of CPD and teachers' development and this learning eventually benefits not only teachers but schools also (Timothy R.N. Murphy, 2017).

b. Finding from questionnaires

1. It was noticed from the analysis of all three methods that majority of the teachers believed in the importance of CPD and they acknowledged that how they have improved after attending certain CPD plans. Majority of the teachers emphasized on the context of how and why CPD should be conducted.
2. 15 out of 20 teachers mentioned that teachers should be part of planning for professional development.
3. Most of the teachers believed that CPD should be planned around their needs. However, some teachers mentioned students' needs also.
4. Responding to questions related to the outcomes of CPD, teachers discussed their personal career aspirations. They appeared to believe that they must receive rewards after they have gone through certain professional development benchmarks. Teachers also expressed their expectations to be promoted in organizational hierarchy after they had received certain PD's.
5. Responding to the questions related to CPD planning, majority of the teachers wanted to be part of the planning. However, they also expressed their views on how they would like to work in their departments rather than having one or two big sessions from external resource person.
6. Teachers also wanted to experience PD's, which help them in their day-to-day lesson delivery; they want to understand and get expertise on their day-to-day teaching. They seemed less interested in areas of curriculum development etc.
7. Teachers appeared to be pressurized by the PD as a policy by schools. For example, one of the teachers said,
"We don't like when they bring a new software without consulting with us,
and plan professional development on that as a compulsion for us"
8. Teachers commented on changes in attitude as positive ones, they appeared to believe that they had learned to accept changes in their approaches towards teaching. And they were learning to their change their beliefs in teaching. Teachers acknowledged changes in their pedagogical approaches were hard to accept initially.

c. Finding from classroom observations

Research could easily identify predominant presence of fundamental 5 in most of the lessons observed in school A, whereas, in my school, which is termed as school B, most of the lessons observed lacked it. The data from both the schools was written forms of tables and graphs were created for a simpler comparison.

Figure 3: School A

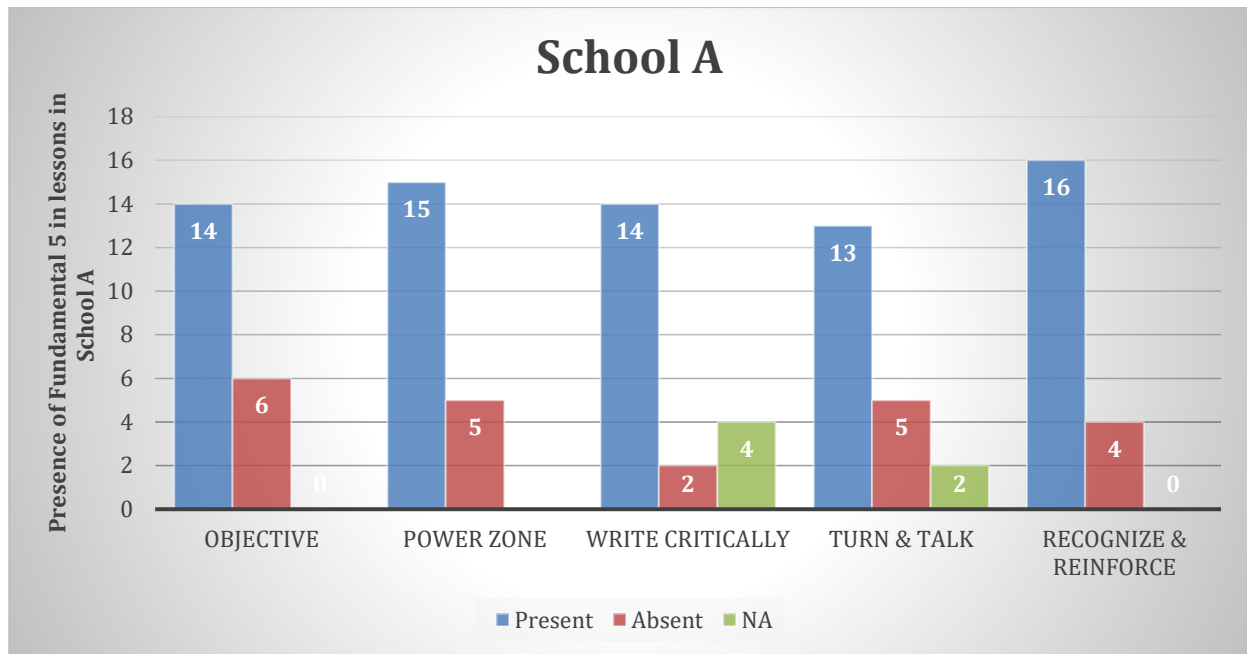
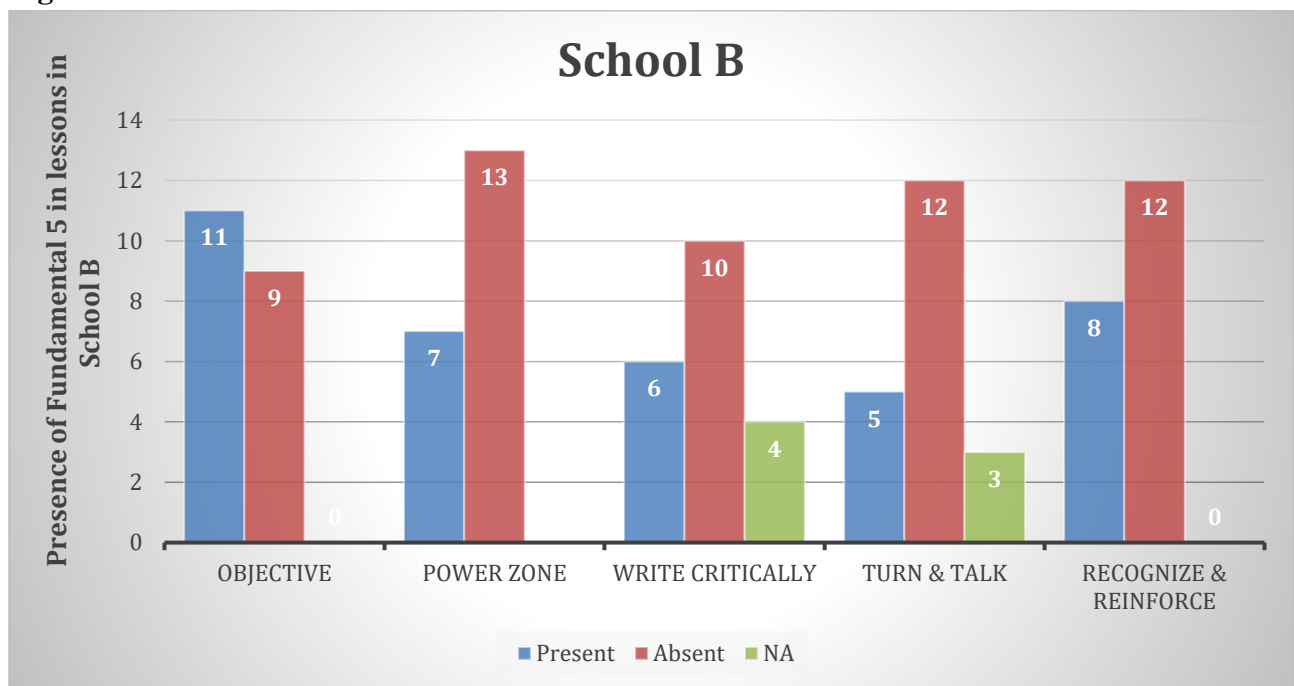


Figure 4: School B



Discussion, Analysis and Conclusions:

In this section the discussion is around the following:

- Major findings from analysis of research methods
- Major findings from analysis of classroom observations
- Overlapping ideas in all three methods
- Linking findings with literature review section of the assignment
- Linking findings with more literature

Discussion & Analysis: Barriers to Effective Continuing Professional Development

Schools are considered to be one of most effective learning professional communities because the learning in schools is acquired through practices (Kwakman, 2003). However, argument by Ball & Cohen (1999) debates classroom situation may still not be an ideal place to make connection between teacher learning and practice. These researchers, instead, suggest that strategic documentation of practice can be a basis of creating better learning opportunities for teachers. Concrete documentations and records of teaching helps teachers and schools making better connection in professional development and teaching practices. This helps me relate to the findings from classroom observations.

School A had a systematic and documented procedure in place to monitor the impact of professional development. The learning walk forms in schools were meant to identify if the practice of presence of fundamental 5 is being carried out in classrooms or not. I requested data on learning walk forms from school B, which they agreed to share. After analysing 132 learning walk forms, I found out that teachers were given constructive and specific feedback on elements of fundamental 5 after every learning walk. This practice had helped school establish learning culture, which is hinted by Ball & Cohen (1999) whereas in school B there was no such practice.

There was another interesting finding about these two schools, the professional development participation from school A was 70% whereas the participation in professional development by school B was 100%. This finding implies that follow up along with monitoring and evaluation system need to be part of the school operations. Providing sustained opportunities to teachers is enhances the quality of their professional development. Teachers must get sustained opportunities to apply their learning in their classrooms over an extended interval of time. The professional development should not be in one sporadic session; it rather has to be structured to develop an in depth, sustained and rigorous learning over an extended period (Bubb & Earley, 2009). This conclusion can be well related in context of these two schools in discussion. School A provided sustained, in-depth and intensive professional development learning to its teachers and school B although provided more opportunities to its teachers but most of them were in large session conducted once for all. There was no mechanism to follow up and ensure the learning has occurred or not (Ball & Cohen, 1999). Ofsted (2006) suggests after a study conducted to determine the usefulness of CPD that professional development coordinators should be made part of senior leadership team because it was reflected in the study that schools where PD coordinators were part of SMT had better outcomes of professional development activities.

Teachers had clearly identified a change in their teaching practices interviews and questionnaire. They had acknowledged that they have become better teachers after they have received trainings. The changes, teachers perceived to have experienced as a result of their professional development can be generalized in two major categories: better pedagogical knowledge & better attitudes and understanding. As reflected from teachers' views that continuous professional development has changed them as teachers over time. It is essential in context of findings in all three methods specially method No. 3 to look into the reasons and factors, which may hinder the effectiveness of professional development of teachers. It is, however, important at this point to explain and relate the findings from the research method no. 3 in this discussion.

As a result of effective PD, the probability of use of new knowledge is perceived to be upwards. However, the barricading factors can be causing hindrance to teachers' performance at three different levels. Firstly, it is at times a difficult knowledge to grasp, teachers may not have skills set to comprehend and grasp the real concept and philosophy, it is therefore, advisable that many leaders

in schools have such knowledge to continuously collate for consistency. It is empowering teachers' knowledge through constant guidance and follow up by leadership. As discussed earlier, schools where professional development coordinator is part of senior leadership team have better outcomes of CPD. Lack of involvement by leadership team and absence of follow up systems may be some of the major reasons of ineffective implementation of CPD in school B. Secondly, adopting and practicing new knowledge at times means a cultural change too, which may face implicit or explicit resistance by individuals (Klenowski, 2002). As discussed earlier, teachers teaching beliefs can influence their learning hugely. Thirdly, an educational change doesn't mean a quick fix (Fullan, 1990). For instance, teachers from School B are trained in a country where teaching is teaching methods are limited and teachers depend and believe in lecture-based teaching. The resistance to change may be tacit or otherwise. This can be one of major factors here.

Conclusion & Recommendations

This study has implications and limitations like most of the researches. Of which, the first and foremost is the context of writing this paper. It is written in context of certain school and certain region, it does not therefore; imply the findings are applicable to professional development learning universally.

The following list is based helps researchers understand how teachers' learning and changes in their practices over time can be manipulated by using key terms of Fullan's change theory (Fullan, 1991). Change theory encompasses change management through these seven basic core areas, which are listed as below:

1. Results oriented capacity building focus on motivation;
2. Focus on motivation
3. barriers to honest reflection
4. three layered management.
5. learning context
6. change in context
7. flexibility and persistence

It is concluded with an understanding that there are many factors, which can influence the usefulness of CPD. In spite of a clear professional development structure in place, the professional learning may still be at stake due to different multifaceted reasons. The study suggests that school leadership plays a significant role in implementing effective CPD structure in schools, therefore the professional development personnel should be a key member of senior management team. It is also suggested that schools having rigorous follow up systems and professional development policy regulation may be benefitted more as result of professional developments, as was evident in case of school B.

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