

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD) PROGRAMME FOR TEACHERS AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING

BACKGROUND

Teachers today need to upgrade their skills and knowledge to meet the pedagogical requirements of modern times. This objective is best achieved by continuous professional development, an essential professional attribute which helps teachers evolve and improve their teaching practice to be better aligned with students' needs. Student learning and achievement are linked with the teacher's competencies and skills to engage them in learning. Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to understand and use emerging innovations in education. For instance, the use of technology in learning, the new instructional modern design and better student assessment techniques.

With funding from the European Union along with technical support of UNICEF, the Sindh Technical Assistance for Development through Enhanced Education Programme (STA DEEP) aims to provide the Sindh School Education & Literacy Department (SELD) with technical assistance to help it build a more responsive education system that can provide access to quality education in Sindh. One of the major initiatives is to update and implement the School Clustering Policy (SCP). A school cluster consists of a grouping of four to five schools located within proximity to each other. The smaller poorly resourced (feeder) schools are associated with the cluster school. This optimizes their performance since it is quite easy to monitor and manage them. A total of 20 cluster schools have been identified as a pilot for the implementation.

Literature available on the continuous professional development implies that an organized and well-structured CPD programme can lead to advancement in teaching practices at the institutional level and it will also improve student performance.

In parallel to SCP, the STA-DEEP is also helping SELD to implement the modified Continuous Professional Development (CPD) policy developed this year. The CPD policy is a guideline reflecting the main activities planned for teachers. Guide Teachers and Subject Coordinators were identified and recruited during the profiling of cluster schools. Each cluster school has a Guide Teacher and a Subject Coordinator to observe and make sure that new teaching methodologies are implemented in accordance with the CPD policy.

The programme trained over 100 Guide Teachers and Subject Coordinators on applying new teaching methodologies and pedagogical frameworks. It also carried out a training needs assessment, based on which manuals were updated to provide in-service training to Head Teachers, Subject Coordinators and Guide Teachers.

The programme held a series of meetings to discuss the policy and model with government stakeholders, including Sindh Teachers Education Development Authority (STEDA) and Provincial Institute for Teacher Education (PITE). The collective feedback on CPD was consolidated and used to strategize the operationalization and implementation of CPD activities that were aligned with the CPD policy of Sindh.

This case study focuses on the impact of the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training to a selected group of schoolteachers associated with the government schools in Sindh. Having completed its first learning cycle in November 2022, the remaining five cycles of the

CPD training initiative will be completed in 2023. After the successful completion of the first CPD training, data were collected through semi-structured interview of a Guide Teacher at the Government Boys Secondary School (GBSS) in Shanti Nagar, a small residential area which is a part of the Gulshan Town in the Karachi East District of Karachi.

A collection of open-ended questions and their responses allowed observations to be made pertaining to the study. The government school in Shanti Nagar was selected as a sample, considering its recognition of the CPD model and its constructive implications on both teaching and student learning. The data analysis revealed that Guide Teachers ensure pursuing the CPD model as planned, and their follow-ups with class observations of other schoolteachers help them ascertain the individual capacity of teachers and provide them with avenues to upgrade their pedagogical practices with timely support.

In general, public schoolteachers employ outdated teaching methods, which were evident in the form of delivering lectures and recitations from textbooks in the classroom. Traditional teaching approaches such as these are teacher-centric rather than student-centred and are mostly construed as an affirmation of the supremacy of teachers, thus taking away any autonomy from students. The conventional way of teaching promotes a lecture-based model in which students rely on rote learning to pass their examinations, but in the long run, it does not help in their learning. "Students have much trouble in understanding their subjects and it thus severely affects their academic performance," says Sadaf Fatima, the Guide Teacher with about nine-year experience in teaching. Most students, according to Fatima, belong to diverse ethnic backgrounds and prefer to communicate and study in their regional languages. "Since it is difficult for them to learn in English and Urdu languages, they take recourse to learning by rote. After passing to the next level by memorizing without giving any thought to what is being learned, their understanding of certain subjects is incomplete to the point of non-existence," believes Fatima.

Senior teachers are hesitant to change and are still employing the same old teaching methods. Though they did receive training about new teaching techniques, those efforts were not successful, as with no supervision or follow-up mechanism in place, it was quite easy for them to go back to their traditional teaching habits in the classroom.

Student attendance was reported to be very low. Some students used to work part-time to make ends meet as education was not their primary focus from the beginning. The old teaching style further reduced their interest in attending school. Teachers often complained about students' low participation in academic activities and pointed out their low confidence levels.

STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING

The first fundamental lesson that was taught to teachers was about student-centred learning, in place of relying on teacher-centred approaches. Student-centred learning shifted the focus of activities from teachers to students as they were given the freedom to question, discuss and learn how to solve problems on their own. Group work was encouraged in the classroom to help struggling students participate actively in their lessons. For instance, students were divided into groups to present a lesson on the importance of first aid. The presentation involved role-playing a doctor and patient. One student lay down on the table as a patient and the other one explained to him how to treat a patient bitten by a snake. This helped the rest of the students in the class to get a better understanding of the subject than just reading it from the textbook. The

lesson was planned by a CPD-trained schoolteacher, while the session was also observed by a Guide Teacher to make sure that it was implemented correctly.

The students, coming from diverse backgrounds and experiences, mostly speak the regional languages. However, presentations and group work provide them an opportunity to speak in the national language. Working together in groups helps them learn more from their peers and perform better in a friendly environment and it also leads to improved attendance. “Using these new teaching techniques is beneficial for students. They enjoy working as a group and learn a lot from each other. This also gives them a sense of achievement, boosting their morale to do better,” says Sadaf Fatima.

CREATING A BOND WITH STUDENTS

As taught in the CPD programme, modern teaching methods emphasize the importance of connecting and creating a bond with students. Establishing meaningful relationships with students creates an environment conducive to learning that leads to better student attendance and lower dropout rates. “When we talk to students with individual attention, some of them even share their personal matters and domestic issues with us,” says Sadaf Fatima. She believes that encouraging students to speak their mind helps teachers to understand their limitations as well. Students should always be treated with love, care and support which, as a result, makes them motivated and regular at school. It also enables them to listen to their teachers and deliver quality work.

“After seeing such positive results as improvement in student attendance, we are encouraging more teachers to adopt such new practices,” according to her.

SOLICITING FEEDBACK FROM TEACHERS

Recruited as a Guide Teacher by SELD, Sadaf Fatima has directly been involved in the CPD initiative and monitoring its execution. “Though teachers, as a general rule, go through different training programmes several times, what sets the on-going CPD initiative apart from others is its policy of doing follow-ups and monitoring the progress to make sure that teachers are incorporating activity-based lessons,” explains Sadaf. With Guide Teachers observing classrooms of different grades, teachers are provided with constant support in delivering modern practices, such as brainstorming and lesson planning which help them prepare better.

The CPD programme offers about six learning cycles, each a month in duration. With the assistance of the CPD initiative, students are now more willing to attend school on a regular basis and the rate of their participation in classroom activities is also high. Most teachers have reported that their students are now feeling more confident with student-centred learning.

This study is focused on the overall impact that new teaching approaches have on children’s academic development and growth. The analysis concludes that having such professional development programmes as the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is the way forward to augment teachers’ learning capacity and promote best teaching practices in terms of lesson planning and preparation. However, this objective can only be achieved if teachers are willingly ready to adopt and implement new teaching methods.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For continuous training and professional development of teachers, the CPD programme should be maintained. Collective learning promotes an environment where teachers can solicit feedback from their colleagues and enhance their teaching skills and expertise through discussions and knowledge sharing.

A Guide Teacher is a mentor for the rest of the teaching staff. However, he/she continues to work as a schoolteacher with an additional responsibility of supervising and providing professional guidance to other teachers, a specialised job that needs to be recognised as such and compensated.