CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING FOR IN-SERVICE ESL TEACHERS IN INDIA: RELEVANCE AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract - The aim of this study is to understand the usefulness and appropriacy of the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs arranged by the respective government departments or councils to the in-service Undergraduate public institutions' teachers, in Andhra Pradesh, India. The focus is on how the needs of the teachers to upskill themselves are perceived as common to everyone and how effective such training programs are when the teaching contexts and environments differ from teacher to teacher. While 43.58% of teachers felt that such training programs are very relevant, only 12.8% felt that the content in these training programs is appropriate. On the other hand, 56.42% felt that the CPD programs organized by the concerned department are not very relevant to their teaching needs and conditions and 87.2% felt that the content is not very relevant to their teaching conditions. The results of the study implicate that giving freedom to the teachers to choose the training programs as per their skills and needs would be more meaningful than the training given based on the common needs perceived by the concerned councils/departments.

Keywords - Continuous Professional Development, Indian ESL teachers, teacher training relevance, CPD challenges

I. INTRODUCTION

It is undebatable to say that teachers play a pivotal role in implementing educational reforms. As change is inevitable; so are the demands and expectations of teachers of their profession. Teachers are expected to constantly enhance their professional skills and accommodate changes as per the learners, government policies, and teaching-learning context and environment. In this context, professional development for teachers is a multifaceted endeavor that calls for dedication by continually undergoing training, with unwavering support from the education system to help them perform better as per the expectations of all the stakeholders [2].

Continuous professional development, as the term suggests is the development expected by the teachers professionally, which is a lifelong and ongoing process. It encompasses a range of methods and techniques that aims at teacher's instructional techniques. The professional development programs should provide learning opportunities for the teachers to put their new knowledge into practice in their classes. Teachers' Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training directly influences the success of reforms, and the quality of education and of course, indirectly influences the future of society [10].

With the changing times cum educational policies and new challenges that the in-service teachers have to cope with, the concerned councils/departments of the government arrange for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs. The prime aim of these programs is to align the teaching-learning practices with the new policies and changed expectations. The objectives of these training programs are:

a) to maintain uniformity in the quality of education imparted across institutions in the jurisdiction of that department
b) to impart better quality of education and improve educational standards.

However, the challenge here is that not all teachers teach the same group of students nor in the same educational environment. So the impact of these training programs when it comes to praxis in the classroom is at stake. Hayes [1] confirms this argument saying that innovation in CPD is context-specific.

As Maleki[3] states, teachers face challenges externally because they are neither directly part of the curriculum development nor the policy-making processes. In addition, they also face challenges within their classrooms as well because they do not have a choice of the students, instructional time, and other classroom-pertaining factors such as infrastructural facilities. Any CPD for teachers should train them to face/resolve and overcome these challenges.

II. INDIAN ESL CONTEXT AND CPD

In India, the teacher training process is even more complex because of the vast diversity that exists in culture, languages, beliefs and education system. Further, education is a concurrent subject where both state and central governments are equally responsible for policy making, governance and execution at the ground level [8]. There are several commissions,

boards, departments, and apex bodies for different levels and streams of education apart from teacher education.

A unique feature of this system lies in untrained Post-Graduate degree holders being recruited for teaching positions in higher education institutions. They are expected to complete Induction, Orientation and Refresher courses after they are recruited. So CPD has a major role to play in helping and enhancing the performance of teachers in the classrooms. The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), NCERT [6]and NEP 2020 [11] admits that CPD plays an important role in helping maintain and enhance the quality of education in Higher Educational Institutions. As Tyagi and Mitra [12] suggest, CPD is not just the responsibility of the government but more of the individuals who are in the profession. They should be self-initiative and take charge of their own professional learning opportunities and growth which many not be the case with many of the teachers.

However, both the state and central government departments provide opportunities for the teachers to upskill themselves by attending training programs organized by University Grants Commission sponsored training centres across the country. If a state government brings about any change in its policies, they organize training programs to help their teachers adapt themselves to the changes which the teachers are to attend without fail.

A. Context

The State Government of Andhra Pradesh as a policy matter shifted from the vernacular medium of instruction to English as a medium of instruction from the primary school to the Undergraduate level. In this context, the AP State Council for Higher Education (APSCHE) requested the EFL university to conduct a training program for all the teachers on teaching English as well as using English as a medium of instruction across the curriculum. The objective of this training program is to enable a smooth shift from a bilingual method of teaching the concepts to ONLY English to teach concepts in the classrooms. Most of the students (87%) who attend their classes are the ones who completed their schooling from the regional language (Telugu) medium of instruction. However, after the completion of graduation, the job market is open only for prospective employees who have proficiency in English resulting in these students from the government-run colleges not securing reasonably good jobs in the market.

A. Final Stage

When you submit your final version, after your paper has been accepted, prepare it in two-column format, including figures and tables.

B. Research Methodology

The study is conducted on in-service teachers who teach English to Undergraduate students at various Government degree colleges across the state of Andhra Pradesh. The respondents are 78 in number, and their teaching experience varied from 3 to 25 years. The trainee teachers are given a questionnaire to gain knowledge on the relevance and satisfaction of the training program they have attended. In addition, 25% of the trainees were randomly chosen and interviewed in a semi-structured form to get their personal views on the benefits of CPD they were attending.

C. Research Questions

The prime focus of this research is to answer the following questions:

What are your specific needs to attend in-service training programs?
Can a common CPD for all in-service teachers be effective?
What are the general takeaways from such training programs?
How are the professional development opportunities perceived by the in-service teachers?

III. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The need for the training programs as per the participants is presented in graph 1.1. While 49% felt that there is a need to enhance their language proficiency and the content to be delivered in the class, 40% felt that they need more input on language pedagogy and classroom management skills. A few others (11%) felt that they needed training in specific skills based on their personal needs. This shows the diversity of the needs of the teachers to undergo training

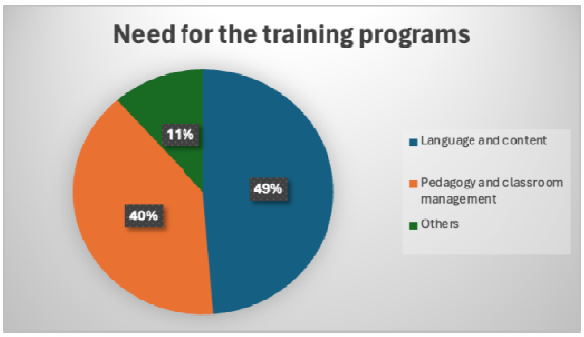
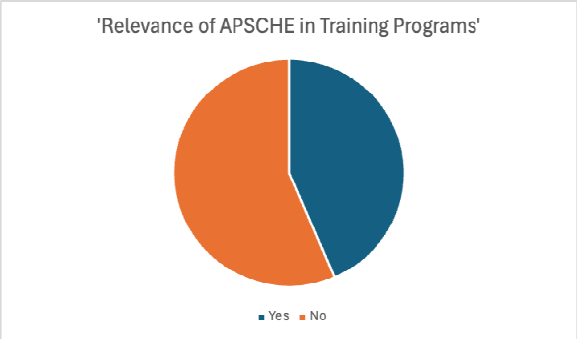


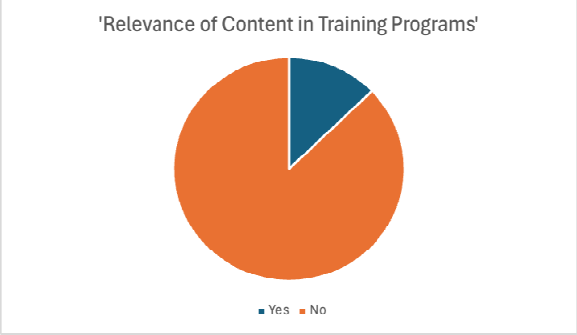
Fig. 1.1 Need for the in-service training programs

All the participants mentioned that they attended 2 training programs a year after they joined the service. Unfortunately and very alarmingly, 87.3% of them said they did not get the right inputs required during those training programs while only 12.7% said that these training programs helped them develop their professional skills. The graph presents the data. When asked for the reasons, some of them said there were

induction, orientation and refresher courses that they were asked to attend as soon as they joined the service and before they completed 5 years of their service. While most of these training programs had lectures given by different experts in their own field of expertise, a few of them conducted their sessions in workshop mode where they were allowed to get hands-on experience through the training. This resulted in the teachers' dissatisfaction regarding their take-home learning from the training programs.



Graph-1.2a: Relevance of the training programs



Graph 1.2b Relevance of the content

The third major research question was on the professional development opportunities they have that would help them enhance their professional skills. The histogram below gives the details:

Graph-1.3: Satisfaction on professional development opportunities

While 26.9% of the participants said that they are not given enough opportunities to choose the training programs as per their needs, 37.2 % felt that they have opportunities to develop but it is their choice of selecting the training program. A crucial lot of the participants (35.9%) said that they have opportunities to enhance and update themselves in their profession. However, it is the working conditions that hinder them from utilizing such opportunities. An example given by the participants was about a training program on the Use of ICT offered by National Institute of Technology, Warangal. They could not attend that training because it was scheduled when they had examinations followed by unavoidable assessment duties. So sometimes, even when they identify the right training program required for them as per their skills and needs, the work environment or schedule does not give them enough space to utilise the opportunity.

Interviews: About 19 teachers were interviewed based on their responses given to the questionnaire. A summary of the teachers' opinions expressed in the interviews as following as their requirements for CPD:

1. Putting pressure on the in-service teachers to attend professional training programs would not be effective but a gradual change in an incremental manner would do. For that, shorter duration and more frequent training programs with single modules are to be planned in the beginning of the academic year so that the teachers can plan their schedules well in advance.
2. Apart from CPDs helping in professional development, it would be good if CPDs help in holistic development that include self awareness, reflective practices, research orientation maintaining learning journals, teacher portfolios, blogs, organizational and managerial skills and record change stories because of their performance in the classroom and similar kind of activities.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

1. It is evident from this study that in-service teacher training programs are not very successful in achieving the objectives laid by APSCHE because they are not able to cater to the needs of the teachers who work at different places and different social and institutional environments.
2. In addition, the State Board has a Common Core syllabus across the state and the students are expected to take a common examination. The success of a teacher is rated based on the results in the common final examination conducted by the board. This is expressed as a major challenge by teachers as per the TISS report [13]
3. There is no clear and comprehensive policy specifically addressing the needs and challenges of teachers. For example, a training workshop before formulating new educational policies that involves teachers and allow them to express their opinions would help make the changed policy more practical and implementable. Similarly, just before the academic year begins and the new/changed policies are to be implemented, conducting comprehensive professional development training workshops.
4. As [9] state, though CPD should be an autonomous activity where individuals decide on their training needs, collaboration and sharing of teaching experiences in common training programs would leave more scope for professional development in teachers.

IMPLICATIONS

1. The training for in-service teachers has to be either individualized, that is, cater to the needs of the individual teachers as required by their teaching environment and students' backgrounds or it has to be the choice of the teachers to choose the kind of professional development training they would like to attend based on their needs and skills or areas they wish to upgrade. The concerned government departments have to systematically plan the trainings as mentioned above [5].
2. The students' performance in the examinations should be one of the many criteria and not the only one to be considered for the performance appraisal of the in-service teachers.
3. A comprehensive training policy for the in-service teachers has to be in place where the roadmap for the trainees, trainers, and policymakers should be clear and systematic. This would help them utilise the opportunities available to attend training programs as per their personal-professional requirement.
4. As Padwad and Dixit [7] & [8] suggest, the building networks among the teachers would result in mutual development. This move of building networks will bring in 'collective consciousness, commitment, conviction, courage, consistency among the Waymade team'(p.30).

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