

A Review Paper On: Identified Effective Methods Which Are Used In School-Based Teacher Professional Development in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

School Based Teacher Development (SBTD) is a new concepts in Sri Lankan education system, in 1980s and 1990s decades of 20th century, this School Based Teacher Development concept (SBTD) was introduced to the general education system in the country. However the importance of the School Based Teacher Development was emphasised by the government in 2006 under Program of School Improvement (PSI) project. Currently this School Based Teacher Development (SBTD) programs are being developed in the general education system in Sri Lanka. Under SBTD programs, several teacher professional development methods are used by school principals and the staff of the schools. This paper reviews some identified more effective methods which are applied in SBTD programs in Sri Lanka. In this review process relevant books, journals, research papers, websites, policy documents, and hand books were referred to collect information.

Key words: School Based Teacher Development, Program of School Improvement, in-house sessions, job-embedded teacher professional development methods

Introduction

Different methods are used in SBTD programs, some of which are traditional and one-shot, for example, workshops, seminars and conferences (Smith et al., 2003). Others are job-embedded teacher professional development methods (Smith & Gillespie, 2007) such as study circles, practitioner research and inquiry projects. Various types of activities are applied in the above methods, which are group works, peer learning, projects, team teaching, and observation of model schools. These activities help to increase the quality of teaching-learning processes in

schools, as “...the success of professional learning activities depend on teacher motivation, enthusiasm and commitment” (Yates, 2007, p. 215). In addition, Smith et al (2003) outlines some school-based continuing professional development activities, which are listed below:

- Induction (pairing with a master teacher or mentor when beginning to teach, offered by the school).
- Ongoing inquiry activities (practitioner research or study circles, organised by the school).
- Coaching (whether peer or mentor).

The Department of Education & Training (2005) provides some effective professional development activities: action research, study groups and case discussions. In addition, SBTD programs at outside locations are also a different activity of SBTD programs.

Methodology

The qualitative data (information) for this study were collected by reviewing relevant books, journals, websites, thesis, paper articles and hand-books. The collected information were analysed and finally this reviewed paper is presented. Especially the paper was focused to review national and international literature which are relevant to various types of effective methods of SBTD programs in Sri Lanka. The flowing sections of the paper describe some identified effective methods which are used in SBTD programs in Sri Lanka.

Action research

This is a strategy in the teaching and learning process, and it is a good tool for individual self-teacher professional development. Action research strategy allows teachers to formulate valid questions about their own practice and pursue objective answers to these questions in the same workplace (Department of Education & Training, 2005). One of the previously discussed programs was included this activity.

This is an action research-based case study which was conducted in a disadvantaged school in Sri Lanka. This research was conducted by the National Institute of Education (NIE). This project was conducted about two-and-a-half years and the research has five specific objectives: “to report an attempt to introduce school improvement in Sri Lanka; to assess the success or otherwise of this innovation; to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used in the process; to identify factors that hinder the improvement process; and to develop insights on the role of the

facilitator” (Wijesundera, 2002, p. 170). In this school improvement project, the Action Research method was used and the project procedure is explained in the diagram below.

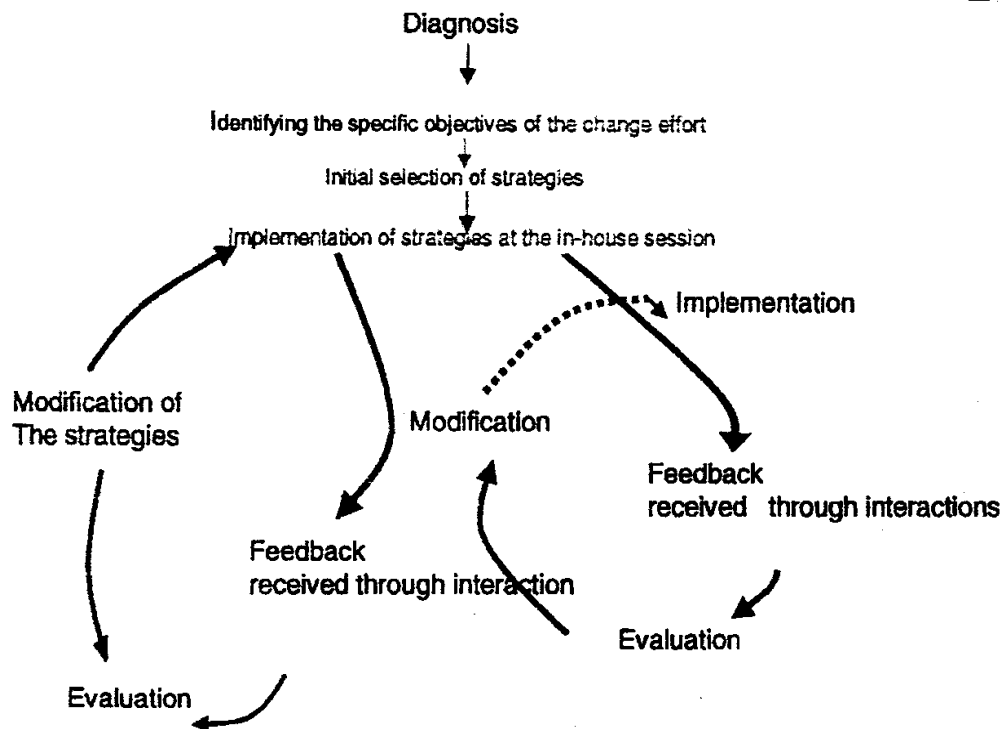


Figure 1: Diagram of action research based study

(Wijesundera, 2002)

This action research procedure has two aspects which are relevant to the SBTD concept. Firstly, it is school-based, and secondly it considers in-house sessions conducted for teacher professional development to make awareness of the project. The effectiveness of the strategies and processes used in the in-house session were explained as, “The most successful strategies used in the in-house sessions were the individual and school levels” (Wijesundera, 2002, p. 180). The next section articulates identified two methods which are applied in SBTD programs.

School-based teacher development programs at outside locations

SBTD programs are usually implemented in-house and sometimes may create boredom and dullness among teachers. Therefore some SBTD programs are also organised at outside

locations. Since teachers are adult learners, teacher professional development activities should be incorporated with some aspects of adult learning theories; while Butler (1992a, p. 3) describes that "...adult learners exist in situations separate from the learning context. They are motivated to learn by changing in their situations and learn best when new learning is applied in practical ways and/or are relevant to the changes in their situations".

Some important aspects of SBTD programs at outside locations are:

- Participation of all teachers of the school.
- Transport is reserved for participants.
- Accommodation and meals are provided.
- Various teacher professional development programs are organised and implemented according to specific subjects, grades and sections (e.g. Science, Art, Commerce, etc).
- Different types of physical and human resources are used, for example, popular lecturers are invited for the lectures.
- Various activities are organised for teachers' entertainment at evening and night time.
- At the end of the program, a special ceremony is organised and certificates are presented by the chief guest.
- In the SBTD programs, every teacher is assessed and this assessment will be evaluated for the next promotion of the teacher service.
- Programs are organised and implemented annually or two or three times a year and the locations are changed from time to time.

These programs are assumed as those that develop teachers' skills, knowledge, attitudes and values.

ICT for teacher professional development

This section describes the importance of Information Communication Technology (ICT) for teachers and students. The literature shows that ICT is a strong tool for teacher professional development (Anderson & Henderson, 2004; Brooks-Young, 2001). Nowadays, ICT is a part of the teachers' working life. Teachers are required to have at least a basic knowledge of ICT. "As pre-service teachers are prepared to teach in tomorrow's classrooms, they must learn to use computer technology in the ever-changing global marketplace and as a critical tool to strengthen educational reforms for improved student learning" (Seabrooks et al., 2000, p. 219). This

statement emphasises the importance of ICT education for teacher professionalism. However, prospective teachers do not have an opportunity to undertake ICT education in Sri Lanka. Mendes, Tuijnman et al (2003, p. 64) mentions that “there are 17 national colleges of education offering a diploma after three years of study but they offer little or no ICT training”.

“In this ‘Digital Age’, computer technology enables many people to work anytime, anywhere, freed from a workplace anchored in time and space” Computer Literacy of Sri Lanka, (MOE, 2004, p. 1). Thus, teachers in the 21st century should have a better computer knowledge, skills and attitudes. Using SBTD programs, teachers’ computer ability can be developed to a considerable extent in their workplace. Even though the availability of Sri Lankan ICT-related facilities such as electricity, telephone, internet, e-mail and hardware (computers, printers, scanners, etc.) are insufficient (MOE, 2004), the above mentioned ICT-related facilities could be provided using the power and authority of School-Based Management (SBM) to organise and implement SBTD programs to develop teachers’ ICT ability at school level. In addition, Davis (1997) states the importance of ICT for teachers and he highlights five foci for professional development. These are: skills with particular applications; integration into existing curricula; IT related changes in the curricula; changes in the teacher role; and understanding theories of education.

While Hartley (2007) believes that more adults are becoming interested in continuing education, both formally and informally. Thus continuing education (lifelong learning) can be enacted with SBTD programs, and CDs, software and internet facilities help with teacher professional development. By introducing ICT in SBTD programs, time could be saved, because teachers are allowed to use these materials according to their own timetable. The Sri Lankan government planned to make ICT a culture in Sri Lanka. This plan has goals; one of them is to make 50% of the Sri Lankan population ICT literate by 2010 (MOE, 2005). Thus the United State of America, Canada and Norway used a ‘Web-based, Case-based’ learning environment for professional educators. This is called ‘Case *NET*’ and has four aims (Bronack et al., 1999):

1. Both in-service and pre-service teacher educators use Case *NET* to develop and refine their abilities to understand professional problems using case studies.

2. The Case *NET* is used by educators to develop collaboration and their group problem solving.
3. The Instructional Technology model can be used as supporting material for student-centred learning.
4. The Case *NET* provides opportunities to participants to promote technical skills.

In SBSD programs, the abovementioned Case *NET* can be used in SBTD programs in Sri Lanka. Moreover, Doncaster Secondary College in Melbourne, Australia, used technology to make a ‘Global classroom’ in the school. At the beginning of this project a few Geography teachers had experiences in the use of new technology to make a ‘Global classroom project’. Finally, all the staff got formal training to use technology for their professional development. This professional training project included three phases over a period of six months. In the first phase, the project focused on giving knowledge and understanding of the application of Windows, Word, Excel and PowerPoint to teachers. In the second stage, organised group worked in particular key learning areas, and during the final phase, teachers were trained for curriculum software packages (Allen, 1998).

In 1998, the United Kingdom conducted a research that investigated teachers’ ICT development needs. According to the research finding, they categorised teachers’ ICT needs in three major areas (Williams. D. et al., 2000). Figure: 1 depicts the abovementioned teachers’ needs.

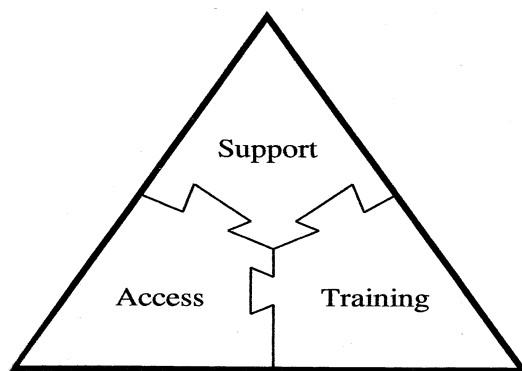


Figure 1: Teachers’ ICT needs

(Williams, D. et al 2000)

Williams, D. et al (2000) discuss three areas of teachers’ ICT needs. Access to ICT is the availability to use computers for teachers. Training means appropriate training to teachers to

develop skills, knowledge, and relevance to achieve educational goals, priorities and delivery. Support is explained as encouragement to education or training for teachers.

Conclusion

The paper articulated international and national literature which related to deferent methods in SBTD programs and this review paper presented a summary of the findings of this study. Further some important and effective methods are identified which are used in School-Based Teacher Professional Development in Sri Lanka. With respect to contributions to new knowledge, further this review paper summarised some suggestions for future study in the area of methods of SBTD programs in Sri Lanka.

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