

EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE: THE ROLE OF UEI-PDP IN ENHANCING GOVERNMENT SCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Saira Fatima Malik

Notre Dame Institute of Education (NDIE), Karachi, Pakistan

Abstract

A positive change in the learning environment in schools is visible through ongoing professional development of teachers and administrators. Monitoring the professional development program and providing support to teachers and administrators to transfer their learnings into the school environment ensures some measures of quality. Quality issues led to the launching of the Professional Development Program (PDP) for Primary School Teachers (PSTs) of Sindh by the United Educational Initiative (UEI), a consortium of five Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations, working under the supervision of Education Sector Reform Assistance (ESRA). Implementation of the UEI-PDP in four districts of Sindh, is ensured by a team of professionals in each district. Recognising that capacity building of district education employees would improve the educational system in the country, 130 Master Trainers were selected, on merit, from the District Education Office for the training of 17,000 teachers and 3000 Head teachers/administrators over a period of two years. This paper developed the design of a Monitoring Process for a Professional Development Program for Primary School Teachers and Administrators. Data was collected through Pre/Post-observations, Interviews, Questionnaires and Reports. Such tools make it possible for the monitoring teams to observe, to inquire further, and, along with the Managers, Master Trainers and School Support Team, seek to explain the progress of the program and take corrective action where indicated. Both formative evaluations as well as summative evaluation techniques are utilized for evaluating the program. The monitoring process that assisted in formative evaluations is described. In order to assist in summative evaluation, data collected through the monitoring process was further developed to categorize the schools where teachers and head teachers are trained. It is hoped that the categorization of the schools may lead to further improvements in those schools which fall in the group for need improvement. It may also initiate further research as to reasons behind why some schools are in the good category and why others fall in the average category.

Keywords: Quality, monitoring, positive change, professional development.

INTRODUCTION

Local newspapers often decry the dismal standards of education in the public sector (“Gap widens,” 2003; “Academics concerned,” 2005). This is stated by notable scholars associated with educational institutions in the country who have organized forums to find the means for a solution. Concern about the quality of education has been acknowledged in the educational plans (Ministry of Education, 2003) and in studies conducted by various researchers (Shah, 2003; Hussain, 2005). Previous National Educational Policies have been formulated using a top-down approach. To address this top-down approach, the present government devolved power to the local governments in the year 2001 which led to the decentralization of the education system.

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Nevertheless, studies (Farah, 1996; Simkins, Garrett, Memon and Nazir-Ali, 1998) indicate that in spite of substantial foreign and local financial assistance there appears to be no significant change in the quality of the overall education system in Pakistan (Hoodbhoy, 1998; Hoodbhoy, 2004; National Education Policy, 1998-2002). Consequently, Pakistan has continued to search for ways to address the issue of quality in its education system (Rizvi, 1999; Hashim, 1999).

Quality in education means a substantial continuous effort to research, document both negative and positive outcomes and effect changes accordingly. It could be argued that since 1952 with the setting up of first Educational Conference up to and including the current National Education Policy, Government educational plans and the people of Pakistan have continuously acknowledged the need to address the quality of education (Malik, 1992). Educational reviews have been conducted to find ways to bring this about and educational innovations have been introduced directly in both the government and private schools. However, efforts have failed and the finger of accusation points directly to a lack of commitment and the highly centralized decision making of the bureaucrats (Ranis and Stewart, n.d; Rampal, 2000). This is in spite of the transfer of decision-making power to the provincial educational authorities (Shah, 2003).

Primary education is the foundation of a child's success and ensuring that children want to come to school requires quality teachers with sound pedagogical skills and knowledge (Academy for Educational Development, 2006; Mohammed, 2004). 'If the supply of educational services to children in Pakistan is to improve, teachers will have to be active participants in the learning process' (Bregman and Mohammad, 1998, p.82). However, quality teachers can only produce quality when working in collaboration with quality leadership on the part of the head teachers (Winch, 1996).

In order to bring desired change and improvement in the education system of Pakistan, educational leaders (Teachers, Head teachers, District Executive Officers Education, Executive District Officers-Education) need to 'play an important role and also need to be trained first in team building, reflection and the collaborative culture' (Kazilbash, 1998 p.134). A readiness for change in both teachers (Calderhead, 2001) and also for head teachers is critical for reforms to be implemented at the grass roots level in the Pakistani context (Fullan, 1999; Fullan 2001). For this to transpire, teachers will have to be encouraged by the head teachers, District Executive Officers Education, Executive District Officers-Education to transfer their learning into the classroom. The head teachers with leadership qualities and a vision for quality education will actively participate in improving the teaching and learning environment (Del Cotto-Kaminski, n.d; Darling Hammond and Cobb, 1995). Furthermore, teachers will be able to transfer their learnings into the classroom situation when they receive follow-up support after their training (O'Sullivan, 2002).

The focus of this paper is on the monitoring mechanism designed to measure the performance of the United Education Initiative-Professional Development Programme (UEI-PDP). The UEI-PDP includes training to

enhance pedagogical skills and content knowledge with follow-up support to facilitate the transfer of acquired skills and knowledge of teachers in their classrooms; and to enhance the development of the head teachers as leaders of primary schools. The study is not only significant for UEI and the stakeholders but will be helpful in gaining an understanding of the strengths and limitations of an innovative approach within the Pakistan education system. This innovation may later be replicated in other districts in Pakistan.

Education in Pakistan

The formal schooling system in Pakistan is marked by its multiplicity. There are government schools, semi-government institutions, independent private schools and private school systems. However, only around 50% of the school-aged children are attending schools (Saleem, 1999)

On the world scale, Pakistan has one of the highest number of illiterates per head of population. The situation is especially alarming for women. In 1951, the overall literacy rate was 16.41%. After 50 years in 2001, it was 49.51% (Ministry of Education, 2002). The male literacy rate is currently around 60% while the female literacy rate is only 36% (Gap widens in male, female literacy rate, 2003).

With an intention to implement objectives stated in the National Education Policy (1998-2010), the Education Sector Action Plan (2001-2005) of the Government of Pakistan envisages improving the quality of education through teacher training, use of innovative programme and public-private partnership (Shah, 2003).

United Education Initiative-Professional Development Programme

The United Education Initiative (UEI) is a product of the government's initiative to encourage public-private partnership. It is a consortium of five organizations who have pooled their resources to assist in the professional development of teachers. UEI believes in improving the quality of education for the masses through independent educational organizations forming a partnership by setting up viable institutional structures that focus on planning, implementing and assessing educational activities and the professional and personal development of individuals involved in the programme. A constructivist approach is envisaged where individuals are actively involved in building or re-inventing knowledge construction to make meaning.

UEI has been engaged in implementing the Whole District Initiative (WDI) in regard to Primary Education on behalf of ESRA (Education Sector Reform Assistance). The study will explore the contribution of the UEI Professional Development Programme, now in its 2nd year, in bringing about improvement in the education system in the four districts of Sindh (Hyderabad, Khairpur, Sukkur, Thatta). This is brought about through professional development programmes for primary school teachers and head teachers held at centres in several talukas of the four districts.

Figure 1 highlights the implementation strategy of the professional development programme. The professional development programme (PDP) for teachers consists of 2 weeks of workshops; plus 4 weeks of field work; 2 weeks of workshops; and the training concludes after a further 10 weeks of follow-up. The PDP for Head Teachers / Administrators consists of; 4 weeks of workshops; plus 2 weeks of field work; concluding with another 4 weeks of workshops.



Figure 1. Implementation strategy of the UEI-PDP

Purpose of Study

The quality of education is directly related to the quality of instruction in the classrooms. The academic qualifications, knowledge of the subject matter, competence and skills of teaching and commitment of teachers have an impact on developing students' learning (Arcaro, 1995). It is the teacher who is a crucial factor in implementing all educational reforms at the grass roots level. Thus, for educational reforms to be implemented, changing the thinking patterns of the teacher about his/her teaching practices (Calderhead, 2001) and the professional training of the teacher with follow-on support is essential (Siddiqui, 2003).

Due to the recent emphasis on ensuring massive access to 'Education for All', the teacher education system has quantitatively expanded to keep a reasonable balance between demand and supply. On the contrary, the qualitative dimensions of teacher education have received minimal attention resulting in mass production of teachers with shallow or no understanding of subject knowledge and teaching techniques (Jalalzai, 2005; Khan, 2003; National Education Policy 1998-2010).

Many of the primary school teachers in the rural areas of the Sindh Province are not trained before becoming a school teacher (Jalalzi, 2005). They have taken up this position through political interference or obtaining certification through unfair means (Ali, 1998). Pakistan's various educational policies emphasize dedicated and trained school principals but this is not observed as being the case within the reality of the schooling system (Simkins, Sisum, and Memon, 2003). The teacher educators in the public educational institutions are not trained to deal with the high demand of quality teacher training, professional development of potential leaders and have no culture of research at all (Ali, 1998; Ministry of Education, 2002).

Due to the failure of the public system to provide quality teacher education and proper leadership programmes, a number of private and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) have emerged in order to initiate and sustain

quality teacher and leadership education programme in Pakistan with the encouragement of the Government (Shah, 2003).

The question arises concerning how these programmes are influencing their local participants. How successful are these programmes in bringing about positive changes in the lives of teachers, students and in the society?

This study focused on the UEI-PDP implemented in four districts of Sindh, (Hyderabad, Khairpur, Sukkur and Thatta). Little or no research has been done in the Pakistan context on the area of follow-up support provided to primary school teachers after their in-service training. Therefore, this study explores the contribution of UEI-PDP to the development of the school support system to ensure the teachers transfer their acquired learning into their classrooms. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to find out:

“How and to what extent does the UEI-professional development programme have an impact upon its primary school teachers to implement their learning in the classrooms so as to improve the quality of teaching within the Pakistan education system?”

Significance of the study

This study is significant as its findings suggest alternative structures and strategies for improving the quality of professional development programmes within the local context.

Relatively little has been written or researched on the role and impact of follow-up support for teachers after undergoing a professional development programme especially in the case of Pakistan (Siddiqui, 2003). This paper seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge related to the impact of teacher education programmes in developing countries.

Future educators, researchers and educational authorities can be informed by the study on the benefits of follow-up support after professional development programmes for teachers in Pakistan. It may also signify the weaknesses of such programmes. Insight can be gained into factors that influence the process of transferring ideas and methodologies from one educational context to another and their successful application in another very different context.

The study will demonstrate the monitoring and evaluation mechanism that was set up to help ensure quality control and quality improvement through the design of a monitoring process, tools for measurement and evaluation.

Review of the Literature

The review of literature has a focus on the importance of a follow-up in the field after training and the importance of a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to assess to what extent the intended outcomes of the professional development programme are achieved.

Follow-up support for in-service teacher education

Hayes (2003) suggests that pre-service teachers need to be guided on how to survive and prosper as teachers. Teachers with some experience also need to be provided with refresher courses in order to learn new techniques. UNESCO PROAP (cited in Rarieya, 2005) states that professional development activities in rural areas of

Pakistan are rare and of poor quality. In addition, female teachers have less access to these professional development activities. Halai (cited in Rarieya, 2005) adds that family commitments and social expectations for females in Pakistan, especially in the rural areas, often clash with professional development opportunities. To address this issue, teachers training centres were operational exclusively for female teachers in areas where required and school support trainers (of the same gender) were appointed to provide support to the teachers in their classrooms. Trainers were appointed to provide support to these teachers. Haberman (cited in Kent, 2005) asserts that providing pre-service teachers in low-socioeconomic schools with more field experience and a mentorship team will address the issue of teachers quitting the profession and enable them to transfer their learning in the classroom situation. O'Sullivan (2002) adds that functions of follow-up are supportive, with monitoring leading to identification of positive and negative outcomes of training which points to areas for further support or training. This directly affects the quality of learning as improvements in the learning process occurs (Motola, cited in O'Sullivan, 2005).

To ensure that professional development activities are meeting the intended outcomes of the UEI-ESRA programme a monitoring mechanism was designed.

The Monitoring Mechanism

The monitoring mechanism, highlighted in Table 1, was designed to monitor professional development practices; to provide an authentic base to improve the programme (Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, 2004; Valadez and Bamberger, 1997); and to deduce whether or not the programme was successfully implemented. Both formative as well as summative evaluation techniques were considered to be the effective methods for evaluating the programme. Monitoring activities (formative) were undertaken throughout the programme whereas summative evaluation will be done at the end of the project.

Although monitoring of activities was undertaken as indicated in Table 1, the focus of this paper is on the monitoring mechanism designed to monitor the performance of the school support team (SSTs) and assist them in mentoring the primary school teachers in their schools, on the teachers return from the formal training sessions. Both O'Sullivan (2005) and Rarieya (2005) contend that on-going support to teachers after training, especially in their schools, helps to improve the transfer of acquired learning. In addition, reflective dialogue with the school support team (Martin, 2005; Rarieya, 2005) underpins good teaching practice leading to professional growth and personal development.

An assessment criterion was developed for quality assurance in the PDP (Appendix A and B). Both teachers' and head teachers' performances in the classroom at the training centres were monitored by the Master Trainers (MTs) who graded the attendance and performance of the participants. Each teacher's performance was also monitored by the School Support Team during their follow-up visits (Figure 1) using the assessment criteria. Support was provided by the SSTs to the teachers in their respective schools in lesson preparations, teaching strategies and the

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development of low cost teaching aids. Tools (pre-observation and post observation) were designed by the monitoring and evaluation central coordinating unit (M & E-CCU) to collect data on classroom performance. Quality control was maintained through frequent meetings and feedback sessions between the M & E-CCU, M & E-DU, Programme managers, MTs and SSTs. These meetings and discussions provided insights into the strengths and weaknesses during the implementation of the programme and enabled corrective measures to be put into place. An example of a corrective measure would be the in-house professional development activities for the SSTs to bridge the gap in their understanding of certain concepts.

Table 1. Monitoring Mechanism

Monitoring Level	Level 1. 1 and 3 Phase of the Training	Level 2. 2 and 4 Phase of the Training (Field work)
Activities/Resources to be monitored	- Handbooks and/or unit plan of the teaching modules to be taught in the first phase of training. - Master trainers professional development activities according to the objective and planning in the handbook unit plan. - Availability of required resources. - Time commitments (MTs and participants). - Attendance (MTs and participants). - MTs' assessment of CPs.	- Lesson plan and classroom teaching (teachers applying what they learnt). - Monitoring by the SST. - Students' responses and learning outcomes in the classroom. - Teachers' and SSTs' time commitment (regularity and punctuality).
Monitoring Strategies	- Reviewing the handbook and/or unit plan by the specialists prior to the beginning of the training sessions. - Work samples.	- Review teachers' lesson plans and SSTs' action notes. - Classroom observations - Interviews
Outcome	Written records and the district units' as well as central unit's written report for evaluation.	Written records and documents of the outputs for evaluations.

Theoretical perspective

From a theoretical perspective, the constructive approach guided the programme. Thus, the aim was to make the PDP meaningful by building on what the teachers and head teachers already knew, through extending their knowledge and skills, acknowledging their strengths and naming what could be improved as well as identifying their existing values, skills and capabilities. Challenges were provided in the training sessions and participants were encouraged to change their views and reflect critically on their actions to continually improve them. The objective was to extend their skills and acquire new skills for student-centred teaching and school improvement.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology defines what the activity of the study is, how to proceed, how to measure progress and what constitutes success. Both quantitative and qualitative methods (Patton, 1990) were used to monitor, record and

evaluate the UEI-ESRA programme. Quantitative methods involved measuring to what extent the training targets that were set at the beginning of the programme were met and data was collected through the use of tools (pre-observation and post-observation checklists; pre-conference forms, target setting forms; school monitoring forms and training centre monitoring forms) that were developed and pilot tested in the districts.

The study included analysis of documents; data collection was through observations and recording the perceptions of primary school teachers, master trainers and school support trainers of the UEI-PDP in the four provinces of Sindh. Data was also gathered through semi structured interviews and informal discussions conducted during M & E-CCU field officer visits to the districts twice a month. The aim was to determine the strengths and weaknesses in the implementation and find solutions to challenges experienced. On site visits to the schools and training centres by the monitoring and evaluating team served as a rich source of primary evidence which helped to regulate data for verification procedures.

Participants

As it is a Whole District Initiative, the participants included 17,000 primary school teachers and 3000 head teachers for the districts of Thatta, Hyderabad, Sukkur and Khairpur.

Insights into the follow-up

The difficulties inherent in a whole district initiative with

- schools widely spread out were one of the major difficulties that had to be overcome. This was overcome through clustering of the schools for training and support purposes.
- In some districts, support was provided by employees of the district education office who were deputed to the UEI-PDP as SSTs. Changing their mind-sets from their previous practices directly impinged upon the success of the follow-up programme.
- The follow-up was also affected when the deputed SSTs and teachers were called in by the District Education Officers for administrative duties on ad-hoc basis. Teachers were appreciative of the support system as they said that this support helped them in transferring their learning into their classes. Support was provided in lesson planning, teaching strategies and developing low-cost materials.
- The success of the support was dependent on a number of factors enumerated below:
- Some of the SSTs needed professional development in critical analysis of lesson plans.
- Teachers received 10 weeks of support. However, some teachers were found to be weak in content knowledge and required more support. Literature reveals that 10-15 practices with teaching strategies builds confidence of teachers and eight months of support is required for a teacher to become proficient in utilizing the new methods of teaching with their own initiatives.
- Political and sectarian affiliations affected delivery of support.

- Professional attitude of SSTs as well as their dedication and commitment to the success of the follow-up provided to teachers

Lessons Learned

- Change in belief system of participants in the training program is imperative for transfer of learning to occur. A positive change was seen in the teachers who changed their attitude and reflected on their methods of practices.
- Some teachers required more support and financial implications occasionally made this impossible as the distance to be covered, or the roads to these schools were impassable.
- Provision of transport to pick and drop the SSTs and the M & E-officers is important for authentic visits to teachers and schools.
- Ownership by the District Education Office, the Assistant District Education Officers and Supervisors is essential for the sustainability of the Professional Development Programme.

Conclusion

Monitoring a professional development programme in four districts of Sindh, especially where the infrastructure (regular electricity supply, working telephones and access to internet facility) is ineffective was a challenge.

This challenge was further enhanced in parts of some districts which were labeled as 'No Go Areas' by some influential individuals. However, it was satisfying to observe teachers with limited resources making an effort to improve teaching and learning environment in their classrooms. The teachers demanded further professional development opportunities. The importance for female students to improve their completion rate to enable them to be the future teachers and head teachers in their environment was a commonly heard phrase both in female government schools and co-educational schools. It is hoped that with the support of donor agencies UEIESRA PDP will be able to provide continuous professional development opportunities to enhance the quality of teachers, especially female leadership, in order to thread the path for quality in education.

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