RESEARCH ARTICLE

Professional Development for Language Teachers and the Efficacy of Mentoring System to Reinforce Professional Skills

Pramila K[1*], Ravindran R[2] and Muthukannan A[2]

[1]Professor and Head, Department of English, PSG Institute of Technology and Applied Research, Neelambur, Coimbatore, (Affiliated to Anna University), Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.
[2]Assistant Professor (Sr Gr), Department of English, PSG Institute of Technology and Applied Research, Neelambur, Coimbatore, (Affiliated to Anna University), Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

*Address for Correspondence
Pramila K
Professor and Head,
Department of English,
PSG Institute of Technology and Applied Research,
Neelambur, Coimbatore,
(Affiliated to Anna University),
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

ABSTRACT

High quality teaching is never by chance. Some teachers are inherently inclined towards teaching than others, all successful teaching is the result of conscious efforts, self-introspection, self-evaluation, practice and hard work. Considering that all classes are heterogeneous, it is highly challenging for a teacher to gauge how students learn, what hampers their learning and how teaching can improve the learning of the student. All education system all over the world is fixated on raising student performance. If this is to succeed, then it must be recognized that the teachers play a key role in raising the performance of the students. Parents demand that their children get the best teacher which demonstrates thatthe quality of teaching is directly proportionate to the success of the students. The need for professional development has been the topic of much discussion because a student's learning has a direct bearing on the way he is taught. Effective mentoring is considered of prime importance for a language teacher's development and it is an indispensable aspect of language teaching as it helps the language teacher in improving his teaching. English teachers as mentors can share their teaching experiences and enhance the professional growth of the teachers.

Keywords: language teachers, mentor, performance, professional development, students

INTRODUCTION

Professional development is often discussed due to its impact on a student's learning since it affects the teaching methods used. The need for ongoing learning arises because teaching challenges do not remain static. And despite a steady stream of new educational theories, updating of degrees and technology, very little has changed in actual classroom teaching, and teachers are doing more or less the same thing they did a generation ago. But, the wide diversity of students with the pressing need for graduates with good knowledge, skills and values have necessitated a deeper look and change in our instructional practices. A shift from a tradition-based and a theoretical educational process to a more innovative process is required for learners to master high-order cognitive skills such as critical thinking, complex problem-solving skills and also interpersonal skills and ethical values. Hence, faculty development programmes of high quality for all the teachers are an urgent need and vital for educational institutions for the institutions' growth and survival.

Professional skills of teachers are need based. Teachers have to continuously reinvent themselves during different times of their career as their needs keep changing. As the education system keeps evolving, educational institutions also change to cater to the demands of the times. Hence, the more diverse the classrooms, the pressure for English language teachers to update their knowledge in curriculum framing, better assessment methods and classroom teaching is intense. The institutions play a pivotal role in offering professional development training and also providing mentors for teachers to guide through the ever evolving and dynamic curriculum.

Teacher Training and Teacher Professional Development

Teacher training and teacher professional development serve different purposes. Teacher training aims at fulfilling the immediate goals of a teacher and the short-term responsibilities. Teacher training offers support in classroom practices and encourages them to attempt new strategies and to use teaching aids and resources effectively in the classroom. Teacher training can also be curriculum specific where, teachers can be guided on the implementation of a new or updated curriculum. In the case of English language teachers, teachers can be trained on how to link and incorporate grammar with the texts and also the kind of activities that can be carried out to making learning of grammar enjoyable and interesting. Teacher development is focused on overall growth and caters to a long-term goal. It aims to expedite growth of a teacher's understanding of himself as a teacher, his responsibilities and in a broader sense of teaching itself. Professional development for an English language teacher would entail understanding how the language teacher's roles change according to the kind of learners in the classroom. Such development programmes would act as a forum for a teacher to introspect, review his own method of teaching and develop a style of teaching suited to the students. Language teachers can explore new approaches in language teaching and familiarize themselves with development in grammar and other subject-matters.

Professional Development for Teachers

"Advocates of professional development for teachers are not arguing that teaching is of poor quality and must be fixed. Their advocacy for professional development for teachers reflects the recognition that teaching is so hard that it is never perfect; no matter how good a lesson is, it could always be improved." (Danielson, Talk About Teaching (2009).Professional development refers to various types of experiences in the field of education relevant to an employee's work. People in various sectors actively partake in professional development programmes to acquire new knowledge, to relearn and to apply the latest skills to enhance their performance at their workplace . "Effective professional development focuses on improving instructional practice by giving teachers new knowledge and techniques for assessing learning with the ultimate goal of improving the learning of students." (Wei et all., 2009) Moreover, effective professional development empowers teachers with knowledge and skills required to meet students' learning challenges.

Pramila *et al.*,

Research has shown that teachers who participate in well-designed professional development activities get better results from their students. A systematic, on-going teacher professional development is much more effective than traditional workshops and conferences. Teacher development programmes have now shifted from brief on campus training programmes to a series of programmes extended throughout the year. There is a powerful need for development in the field of teaching and the teachers are very clear that they do not feel adequately equipped to deal with increasing heterogeneous groups and to address the needs of the students who have some learning challenges as well as students who are gifted. Quite a compelling proportion of the educators believe that professional development programmes organized by the institutions do not meet their needs and so the authorities must ensure that the development activities organized are potent and fulfill the teachers' requirements.

Teachers' perceptions are very important and cannot be ignored as their perceptions influence their behaviour. Teachers' teaching beliefs, their teaching practices and their professional co-operation are related to their participation in different forms of professional development. Professional development has a direct bearing on student achievement. Hence, opportunities for active learning, content centered on student learning, follow-up training with support and time to practice and facilitating opportunities for collaborative work and embedded learning should be effectively addressed in teacher professional development programmes. Suitable activities that will provide teachers with opportunities to develop and deepen their professional understandings and skills must be mapped into the framework of any professional development programmes.
The following is a variety of activities based on a study in Auckland University, New Zealand:
Professional learning activities mapped onto the framework:

Activities constructed to promote learning
Professional development / professional learning activities designed to develop and deepen
professional understandings and skills:
• listening;
• watching;
• being observed and receiving feedback;
• receiving student activities and materials;
• engaging with professional readings;
• discussing practice with someone more expert;
• authentic experience of subject in action;
• discussing own theories of practice and their implications;
• examining student understandings and outcomes;
• analysis of current practice and reconstruction of new practice;
• discussing self or mutually identified issues.
Teacher Professional Learning and Development Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration [BES] Pg:29

The efficacy of professional development programmes rests on how meticulously such programmes are conceived, planned and implemented. In effective professional development the college authorities/organizers must analyze the data of student achievement and find out the challenges that are commonly faced by students in a particular class or batch and ascertainthe issues which need to be addressed and work out practical plans to help students overcome the challenges so that they improve their performance in their academics. The types of development activities may range from organized to structured to a more informal interactive discussion on improving teaching. Some of the activities are: individual research, study groups among peers, teachers observing other teachers, mentoring of new teachers by more experienced teachers, faculty-administrators meeting to plan lessons, problem solving and improving performance, workshops and conferences to learn from a variety of expertise from around the state or country.

The first step in creating a comprehensive professional development programme is developing a framework. There are numerous models available to replicate for all kinds of educational programmes. But the programme will be

Pramila *et al*.,

most effective if the planning relies on the curriculum. It is always fruitful if the academic degree offered is taken into consideration. The faculty development programme should be analogous to the academic programme offered by the department or college."Teaching occurs in particulars: particular students interacting with particular teachers over particular ideas in particular circumstances. Teachers need to learn in and from practice" (Ball & Cohen, 1999). It gives teachers opportunity to collaborate with other teachers and address specific problems faced by teachers in their classrooms. Professional development should bring teachers and administrators together for continuous professional learning. Professional development in which educators are given the forum to learn new teaching methodologies which they can actually implement in their classrooms will be far more effective than traditional methods of professional development.

The first and foremost thing that should be focused to transform any faculty development to work is creating learning opportunities for teachers that are practically possible to be implemented in their classrooms. Virtual workshops and online learning could also be considered so teachers can learn anytime anywhere. It should involve hands-on, active learning. Such professional development programmes must be relevant and there must be an inherent value in the activities offered. The best programme is where strong relationships are developed between faculty and administrators.

Teacher burnout is a gradual process which obstructs teaching. Teaching today requires a great deal of emotional energy, and teachers need to genuinely care and connect with students especially with slow learners. Teachers must realize that their teaching promotes their acquisition of knowledge and development of skills. Faculty development programmes help faculty become better teachers who take responsibility for their students' learning. Some professional development may be provided on a mandatory basis because the skills and knowledge that they acquire enhances the teaching quality. It is commonly assumed that learning outcomes are influenced by what is taught. So, teachers must take greater responsibility for promoting the learning of all students and realize that what teachers do has an impact on how students respond and so they must develop a plan of action to address professional learning. New methods and approaches and skills have redefined teaching-learning process and teachers who don't learn and engage in them will see themselves increasingly irrelevant. Effective professional development for teachers can never be an event constrained by time. And it must be a systematic process if quality improvement in education is to be visibly seen.

Mentoring as a Positive Reinforcement for Effective Teaching

A good teacher does not need not necessarily be a mentor. A good mentor should possess both personal and professional skills to facilitate a symbiotic relationship between the mentor and his mentee. The mentor should communicate effectively and should be truthful, dedicated, tactful, and enthusiastic and possess a sense of humour. There are two types of mentors. Informal mentors are colleagues whom teachers turn to for advice. Formal mentors are those with a specific mentoring responsibility assigned by the institutions. A mentor nurtures the less experienced teacher through counselling, coaching, and allowing the teacher to observe and reflect and arrive at solutions to any problems that he may encounter in the classroom. While, mentoring is required mostly for new teachers to ensure a smooth transition into the profession, mentoring also targets teachers who have some difficulty in some aspects of their job.

As part of her doctoral dissertation psychologist Linda Phillips-Jones has given a comprehensive set of mentoring skills. The following is the mentoring skills model developed by Linda Phillips-Jones:

The mentor-mentee relationship provides an exposure to new avenues for learning and growth. Mentors should possess strong interpersonal skills and good communication skills and mentees should be intrinsically motivated and willing to learn and improve their performance. Sherman et al (2000) in their respective research identified specific skills and knowledge areas needed by competent mentors as in Table 1:

Pramila *et al.*,

English Teachers as Mentors

Good communication skills in the English language is a prerequisite for employability. Hence, imparting speaking skills is in the spotlight. English teachers face mounting pressures due to large class size and heterogenous classes. English teachers must cease to work in isolation as they require specialized knowledge and skills. Currently, there is a strong emphasis on teachers continuously improving their knowledge, abilities, and teaching approaches to improve students' academic achievements. Educational professionals are seeking ways to guarantee that all teachers receive proper training to achieve desired learning results. Mentorship has been crucial in educational change since the beginning of the 1980s, offering teachers a way to enhance their teaching abilities. Mentoring is a "means of fostering stronger connections among the teaching staff, leading to a more positive and cohesive learning environment for students." (Brewster and Railsback) Mentoring is typically seen as a purposeful and nurturing process in which an older, more experienced individual guides and supports a younger, less experienced person to aid in their growth and development. These experienced mentors possess specialized knowledge and skills needed to educate students with limited English skills, making them well-equipped to guide English teachers in effective teaching methods. This collaboration often involves close interaction with seasoned educators, thereby, expanding the support available to new teachers. Effective mentoring requires the mentor to show a commitment to supporting others, being open-minded, adaptable, and empathetic. New English teachers often deal with various challenges every day, particularly in mixed-ability classrooms. The mentor should encourage opportunities for observing and discussing suitable teaching methods, second language learning, and more.

Mentoring aids in developing the mentors' supervisory skills and enhancing the teaching-learning process. The mentor needs to be highly proficient in the language and have a strong track record as a teacher. He needs to show an effective teaching method in the classroom. The mentor, who must be proficient in English, should guide their mentees in lesson planning and teaching. English teacher mentors share their teaching experiences and support professional development. The mentors need to offer guidance and support, demonstrate effective teaching methods, and give feedback on the mentees' growth and progress. In addition to training sessions, mentors should also observe mentees' classes and provide constructive feedback with suggestions for enhancement when needed. In an English class, a mentor's key responsibility is to inspire students to learn the English language effectively. It is crucial for English teachers to be proficient users of the language to fulfill this role. The mentor needs excellent communication skills to enhance teaching methods and boost learning results. Mentees depend on their mentors' English proficiency to grow personally and as educators. Mentees see mentors as role models, especially in their teaching methods and English pronunciation.

In addition to practical training sessions, the mentor should allow the apprentice to witness the mentor's teachings. Prior to class, the mentor and the mentee should communicate about the upcoming lesson to be taught. Both should also review the lesson together after class. The mentee and mentor collaborate to plan the lesson, followed by the mentor observing the mentee's class and providing feedback. The mentor is responsible for ensuring that the mentee has acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to lead lessons effectively. Teaching English to students from various backgrounds can be intimidating. The language teacher faces even more difficulty due to the high number of students, limited teaching resources, and low English proficiency levels among students. It is essential to provide intensive guidance in order to create suitable teaching materials. The mentors should motivate the teachers to utilize materials found in the local area and to effectively incorporate appropriate materials in the classroom.

The mentors need to give the mentees an overview of how to use different assessment tools such as written assignments, verbal assessments, observation, and group activities. They should teach their mentees the importance of focusing on knowledge-based teaching rather than exam-focused teaching. Mentors are responsible for helping mentees effectively manage classroom tasks. New English teachers benefit from mentoring by learning to develop effective work habits, integrating theory with practice, collaborating with experienced teachers, and observing their mentors to improve their teaching skills, strategies, and classroom performance. The mentors and mentees work together to assess their teaching experiences by discussing with teachers and reflecting on their own practices. They use different methods, techniques, and abilities to enhance learning. Through this process, mentees learn how to

78957

create lesson plans, conduct language activities, and assess student work effectively. Consequently, they discover their unique teaching style, personality, and establish their own teaching identity.

CONCLUSION

In all educational institutions, there will be teachers with different levels of education, experience, knowledge, skill, and expertise. In such a mixed group of professionals there is tremendous scope for sharing of knowledge and expertise and this is very beneficial for professional development. In the initial stages of their career, teachers are very keen to develop and enhance their professional skills. Language teachers need to keep learning and unlearning and updating as the language teaching is constantly evolving. Educational institutions must provide regular opportunities   for language teachers to update their professional knowledge and motivate teachers to actively participate in them. There are two aspects to professional development: one can be seen from institution's perspective and the other from the individual's perspective. The individual's personal goals must align with the institution's vision and mission. Teachers feel more confident when they improve their teaching skills and it provides them a sense of fulfillment when they can produce better results with their students. Areas that require professional can be identified, like grammar, various language teaching approaches in second language acquisition and curriculum development. When the teachers are equipped with the necessary skills they feel empowered and they develop the expertise to teach different learners of various backgrounds.

Even experienced teachers need professional development as their knowledge and skills can become outdated, hence, educational institutions should organise in-service training programmes which will contribute to the professional development of the teachers. Educational institutions should consider such professional development programmes as top priority as it leads to better performance and better teacher retention. When the quality of teaching improves, the students' performance improves resulting in high student achievement rate. Professional development can be integrated into the curriculum as this will ensure a culture of professional relationship among the teachers and help in the regulation of the day-to-day activities.

Professional development can be made effective with a good mentoring programme. Teachers can be coached by mentors to apply the knowledge and skills learnt in professional development workshops in their classrooms. Mentors should pay classroom visits, provide constructive feedbacks, help their protégés with finding suitable resources and offer guidance on follow up activities. To conclude, both the educational institutions and the individual teachers must take responsibility to organise and plan professional development programmes and participate enthusiastically in order to benefit all the stakeholders.

REFERENCES

1. Arnold, E. (2006) "Assessing the quality of mentoring: Sinking or learning to swim?" ELT   Journal, 60.2 :117. Print.
2. Bigelow, R. M. (2002) Preservice mentoring: Voices of Mentors and Proteges. Thesis. Wyoming: University of Wyoming. Print.
3. Brewster, C. & Railsback, J. (2001). Supporting beginning teachers: How administrators, teachers and policy makers can help new teachers succeed. ERIC, ED 455619
4. Cohen, D.K., & Ball, D.L. (1999). Instruction, capacity, and improvement (CPRE Research Report No. RR-043). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Consortium for Policy Research in Education.
5. Danielson, F. Charlotte. (2009) Talk About Teaching: Leading Professional Conversations, Corwin Publishers, Dallas
6. Driscoll, A., & Wood, S. (2007) Developing outcomes-based assessment for learner-centered education: A faculty introduction. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
7. Haney, A. (1997) The   Role of   Mentorship in the Workplace. Ed. M.C.Taylor. Toronto: Ontario. Print.

Pramila *et al.*,

8. Phillips-Jones, Linda (2003) SKILLS FOR SUCCESSFUL MENTORING: Competencies of Outstanding Mentors and Mentees. CCC/The Mentoring Group, 13560 Mesa Drive, Grass Valley, CA 95949

9. Sherman, R. Voight, J., Tibbetts, J., Dobbins, D., Evans, A., & Weidler, D. (2000). Adult educators' guide to designing instructor mentoring. Washington, DC: Pelavin Research Institute. Retrieved from http://www.calproonline.org/pubs/Mentoring%20Guide.pdf

10. Timperley, Helen et al. (2007) Teacher Professional Learning and Development. Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES), University of Auckland, New Zealand. http://educationcountsedcentre.govt.nz/goto/BES

11. Wei, R. C., Darling-Hammond, L., Andree, A., Richardson, N., Orphanos, S.(2009). Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad. Dallas, TX: National Staff Development Council.

Table 1 Retrieved from http://www.calpro-online.org/pubs/Mentoring%20Guide.pdf

Skill/Knowledge	Mentors
Interpersonal	▪ Are amiable, patient, empathetic, honest, self-confident and open
Communication	▪ Can pickup mentees' verbal and non-verbal cues. ▪ Recognize and understand different communication skills. ▪ Are skilled in conflictre solution.
Listening	▪ Are active listeners
Content Area	▪ Are experts in the areas in which mentees requires assistance. ▪ Have a broad knowledge base in their field. ▪ Keep up with current trends and latest research
Awareness of Diversity	▪ Are sensitive to mentees' individual learning styles. ▪ Are comfortable with people of diverse backgrounds ▪ Can accept different points of view
Reflective Supervision Skills	▪ Have strong skills in observing and giving feedback ▪ Engage in self-reflection ▪ Buildonpastexperiencetoadviseandassistmenteeswiththeircurrentdilemmas.

THE MENTORING SKILLS MODEL

SHARED CORE SKILLS

MENTEE-SPECIFIC SKILLS

Acquiring Mentors
Learning Quickly
Showing Initiative
Following Through
Managing the Relationship

Listening Actively
Building Trust
Encouraging
Identifying Goals & Current Reality

Instructing/ Developing Capabilities
Inspiring
Providing Corrective Feedback
Managing Risks
Opening Doors

MENTOR-SPECIFIC SKILLS