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STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS AT UC-TRC LEVEL – A HUB FOR TEACHERS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
Professional development is a continuous improvement process, on job training and support needed to improve teaching, it encompasses the processes that educators engage in to initially prepare themselves, continuously update themselves, and review and reflect on their own performance. The experiences suggest that continuing professional development is needed to reinforce learning and support educational change process. This paper encompass on strengthening the professional development for teachers at Union Council Tehsil Resource Center (UC-TRCs). Teacher Mentors, developed by AKU-IED, STEP Project initiated the Cluster-based Mentoring Programme (CBMP) and also providing teachers follow-up support through Schools visits. Teachers professionally support each other, which bring some positive change in classroom teaching practice. They were provided opportunity to learn about and enhance their pedagogical skills in working with different approaches to professional development. It is critical for teachers to have ongoing and regular opportunities to learn from each other. The best professional development is ongoing, experiential, collaborative, and connected to and derived from working with students and understanding their culture. UC-TRCs working as a hub for teachers’ professional development at Tehsil level in selected Districts of Sindh and Balochistan. This paper highlighted some of the experiences of District Killa-Saifullah in Balochistan. Professional Development opportunities provided for primary and elementary School’s teachers (male & female) at UC-TRCs level, specifically focused to enhance the subject-based pedagogical content knowledge, skills, integrating the gender perspectives in their work, with special emphasis on mentoring skills. These professional development activities provided support to mentors and cluster schools’ teachers, which show a change in their classroom practices. These initiatives help to enhance the mentors’ capacity to work with their cluster school teachers for improving their performance and impacting student learning.

Introduction
AKU-IED is implementing the Strengthening Teacher Education in Pakistan (STEP) project in the selected districts of Sindh (Hyderabad, Khairpur, Sukkur, Thatta, Tando Muhammad Khan, Tando Allahyar and Matiari and Balochistan (Quetta, Qila Saifullah and Chagai). The Project has been funded by Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Aga Khan Foundation Canada.

The outcome of teaching and learning result aims to improve performance of teachers and education managers in delivering and supporting quality teaching and learning within the school and classroom by building the capacity of education teacher mentors, and teachers through a number of customized courses and innovative field-based models.
In this connection capacity of government primary teachers developed, to undertake quality teaching and learning in the classroom, 130 Teachers Mentors in total 4 subjects (Math, Science, Social Studies and English), through an Advanced Diploma in Primary Education (ADIPE) were trained in 2009 and 2010. These Teachers Mentors have initiated Cluster-Based Mentoring Programme (CBMP) through conducting workshops and provide continue Follow-up school visits at UC-TRC Level primary teachers activities in 2011 and will continue same for 4 years to improve the quality of primary education in selected districts of Sindh and Balochistan.

**Professional Development for Teachers at (UC-TRC) Level**

Improving teacher quality depends on improving professional development and improving professional development depends on creating meaningful learning experiences for teachers. The experiences suggest that continuing professional development is needed to reinforce learning and support educational change process. Teachers Mentors transformed existing Learning Resource Centers developed through a previous USAID funded programme into the more robust Union Council – Teacher Resource Centers (UC-TRC) or hubs for teachers’ professional development at the Tehsil level in their districts.

Literature reveals that Mentoring programs are recognized as effective ways to develop a sense of belonging, facilitate intergenerational transfer of knowledge and promote staff retention. By focusing on the development of human relations, such programs often have a positive impact on cooperation and the quality of teamwork.

Focusing on mentoring centered on professional development and the work world leads impacts on the personal and professional development of both the mentee and mentor. Professional development is a continuous improvement process, on job training and support needed to improve teaching, it encompasses the processes that educators engage in to initially prepare themselves, continuously update themselves, and review and reflect on their own performance. UC-TRCs or hub for teachers’ professional development provided ongoing learning opportunities to teachers through their schools and districts and play a vital role in School improvement.

**Cluster-Based Mentoring Programme (CBMP)**

Cluster Based Mentoring Programme (CBMP) is an innovative Field-based Model for professional development at UC-TRCs level for the teacher Mentees, to improve the quality of primary education in selected districts of Sindh and Balochistan. The Programme is conducted by the Advanced Diploma graduates teachers mentors since 2011. In each District UC-TRCs developed tehsil wise in schools, known as Nucleus School and the cluster schools are called feeding schools. Teaching learning resources provided to each UC-TRC, including books of four subjects, activity books, science & math learning material, globe, charts, Maps and story books along with other teaching & learning materials. Mentors used these materials in their workshops with mentee teachers and learning material also used by teachers in planning.
In each UC-TRC 20-25 teachers from cluster Schools are participating in the programme over the period of the project (4 years) and each teacher mentee of UC-TRC will receive 16 workshops per subject (Languages, Math, Science and Social Studies).

The CBMP is designed with the aim to help teachers to improve their content knowledge, enhance pedagogical skills, classroom management and students’ assessment strategies within the framework of contextual needs. On the completion of the 4 years programme, the teachers will be able to:

- reflect on their own practices and act to improve it;
- Enhance the content knowledge and teaching skills of the teachers
- demonstrate understanding of pedagogical content knowledge in 4 subjects and critically analyze the Standard based national curriculum.
- Develop gender objective for their teaching, learning and management practices,
- Use of gender inclusive teaching strategies, gender inclusive teaching and learning resources and use of gender inclusive classroom management practices.

**Structure of CBMP**

1. Face-to-face interaction: The mentors are conducting subject based workshops in their respective clusters on a rotational basis at UC-TRC level.
2. Follow-up Support Phase: Mentors providing continuous follow-up support to mentees in classroom teaching and learning, they co plan, observe and provide feedback to the mentees.

**Experiences of District Killa-Saifullah in Balochistan**

This paper highlighted some field experiences of Cluster Based Mentoring Programme (CBMP) at UC-TRC Level in District Killa-Saifullah. Professional Development opportunities provided to primary and elementary School’s teachers (male & female) at UC-TRCs level, so it act as a ‘Hub for Professional Development”. Each UC-TRC provided with teaching & learning resources; In Coaching and Mentoring by Parslow & Wray (2000), Megginson and Clutterbuck (1995) define it as a shared, meaningful relationship formed between two people in order to support successful knowledge, work or skills transitions. It is characterized by a feeling of mutual trust, with accountability as a core value. Gordon (1983) describes it. Communication, learning and reflection clearly convey the quality of the relationship of support that forms between the mentor and mentee. The mentor’s role is not to criticize, dictate conduct, rate performance, and rescue or create in the mentee a carbon copy of himself. These are mistaken concepts of mentoring and instead illustrate behaviors to be avoided.

- Professional development programme is going on for teachers, a continuous facilitation and support provided to improve classroom teaching
practices;

- Mentors engaged in the process of mentoring & professional development at school level, continuously update themselves, review and reflect on their own performance.
- Continuing professional development needed to reinforce learning and support educational change process.

**Changes Observed in Mentee Teachers**

It was observed that Professional development initiatives through CBMP at UC-TRC level and through follow up support to cluster schools’ teachers make a difference in teachers’ classroom practices and some positive change in other school activities. The following are some significant observations & reflections of teachers;

- Effective Classroom Teaching Practices: It was observed that the teachers were using practical activities in classrooms and students involved in learning process, they were discussing the activity and raising questions, like in teaching of Primary Science concept of Sound, students were involved in simple practical activities, which can easily be arranged in classrooms, mentee teacher provided students opportunities to learn and discuss themselves. This was a change at primary level the students were participated in practical activities.

**Teacher’s Reflection**

“We were not aware about the importance of these practical activities in teaching of science, we were just explained the content from text books and now learning from CBMP workshops I came to now that for effective learning students involvement is very important, now students enjoy by doing themselves they learn the concept” (Male Mentee teacher)

“As a math teacher at primary level in classes I never used practical activities. In Math workshops we learn through simple low cost materials the Math concepts, so I try to implement in my classes, the students take interest and everyone wants to participate in activities and this changes the overall classroom environment”. (Female Mentee teacher)

- **Improved content knowledge of 4 subjects:** Improvement in subject knowledge is the main success of CBMP workshops, because mentees developed content knowledge in four subjects by subject mentors of AKU-IED graduates, they introduced specific skills for teaching for specific topics, like how to teach History or Geography in Social Studies. During follow up mentors provided support in classrooms through demo lessons and co-teaching, which are very helpful and teacher’s confidence level developed.

- **Lesson planning & maintaining portfolio:** Teachers are now learned lesson planning technique and develop lesson plans in 4 subject areas, considering the objectives, activities and assessment methods. These skills gradually improved by classroom support, which is given by the mentors. All lesson plans, sample of students work and
Success Story of Female Mentee Teacher

This is a story of a female teacher, who is teaching in a multigrade school in rural area of Killa-Saifullah, in single Teacher School, she teaches to different classes and after participating in CBMP workshops and with follow up support she developed some no cost material for her classroom teaching, such as activity cards, pictures, in teaching. I have observed that her students were engaged in learning process in different ways. By doing some card activity and in groups they were reading and writing. In multigrade class, it was quite difficult for her to involve and manage all students, but she reflected that now she is able to manage some issues of her class. She was appreciated and said that teachers training workshops and follow up help her to improve her classroom teaching before these CBMP, she was facing problem in managing the students of different classes but now she learn how to teach in a multigrade school, now she is able to use teaching & learning material in her class and students learn in groups through activities. She is very enthusiastic and reflected that it is our responsibility to motivate community so they can cooperate and send their children in School.

Developed Gender awareness; it is important to highlight here that Gender is an integral part of STEP Project, and teacher Mentors learned and plan workshops and activities for the mentee teachers, which they have conducted in UC-TRCs. The importance of gender awareness in Education for male & female teachers, so mentors integrated gender objectives and activities in each workshop of CBMP.

Low cost /no cost Material Used in classroom teaching: It was significant that mentee teachers developed low cost and no cost teaching material for their classroom teaching. They learn these skills through CBMP workshop and involved the students. One of the mentee teacher Naseeb-ullah is teaching in his classroom, when mentor visited his school he observed that he were using low cost / no cost material like bottles tops, board sheet, paper cards and sticks and students work were displayed on classrooms wall. Students were encouraged by him and they all actively participated in classroom activities. These steps improve the classroom learning process.

Multi-grade Teaching: The Schools’ context of rural and some semi urban have the multigrade context of teaching, where teaching involves the teaching of children from two or more grade levels in one classroom. The professional teacher is a key resource person in the multigrade context. Teachers need special skills and techniques to manage and teach in such conditions.

A male teacher mentee reflected that: “These workshops change my thinking as a primary school teacher, before this I was not involved students in group work and in activities, but now I plan different activities for multigrade class. Students now taking interest and enjoy their learning. He also involved their parents and community to solve school problems”.

reflections are documented in Portfolio folder. Teachers used different methods to change their practices like Brainstorming, group work, discussion & role play;

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Conclusion

Continuing professional development is needed to reinforce learning and support educational change process. CBMP workshops mainly focused interactive methods of teaching, which help teachers to learn together through participation in thought provoking activities of teaching & learning. The continuous mentoring process facilitates learning opportunities. The professional development activities provided support to mentors and cluster schools’ teachers, which show a change in their classroom practices. These initiatives help to enhance the mentors’ capacity to work with their cluster school teachers for improving their performance and impacting student learning.

References


Report of Follow up visit developed by Rakhshinda Meher (AKU-IED) Mentees Reflections.