Improving Indian Teachers' Readiness to Adopt New Methodologies:
Role of Learner-Centered In-Service Training

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ABSTRACT

Appropriate pre-service and in-service professional development programs help improve teacher effectiveness. Though the Indian government has invested substantial resources on in-service teacher training, teachers rarely implement the learning from such programs in the actual classroom. This article draws insights from a qualitative analysis of the teacher training conducted during a larger study that developed and tested an intervention program for language learning problems in Marathi, and Indian language. It discusses the current status of in-service teacher training in India and identifies important practice implications that could be used as a basis for more detailed research in this field and for reforming teacher training in India. Based on the interactive and learner-centered teacher training method used in this study and the positive impact it had on the two teachers who participated, the author recommends methods to help teachers challenge, re-examine, and re-structure teachers' belief systems related to teaching children.

KEYWORDS

India, In-Service Training, Interactive Learning, Learner-Centered Teaching, Readiness, Teacher, Teacher Effectiveness, Teacher's Beliefs

INTRODUCTION

Several studies have identified teacher effectiveness as a factor that influences children's academic achievement (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004). For instance, Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005) conducted a large-scale study with about half a million children from 3000 schools in Texas. Their findings revealed that quality of instruction had a large impact on children's achievement. Similarly, in a study on two cohorts of kindergarten students with about 24,000 children, Araujo, Carneiro, Cruz-Aguayo, and Schady (2016) reported that teacher behaviors, as measured by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, had a positive impact on students' test scores. While several studies in India have examined the impact of teachers' characteristics, such as caste, religion, qualifications, presence of pre-service training (Kingdon, 2006), gender (Kingdon, 2006; Muralidharan & Sheth, 2013), and union membership (Kingdon & Teal, 2010), there is little research on impact of teacher effectiveness on students' actual scores on measures of performance in India. One such

study was that conducted by Azam and Kingdon (2014) using matched administrative panel data from private schools in one district in India. They reported that teacher quality affected students' achievement, but that the reason for variation in teachers' quality was unclear.

However, owing to the importance of teacher effectiveness, it has received substantial research interest, leading to the development of models on dimensions of teacher effectiveness. Most popular models acknowledge the role of three to four similar dimensions. For instance, Freeman's (1989) model on language teachers' effectiveness included four factors; knowledge, skill, attitude, and awareness. In this model, "knowledge" refers to the content of the subject being taught, an understanding of students' backgrounds and learning styles, and awareness of the educational context and socio-cultural dynamics. "Skill" pertains to teachers' abilities related to daily classroom activities, including provision of instructions, classroom management, etc. Teachers' disposition towards students and their beliefs about the teaching-learning process comprise the "attitude" factor, while their ability to respond to situations that arise in the classroom is included in the "awareness" factor (Freeman, 1989). Similarly, Cooper and McIntyre (1996) identified three aspects related to teacher effectiveness; subject content knowledge, craft of teaching, and teacher sensitivity to and awareness of learner's individual needs and differences. To put it simply, there seems to be consensus that teacher effectiveness entails expertise pertaining to the "what" (subject knowledge), "how" (teaching strategies and teacher-child interactions), and "who" (sensitivity to individual differences and needs of the children) of the teaching-learning process.

It is believed that teacher effectiveness could be improved through pre-service and in-service professional development programs that help teachers reconstruct their understanding of the teaching-learning process (O'Connell Rust, 2010). Further, Yadav and Nikalje (2006) recommend that teacher education curricula in India include content that is to be taught by the teachers in the classroom, methods to develop sensitivity towards the learner and learning conditions, and methods of teaching that facilitate academic achievement. The present discussion paper explores potential avenues for practice and future research on in-service teacher training in India, based on insights drawn from a qualitative analysis of the teacher training conducted during a larger study that developed and tested an intervention program for language learning problems in Marathi, and Indian language. That study used this knowledge regarding components of teacher effectiveness to train regular classroom teachers to implement a program that addressed language learning problems in Grade IV children. To set the context for the present paper, however, the history and current status of in-service teacher training in India is first presented.

In-Service Teacher Training in India

The importance of using in-service teacher training to tackle quality problems in education has been recognized by several high-level committees on education. Post-independence, one of the first steps in this direction was the recommendation of the Secondary Education Commission in 1952–53 for setting up of extension service departments to impart in-service training to teachers. Later, in the mid-60s State Institutes of Education (SIE) were set up for this purpose (National Council for Teacher Education [NCTE], 1998). The in-service training agenda gained further momentum following the recommendations of the Chattopadhyay Commission or National Commission on Teachers-I, in 1983–85. The commission recommended mandatory in-service training of three weeks in blocks of five years for all teachers. Further, to ensure participation of teachers, this was linked to career promotions (National Commission on Teachers [NCT], 1983). However, according to observations of the Justice Verma Commission, these recommendations were not effectively implemented due to opposition from teachers' unions and lack of infrastructure to provide the training (Government of India, 2012).

To remedy the lack of infrastructure, major steps were taken based on the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 (Government of India, 1986). Subsequently, District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET), Colleges of Teacher Education (CTE) and Institutes for Advanced Studies in

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