
Book Review

Developing Support Systems for Rural Teachers' Continuing Professional Development

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Continuous professional development is an essential component for ensuring professionalism including teaching profession. Professional development enables teachers to continuously acquire, expand and extend their knowledge and to develop skills and abilities with the aim of improving the quality of both teaching and learning, as well as the achievements of all students. It also provides an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills to ensure quality, to improve the relationship with colleagues, school management, parents and local communities. This helps the teachers to prepare for the acceptance of changes in the education system, successful implementation of the revised practices and active participation and initiative in carrying out these changes. Organising professional development programmes and reaching it to all teachers of the country is a biggest challenge of many of the developing and under developed nations.

The book under review presents five case studies, which highlights the successful practices in the area of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for rural teachers working in different contexts and with various challenges. The objective of the book is to identify the fundamental similarities and features of successful rural teacher support systems in different countries and to provide a platform for replication, if possible. The book starts with an introductory chapter followed by five case studies and ends with a concluding chapter of summary along with the policy recommendations.

In the introductory chapter, F. Helen Drinan has excellently narrated a comprehensive picture of various theoretical as well as historical basis of Continuing Professional Development

Programmes for teachers especially those working in rural areas. The chapter begins with rationale of organising CPD in the context of Education for All (EFA) and UNESCO strategies for teachers 2012-15. Author reiterates the place of CPD in the development of professional competence and commitment among teachers in order to accomplish quality education and states that 'Continuing Professional Development is an on-going, life long process of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning by building the motivation, commitment, understanding, attitude, skills and knowledge of teachers and other educational staff'. The mention of building motivation and commitment has overriding importance as far as rural teachers are concerned since rest of the attributes mentioned in the definition are common to other teachers as well. Drinan narrates the various challenges faced by rural teachers in general and rationale for introducing a variety of CPD that could be implemented in order to overcome these challenges. The different CPD activities, that may be included in these programmes also has been given a place in the chapter. In the penultimate section the author discusses vital components of an effective Teacher Support System for rural teachers.

In the second chapter, Ana Maria Sandi illustrates mentoring system for teachers Professional Development implemented for rural teachers of Romania. The case study begins with a short background about the initiative and then elucidates the piloting of the project named Rural Education Progress (REP). Author explains how mentoring programmes were implemented as a part of REP, its processes like development of training curricula, training modules, and teaching learning materials for mentors. The systematic procedure used for selection, recruitment and training of mentors as described in this case study could be replicated in many of the similar contexts. The setting up of mobile as well as fixed resource centres for reaching mentoring to all teachers was really an excellent idea for 'reaching to unreach'. The effectiveness and outcome of the mentoring programme are illustrated with the help of the results of many other empirical studies conducted in this area. Some of the lessons learnt from this experience also will give the reader to think about the benefits of using the strategy in similar situations. The chapter gives a brief explanation about the future plan of action before giving the summary. As a whole the chapter gives a detailed report of a nationwide teacher development programme implemented in Romania aimed at improving the

knowledge and skills of rural school teachers. The highlight of the report is role played by the mentor in reaching at distant corner of the country in order to guide and support rural teachers with an objective of improving teaching and learning. The study also reveals how to tackle the challenges of selecting, recruiting and orienting right mentors and sending them to remote areas of the country where lots of challenges in transportation is existing.

The second case study in this book by Liu Jing is about the Southwest Basic Education Project (SBEP) implemented in China for supporting rural teachers' professional development from various counties. Author describes various components of the programme starting from government policies and an overview of SBEP and support mechanism for rural teachers before SBEP in place. The rationale of implementing SBEP based on the lesson learnt from the pre SBEP experience and modification of Teacher Support System (TSS) also has been provided by the author in a convincing manner. Author describes this initiative as a 'local support system, in which a local teacher training institutions and local education authorities play a decisive role in teaching and assisting teachers in remote areas to support rural teachers in an effective way'. This is very crucial as the quality dimension of education is concerned. The local authorities from county and township TLRC were used as a platform for sharing resources and best practices among teachers in remote areas, improve access to a wide range of professional development activities, to mediate various in-service teacher training providers and schools, and to manage education. While describing the effectiveness and outcome of the TSS under SBEP, the author mentions that 'most of SBEP teacher training courses were conducted at county and township TLRC, therefore teacher training and other CPD activities had been made accessible to teacher in the very remote schools who were normally neglected before because of limited logistic recourses'. This of course can be considered as an outstanding example of decentralisation of teachers' professional development programmes in order to reach at grass root level. Another significant contribution of this programme is the success of organising follow up programmes and its utilisation in various in-service and pre-service programmes, which is the area we usually neglect in CPD. Author describes that the follow up programmes implemented through SBEP, helped the teachers to reflect and internalise what they learnt in the training course. Practice the new methods/techniques in normal classroom,

share the experience with other teachers and ongoing support from mentors through doubt clearing, correcting misunderstanding etc are some of the follow up activities.

The next case study is from Cambodia, reported by F. Helen Drinan, about school cluster system for supporting teachers from rural area. The chapter begins with a brief description about policy and practices of Cambodian government specifically in relation to teacher education and continuing professional development of teachers. It is followed with historical, political and socio-economic background of Cambodia, and how these influenced the educational initiatives of the country. In the next section, author gives a clear and comprehensive picture about the evolution, piloting, organisation and functioning of school cluster system in Cambodia. A brief analysis of its effectiveness and outcomes are given in the next section and are followed with lesson learnt in terms of some challenges and future of school clustering.

Chapter 5 describes about Pedagogical Workshops (PW) as a means for helping rural teachers professional development, an initiative undertaken in Mozambique, coordinated by Ajuda de Desenvolvimento de Povo para Povo (Development Aid from People to People, (ADPP)). The case report includes a brief historical as well as political description of Mozambique, major constraints, problems and challenges faced by the nation in providing education to people and contribution of ADPP in providing and improving quality of education in Mozambique. It is followed by the description of Pedagogical Workshops (PW) in terms of its meaning, components, functions and purposes. The report mentions that 'Pedagogical workshops are part of a process that enables teachers, students and communities to gain life-skills that contribute to improve teaching skills and community developments'. The aim is to create better learning opportunities for children and adults, and enhance their capacities, and skills in order to involve whole heartedly in the social and economic development of their districts. This case study also speaks about involving community in the functioning of school. The section which details about the impact and outcomes of PWs share some theoretical descriptions of functions and benefits of PWs. It could be better, if author could give some evidence for the benefit of PWs either from some empirical studies or from their own experience with empirical support.

The focus in the sixth chapter is on the Rural Teacher CPD Support System Practised in Ethiopia. This case report did by T

S Belew gives a brief description of teacher education policy in Ethiopia, specifically the policy regarding continuing professional development of teachers. It contains a review of two studies conducted on the teacher's CPD and lists out the challenges and problems faced in general while organising CPD for rural teachers. Then Belew shifts to the need of developing a revised framework of CPD for teacher based on the challenges mentioned in the previous section. It is followed by a detailed explanation of two types of CPD initiatives viz, school-based CPD and cluster-based CPD. The components like teacher working together, peer observation and feedback, planning lessons together, and group action research are critical in the school based CPD. The framework mentions that teaching skill gaps, instructional problems, and other issues related to the quality of classroom instruction common to all teachers in the country (called National Priorities) are considered in the cluster based CPD. The salient feature of the revised framework is that, it has explicitly indicated the roles and responsibility of various CPD stakeholders like teachers, school leaders, cluster, etc. The author gives a brief explanation of three different models of clustering viz, hierarchical model, horizontal model and hybrid model and reported that Ethiopia has utilised hierarchical model of clustering in the initial stage due to various reasons and later on shifted to hybrid model. The section, which discussed the effectiveness of the programme has only given few general benefits of Cluster based CPD without having any empirical evidences. Author has cited some empirical study reports regarding the effectiveness of a pilot project on science and mathematics improvements programme. It would have been better if this section briefed the effectiveness culled out from some empirical studies. Even though author has mentioned about another type of programme, namely school based CPD, no such remarks have been made about its effectiveness or outcomes in this section.

Last chapter describes a brief summary of the case studies followed with significant and meaningful policy recommendations that could be utilised by countries having similar challenges and with same contexts.

Definitely the various models, approaches and activities implemented and succeeded in these five cases have innumerable values and significance today. Most of the developing and under developed nations; some of the developed nations can replicate or can offer one or a combination of these models for supporting

rural teachers for their professional development by adopting or adapting. No nation can expect development without having a coherent and excellent policy at education and its practice. Quality of education by and large depends on the quality of teachers. It is in this context, this book have high value since it gives a clear picture about upbringing of teachers through appropriate and practicable approaches. This book definitely will be an asset to anybody who thinks and works for quality education.

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