

EXPLORING TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TEACHER RESEARCH

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Abstract

Present research paper attempts to explore teachers' professional development through teacher research. On a structural mode, this term paper is divided in to three parts. In the first part, a general introduction on teacher's professional development and teacher research will be given. In the second part, the concept of professional development will be discussed in detail manner and in the last part; efforts will be taken with the help of few teachers' research including mine one to show you the effect of the teacher research on the teachers professional development and how teacher research becomes a powerful mean for teachers professional development.

Key Words: - Teacher research, Teacher professional development, Teacher learning.

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Introduction

In India since 1960s, teacher's professional development and teacher research has been recognized as crucially important aspects in the field of teacher education and over a period time literature on these two concepts have shown a dynamic growth in these two concepts. In recent years, language teachers in many parts of the world have expressed a growing interest in their own professional development. Although a large number of articles and a small number of books have been published on this issue, there have been few practical introductions to the field of professional development and teacher research in language teaching as a whole. The main aim of this paper is to show how teacher research is a feasible activity for teachers' professional development. Similarly, it also attempts to show how teacher research helps teachers for their profound growth in their profession. it promotes the concept of teacher as a classroom researcher and their efforts to research their thinking, practice and professional development. It seeks to highlight the relationship between doing research and and developing professionally.

The literature on professional development has stated that traditionally, teachers' professional development has consisted of short term or one-shot in-service programmes conducted by outside 'experts' who disseminated a knowledge base constructed again almost exclusively by 'experts' where there is no any scope for teachers own classroom experience. As a result, their needs for professional development remain unaddressed. Existing teacher education programmes neither accommodate the emerging ideas in context and pedagogy nor address the issue of linkages between school and society. There is little space for engagement with innovative educational experiment. So to enhance teacher's professional development and innovation in the classroom, it is very important to provide them with a tool which will enable them to learn from their own classroom experiences. Teacher research is such one of the tools, which enable teachers to learn from their own experiences. Research is used in many professional learning contexts, both formally and informally. Research enquiries begin with the question, 'How do I improve my work?' 'How do I help my institution to grow?' This perspective is quite different from traditional views of professional education, which often take the form of training. Such more enlightened forms of professional learning work on the assumption that professionals already have a good deal of professional knowledge, and are highly capable of learning for themselves. What they need in their professional learning is an appropriate form of support to help them celebrate what they already know, and also generate new knowledge form it. The question 'How do I improve my work?' contains a social intent. The

intention is that one person improves their work for their own benefit and the benefit of others. If you can improve what you are doing (at least improve your understanding of what you are doing), there is a good chance you will influence the situation you are working in and as a result you will grow in your profession. Improving the work you do is about learning to do things in new ways. It is a process of professional learning. This is true whether you are just beginning your career or whether you are in full swing. Learning is for life, not just for college. Many professional learning programmes work from the point of view of the person who is conducting them ('delivering' them in much contemporary language.) The emphasis is often on teaching or training, not so much on learning. The assumption is that the trainer knows the answers and passes them on to you, and then supervises you to make sure you are applying them correctly.

This delivery model is widespread and often unquestioned. When research informs professional development programmes, they work from the point of view of the person who is learning. It is assumed that you already know a great deal. Perhaps your knowledge is intuitive or only roughly worked out, but you still have the answers in yourself, ready for the right stimulus to set them off. You don't need a trainer so much as a supporter, or critical friend, who will listen to your ideas, challenge them, and help you to find alternatives. This kind of facilitative model means that the supporter is also learning; they are not expected to have answers to your workplace-based questions. They actively learn with and from you; it is a dialogue of equals. Of course, being an effective supporter means developing a high level of interpersonal skills, sensitivity, and wisdom. Developing these skills is a research process.

Teachers' Professional Development:-

Professional development generally refers to ongoing learning opportunities available to teachers and other education personnel through their schools and districts. Effective professional development is often seen as vital to school success and teacher satisfaction, but it has also been criticized for its cost, often vaguely determined goals, and for the lack of data on resulting teacher and school improvement, that characterizes many efforts. Before turning up to a detailed examination of how teacher research enhances teachers' professional development in a profound manner, it may be helpful to take a brief historical tour over some of the major highlights of earlier approaches to language teachers' professional development.

Historically, administrators have favored the workshop approach, in which a district or school brings in an outside consultant or curriculum expert on a staff-development day to give teachers a one-time training seminar on a garden-variety pedagogic or subject-area topic. Current literature on teachers' professional development have shown that there are many approaches through which teachers' professional development can happen. According to Richards and Farrell (2010) there are eleven approaches to teachers' professional development such as workshops, self-monitoring, teacher support groups, keeping a teaching journal, peer observation, teaching portfolios, analyzing critical incidents, case analysis, peer coaching, team teaching, and action research. Professional development is considered an essential mechanism for deepening teachers' content knowledge and developing their teaching practices. As a result, professional development could be a cornerstone of systemic reform

efforts designed to increase teachers' capacity to teach to high standards (Smith & O'Day, 1991). According to Revans (1982, 1984) to be effective, professional development must provide teachers with a way to directly apply what they learn through their teaching. Research shows that professional development leads to better instruction and improved student learning when it connects to the curriculum materials that teachers use, the district and state academic standards that guide their work, and the assessment and accountability measures that evaluate their success.

The teacher research reported here focuses on the effect of teacher research on teachers' professional development and tries to argue that teacher research is very effective tool for teachers' professional development. Even in that case Stenhouse has also emphasized teachers' research and development competence, saying that this is the way 'through which he is progressively increasing his understanding of his own work and hence bettering his teaching' (1975, 143). Stenhouse called teachers who have a critical and developmental orientation to their own work 'extended professionals'. Furthermore, in the field of curriculum development he was the first who advocated the teachers' professional development through teacher research.

In the last few decades, both educators and researchers have attempted to alter methods of teacher professional development so that teachers assume control of classroom decisions and actively participate in their own instructional improvement on an ongoing basis (Hopkins 1985; McDonough and McDonough 1997). Research, done by practitioners using their own site as the focus of their study, has been suggested as one means of fostering meaningful professional development for teachers (Wallace 1998). It is a type of inquiry, which aims at discovering, developing, or monitoring changes in classroom practice through interrogating one's own and others' practices and assumptions. The emphasis here is on reflecting critically and conceptualizing alternative perspectives on a problem, which according to Schön (1983), lie at the very heart of professional development. Teacher research as a form of professional development has been found to have a profound effect on those who have done it, i.e. it helps teachers to become more flexible and more open to new ideas (Oja and Smulyan 1989). Moreover, it has been asserted that teacher research raises the status of the occupation of teaching in the society and produces knowledge about teaching and learning useful to other teachers, policy makers, academic researchers, and teacher educators (Francis, Hirsch, and Rowland 1994).

Teacher research and professional development

This part of the paper contains three summaries of research studies done by three teachers first one is mine and other two are picked from teacher development project carried out by S. Bartlett (2003).

Teacher no. 1. College teacher

This is my research study, which I conducted, in an engineering college. As part of my teaching duties, the college management asked me to teach for second year engineering students. At the initial stage, I took the textbook (that I was supposed to teach) and started reading it for my upcoming classes. While reading the textbook I found that there were some poems and prose, which were not at all related to their learners' field, and similarly the tasks and exercises given at the end of the text were also not suitable to the learners'. However, since I was new to the field, I thought to ponder on it after some teaching. Therefore, I started my teaching lessons. During my teaching I found that even though my teaching was effective and even learners' were participating in the classes, after some lessons they started asking me to teach them something which will help them in getting good jobs in the college placements. Then I thought now it's time to do something for me as well as for my learners'. After that, I decided to do a research on the materials evaluation and materials adaptation. Since I did my B.Ed. in EFL University, I was much aware of the various methods for doing teacher research so that was not my headache but I was not much aware of the field of materials evaluation and materials adaptation. Therefore, to carry out this research I read literature [Brain Tomlinson (2003), Rod Ellis (2010)] on my research topic. After that based on my reading, I designed and administered a small questionnaire and semi formal interviews which will tell me what kind of teaching they wanted from me and why do they think so.

After the analysis of questionnaire and I found that my learners wanted me to teach problem solving skills, discussion skills and interview techniques. For that, reason while teaching given textbook I adopted various tasks and activities, which will my learners to learn above-mentioned skills. To give one example of the materials adaptation – there was a prose lesson on 'Bloodhounds on the trail' followed by some factual and inferential questions for learners. The text of this unit was dealing with a problem of missing people in the America and how bloodhounds helped them in getting to those missing people. Before teaching this lesson, I designed some five to six problem solving tasks related to the lesson. While teaching I divided the learners' in five to six groups and asked them to arrive at the possible solution. During their work on tasks, I found that they were happy about the tasks and they participated voluntarily in given tasks. After this to assess their learning I designed different some problem solving tasks and asked them to solve. In the assessment, I found that learners have learnt problem-solving skills similarly; they were also able to arrive at the logical reasons for choosing such solution. At the end of my project, I shared my research in my department similarly I made a paper presentation on my research in an national conference at Nagpur.

After doing teacher research, I understood that it has helped me in developing myself in my profession in many ways. At the initial stage of my research, I did not know anything about materials evaluation and materials adaptation but due to the research, I read the literature on the topic, which enhanced my understanding of various issues related to the materials development. then second due to my research I learnt how to design problem solving tasks. Third through this research I learnt that if I teach my learners according to their will and will

then the learning will happen as fast as possible because here learners take initiative to learn and not the teacher. Fourth by this research, I learnt how to write research articles and how to present it in conferences. I learnt these things because when I submitted my research article to the conference committee asked me to change some part of my research paper based on that I learnt that I should not write academic documents in informal way. Similarly, at the conference, I learnt how I should and I should not prepare myself for presentations. Finally the conference committee selected my research paper for the book which got published soon after the conference. When I saw my research paper in the book, I forgot every toil that I took for my research.

Teacher no. 2. Primary school teacher

This teacher worked in a particularly challenging school. During her teaching, she felt that use of interactive whiteboard had made her teaching more effective especially for those pupils who generally had more difficulty in concentrating. Therefore, in this case she wanted to identify the effectiveness of the interactive whiteboard and the use of it to develop pedagogy. For this initially she decided to give similar lesson to her class without and then with the whiteboard. So at the initial stage she taught a lesson without whiteboard During her class, she asked her colleague to observe the learners' response and behavior then she conducted a test on the lesson. After this she taught the same lesson with whiteboard and followed the same procedure she followed at the beginning of her research. Then she designed a questionnaire regarding the use of whiteboard in the classroom and administered it to her learners. At the end of the research she analyzed the observation reports given by her colleague, then test scores of both the tests and the questionnaire administered at the end of the study. Her data analysis reported that the use of whiteboard made her class effective in terms of learner motivation, interest. Similarly the mean of test scores revealed that her lesson with whiteboard was very effective than her lesson without whiteboard. In the similar manner, her questionnaire revealed that learners gave more preference to lessons with whiteboard than without whiteboard. At the end of the research study, she wrote research article and published in the school bulletin. In her writing, she wrote that this research has helped her in understanding her classroom practices in a deep manner. While explaining this point she mentioned that through this research she understood that to be successful teacher one should always pay attention to the learners' motivation and interest. Similarly, she said that the test scores and questionnaire helped her in deciding her future teaching strategies. While writing about her publication she said that she became very careful about the academic language writing and for that, she read some of the academic writing books as well and during that period, she learnt about the use of academic words, the use of formal language etc.

If we examine the summary of research conducted by teacher researcher from the point of view of professional development, then we will understand that the research has helped teacher researcher in various ways. First, it helped her in deciding the effective tool for her teaching. Secondly, by this research she understood that the motivation and interest of the learner is very important for successful teaching and learning. Thirdly during this study she

started talking about her teaching to her colleagues and started taking help from them which indicates that due to the research she learnt how to work together to develop professionally in the teaching field. Finally, her decision of publication of her research made her work on the academic language writing explains that research has helped her in developing her academic linguistic competence.

Teacher no. 3. High school teacher

This teacher researcher was working in a high school, which was located in a remote area. As a part of his daily teaching duty, he was teaching to 8th class. As like other English teacher he taught one poem to the learners. After the lesson as a part of their midterm assessment, he designed a small test and administered it to the learners. The assessment results made him shocked, this was primarily because more than fifty two percent learners' did not get average marks, and remaining learners' were just above the average marks. As a result, he decided to find out the main reasons for this incident and for that he analyzed the learners' answers and found that learners' performance on conceptual understanding and vocabulary were very poor. By now through reflection and evidence he completely understood that whatever he taught to his learners' was not comprehensible to the learners 'and hence he decided to re-teach the same lesson in a different way. This time he did not teach the lesson in the same fashion, before the lesson he prepared some pictures for teaching vocabulary related words from the poem, similarly to make poem more comprehensible to learners' he took video on the poem.

Then he taught the lesson through the video and pictures with explaining concepts in a detailed way after that, he administered the same test to the learners'. After the test, he assessed the learners' responses and compared the test scores with the previous test. The comparison of the first and second test revealed that the learners' performance in the second test was far better than the first test. In second test more than fifty-six percent learners' were above first class, more than twenty three percent learners' were above first class and the rest were above pass marks. So by his research he found out that pictures are the best recourses to teach vocabulary to the learners' similarly he also found out that if you teach poem with videos related to the lesson then learners' conceptual understanding increases in a better way than the traditional method. At the end, he shared his entire research with his colleague and by looking at his success his colleague also started using pictures and videos in his classes, similarly from that point they started sharing their ideas and problems regarding their teaching in the staff room.

The close examination of this teacher research reveals that this teacher research has helped the teacher researcher and his colleague in their professional growth in many ways. First, it helped him in deciding what will work in teaching poetry and vocabulary. Secondly, by this research he understood that the motivation and interest of the learner is very important for successful teaching and learning and by using pictures and videos, he will be able to motivate his learners far better way than other methods. Thirdly, after this study, he shared his research findings with her colleagues and as a result, his colleague also started using pictures

and videos in his classes. Finally, we can say that his decision to conduct research in his classroom made him ponder on a problem that he faced while teaching similarly the solution that he arrived at was also applicable to other classroom, which indicates that teacher research has helped him in developing his own professional growth.

Conclusion

Above-mentioned three teacher research studies reveal that teacher research is very powerful tool for teacher's professional empowerment. It helps in teachers' professional development in various ways for instance - to solve their own problems, it enhances their understanding of teaching and learning, it facilitate teacher learning, it help teachers grow in their own field professionally. However, one of the limitations of this tool is teachers must be aware of research methodology, to carry out teacher research they must know how to do it systematically. If teacher is not aware of these issues, then he won't be able to report out and as a result it will be confined to him.

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