The role of Pedagogical leaders in the professional development of Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Effective leadership is vital for educational transformations and achieving positive student outcomes. One of the primary responsibilities of a pedagogical leader, particularly the school head, is to promote the professional development of teachers. This qualitative study explores how school heads foster professional development in their institutions in the Indian context. The study sample included six heads of schools. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected through the interview schedule. The findings indicate that school heads employ diverse strategies to promote the professional development of teachers. The impact of NEP 2020 and CBSE initiatives is visible in the Indian school context. However, challenges such as time constraints, socio-economic factors, lack of commitment, and resistance to learning and unlearning persist. Schools need professional development programs for their leaders that focus on teaching practices. This is essential for effective school leadership today.

Keywords: Pedagogical leadership, professional development, pedagogical leader, Heads of schools

Introduction

Education that is relevant and connected to real life is essential in today's world. To provide quality education, we need effective teachers. Our goal is to develop well-rounded individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also skilled, compassionate, and resilient (Sastri, 2024). We are not solely accountable for a child's academic results but also for influencing society in the present and future through our educational practices(Grice et al., 2023). In India, school heads are called pedagogical leaders responsible for leading learning. The pedagogical leadership practices emphasize fostering professional development for teachers to achieve better education and student outcomes. This paper examines how school leaders promote teachers' professional development and their challenges in this essential role. It utilizes qualitative research to explore these concerns about enhancing teachers' growth.

Theoretical background

Pedagogical leadership was introduced as a new approach by Sergiovanni (1998). He claims that "pedagogical leadership invests in capacity building by developing social and academic capital for students and intellectual and professional capital for teachers."(Alonso-Yanez et al., 2021). Leithwood and Riehl (2009) describe pedagogical leadership as motivating and guiding others toward attaining common objectives for the school(Heikka et al., 2020). Bolivar (2010) defines pedagogical leadership as influencing others and arranging the organization to improve students' learning. A central aspect of pedagogical leadership is creating conditions that promote learning and school improvement. Here, the principal plays a catalytic role, not an absolute one(Contreras, 2016).

According to Peng&Chudy,2024, there are four principal perspectives on pedagogical leadership. The professional dimension highlights the capacity of school leaders to inspire and motivate educators toward ongoing professional growth. Pedagogical leadership aims to influence the perceptions, values, knowledge, understanding, or actions of others by inviting others to engage in activities that will most likely result in learning(Elo & Uljens, 2024).

The heads of schools, according to CBSE, are called pedagogical leaders. Their primary duty is to lead pedagogical activities. It includes leading, guide, and support the teaching and learning processes in the school by focusing on classroom-specific requirements for transacting the curriculum so that both teachers and students perform at their best(CBSE, 2024).

Pedagogical leaders and professional development of teachers

Effective pedagogical leadership is crucial in ensuring effective teaching and achieving educational goals(Calderón et al., 2021). Professional development of teachers is essential in this fast-changing era of scientific and technological advances. The knowledge and skills that teachers gain during their pre-service education days may not serve them for all time to come in a rapidly changing world. Professional development programs or in-service education are meant to update and enhance the knowledge and skills of teachers(Selvaraj et al., 2015).

A school leader may not possess expertise in every aspect of pedagogy, where teacher leadership comes into play. Collaborative efforts are necessary to identify suitable solutions for specific contexts. Providing teachers with ample professional learning opportunities can significantly improve their leadership skills, fostering professional learning communities' growth (Fonsén & Soukainen, 2020). Pedagogical leadership is strengthened when teachers, the central players in the education system, collaborate with the principal. They foster an environment of confidence where everyone—students, teachers, and other staff—feels valued and empowered to succeed (Conteras,2016).In 'Six Principles of Pedagogical Leadership' by Webb,2022, creating conditions for learning stands as the second principle. (Webb, 2022).

In their studies, Rahmedi et al. (2021) demonstrated that pedagogical leaders who effectively employ charismatic and democratic leadership styles can empower and mobilize teachers and staff. They achieve this through supervision, workshops, regular meetings, and encouraging teachers to participate in educational training and seminars to enhance their pedagogical competence(Rahmadi et al., 2021).

The handbook prepared by CBSE regarding Practicing Pedagogical Leadership clearly outlines pedagogical leaders' responsibilities. As a pedagogical leader of the school, it is the responsibility of the principal to provide opportunities for teachers to learn continuously through a comprehensive professional development program. (Mythily, 2021).

NEP 2020 and Professional Development

Our policies emphasize the need for professional development and its promotion by school heads. NEP,2020 recommends that professional development programs provide continuous self-improvement opportunities through local, regional, state, national, and international workshops and online modules. Each teacher must complete at least 50 hours of continuing professional development (CPD) annually, focusing on their interests. CPD will cover modern pedagogies related to foundational literacy and numeracy, adaptive assessment, competency-based learning, and innovative approaches like experiential learning, arts integration, sports integration, and storytelling(NEP, 2020).

The National Curriculum for School Education 2023 also highlights the duty of the school principal in the following manner. Teachers' professional competence and collaborative efforts are the most critical factors impacting student learning. Every school needs effective processes that enable this, and the school principal can make this happen effectively. Trusting and respecting teachers is the foundation. Principals can do it in multiple ways: by listening to them, providing them with the facilities and resources to work, arranging academic and other support, and involving them as equal partners in school-related decision-making. Schools require mechanisms facilitating sharing, reflection, and working together among Teachers(Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2023).

The paradigm shift from rote learning to critical thinking, experiential learning, and holistic development in the Indian education system is a positive and necessary change. Continuous professional development for teachers is essential to equip them with the skills and knowledge to implement new teaching strategies. Additionally, the focus on high-stakes exams and societal pressure to achieve high grades can hinder the adoption of new methods(Thankachan, 2024)

Research Questions

How do heads of schools facilitate the professional development of teachers?

What challenges do heads of schools face in fostering the professional development of teachers?

Methodology

The research methodology of the study is qualitative. The population includes all heads of schools in CBSE schools of Jaipur. For the present study, six schools from the Jaipur district of Rajasthan, India, are purposively selected. All six heads of schools were selected for data collection. All these schools are private schools and follow the CBSE curriculum. Open-ended questionnaires were prepared to interview heads of schools. The questions included the identification of professional needs, scheduling, implementation, and challenges associated with fostering professional development in schools.

Table-I: Demographic Details

Principal	Gender	Age	Total Years of experience	Years of experience in current school	Code	Rural/Urban
P1	Male	52	12		P1	Rural
P2	Male	56	23	6	P2	Urban
P3	Male	40	7	4	P3	Rural
P4	Female	57	15	5	P4	Urban
P5	Female	47	6	2	P5	Rural
P6	Female	45	5	3	P6	Urban

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher visited schools after obtaining prior appointment and consent. The interviews were conducted in the school office and lasted for 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded with permission, and the data was transcribed manually.

Data Analysis and Findings

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework was used for the present study for thematic analysis. The six phases of the framework include familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes by combining them, reviewing themes from the data set, defining themes, and writing the analysis. Initial codes were created after familiarizing the content with it through repeated reading. Table 1 includes the initial codes created from the interviews of school heads.

Table-II: Initial Codes from Interviews with Heads of Schools

Identifying the need and type of PD programs	Impact of NEP 2020 and CBSE Initiatives
-Through classroom observation(all)	-50 hours of CBP compulsory for all(P1) (P2)(P6)
-Based on feedback from students and parents(P1) (P6) (P3)	-Teachers are sent to CBSE training programs(P1-6)
-Gives liberty to teachers to discuss needs(P3)	-25 hours of CBP from school and rest by themselves(P1)
-Teachers request for training in certain areas(P4)	-Our teachers participate in relevant and innovative training conducted by CBSE (all)
-Through lesson plans(P1) (P6)	
Schedule of PD	**Collaboration and sharing among teachers**
-Planned from the beginning and added to the academic calendar (P2)	-Identify and explore the expertise of talented teachers for the good of all(all)
-Society arranges at the beginning of the session(P1) (P2)	-HOD's and Coordinators guide and lead (P3) (P4) (P5)
-Three times in a year(P3)	-
-Quarterly once (P6)	
-Two times in a year by the school(P5)	
- Not everyone attends, so we follow the rule, 'each one, teach one.'	
Feedback from Pedagogical leaders to teachers	**Peer tutoring and team teaching**
-Personal meeting	-HOD takes the lead in peer tutoring(P1)
-After classroom observation	-Peer tutoring is there every day in zero period(P6)
-Through lesson plan checking	-For certain subjects like Mathematics and science, only use team teaching(P6)
-Common feedback through morning assemblies of teachers(P5) (P6)	
-Administrative work hinders in giving feedback(P1) (P4)	
Encouragement from Pedagogical leader	**Recognition from pedagogical leaders**
-Arranging programs to update themselves(all)	-Appreciate them in staff meetings and school assemblies(all)
-Calls resource persons from outside	-Providing financial increment(P5)
-Providing resources and books(all)	-Setting up awards(P5,P6)
-Giving constructive feedback in person(P2,P4)	-Registering in school data about the details of PD programs attended(P1)
-Opportunity provided to become resource persons in and out of school(P5)	-Arranges competitions among teachers and prizes for winners(P4)

	-On special occasions like Teachers Day, honor the teachers for their achievement (P1, P2) -Publishing in school magazines(P6)
Induction program for freshers -Meeting with Principal (P1, P3, P4, P5) -Special training program (P2, P4) -Pairing with senior teachers(all) -Familiarizing with all by welcoming them to school assemblies(all) **Challenges** -Lack of commitment (P1, P5) -Lacking the noble aim of the teaching profession (P1, P5) -Training older teachers are difficult compared to new ones(P2) -Lack of resources in rural area schools (P3, P5) -Lack of support from illiterate parents(P3) (P5) -"Chaltha hei" attitude(P4) (P6) -Not ready to take risks and challenges () -Need constant accompaniment(P1) Some are very stuck to old methods(P2) -Time does not allow to show justice to PD programs(P3) -We will not get resource persons as per need(P3) -Financial constraints(P5) -Some pull down those who come up with innovative ideas due to workload (P4)	**Evaluation of the effectiveness of PD** -Through outcome of students-performance metrics(P3) -Through the evaluation of board results (P1, P4) - Self-evaluation by teachers (P1, P5) -Observing the lessons in class -By taking feedback after every PD program (P3) -Conducting follow-up programs (P4) -Feedback from coordinators and students
	Supportive environment -Encouraging -By providing resources and training -Leadership opportunities -mentorship programs Creates a family atmosphere -Conflict resolution techniques through dialogue -Prayer sessions -Be with them in times of difficulties
	Professional development of pedagogical leaders -Participates in various national seminars -Society arranges every year for principals -Attends CBSE initiatives -Through reading and webinars
Tangible improvements -During the pandemic time, through patience and training, many come out as shining stars(P2) -Everybody equipped with basic ICT skills -Use of diverse pedagogical strategies in classroom teaching	**Availability of resources** -All labs such as science, Mathematics, Computer present(all) -Every classroom is digitalized with smart classroom (P1, P2, P4, P6) -Library facilities(all) -Special computer and science lab for preparation of teachers(P2)

The following themes were formed from the initial codes.

Impact of NEP 2020 and CBSE Initiatives:

The study participants highlighted the impact of NEP 2020 and various CBSE initiatives that contributed to raising awareness of the importance of the professional development of teachers.

"Of course, the CBSE also has set 50 hours of training program. Out of 50 hours, 25 will be the responsibility of the school and the rest teachers have to do by themselves" (P1).

Identification of professional needs of teachers

The ways through which heads of schools identify the need and type of professional development mainly include class observation. Monitoring lesson plans and feedback from heads of department, coordinators, students, and parents are also used to identify. A few comments from participants are as follows.

"Give liberty to teachers to discuss professional development needs" (P3)

"Teachers who are lagging in innovative practices, content knowledge, poor planning of lessons, feedback from students and parents helps me in the identification of needs" (P6)

Schedules of professional development programs in schools

While scheduling professional development programs, pedagogical leaders emphasize the goals and expectations set for the school.

"...constantly talking to them... what we stand for, what the school stands for, our vision, mission, and all the education goals such as in the school education is concerned(P1).

The discussions proved that heads of schools take direct responsibility for providing relevant opportunities for professional development for school teachers as per needs. Schools depend mainly on either online or offline CBSE training programs, the school's programs by resource persons, and the standard programs arranged by the societies of the schools under which it is established.

Collaboration and sharing among teachers

Each school has its own collaborative practices. All participants agreed that they explored the rich knowledge of expert teachers for the betterment of all.

"It is not a one-man show- I take the help of others. It is a collaboration" (P4)

"Some teachers are resource persons for our school, and some are very good at many innovative practices. So, I give them liberty to share with others" (P3)

"All cannot attend training programs due to time limits … I send a few... after attending training… I make them to give to others. each one teaches one(P6)

Encouragement from Heads of Schools

Induction programs

There are many ways heads of schools encourage teachers in their professional development. Every school conducts an induction program for freshers. It includes personal meetings with the principal, introduction to subject experts, welcoming to the school, and pairing with a senior staff member.

Feedback from heads of schools

Feedback from heads of schools from time to time is considered as a boost for improvement in teachers' development. Participants discussed that they use one-to-one meetings, classroom observation, and checking lesson plans, which are mainly used for giving feedback to teachers. Two participants agreed that the immense administrative tasks prevent them from providing timely teacher feedback. Two school heads shared one of their best practices: meeting all or category-wise teachers every morning as a platform for providing general feedback.

"And then for the teachers, we take feedback from the students, coordinators and vice principal, authorities, or through some observation feedback…. Also, there is a questionnaire for evaluating a teacher in the classroom by the students, by the teachers, and through my classroom observation and giving them feedback(P1).

Allocation of resources

Providing adequate resources for teaching activities enhances the professionalism of educators. The school leaders involved in the study tried to supply various resources to support the professional development of teachers. The schools have good infrastructure, including various laboratories, interactive boards, well-stocked libraries, and other resources. However, despite encouragement from school heads, teachers' use of library facilities was deemed unsatisfactory, according to the leaders' observations.

"well-updated libraries with books and magazines, do research. I Always encourage" (P4)

"They are free to access, but they are not that much benefitting, not interested(P5)

Supportive environment

Constant encouragement of participation in training programs, appreciation of small and significant achievements, provision of professional learning platforms, mentorship programs, peer tutoring, team teaching, collaborative practices, sharing of best practices, reaching out to the various needs of teachers such as individuals and groups, helping them in difficult situations and conflicts show the maintenance of a supportive environment in school. An atmosphere of freedom and support nurtures learning among teachers. One well-experienced principal commented on the way of promoting teachers as follows.

"Emphasize success comes from effort learning, from mistakes and embracing the challenges(P4)"

Evaluation of the effectiveness of PD programs

The researcher could not identify any systematic or conscious effort pedagogical leaders made to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development programs. Two principals discussed the annual evaluation at the end of an academic year and students' performance metrics, proving its effectiveness. The opinion of principals about the evaluation is as follows.

"…. Certain objectives we kept, learning outcomes, and what they are able to display talk about it(P3)

Changes are not consistent. Some are continuing... sometimes they go back. (P4)

Challenges Before Pedagogical Leaders

School heads' main challenges include lack of time, financial constraints, lack of resources, socio-economic status, and less commitment from teachers.

Timing is more important... cannot give justice to them, resource persons we will not get (P3)

-There was a time when teaching was a very noble profession, and only those who wished to become only join teaching… now… they need a job...it is job-oriented. The dedication is missing, especially in the new generation…these are some challenges. What to do? (P4)

- We do not have access to all the resources. The fee structure is low; children come from low-income areas, cannot provide all facilities, and financially weak parents (P5)

-Not wanting to learn and unlearn, some continue the monotonous way, "Chaltha hei" attitude…also if anyone comes up with some innovative ideas, pull them down; it is not easy… they do not want to take challenges(P6)

To sum up, school heads recognize the importance of providing professional development for teachers, but administrative tasks and other factors often hinder efforts.

Implications

- Mixed method studies, including various stakeholders and schools, need to be conducted to better understand the topic.

- Not every school can arrange professional development to meet all teachers' needs. Greater collaboration among neighboring or local schools is essential. Policy can play a role in this.

- The teaching profession is losing its nobility and becoming job-oriented, undermining its purpose. Easy entry into teaching, especially for those lacking other options, highlights the need for better teacher professional programs and policies.

- There is a need for professional development programs for school heads with a special emphasis on pedagogical leadership.

Conclusion

The study indicates that school leaders considers the professional development of teachers as a critical responsibility. They strive to offer support within their available resources. The initiatives from NEP 2020 and CBSE have significantly raised awareness and enhanced dedicated efforts within schools to enhance the professional development of teachers. However, challenges such as time constraints, socio-economic barriers, varying levels of commitment, and the need for a systematic, organized approach continue to hinder progress in this area. Schools need professional development programs for their leaders that focus on teaching practices. This is essential for effective school leadership today.

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