

AN INVESTIGATION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES OF PRIMARY TEACHERS IN YANKIN TOWNSHIP

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were to study primary teachers' participation in professional development activities and to study primary teachers' perceptions on their needs of professional development. The questionnaire was developed based on "An analysis of Teachers' Professional Development Based on the Teaching and Learning International Survey" (OECD, 2009), others' research and literature review. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted. 130 teachers were selected as subjects by using purposive sampling. For quantitative study, 40 items with five point Likert scale for activities and 11 items with four point Likert scale for needs were used to collect data. For qualitative study, 8 interview questions were used. Descriptive statistics, independent samples *t* test, one-way ANOVA and Tukey were used to find out the significant differences in teachers' participation in their professional development activities grouped by academic qualification and trainings. The quantitative findings showed that teachers often participated in all professional development activities. There was a significant difference grouped by their teaching services in professional development activities. There were significant differences in observation, participation and research activities in training for new curriculum refresher courses. It was found that teachers moderately need for their professional development. In qualitative finding, most of the teachers do not get the opportunities to participate in professional development activities.

Keyword: professional development

Introduction

Education is a cornerstone of economic and social development; primary education is its' foundation. Advance education and training must test on the solid foundation of good primary education. Primary education has other benefits for individuals end society as well (Lockheed and Verspeor, 1991). It must aim at giving students the opportunities for personal development and confidence to adapt new situations as well as to change these when they find it necessary (Fredriksson, 2004). Young people and children must be given the tools through education to deal with the different tasks that they will need to perform in their lives. Thus education is the necessary investment to the development of human resources.

The teacher is the important factor in teaching/ learning process. Thus the area of teacher development is n major area of concern for the immediate future. Similarly, upgrading the quality of basic education teachers is one of the main tasks of the education promotion program in Myanmar (Ministry of Education, 2005).

Effective professional development enables teachers to develop the knowledge and skills they need to address students' learning challenges. Professional development is nor effective unless it causes Teachers to improve their instruction or causes administrators to become better school leaders.

Sparks (1993) described that in order to change practice insignificant and worthwhile ways, teachers must not only team new subject matters and new instructional techniques but they

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must alter Weir beliefs and conceptions of practice. Guskey (2003) argued that change in beliefs and attitude occurs subsequent to change in practice and results from observing the impact of change of their practice on student outcomes. Ye Aung (2006) said that a teacher can do not only teaching the subject but also monitoring, guiding, helping pupils. They can afford and learn themselves more for that responsibility. That is the virtue of teachers and they could be called teachers.

Considering the mentioned above reasons, the study will present an emphasis to the professional development activities of the Primary Teachers in Yankin Township, Yangon Region.

Objectives

- To study primary teachers' participation in professional development activities
- To study primary teachers' perceptions on their needs of professional development

Research Questions

This study is focused on the following questions:

- To what extent do primary teachers participate in professional development activities?
- To what extent do primary teachers perceive their needs of professional development?

Definition of Key Term

Professional Development

Professional development is defined as activities that develop an individual skill, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher. (The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2009).

Operational Definition

Professional development activities are the activities that develop a teacher's skills and knowledge in order to promote student learning.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

In this study, professional development activities for primary teachers are based on (OECD, 2009).

- courses / workshops
- education conferences or seminars
- qualification programme
- observation visits to other schools
- participation in a network of teachers
- individual or collaborative research
- mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching
- leading professional literature
- engaging in informal dialogue with peers

The professional development undertaken by teachers most commonly consisted of informal dialogue to improve teaching, specified courses and workshops, and reading professional literature (OECD, 2009).

OECD (2009) stated the eleven professional development needs. They are content and performance standards in the main subject field(s), student assessment practices, classroom management, knowledge and understanding of the main subject field(s); knowledge and understanding of instructional practices (knowledge mediation) in the main subject field(s), Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills for teaching, teaching students with special learning needs, students discipline and behavior problems, school management and administration, teaching in a multicultural setting, student counseling.

Methodology

Research Design

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect the information about teachers' participation in their professional development activities and teachers' perception on needs of professional development in Yankin Township. Data were collected through questionnaire survey in quantitative study and interview questions were used in qualitative study.

Sample

In this study, purposive sampling method was used. Two BEHS, seven BEMS and ten BEPS schools were selected for samples. The target population was primary teachers from Basic Education Schools. 130 primary teachers participated as respondents for quantitative data. 12 teachers were randomly selected from 6 schools for qualitative data.

Research Instrumentation

The questionnaire was developed based on "An analysis of teachers' professional development based on the Teaching and Learning International Survey" (OECD, 2009), others' research and literature review. It consisted of totally 51 items: 40 items concerned with the teachers' participation in professional development activities and 11 items concerned with the teachers' perception on needs of professional development. For interview, 8 questions were developed.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, independent samples *t*-test, one-way ANOVA and Tukey were used for the analysis of qualitative data. Qualitative data was analyzed based on categorizing and interpreting the interview.

Findings

Quantitative Findings

The teachers' participation in professional development activities was explored by using 40 items of the questionnaire survey in this study.

Table 1 Mean Values and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Participation in Professional Development Activities (N=130)

No.	PD Activities	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Courses / workshops	2.58	0.85	Sometimes
2	Education conferences or seminars	2.81	0.77	Sometimes
3	Qualification programme	2.54	0.96	Sometimes
4	Observation visits to other schools	3.28	0.85	Sometimes
5	Participation in a network of teachers	3.89	0.69	Often
6	Individual or collaborative research	3.34	0.79	Sometimes
7	Mentoring and coaching	3.56	0.89	Often
8	Reading professional literature	3.91	0.78	Often
9	Engaging in informal dialogue with peers	3.89	0.79	Often
Overall		3.50	0.60	Often

Scoring Direction: 1.00-1.49=Never 1.50-2.49=Seldom
2.50-3.49=Sometimes 3.50-4.49=Often 4.50-5.00=Always

According to Table 1, it was found that teachers were often participated in all professional development activities.

To analyze and evaluate the teachers' participation in their professional development activities grouped by academic qualification, the independent samples *t* test was conducted. As shown in Table 2, there was no significant difference in their professional development activities grouped by academic qualification.

Table 2 Independent Sample *t* Test Results Showing Teachers' Participation in their Professional Development Activities Grouped by Academic Qualification (N= 130)

No.	PD Activities	Qualification	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
1.	Courses / workshops	BA	2.54	-.51	130	ns
		BSc	2.62			
2.	Education conferences or seminars	BA	2.77	-.71	130	ns
		BSc	2.86			
3.	Qualification programme	BA	2.46	-.72	130	ns
		BSc	2.58			
4.	Observation visits to other schools	BA	3.43	1.77	130	ns
		BSc	3.17			
5.	Participation in a network of teachers	BA	3.93	.51	130	ns
		BSc	3.87			
6.	Individual or collaborative research	BA	3.47	1.72	130	ns
		BSc	3.24			
7.	Mentoring and coaching	BA	3.67	1.23	130	ns
		BSc	3.48			
8.	Reading professional literature	BA	3.96	.737	130	ns
		BSc	3.86			
9.	Engaging in informal dialogue with peers	BA	3.95	.689	130	ns
		BSc	3.85			
	Overall	BA	3.59	1.396	130	ns
		BSc	3.44			

p*<.05, *p*<.005, ****p*<.001, ns = not significant

Table 3 One-way ANOVA Result Showing Teachers' Participation in their Professional Development Activities Grouped by Types of School

(N= 130)

No.	PD Activities	Schools	Mean (SD)	F	p
1	Courses / workshops	BEHS	2.93 (1.00)	3.31	.04*
		BEMS	2.45 (0.79)		
		BEPS	2.56 (0.79)		
2	Education conferences or seminars	BEHS	3.14 (0.82)	3.26	.04*
		BEMS	2.73 (0.70)		
		BEPS	2.75 (0.77)		
3	Qualification programme	BEHS	2.97 (1.08)	3.80	.03*
		BEMS	2.41 (0.95)		
		BEPS	2.42 (0.84)		
4	Observation visits to other schools	BEHS	3.07 (0.87)	1.07	ns
		BEMS	3.34 (0.75)		
		BEPS	3.31 (0.94)		
5	Participation in a network of teachers	BEHS	3.88 (0.63)	0.14	ns
		BEMS	3.91 (0.70)		
		BEPS	3.84 (0.70)		
6	Individual or collaborative research	BEHS	3.69 (0.68)	4.25	.02*
		BEMS	3.19 (0.70)		
		BEPS	3.27 (0.91)		
7	Mentoring and coaching	BEHS	3.62 (0.80)	0.11	ns
		BEMS	3.54 (0.82)		
		BEPS	3.53 (1.03)		
8	Reading professional literature	BEHS	4.14 (0.67)	1.88	ns
		BEMS	3.85 (0.77)		
		BEPS	3.80 (0.83)		
9	Engaging in informal dialogue with peers	BEHS	4.06 (0.85)	1.14	ns
		BEMS	3.88 (0.72)		
		BEPS	3.78 (0.83)		
	Overall	BEHS	3.62 (0.53)	0.85	ns
		BEMS	3.46 (0.55)		
		BEPS	3.47 (0.69)		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$, *** $p < .001$, ns = not significant

According to Table 3, it can be said that there were significant differences in participation of teachers in professional development activities such as courses/ workshops, education conferences or seminars, qualification programme and individual and collaborative research activities.

Table 4 Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons Result for Teachers' Participation of their Professional Development Activities Grouped by Types of School

(N=130)

Dependent Variable	(I)School	(J) School	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i>
Courses/ workshops	BEHS	BEMS	0.486	.031*
Education conferences or seminars	BEHS	BEMS	0.413	.043*
Qualification programme	BEHS	BEMS	0.554	0.029*
	BEHS	BEPS	0.545	0.049*
Individual and collaborative research	BEHS	BEMS	0.496	0.014*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$, *** $p < .001$, ns = not significant

Table 4 displayed that there were significant differences between teachers from high school group and teachers from middle school group in courses and workshops, education conferences and seminars. There were significant differences in qualification programmes between teachers from basic education high schools and teachers from basic education middle schools, and between teachers from basic education high schools and teachers from basic education primary schools. There were also significant differences between teachers from high school group and teachers from middle school group in individual or collaborative research.

Table 5 Mean Values and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Perception on Needs of Professional Development

(N=130)

No.	Variable	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Content and performance standards in my main subject field(s)	2.55	1.08	Moderate
2	Student assessment practices	2.81	1.01	Moderate
3	Classroom management	2.48	1.12	Low
4	Knowledge and understanding of my main subject field(s)	2.59	1.08	Moderate
5	Knowledge and understanding of instructional practices (knowledge mediation) in my subject field(s)	2.58	1.03	Moderate
6	Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	3.05	0.79	Moderate
7	Teaching students with special learning needs	2.69	1.17	Moderate
8	Student discipline and behavior problems	2.50	1.08	Moderate
9	School management and administration	2.40	1.06	Low
10	Teaching in a multicultural setting	2.31	1.07	Low
11	Student counseling	2.45	1.06	Low
	Overall	2.58	.86	Moderate

Scoring: 1.00-1.49=No need at all 2.50-3.49=Moderate level of need 1.50-2.49 =Low level of need
3.50-4.00=High level of need

According to this table, the overall mean values of teachers' perception on needs of professional development was 2.54. Thus, it could be found that the teachers perceived that their professional development needs were moderate level of needs.

There were 8 questions for teachers. Each school responded the following questions as:

Q. (1) Do you attend the courses, workshops, education conferences and seminars? If so, what advantage do you have?

Most teachers from primary schools responded that there have no chances to attend conferences, seminar and workshops.

Q. (2) Do you attend qualification programmes? If so what advantages do you have?

Every primary teacher responded that qualification programmes taught the new curriculum to the teachers and made them to be useful in current situation and their life-long learning society. Qualification programmes train teachers to become qualified teachers.

Q. (3) Do you observe other schools?

Every primary teacher responded that they receive strategies for issue and difficulties which arise from other teachers teaching, new problem-solving methods and effective teaching method. By observing outstanding teachers, they get good examples.

Q. (4) Do you participate in teachers' network?

The relationship among the primary teachers is satisfactory, helpful and kind to each other. In network, they communicate friendly with other teachers and get opportunities to share ideas and to encourage other thinking.

Q. (5) Do you conduct individual or collaborative research? how do you do?

Teachers make the active participation in research, are aware of their children's strengths and weakness and good attitude towards school and teach to be outstanding student.

Q. (6) Do you participate in mentoring and coaching? If so, what advantages do you have?

Every primary teacher responded that teachers can solve new problems about teaching-learning process and perceive insights, Teachers can counter with daily life situation.

Q. (7) Do you study professional literature? If so what advantages do you have?

Every primary teacher responded that they study Pyinuya Ta Zaung, Education Papers, Journals/Books and Newspaper. They make reading professional literature, well-resourced library support from the school.

Q. (8) Do you engage in informal dialogue with peers?

Every primary teacher responded that they engage in informal dialogue with colleagues. So, teachers have self-confidence and motivation, teachers have improving teaching ability.

Discussion

Primary teachers sometimes participate in courses and workshops, education conference and seminars, and qualification programmes. Teachers from primary schools responded that these have no chances to attend workshops. Teachers from middle schools and high schools

responded that workshop is a pleasant place where they can meet different teachers and learn different ways of reaching. In the qualitative study, all of the primary teachers are not given the chances to attend workshops, education conferences and seminars.

Hallinger and Murphy (1986) stated that principals work together with teachers directly by conducting in-service workshops for their staff and by working in the classroom with teachers who are teaming new skills. They need to arrange for teachers to observe their colleagues' teaching. So, principals should arrange teachers to attend workshops and seminars in the school level, township level and in-service training.

Primary teachers sometimes participate in qualification programmes. Even primary teachers responded that qualification programmes discuss the new curriculum to the teachers and made them to be useful in current situation and their life-long learning society. Qualification programmes that train teachers to become qualified teachers. Qualification programmes that train the teachers to become 8 teachers for qualified teachers. Teachers improve teaching qualities and teach theories practically.

Every primary teacher responded that new curriculum system cannot improve because of class size, when class size is big, teaching will be less effectiveness. A parallel teaching has difficulty for making teaching aids and preparing lessons. Every primary teacher response for effective refresher courses should discuss more times and need more time. Teachers want training experiences should be taught. Think of gaps in sharing training knowledge. Teachers (Leaders) need to teach perfectly. Training school having moderately effectiveness because of less aids (e.g. projectors). Training can effect if teachers participate enthusiastically.

According to qualitative findings, teachers want to attend PD training which can fulfill their pedagogical knowledge, requirements of professional teachers and effective classroom management.

Micheal (2001) viewed the professional development as a developmental process that allows the teachers to expand and elaborate their professional knowledge base. Reitzug (2002) gave a definition on the professional development as processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills and attitude of educators.

Many primary teachers had no college training, government were reluctant to extend college course beyond a year and teachers had to make do with a patchy provision of opportunities; without distant education many could not have improved their qualifications and their professional prospects (L'vans and Hation, 1988).

Teachers should send for in-service training without over loading. Professional development activities help teachers plan to implement changes in their classroom and should help teachers to overcome barriers they will encounter in their classroom. Therefore, unnecessary workload should be reduced.

Primary teachers sometimes participate observation that visit to other schools. Teachers from high schools, middle schools and primary schools responded that they visit to school family. After observation and meeting they can be more knowledgeable such as receiving strategies for issues and difficulties which arise from teaching, receiving new problem-solving methods. By applying CCA (child-centered approach) teaching methods, teaching-learning process can have effectiveness. Some teacher described lack of facilities, sport fields and equipment, library and parents interest on their children's progress as their weakness. The

results of interview and observation indicated that all the teachers had completed professional trainings like PGDT, pre-service teacher training course, in-service teacher training course, DTEC, and so on.

Jackson and Davis (2000 cited in Mertens, 2004) defined professional development as the range of formal and informal process and activities that the teachers engage in both inside and outside school, in order to improve their teaching knowledge and skills. Primary teachers visit to school family or other school to study other teacher teaching-learning process.

According to the result, primary teachers sometimes participate in individual and collaborative research. Every primary teacher responded that teachers always find the means and ways that help their students learning. Teachers need the active participation in research and interest on their children's progress. Teachers get advices, technologies and sharing experiences. According to Hubbard and Power (1999), "Action (teacher) research is a natural extension of good teaching. Observing students closely, analyzing their needs, and adjusting the curriculum to fit the needs of all students have always been important skills demonstrated by fine teachers."

Mills (2000) suggested that Action research is systematic inquiry done by teachers (or other individuals in an educational setting) to gather information about, and subsequently improve, the ways their particular educational setting operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. Every primary teacher record and interest to care and provide student needs. Principal motivated all teacher to collaborate and research in the professional development activities.

According to the quantitative result, primary teachers often participate in mentoring and coaching. Primary teachers responded that teachers can solve new problems about teaching-learning process and perceive insights. Teachers can connect with daily life situation. Teachers ask open-ended questions. Teachers have effective good leadership not only in education but also in their life. The qualified teachers were well-resourced and they are the workers who made students were well-qualified.

According to Mertens (2004) peer coaching was conduct coaching. Teachers helping teachers has become a formalized and well-received way of ensuring direct assistance to every staff member. With the advent of extended responsibilities for career-ladder teacher, mentor-teachers, mentor teachers, grade-level chairpersons, team leaders, and department heads, the time and resources for peer assistance have increased.

According to the quantitative result, primary teachers often participate in reading professional literature. The teachers from high schools, middle schools and primary schools responded that reading professional literature, well-resourced library support from the school. Teachers can realize professional ethics, can upgrade teachers' quality, can get global vision interest on environment, and realize other cultures. Leaders should be reduced to workload, teacher-pupil ratio should consider and need to know current situation. Principal encourage primary teachers to read professional literature such as *Pyinnya Ta Zaung*, *Education Papers*, *Journals/Books* and *Newspaper*.

An important dimension of principals' work includes such task as coordinating professional development activities (Bredeson & Johansson, 2000).

According to the result, primary teachers often participate in engage in informal dialogue with colleagues. Every primary teacher responded that she engages in informal dialogue with colleagues, and can perceive concepts.

Every primary teacher copes with their job-related stress by informal dialogue. In time of stress, teacher finds (engaging in informal dialogue with colleagues) a great relaxation. A free, open atmosphere is established where open expression is encouraged.

Teachers who have attended primary teacher training and junior teacher training sometimes participated in professional development activities.

Teachers who have attended G-2 refresher courses often participated in professional development activities. Teacher is a lifelong journey of learning rather than a final destination of knowledge how to teach. Teachers must continue to update skills and knowledge to become more effective teachers and their professional development activities must be aligned with new knowledge and be related to the real responsibilities of a good teacher (Villarreal, 2003). Every teacher must get chance to attend the refresher courses. Livncli & Livneh (1999) said that teaching service (years in the classroom) is a critical factor to consider when professional development programmes are managed.

When teaching is considered as a profession, teachers need to learn and practice the knowledge and skill that can be acquired through specific training and education. They should be provided access for their professional growth and they should grasp these opportunities and apply them effectively in their profession (San San Hla, 2008).

Sang (2003) highlighted that all teachers should master skill of using computers. Most of the primary teachers have no knowledge, interest and skills for computer using ability even at the basic level. ICT is not fully used in teaching/learning situation among primary teachers. That is necessary to provide ICT materials to primary schools and conduct effective computer training for the teachers. So as to encourage the use of ICT resources in teaching/learning situation as much as possible. Therefore, teacher education needs to include training in technology.

According to finding, it was found that most of teachers often participate in professional development activity. Thus, it can be concluded that systematically designed professional development activities and providing opportunities for professional development are vitally important for the development of primary teachers.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are based on the analyses of the research findings.

- Every primary teacher should get opportunities to participate in professional development activities.
- Educational courses and workshops, conferences and seminars and qualification programmes should frequently be offered in school hours by the experts.
- Every primary teacher should practice how to use information and communication technology and use electronic devices in teaching very often.
- The programmes for demonstration of lesson from experience teachers should be arranged by media channels.
- The teachers who have attended refresher courses should be harmony with their assigned duties.
- The teachers should co-operate with reaches from other schools for improving teaching skill.
- The board of study should be organized systematically and implemented practically in every school.

- Every primary teacher should study their new teaching skills and apply the effective teaching methods in teaching.
- Principal should supervise and should monthly discuss the strengths and weaknesses of teachers' teaching.
- Every primary teacher needs to be provided enough time and opportunities for Professional development activities.
- The teachers should grasp the opportunities and apply them effectively in their profession.
- Every primary teacher should read journals, magazine, and books to enhance their professional development.

Needs for Further Research

This study tried to study the extent of participation in professional development activities for primary teachers in the schools of Yankin Township with the broad function of investigating the teachers' participation of professional development activities and their perception on needs of professional development. The conclusions were drawn based on the finding from tire questionnaire survey. It still shows the necessity to explore the most appropriate and effective professional development activities for teachers of primary, middle and high school levels.

For the reduction of teachers' professional development activities, further studies should be expanded to the teachers in schools of other townships, states, or regions of Myanmar. This research studied teachers' perception on participation of professional development activities. Further research needs to be expended to the other categories.

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