

Perceptions Of Teachers About Their Professional Development At Elementary Level: A Public And Private Bases Comparison

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Abstract

This quantitative research aimed to compare perceptions of public and private school teachers about professional development. Sample of this study were 50 public and 50 private school teachers. Sample was selected conveniently from public and private schools of Lahore. Data was collected using 5 point Likert Scale questionnaire as a tool. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS. Mean score, standard deviation were calculated. Moreover, t test was applied to compare mean scores of public and private school teachers' perceptions. The findings of the study showed that there was a significant difference between the perceptions of public and private school teachers. It is recommended that professional development is beneficial for enhancing teaching skills of teachers at elementary level.

Keywords: Perception, Professional development, public and private elementary school teachers

Introduction

Teachers' development has emerged as an important subject to study and much has been written on it (Evans, 2002). Since development is a continuous process, teachers' development means need for consistent improvement in their knowledge and skills. This is also known as professional development. Effective professional development is an ongoing process it may have various forms and kinds such as professional development courses, workshops, professional degree programs, individual or collective research, mentoring, reflective practice, feedback from fellow teachers or colleagues, self-reading and evaluation (OECD, 2009).

Professional development is very significant to make instructional process effective and meaningful. The world of education is advancing really fast so are the students' learning needs, learning environment as a whole and teaching requirements too. Studies conducted in different parts of the

world put a lot of stress to improve the quality of teachers' education because it would eventually improve the quality of education (Dayoub & Bashiruddin, 2012). Professional development has become a broad concept not restricted only to pre-service professional qualification but it has become something more than in-service training workshops, which are continuous education. Teachers have to learn more and more in order to advance in their professional careers (Quattlebaum, 2012).

Since, teachers are leaders of the whole learning process taking place in classroom; it is of significance to know their beliefs, perceptions and views about professional development. A few researches have been conducted in countries other than Pakistan on this subject. Yates (2007) conducted a survey in which he tried to know perceptions of primary and secondary school teachers about professional learning. Another similar study was done to know the relationship between teachers' perception about professional

development and their job satisfaction at university level in China (Wu & Ye, 2015). Tantawey (2020) in his study investigated teachers' perceptions about impact of professional development on their teaching career.

The situation of teachers' professional upgradation in developed world is quite different from that of developing countries like Pakistan. Pakistan has multiple school system so the recruitment policies, class environment and working conditions for teachers. We can categorize school teachers into two major groups; public and private teachers. There is a need to explore their perceptions on this very important subject 'professional development'. Moreover, knowing about the difference between the both groups of teachers if there is any will be worth mentioning. This study was conducted to address these problems.

Rationale of the Study:

Literature review done for this study revealed that multiple studies have been conducted on this subject in different parts of the world but no specific work has been done to explore difference of public and private teachers' perception on professional development. This study not only investigates private and public school teachers' views about professional development but also explores the difference of their perceptions.

Literature Review:

Education is a dynamic profession with constantly expanding knowledge base. Our knowledge in every subject and academic discipline is increasing rapidly. Therefore, teachers at all levels need to keep abreast of this new knowledge and must be constantly upgraded throughout their teaching career. Therefore, they need to persistently evaluate their teaching practice and then they should make necessary modifications if they fail to achieve desired objectives. They must continuously seek and explore new opportunities to improve themselves (Guskey & Huberman, 1995). The same views are of

Holmes (2005) as he believes that there is no stagnation in the level of knowledge as it changes after every moment and one has to keep abreast accordingly.

As excellent teaching is impossible without a good teacher, so an effective teacher is known for his quality teaching. A teacher's duty is not merely imparting a certain amount of knowledge to pupils (Kayani, 2011), he/she is responsible for students' learning. Many efforts have been done to improve quality of teaching and teaching and learning process but it has gained more attention in past recent years. Thus, the real dynamic force of the education system is the teacher. All kind of investments, initiatives and reforms become useless if the teachers are failed to support, facilitate and implement those reforms (Kayani, 2011). Rapid reforms in the education sector for betterment and quality assurance have fostered teachers to increase their professional competency. Therefore, teachers' professional development to cope up such challenges has become an important subject to discuss and work on. Teachers need to keep increasing their professional competency in order to meet contemporary challenges.

Professional development is a complex term to define and does not have a single definition; people have different views about what exactly professional development is, but one thing that is quite clear that they have a context to give this term a particular meaning. Reimers (2003) says development of a person in his professional role called professional development. Specifically talking about the teaching profession this term refers to professional growth which happens as a consequence of teachers' experiences and systematic examination of their teaching performance (Glatthorn 1995). According to Darling (1994) it is a process which enhances teachers' professional status by expanding knowledge. Guskey (1995) says, a significant professional development is defined as all those activities and processes which increase teachers' skills, attitudes and professional knowledge so that they can improve students'

learning. So, Guskey directly links professional development with students' learning.

Formal experiences like attending workshops, professional meetings etc. and informal experiences like reading specific professional publications, books, self assessment all are included in professional development (Ganser, 2000). Brian et al (2015) argue that professional development is a very important strategy to develop teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. For many years, professional development was meant as available formal opportunities for teachers like staff development programs or in-service training. It was about teachers attending some courses, workshops or special training programs but during the last few years, it has been realized that it is continuous long process which must include systematic activities and experiences to foster development in teaching profession. Now, continuous professional development, career- long or life-long professional development are few terms which are being used. Some people use them interchangeably. Though, they seem similar, still these have some potential differences.

When it comes to the effectiveness of formal professional development activities either pre-service training programs or in-service sessions in comparison with informal professional development happening anytime by any means, we find different opinions. Research (Morewood, 2007) exploring teachers' perceptions on formal professional development activities shows that assessment focused professional development enhanced their content knowledge and really influenced their instruction and pedagogical knowledge. It says, if professional development is evaluated and its productivity is measured then it becomes purposeful and significant.

Wu & Ye (2015) conducted a study in China which was aimed to find the correlation between job satisfaction and teachers' perceptions on professional development at university level. They found a moderate positive correlation between the two variables. Tantawey (2020) has recently conducted a

study in Dubai. She did qualitative research to investigate teachers' perceptions about the impact of professional development on their performance and career. The Results of this study showed that participants admitted the positive impact of professional development on their performance, qualities, students' outcomes, commitment to profession and career progression. Yates (2005) conducted a survey in which he collected data from 395 primary and secondary school teachers. This survey was on 3 of the 7 principles designed by Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI, 1998). Teachers' rating in this study revealed that ICT activities and longer courses contributed well to their professional expertise.

The concept of professional development is not new in developed world. They are well organized and far ahead of our country in teachers' professional development and its effective use to improve teaching and learning process. In developing countries few opportunities are provided to teachers for their professional development as compared to the developed world where this is taken as a life-long process and more incentives are given to teachers for this purpose. In 2009 National Professional Standards for Teachers were developed, which put emphasize on quality of teacher education and teachers' professional development (Government of Pakistan, 2009). The reality is that quality education is creeping in Pakistan but there are a number of problems related to different areas of education. Talking about such problems of quality education, Rettalick and Mithani (2003) write in the background of their research that there is a need to improve the quality of education. One way could be improving quality of teaching. For this purpose, teachers will have to be active participants in the learning process. Both the researchers believe, one of the reasons behind this process might be in most of the private schools; no teaching certificate is required to teach. That is why; a person who completes tenth grade can start teaching. These teachers teaching in such private schools do not come in

this profession as their first choice therefore they are little concerned for their training or professional development (Rettalick and Mithani 2003).

Interest in reflection in teaching is growing in Pakistan to improve teaching practice and skills (Halai 2001, Rarieya 2005). However, it is noticed many teachers are still don't know much about this term. Rarieya (2005) found reflective practice as an alternative approach to professional development. Her study suggested that teachers after getting involved in reflective practice started recognizing importance of professional development.

During the last two decades, the number of private schools has been increased enormously thus leading to many problems related to quality of education. One prominent problem is, multiple systems working side by side. Some schools are English medium, some are Urdu. Some are for elite class and some are for poor communities of society, each has different kind of teaching lot with different qualification, background, and perception about teaching and education. No significant literature is found related to teachers' professional development in such schools. What do they really mean of this term? What are their perceptions about professional development? How do they carry this phenomenon in their teaching career? These questions are worth answering. As a matter of fact, teachers serving our education system can be categorized into various groups e.g government teachers, private teachers etc. We see a clear induction policy for teachers devised by government which includes professional degrees as per the level of school. In contrast to this, private education sector has its own priorities and rules. Working in both type of environment teachers undergo different professional development experiences so the assumption is their perception about this very concept is different too. Therefore, there is a need to work in this area and know the actual status of teachers' professional development teaching in such schools, their beliefs,

perceptions and future intentions. This study will help readers to know the difference of perception of public and private teachers about professional development. It will help educationists and higher authorities to know the public and private school teachers' needs and they may take necessary steps to help them out accordingly.

Objectives of the Study

This study has the following objectives:

1. To explore the difference of perceptions of public and private school teachers about professional development at level elementary level
2. To investigate the effectiveness of professional development activities to improve teachers' performance at elementary
3. To see how teachers intend to do their professional development in future at elementary level

Research Questions

The study will answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between perceptions of public and private school teachers about professional development at elementary level?
2. What is the effectiveness of professional development activities to improve teachers' performance at elementary level?
3. What is teachers' intention to do their professional development in future at elementary level?

Operational Definition:

Professional development: Continuous growth in teachers' knowledge, skills and practice either in formal (courses, workshops, conferences, professional qualification programs, individual or group research) or informal (peer mentoring, observation, principal-teacher meetings, feedback on lesson

plans, teaching in classroom, informal discussion and sharing of ideas with colleagues) manner.

Research Methodology:

Positivist paradigm of research was adopted to find answers of the research questions of this study. As Ex-post facto was the nature of this research so, a quantitative research design was made. Quantitative research can give knowledge about issues which can be numerically explained. According to Creswell (2012) quantitative research is about describing a research problem through collection of numeric data from a large group of people using instruments. Teachers' perceptions about professional development measured numerically using a rating scale. Later on, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used to analyze data. Thus, private and public school teachers' perception was compared.

Population:

Public and private elementary school teachers of Lahore city were population of this study.

Sample:

Convenient sampling technique was used due to time constraint and limited resources. 50 public and 50 private school teachers were selected as sample to collect data. Some participants were approached via using technology and questionnaire was developed on google form. Some school teachers were approached in school as per the convenience of the researcher.

Research instruments:

A Questionnaire 'factor analysis of teacher perception of professional learning activity' (Yates, 2007) was adapted as research instrument of this study. 5 point Likert Scale was used to record responses. 30 items related to professional development of teachers were included across which teachers' responses were recorded and analyzed using SPSS afterwards.

Data Collection:

This comparative study investigated perception of public and private school teachers about professional development. A 5 point Likert Scale questionnaire was used to collect data from public and private school teachers. Items included in questionnaire were based on principles devised by Centre of Educational Research and Innovation (1998). 18 items were used as it is as they were in questionnaire of Yates (2007) 12 were included more by researcher. In scale 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree and 5= Strongly Agree.

Data Analysis:

To check inter item consistency Cronbach's Alpha test was applied. It showed that instrument had good reliability (.823). (table 1)

Table 1: research instrument reliability

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.823	31

To analyze collected data from participants of the study SPSS software was used. Table 2 is showing the mean and standard deviation across each item of the questionnaire. Item 1-20 were measuring teachers' readiness for professional development activities, significance of professional development in improving teaching practice, teaching skills and student outcomes. Mean score is standing above 4 e.g mean=4.34, 4.69, 4.45, 4.44. which means teachers considered professional development of significant importance. Items 21-25 and 28-30 were related to implementation of knowledge and skills gained through professional development and school support in this regard. Mean score values are falling below 4 and above 3 e.g mean= 3.76, 3.62, 3.54. which means teachers were facing some difficulties in implementing the ideas and knowledge acquired through professional development. Item 26 and 27 were based on

negative statement regarding usefulness of professional development activities. Mean score showed that most of the participants disagreed with the two statements (mean=1.47

and mean=2.05), they were of the view that professional development was not wastage of time at all.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for the scores across each factor of PD

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am always ready to attend teacher training workshops.	100	1	5	4.34	.890
I often read literature to enhance my knowledge and teaching skills.	100	3	5	4.69	.545
I really like to share my knowledge with my colleagues.	100	4	5	4.93	.256
Informal discussions among fellow teachers about teaching practice are very helpful in professional development.	100	1	5	4.45	1.048
Principal-teacher meetings are good source of PD.	100	3	5	4.52	.731
I do research on problems I face during my teaching practice for my PD.	100	3	5	4.44	.701
My school often arranges formal PD activities for teachers.	100	1	5	4.05	1.373
I learn new and different ideas from the PD.	100	1	5	4.33	1.164
The PD helped me to improve my teaching skills.	100	2	5	4.41	.818
Knowledge gained from the PD will improve my teaching skills.	100	3	5	4.48	.627
I look forward to trying out new things in my teaching.	100	3	5	4.59	.588
The PD increased my knowledge of what can be done in classroom.	100	3	5	4.67	.604
The PD will improve student learning opportunities in the class room.	100	3	5	4.43	.624
The PD provided me with an opportunity to focus on improving student learning outcomes.	100	3	5	4.56	.625

The PD renewed my enthusiasm for teaching.	100	3	5	4.45	.716
The PD encouraged teachers to share what had learned with their colleagues.	100	1	5	4.13	1.060
The PD encouraged me to reflect on aspects of my teaching.	100	1	5	4.27	.962
I plan to use the knowledge gained from the PD in my work with students.	100	2	5	4.35	1.029
The PD gave me some useful ideas of how to improve student outcomes.	100	2	5	4.30	.870
The PD updated my professional knowledge.	100	1	5	4.09	1.371
Adequate support is available to teachers at my school to share information gained from PD.	100	1	5	3.54	1.473
There is no issue of resources in my school when it comes to implementation of ideas learned from PD.	100	1	5	3.62	1.413
Content shared during PD was quite relevant to my teaching practice.	100	1	5	3.76	1.224
Teachers in my school share ideas, knowledge and skills gained from attendance at PD	100	1	5	3.76	1.296

I think the ideas presented in the PD will be too difficult to put into practice	100	1	5	2.68	1.420
The PD was a waste of teacher time	100	1	4	1.47	1.049
I did not find the PD useful	100	1	5	2.05	1.344
Information presented in the PD was directly relevant to teaching and learning in my school	100	1	5	3.51	1.159

Information presented in the PD was directly applicable to teachers' work in schools	100	1	5	3.55	1.175
Pedagogical knowledge gained in PD made influence students' learning positively	100	2	5	3.94	.862
Valid N (listwise)	100				

As this study aimed to know the difference between the perception of public and private school teachers about professional development, one sample t test was applied using SPSS on collected data. The

corresponding 2 tailed t value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. It means there is significant mean score difference between the perception of public and private school teachers about professional development (table 4).

Table 4: Mean score difference of public and private teachers' responses
One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
School Type	29.850	99	.000	1.500	1.40	1.60
PD	94.374	99	.000	3.85900	3.7779	3.9401

* $p < 0.05$

Findings:

After analysis and interpretation of collected data, findings of the study can be inferred as

1. Both public and private school teachers found Professional development essential for their advancement in teaching practice.
2. Study found significant difference between the perception of public and private school teachers.

Conclusion:

The presented study can be concluded as descriptive statistics showed that public and private school teachers considered professional development beneficial for their teaching practice and found it influential regarding student learning outcomes. As this study aimed to know the difference perception of both type of teachers, significant difference between the both was recorded.

Recommendations:

After conducting this study following are the recommendations for future researchers;

1. A qualitative study can be conducted to have in depth understanding of professional development activities public and private teacher undergo during their teaching practice while working in two entirely different school set ups.
2. An experimental study can be done to see the effects of professional development activities on student learning outcomes in both type of settings (public and private).
3. In this study convenient sampling technique was used, this study can be replicated by using random sampling technique with equal representation of whole population. This may increase reliability of the research instruments used in this study.

Following is the recommendation for the policy makers.

1. As mean score for the items related to school support in implementing ideas learned from Professional development, resources and necessary facilities should be provided to teachers so that they can better utilize their knowledge, skills and ideas etc.

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