



## **IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PRIMARY TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE, EXPLORATORY STUDY ON IB CLASSROOM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Professional Development is the most vital part in teacher education. Professional development is part of the requirement set by International Baccalaureate, and as such it is important to examine the success of providing such training to the teaching community to ensure that teachers acquire in depth knowledge on their teaching strategies for the overall development of the students. This paper captures some of the impact of professional development among the primary teachers through a case study. The outcome of this study showed the impact of professional development on the classroom practices of teachers in the focus school. It was observed that most of the teachers in the focus school view Professional Development as an essential and integral part of their learning journey. The teachers were able to apply knowledge, skills gained in professional development to their classrooms.*

### **Introduction**

Professional Development is a way through which teachers can be equipped to face the challenges presented by, and update themselves to keep pace with, ever changing techniques. The context of this research study which is to understand the perspective of teachers support teachers through analyzing the impact of professional development on the classroom practices of teachers and to look for ways of enhancing its effectiveness. The International

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Baccalaureate Organization (IBO,2013) further perceives professional development as chances to connect with co-professionals and a method for sharing best practices. Professional development sessions are viewed as opportunities to engage with co-practitioners and the means for sharing best practices. One of the key issues that teachers in the focus school lack many important elements in their classroom practices. Through classroom observations it was perceived that regardless whether they are a novice teacher or an experienced teacher, many of them were struggling in a few specific areas, such as providing feedback to the learners, setting higher objectives for students, highlighting duration of the task and ending the lesson with an effective plenary task. By studying the existing state of professional development in the school and exploring teachers' opinions on this, I can acquire better understanding of the difficulties and identify potential solutions to these problems. While and Boyle (2004) states that "the continual deepening of knowledge and skills is an integral part of the Professional Development for a professional working in any profession" (p. 46). Although teachers are supposed to have gained numerous benefits from their participation in Professional Development programmes, several issues regarding the effectiveness of such programmes are also raised. One of the most concerning matters highlighted is the adverse perceptions amongst teachers who regarded Professional Development as "something that they must endure and get out of the way" (Guskey, 2000, p. 15). It seems quite unclear whether professional development does in fact support teachers' skills or, is it something the teachers are burdened with as an obligation from the educational organisations.

## **Background**

There is evidence of the growing need for teachers to engage in continuous Professional Development in the effort to maintain the level of their professionalism. Cardno (2005) states that PD for teachers is crucial to ensure the sustainability and development of teaching profession. Previous research on teachers' Professional Development provides the impression that it is the key to successful education reform. An educational researcher John Hattie (2012) in his book *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning* mentioned that good classroom practices can enhance student learning and can significantly impact their results. Professional Development provides the platform to support and improve the ability of teachers' pedagogies, teaching strategies such as communication between teacher and student, developing collaboration amongst peers, providing suitable feedback to students. As we see over the years many researches have been conducted and a large body of literature is published on the impact of professional development on the strategies of teachers. This study

was conducted in an authorized International Baccalaureate (IB) world school. As a pedagogical leader of the focus school, the researcher's experience in conducting various Professional Development programmes for the teachers are taken for discussion in this article. During PD sessions, comments from some teachers on the effectiveness of PD were recorded. These comments from the peers ignited the interest to discover the impact of Professional Development on their classroom practice and pedagogical skills.

### **Literature review**

Every educational organisation has its own reasons for offering PD sessions to their teachers. High-quality professional development strategies are essential to schools. As explained by different researchers, such as Starkey et al (2009) and Wilson, Barrar and Fung (2007), the main objective of Professional Development (PD) is to train teachers in upgradation of teaching techniques and strategies. Poskitt (2005) stressed that participation in professional development has some impact on the teachers' ability to acquire and develop knowledge and skills. In the focus school, teachers are hired based on their qualifications. However, they may or may not be experienced in teaching. As a part of Professional Development, the focus school offers an intense induction programme, which is essential for every teacher to attend immediately after they join.

Educational Institutions hire teachers who are qualified in their field. These teachers may be able to deliver lessons required to impart the content knowledge to their students, however, professional development helps by providing the most appropriate pedagogical style or skills required in teaching. According to Jovanova-Mitkovska (2010), teachers perceive PD as a tool which allows them to create conditions for lifelong learning, it provides opportunities for attainment of basic knowledge and skills in specific. PD also has significant influence on the beliefs of the teachers and their teaching practice, it affects student learning and the implementation of educational reforms by strengthening teamwork and cooperation in the classroom, influence the determination of goals (specific, realistic and variables) and the tasks of teaching and learning. An educational researcher John Hattie (2012) in his book *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning* mentioned that good classroom practices can enhance student learning and can significantly impact their results. Teachers attempt to meet the principles of good classroom practice in order to deliver effective lessons improving learning outcomes of their students. Professional Development

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provides the platform to support and improve the ability of teachers' pedagogies, teaching strategies such as communication between teacher and student, developing collaboration amongst peers, providing suitable feedback to students and setting clear objectives to deliver the most effective lesson for improved results of their students. The conclusions and information from past literature reviews set a worthy groundwork in understanding the context of the research in a broader perspective.

### **Statement of the Problem**

A large amount of resources and time have been invested to develop and manage Professional Development for teachers in this IB world school. However, the current provision of the PD sessions in the focus school does not seem to be working well for teachers based on the ethnographic observation. Hence, it is important that the effectiveness of Professional Development experienced by teachers and its impact on the quality of their classroom practice needs continuously researched. By studying the existing state of Professional Development in the school and exploring teachers' opinions on this, it paves way in acquiring a better understanding of the difficulties and identify potential solutions to these problems.

### **Research Questions**

- Q1. What are teachers' **perceptions** of the impact of **professional development** on their classroom practices?
- Q2. How does professional development impact the delivery of the lessons?

### **Research Methodology**

This research study incorporated qualitative research method that involved data collection through interview questionnaire and classroom observation. A form to assess the quality of teaching (Quality Assurance in Teaching) form was also used to capture the teaching strategies of the teachers observed. There are three essential components in the QAT form which are assessed while conducting the QAT; 1) the teachers, 2) the learners and 3) the classroom environment. QAT format is in alignment with IB requirement to identify the skills required and support the teachers with pedagogical techniques which they lack to conduct their lessons effectively. A questionnaire was also devised to capture the teachers' perception on PD on their classroom practices. The lessons were observed at specific time and

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questionnaire was given to gather data based on the current situation of the present context, not based on the previous history.

### **Data Analysis**

As the main focus of this study was on PD, the observation criterion were aligned with the teacher's component from the QAT. The teachers were assessed on the criteria set for classroom observation, teachers were expected to get a score between 1 to 4 where 1 is the lowest and 4 is the highest. The criterion is explained using the descriptors. Some of the criteria in the QAT such as strengths of teachers' classroom practices are areas where teachers need to improve in order to make their lessons more productive. The data was collected and analysed in a table format to conclude the findings. After observing the lessons of the 13 teachers, the findings from the data was analysed and the gauged information was used to perceive the impact of PD on the classroom practices. The information gathered through the questionnaire was analysed using thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) and following the 6-phase guide.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Based on the responses from the questionnaire and classroom observation data, four themes were derived depicting the understanding of PD and its impact on teaching practices namely:

1. PD aims for **continuous advancement of teaching practices** while updating teachers with the current trends and aid them in enhancing their professional thinking to improve their skills and knowledge. According to teachers in response to my first research question **perceptions** of the impact of **professional development** on their classroom practices

“PD aims for continuous upgrading of practices” [Q1A1]

“PD helps us to get updated with the current trends”[Q1A2]

“helpsto enhance our skills and knowledge”[Q1A4]

“Continuous growth and enhancement in teaching and learning strategies.”[Q1A5]

2. The teachers perceive PD as a **platform for collaboration** among teachers that provides an insight for new strategies and helped the participants in improving their own competencies. The engagement in discussions within colleagues plays a key role in maintaining trained, informal and motivated employees.

“It provides engagement in discussions with colleagues” [Q2B3]

“ PD provides platform for those in the education community to share best practices”[Q2B5 ]

3.Participants also agree that they can see the **impact of PD sessions** as they have been upheld and encouraged to apply new learning into their classroom. This is consistent to IB’s Standards and Practices detailing the kind of support that the school needs to give to its teachers in ensuring that implementation of the programme is in order. The data collected through classroom observations also verified it.

“ Enables us to experiment more teaching strategies”[Q2C8]

“Impact of ideas and reflect on their classroom practices”[Q2C9]

As a conclusion, PD sessions in the focus school needs modification to ensure that teachers acquire appropriate knowledge from PD sessions on what they perceive and what they actually are exposed to.

### **Conclusion**

As a conclusion of this study about the Impact of Professional Development on IB classroom for Primary Teachers it was captured and analysed that most of the teachers of the focus school consider PD to be a road for them to learn new skills, new techniques and new thoughts that they may discover helpful in their own classroom. Teachers also feel that PD provides them opportunities to make them more prepared and be surer to direct their lesson. PD is not only beneficial for enhancing skills of teachers such as classroom management, effective communication with students, but also alters the learning outcomes of the students to greater extents. With many benefits, PD does have some shortcomings as well. Teachers in the focus school mentioned that many times PD sessions are boring, uninteresting, not much engaging and they see this as a waste of time. They wanted to have more practical involvement to be included in PD sessions. It paves the possibility of restructuring the PD sessions so that teachers can benefit each time they attend these sessions.

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