



An Experimental study on the role of Mentoring in Training In-service Teachers for Action research for Continuing Professional Development

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Abstract:

Action research is acknowledged worldwide as a powerful form of learning and Mentoring is seen as a very effective method for continuing professional development and training (CPD). In this project, the mentors facilitate learning about skills in action research. The mentor's role is to enhance the mentee on a particular skill, facilitate the mentee's growth by simplifying research into doable steps, share resources and networks, and challenge them to move beyond their comfort zone. The mentorship model creates a safe nurturing environment for taking risks and most importantly, focuses on the mentee's total development. It promotes a professional relationship that fosters guidance and support during the mentee's development. The objective of the paper is to capture the benefits of mentoring for in-service teachers in the area of action research through analysis of participant feedback on the process and benefits as a part of the UGC funded ongoing Major Research Project.

Key terms: Mentorship model, mentee, CPD, nurturing etc.

The role of Mentoring in training In- Service Teachers for Action research For Continuing Professional Development:

"Compared to other, more common, quick fix professional development activities, encouraging teachers to participate in action research and supporting them through the research



process can be a viable approach to facilitating change in teaching consistent with current calls for reform.”

(Briscoe and Wells, 2002: 432)

Introduction

Action research plays a very significant role in the preparation and professional development of in-service teachers and pre-service teachers. The main goal of action research is ultimately to improve student learning and learning environments in schools through better practices but it also has the potential to enhance the lives of professionals who work within educational systems. The whole experience improves professional development and gives the teacher an ownership of effective practices.

Thus, action research helps to gather data about one's own practice, and the practices of others with whom one is working. A professional teacher should produce descriptions and explanations of her /his work as personal theories of practice, to show how and why they have engaged in chosen practices, and accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions. When teachers become researchers, they not only become more reflective, analytical, and critical of their own teaching, but it increases their problem-solving skills as well (Briscoe and Wells, 2002). Several researchers all over the world in different fields encourage the mentoring model. It's a well planned intervention for learning and growing in the west and now fast catching up with corporate world too.

Mentoring is considered as an effective method for professional development and training. The term Mentoring is often defined as a relationship in which an experienced person (the mentor) assists another - the mentee in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the less-experienced person's professional and personal growth. In this project, the mentors facilitate learning about skills in action research. The mentor's role is to enhance the mentee on a particular skill, facilitate the mentee's growth by sharing resources and networks, and challenge them to move beyond their comfort zone. The mentorship model creates a safe learning environment for taking risks and most importantly, focuses on the mentee's total development.



This paper describes the initial research outcomes of phase one of a major research project that deals with training in-service teachers for action research to promote professional development through the mentorship model. A cohort of teachers who agreed to study action research and conduct a school based or classroom based research as a part of this project were assigned mentors to learn specific research skills for classroom based research.

The paper also attempts to capture the benefits of this intervention in the first phase of the major research project on two parameters: i) impact on the teacher in terms of awareness of concepts in action research ii) benefits gained by the in-service teachers as professionals like mentoring, conducting the research, stakeholders involvement and professional growth.

Implications of the Review of literature:

The review of literature in this area indicates that action research for in-service teachers has several advantages. Several studies show that teachers involved in action research became interested in their teaching pedagogies, became reflective practitioners and developed professionally with more confidence. The collaborative element helps to learn better.

Studies showing the potential of mentorship models in training for research are available in some studies abroad but very few in India particularly in the field of Education.

The Project Process

World over there is a belief that colleges and universities are responsible for supporting the personal/professional learning of teachers, by valuing new scholarship forms of experiential knowledge and personal self-study. But there is a dire need to come out of the elitist university tradition where research is theoretical. There is a need to start a culture in India; especially among schools, to show that teachers as practitioners care sufficiently for their work and that they are willing to suspend their own prejudices and actually test their ideas in the class or school. The project referred to in this paper is a UGC funded major research project titled '*Promoting Action Research among In-service Teachers for Continuing Professional Development through the Mentorship model.*' This paper shares the process and findings from the initial Phase of the Preliminary study.



The project deals with training in-service teachers for action research through the mentorship model. Schools in Mumbai participate after the Project research team communicates about the project and its objectives and meets with Principals to articulate the benefits of participating in the project. However the school is requested to send teachers who are willing to learn and are interested in learning and conducting action research to avoid drop outs in the learning process. The entire training for each cohort of approximately 25 teachers is broken into systematic phases of learning. Through interesting workshops designed to unravel action research in an interesting manner three workshops are conducted introductory, main and concluding. The themes are around introducing the need and significance of action research through films, case studies, testimonials and exemplars of good school based action research. The second training workshop concentrates on addressing their concerns, raising research questions and putting their project in a log frame provided to them and the review of literature. Facilitators of the project help them to firm ideas, provide feedback and improvise. The last workshop is about tools of research, review and presentation. This is followed by Mentoring sessions. These sessions help them to finalize their action research proposal framework post which they begin their intervention in schools.

Methodology of the study: The study is an experimental study on the effectiveness of the intervention of the mentorship model for training in action research. It's a pre-test- post test single group design. A cohort of 32 teachers forms the sample. Tools used are both quantitative and qualitative. An awareness test on action research has been scored quantitatively to measure gain in knowledge among the participants. An open ended questionnaire was administered to the participants seeking to understand their thoughts, opinions and feedback on several parameters such as mentoring, benefits to mentees, benefits to other stakeholders from the in-service teacher participants perspective. The findings are described in detail below.

Findings of the Study

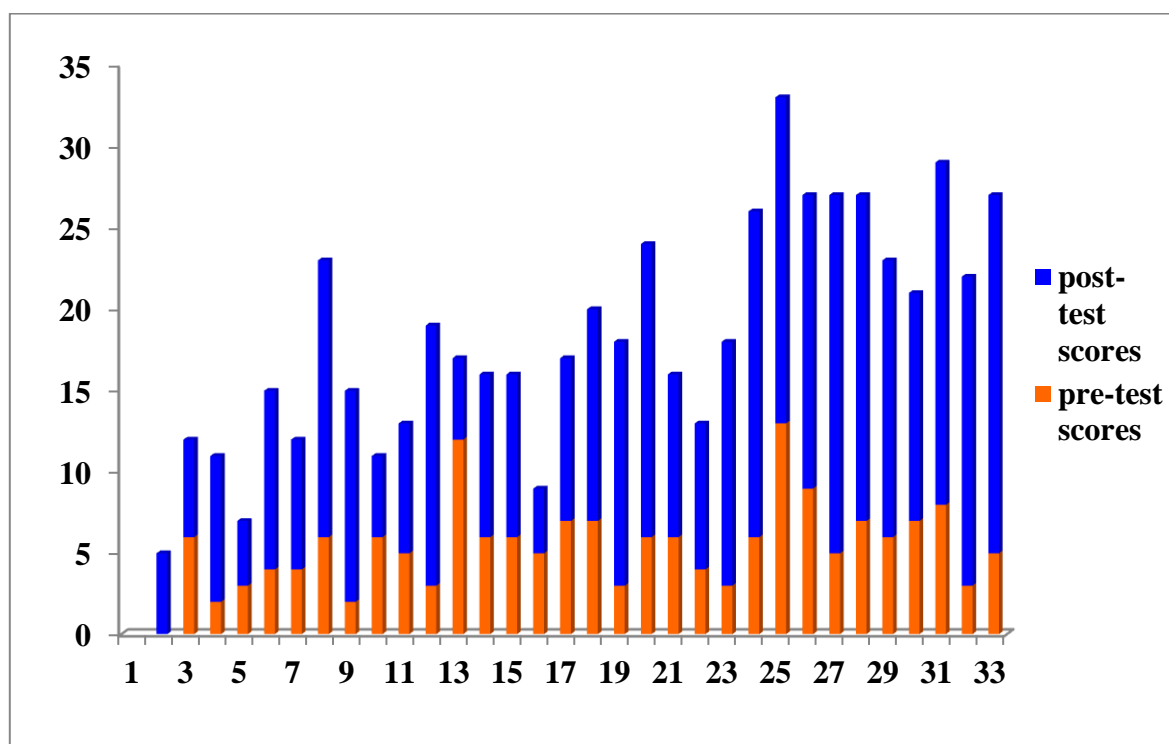
Awareness about action research among in-service teachers:

The action research training and the mentorship model as an intervention definitely made an impact on the target groups' awareness levels. In other words teacher's knowledge about action



research had improved significantly. The awareness was measured by a multiple choice test consisting of questions on action research.

A total of 32 teachers who were trained and mentored to conduct an action research constituted the sample. The scores of pre-test and post-test were recorded. The scores are represented graphically in the following histogram.



Graphical representation of the comparative scores based on the means of the Pre –test and post-test scores on the awareness test on action research.

The graph clearly indicates that the in-service teachers had benefited from the training in action research and had improved awareness on action research post intervention. To ascertain statistically, a total of 32 participant's scores were tabulated.

A t-test was computed to compare the mean scores on the pre and post test on awareness on action research of the target group in this project. The obtained t value (-7.15) is greater than the critical value at 0.01 level of confidence (2.74) and hence we can say there is a significant difference



between the pre test and post test mean scores. This indicates that the intervention was effective to raise awareness of concepts and content in action research among the target population that is the in-service teachers. It also shows that the training and mentoring helped to consolidate their knowledge and understanding of action research.

The teachers underwent several reflective sessions in training and mentoring which definitely would have add some positive effect on the teacher which is reflected in the quantitative scores .To further substantiate the quantitative results, an open ended questionnaire was also administered to study various other impact areas such as mentoring, mentee benefit and stakeholder benefit. The responses gained through the feedback sessions were read and re-read and analyzed by the team of researchers.

Qualitative analysis of the participant's feedback

"We do not learn from experience ... we learn from reflecting on experience." - John Dewey

Reflections from the participants give insights about the depth of the process of conducting the action researches and the value embedded within the process. A cohort of 30 teachers were administered a questionnaire to understand their perceptions and thoughts on the process they had underwent.

A few reflections of the participants are quoted in verbatim.

Participant A: "I have gained the confidence that I did something good for my students and they have shown good improvement. If my little effort can bring these many changes, I as a teacher can do wonders in the coming years in the field of education."

Participant B: "Action Research has made me a better observer and developed in me a habit of reflection."

Participant C: "Action research is an ongoing process which can be implemented in all subjects in schools."



Participant D: “There is clarity of thoughts and it has increased confidence in teaching and experiential teaching. It has been a fruitful experience for all.”

The participants or mentees were asked to provide feedback on the whole process of training and learning action research in terms of content, methodology, mentoring and the overall benefits they gained from the whole process through an open ended questionnaire. The highlights of the feedback by the participants referred to as mentees in this project are presented under various dimensions:

Benefits about research skills

- Acquired the skills of analysing the data and presenting the research findings in a systematic manner.
- Put across their concerns and convert them to research questions.
- Affirmed that the process of conducting action research enabled them to look in diverse ways at things with a scientific bent of mind.
- Experienced that the action research training posed a great challenge to them and forced them to think of new innovative ideas and methods of instruction.
- Felt empowered with new skills for teaching their respective subjects.

Specific skills gained in the training process:

- Showcasing their work in a scientific manner.
- Significant improvement in their related reading and analysis on their research ideas.
- Skill development in the use of ICT and were happy to become techno savvy in the process.
- Improved critical thinking about the research problem. They stated that the identification of issues in the process of conducting the action research project helped to improve and solve students' problems at school.
- Skills to collaborate as a problem solver and a team player.
- Developed feelings of team spirit, self-confidence and optimistic attitude.
- Learnt brainstorming and mind mapping as techniques from their mentors.

**Benefits regarding collaboration:**

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much" — Helen Keller

Very true to this quote, participant mentees conveyed their positive outcomes of working collaboratively. Some of the thoughts emerged from the target group are as follows:

- Enjoyed working as a team, learnt to cooperate with others and learnt to share a lot of information with each other.
- Became more open to discussions and take criticisms positively.
- Emphasized the new found association with students' parents and the co-teachers.

Benefits of Mentoring:

A large majority of the participants showed high esteem for their mentors and held them in high regard. Some of the benefits they received are summed up as follows:

- Guidance and support from their mentors, who gave them timely inputs via emails or during face to face meetings.
- Highly motivated to successfully complete their action research projects despite their heavy workload and time constraints.
- Support they got from the faculty and their Principals and Vice-Principals at school. This in a way opened the doors to peer mentoring.
- Asserted that mentors helped them in organizing information, conducting research in a systematic way and carrying out the analysis and interpretation part with ease.
- Continuous interaction with their mentors and the constant feedback from them widened their horizons in trying new methods and techniques and enabled them to channelize their thoughts and actions in constructive ways.

The mentoring process emphasized that the humane and empathetic hand holding helps teachers to take steps in the direction of research. The benefits were mutual. The mentoring created opportunities for the cohort of teacher educators to strengthen their knowledge base and improve



communication skills and use technology to support this communication. It helped them to become more reflective in their practice.

Benefits to stakeholders (self, parent, student and peer teacher)

The participant feedback also revealed several benefits gained by different stakeholders due to the action research carried out by in –service teachers in the school. The benefits are mentioned below:

- Students were very interested in the sessions or interventions within the research. They looked forward to activities for every subject and almost every session.
- Better rapport with students in the process of implementing the action research project.
- Conducting the action research project, help them realise and explore the potentialities of students which they probably were not aware of prior to this exercise
- Peer teachers started exerting more efforts to understand students' problems and become more sensitized towards them.
- Other teachers also started initiating new techniques and methods in their classrooms and engaging students.
- Revealed that they were able to understand their own lacunae's better as teachers.
- Motivated to use self learning modules and develop more innovative techniques of teaching that benefitted children directly.
- Built healthy discussions with the peer teachers in resolving different problems.
- Parents showed satisfaction in their children's development as an outcome of the project.

Benefits for Continuing Professional Development

A large majority of in-service teachers said that the experience of training in action research broadened their perspective. Some of the thoughts expressed are as follows:

- Eagerness to apply all the new methods and techniques that they learnt in future too.
- Time management and the techniques of self-learning strategies.
- Found action research as a powerful tool to find solutions to problems in classrooms.



- Confidence to take more action research projects in future.
- Reading habits developed.

Almost, all the participants valued the mentoring technique and asserted that they could successfully complete their action research projects without any fear and with total confidence because they got the necessary assistance from their respective mentors at every stage of difficulty. Communication through technology helped.

Most of them reported that in the due course of conducting an action research in their classrooms, they started researching about new techniques and strategies of teaching, their students started enjoying the classes, they started building good rapport with students, they also started becoming aware of different problems faced by students, which they said they never knew prior to conducting this project. This exercise proved more or less an eye-opener to teachers.

Many of the participants affirmed that the horizons of their thinking widened and they could perceive things from a broad perspective. Especially, when they worked towards a project collaboratively in teams, skills like listening, respecting and regarding others' viewpoints, and putting forth one's idea fearlessly gradually started developing in them. They expressed their joy in the process of working in teams. They also attributed their bonding amongst each other to this team process. Their feedback showed their increase in confidence in taking up new issues in their school and a great sense of satisfaction in their present achievement.

Above all, many of the teachers were happy to learn the logical steps of conducting a research, reviewing existing literature, dealing with data, analyzing data and all the intricacies of the processes of research. They also stated that they learnt to organize matter and prepare a systematic write-up to present it as a research report. As teachers, who are always over loaded with commitments, they expressed their gratitude to be chosen as a part of this research project, as they felt they had learnt quite a lot of things in such a small time during the process of mentoring, conducting the action research, presenting the reports and finally being appreciated amongst an audience of academicians.



Conclusion

Findings from this study points strongly to the power of action research as a means to professional development of the teachers in schools. The findings also brought to the forefront the immense benefit of the 'The Mentorship Model' as the key approach that kept the teachers motivated to embark on a reflective research journey to think about their practices, raise concerns, translate concerns into action research and write an action research report in a scientific manner.

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