

A Study on in-Service Teacher Education (ISTE) Opportunities in Sri Lanka

Dr Senevirathna Bandara

Senior Lecturer, Department of Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale, Sri Lanka

Abstract: Sri Lanka has already considered teacher education as an essential part of the education system because teacher education enhances the quality of good teaching. Teacher Education programs in Sri Lanka are divided into two groups. The first is the Pre-Service Teacher Education (PSTE) program and the second is the In-Service Teacher Education (ISTE) program, this study investigated In-Service Teacher Education (ISTE) opportunities and current situation of education system in Sri Lanka. Research framework within the qualitative research approach and the case-study strategy has been employed. Ten secondary school principals and twenty teachers were selected from three educational districts in two Provinces in Sri Lanka. The data were collected by conducting interviews, non-participative observation in ten schools and sample-based documentary searching. Finally the findings of the study and some recommendations were presented.

Keywords: teacher education, Pre-Service Teacher Education, In-Service Teacher Education, professional development

1. Introduction

Professional development of teachers is an important and continuous process. It begins with the selection of an aspirant teacher and includes his initial preparation induction into the profession and his continuous development throughout his teaching career. The formulation of policy and design of teacher preparation and continuing professional development should optimally take into account the whole spectrum of teacher learning. Nowadays, the concept of teacher education has received significant attention nationally and internationally. Therefore, today most reforms of education that are designed and implemented include a main component of teacher education as one of the key elements of the changing process in education (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

In general, teacher education programs could be divided into two groups, one is Pre-Service Teacher Education (PSTE), next is In-Service Teacher Education (ISTE). Pre-service education of teacher means, education of teachers before they enter into service as teachers. In-service education is the education a teacher receives after he has entered to teaching profession and after he gets his education in his teaching service. In-Service Teacher Education (professional development) programs are organized for teachers who are currently working in a school after successfully completing a pre-service course (Long & Riegle, 2002). This research was focused on investigate In-Service Teacher Education (ISTE) programs and opportunities in Sri Lanka.

2. Literature Review

In the teacher education concept, many different terms are used by researchers and others involved in educational practices. Some of these are: teacher professional development; teacher professional learning, continuing teacher education, continued professional development, ongoing career development, in-service teacher education, in-service teacher learning, in-service teacher training,

teacher renewal, human resource development of teachers, recurrent education, continuous career development, life-long education, life-long learning, as well as professional growth (Lalitha, 2005). This study focuses on investigating In-Service Teacher Education (ISTE) programs in Sri Lanka, because current prominent teacher education programs are In-Service Teacher Education (ISTE) in Sri Lankan context. Further, The Sri Lankan school system has different types of teacher categories. These teacher categories are; untrained, trained (holding a three-year diploma), graduate, and graduate with Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) or Master's degree. They work in government schools under the Sri Lanka Teacher Service (SLTS). Since Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948, teachers have been provided with only ISTE programs to develop their professionalism (Tatto et al., 1993). Other types (school-based teacher education, overseas teacher education opportunities, exchange programs of teachers, etc) of teacher education/professional development programs are not popular in Sri Lanka.

Institutes which organized teacher education programs in Sri Lanka

The government policies relevant to the ISTE programs, school policies, policies regulations of Teachers' centres (TC), as well as the National Institute of Education (NIE) or Ministry of Education (MOE) policies. This is because some of the ISTE programs (especially the residential workshops or seminars) are organized and implemented by the Ministry of Education (MOE) or National Institute of Education (NIE) and residential facilities are provided.

Besides, beyond the institutes includes MOE, NIE, PMOE, PDEO, Zonal Education Office (ZEO) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) that organize NIE programs for teachers. These different types of community have the authority and responsibility to provide ISTE programs for secondary school teachers. However, in the process of organizing the ISTE programs, most of the decisions regarding goals and aims of these programs are made by the organisers of the ISTE programs.

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In addition, the organisers of the ISTE programs should consider these variations or reasons for organising the ISTE programs. These are the teachers' subjects (because many ISTE programs are organised according to teaching subjects), the number of the participant teachers, the context of the subject, the duration of the program, the centre of the ISTE program, the number of participants from each school, the invitation procedures, the physical and human resources, the transport facilities for teachers to access to the centre, etc. Furthermore, the community members of the centre school, the principals of the participant teachers' schools, have to arrange a relief timetable on behalf of the participant teachers for the ISTE programs.

ISTE programs are included different kinds of activities, such as seminars, workshops, group discussions, field educational trips, research based investigations and many others. These seminars and workshops are traditional professional development programs. Villegas-reimers (2003, p. 93) explained that, "perhaps the most traditional form of professional development is the typical 'in-service staff training' that includes the use of workshops, shorts seminars and courses. Major criticisms abound in the literature about offering this form of in-service education as the only form of professional development, as traditionally most of these workshops and seminars are 'one-shot' experiences, completely unrelated to the needs of teachers and providing no follow-up". Further Bents & Howey (1981) also criticised that "The most common form of staff development identified was the workshop or lecture, typically occurring at the end of working day and at a site other than the school. Staff development generally took place in a group setting with minimal accommodation to individual differences".

Currently, in Sri Lanka almost all ISTE programs are organised by Zonal Education Office (ZEO); therefore, the immediate responsible authorities of the ISTE programs are the director of ZEO and subjects directors, subject In-Service Instructors (subject master teachers) and non-academic staff of ZEO (they contribute to function ISTE programs). However, clerks, supporting staff and labourers have to do different works, such as preparing payments, and attendance certificates, arranging seminars halls, etc). Beyond the Zone, PMOE, and MOE supervise, provide funds, and evaluate the ISTE programs. Furthermore, in the literature different types of ISTE programs were identified; some examples are mentioned below. Seminar, refresher courses, workshops, conferences, study groups, a study centre of professional writings, experimental schools, correspondence courses etc.

3. Methodology

To seek answers for the research questions, a qualitative research method has been employed and the research design was framed within an interpretive and case study approach. The overarching research question is how do Sri Lankan education system implement ISTE programs?

Four sub-research questions were made to seek answers to the overarching research question:

1) What factors affect the development of ISTE programs in Sri Lanka?

- 2) How is the effectiveness of the ISTE programs demonstrated in each school?
- 3) Which professional development activities are reflected in the ISTE programs in Sri Lanka?

Data

In a case study, typically researchers use three data sources (data collecting techniques); first, conducting interviews, second observation, and finally searching documents (Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Punch, 2009; Patton, 2002; McMillan, 2000; Anderson, 1998). For this research, data was collected through face-to-face interviews with ten principals and twenty teachers who were chosen from a sample of ten secondary schools, non-participating observation of the schools and searching relevant documents of ISTE programs which were conducted in the above schools.

Table 1: Sample of secondary schools and principals

Type of schools	Number of schools	Number of principals	Teachers
National	3	3	4
1 AB	1	1	8
1 C	6	6	8
Total	10	10	20

4. Findings and Discussion

The data of ISTE programs is presented, discussed and analysed in this section. Based on the sample, the majority (90%) of principals believe that ISTE programs can contribute to develop teacher's professional development/ teacher education. However, 30% of them said that these ISTE programs are ineffective and offer less contribution for teacher professional development. The majority of principals and teachers accepted the importance of ISTE programs for teacher education, but they firmly criticised the current ISTE programs in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka main provider of ISTE is ZEO but the participant of the study strongly criticised these ISTE programs and ZEO. Some of the criticisms made by the principals are mentioned below. These ISTE programs are mostly used to introduce changes to the syllabuses, national reforms and subjects' knowledge for teachers. There is a limited opportunity for teacher professional development. The next important reason is that unqualified human resources are used to conduct ISTE programs; mainly these programs are organised by the Zonal office and they do not have the expertise. Even the provincial offices do not have qualified resources to do these programs.

It seems that there are contradictions to the Sri Lankan ISTE program's in the system. These contradictions lead to an obstruction effect to satisfactory participation among teachers. Some teachers refuse to reply call-up letters for ISTE programs from MOE/NIE/PMOE/ZEO, etc. When searching documents which were relevant to ISTE programs, some schools had files that included calling letters (letters to invite teachers to participate in ISTE programs). At the top of some of the letters, there were endorsements by the principal which stated that teachers were not willing to participate to ISTE programs.

Further, when analysing the data, there were many contradictions found to ISTE programs. These are outlined and explained below:

- 1) ISTE programs did not consider teachers' and schools' individual needs.
- 2) Some ISTE programs were organised at national level and held in the capital city of the country, which required teachers to travel long distances.
- 3) Different types of teachers gathered at the same centre for seminars or workshops resulting in a loss of enthusiasm during the period of program.
- 4) Follow-up procedures of the ISTE programs were lacking.

In addition, the majority of seminars organised by ZEO are based on different subjects. The main subjects of the secondary education are science, mathematics, social studies, languages and English, and many seminars or workshops are organised mainly for these main subjects. As a result, teachers who teach other than the main subjects do not have as much opportunities to participate in ISTE programs. In addition, not all of the teachers teaching main subjects in a particular school have the opportunities to participate in the ISTE programs because only selected teachers are invited. As a result, some teachers do not have this opportunity to advance their professional development. In general, seminars are organised for teachers of particular subjects who are in a particular Zone (a Zone has approximately over one hundred schools), and therefore the seminars are overcrowded (more than 40). This situation affects teachers' convenience.

Furthermore, several contradictions were discussed by the principals and teachers regarding time duration of the seminars. Duration of the seminars may vary from one day to a week. Some seminars or workshops are residential. In considering Zonal level ISTE programs, residential programs are commonly not organised by Zonal levels and ISTE programs range from one to two days. These programs are held between 8.00 am to 4.00 pm but teachers arrive and depart at various times throughout the period. Teachers are not punctual and this 'bad habit' of the teachers was highlighted by the principals. On the other hand, some principals and teachers justified the lack of punctuality among the teacher participants as due to the transport problems of Sri Lanka; that is, the lack of public transport facilities to access to the centres of the ISTE programs.

The principals highlighted that ISTE programs are often held at the end of the year. Therefore, schools face a variety of problems when the programs are conducted during school terms. A principal described this situation as "Most of this ISTE programs are arranged in the last two months of the year. During this period, teachers and students are busy. As a result, these programs are inefficient and ineffective. Furthermore, these last two months are used for several seminars for different subjects; therefore the majority of teachers are not in the schools".

Moreover, the principals mention that the organisation or institutes of the ISTE programs influence the effectiveness of the programs. Since most of the ISTE programs are organised by the ZEO, unqualified resource personnel are

used as teachers do not like to participate in such programs because of low payment, low quality of content and weak management. Further, one of participate principals stated that some teachers frequently participated in ISTE programs (mainly seminars), but they seemed to lack the ability to demonstrate positive changes in their classroom practices. In addition, some contradictions to ISTE programs which were organised by the ZEO can be summarised as: resources/unqualified trainers (tutors); time wasting, cancellations (sometimes organised seminars or workshops are cancelled due to various reasons); lack of supervision by authorities; the majority of ISTE programs are organised at the end of the year; sometimes teachers have better knowledge than the content of seminars' imparted knowledge to teachers, creating difficulties for the centre school community; traditional teaching methods are used; does not consider individual teacher's needs; is limited to only teacher professional development reforms and changes of the syllabi; limited opportunities (once a year); and no peer support because participants are from different schools and therefore they unknown to each other and have fewer relationships with each other. Furthermore, there are many differences between participants of ISTE programs with respect to age, qualification, experience, gender, etc (for example, male primary teachers do not like to participate in ISTE programs because there are very few male primary teachers in the system and during the seminars or workshops, they feel lonely due to fewer male friends).

5. Conclusion

This study presented a summary of the findings, and the conclusion of the study. Some recommendations were offered in relation to the findings. With respect to contributions to new knowledge, further this section also summarised some suggestions for future study in the area of ISTE programs in Sri Lanka. The study recognized that the ISTE programs supported to develop teachers' knowledge and skills, however many contradictions were found as follow as; Teachers' and schools' individual needs were not considered, traditional delivery methods were used, and lacked supervision and follow-ups, seminar sessions were usually overcrowded and infrequent (once a year), programs were less effective; therefore money and time wasting for participants, principals faced difficulties managing school timetables when teachers were out on training, unqualified human resources were used, some programs were held quite far from the school, fewer opportunities for peer activities, no evaluation system on teachers' participation.

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