Azərbaycanda müəllim hazırlığı sahəsində çətinliklər və yeni perspektivlər: İngilis dili müəllimlərinin pedaqoji fəaliyyətinin qiymətləndirilməsi

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Annotasiya Tədqiqat işi müəllimlərin peşəkar inkişafı sahəsində səmərəlii dəyişiklikləri araşdırır və onların karyera bacarıqlarının artırırılması üzrə təlimlərdə qazandıqları bilik və bacarıqlarının qiymətləndirilməsi sahəsinə geniş nəzər yetirir. Məqalənin əsas hissəsi Azərbaycan məktəblərində müəllim hazırlığı ilə bağlı müxtəlif müzakirələrə və problemlərə tənqidi yanaşma, müəllimlərin bilik və bacarıqlarını inkişaf etdirməyə yönəlmiş təlim proqramlarının məzmunu haqqında fikirlərə həsr edilmişdir. Aparılan tədqiqatın əsas məqsədi müəllimlərin, təlimçilərin və məktəb menecerlərinin perspektiv fəaliyyətlərinin qiymətləndirilməsi yollarını təqdim etmək və bununla da məktəblərdə müəllim hazırlığı təcrübəsi reallıqlarını müəyyənləşdirməkdir. Məruzənin sonunda müəllimlər, təhsil işçiləri və təhsil siyasətçiləri üçün inkişaf etməkdə olan ölkələrin ən yaxşı təcrübələri və bəzi səmərəli metod və üsulları tövsiyə şəklində verilmişdir.

Açar sözlər Qiymətləndirmə, müəllim, təlim, məktəb, təhsildən əvvəlki və sonrakı xidmət, proqram.

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Challenges and New perspectives of Teacher Training in Azerbaijan: Assessment of pedagogical activities of English language Teachers

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Abstract This study investigates effective changes in professional development for teachers and takes a broad view of professional development, considering training teachers may receive throughout their careers and assessing their knowledge and skills. The main body of the article is devoted to a critique of various discussions and problems involved in teacher training in Azerbaijani schools, as well as pre-service and in-service teacher training programs which aim to develop teachers' knowledge and skills. The research paper introduces the perspectives of teachers, trainers, and school managers assessing their activites as the main focus of the study, thus identifying the realities of teachers' training experiences in schools. Concluding the report, some effective methods and experiences of developing countries and their best practices are given as recommendations for teachers, educators and policy-makers.

Keywords Assessment, teacher, training, school, pre-service, in-service, program.

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1. Introduction

Training qualified teachers to apply new methods of teaching is considered one of the main priorities in education. Recently, the Ministry of Education adopted new strategic reforms in teacher development for secondary schools, which have been well-received. One of the aims of the Action Plan of the "State Strategy of Educational Development" (January 19, 2015) is to create a new system that will ensure the continuing improvement of teachers' professionalism. Studying current practice in teacher training for secondary English teachers is necessary, firstly to identity the problems, and suggest solutions, and secondly to learn from what has already been achieved. The findings are based on interviews with teachers, focus group discussions and surveys of teaching staff in schools to identify the major issues state school teachers face. Additionally, some school specialists, stakeholders, and teacher trainers from NGOs were involved in discussions. The teacher development program for secondary schools is considered a program with a lack of diversity in provision. Moreover, teacher evaluations were usually organized to evaluate task performance, meaning that evaluation of their contextual performance was neglected.

Teacher development has been one of priorities of the Action Plan of the Ministry of Education in the Educational Developmental Strategy, and some of the planned changes are relate to developing teacher training in Azerbaijan. English teachers play a key role in the growth of our society, socio-economic interaction, people's behavior, the young generation's life, and their education. The young generation has an important role to play in society, as they know how to use new technologies, and can, therefore, share this knowledge with students, helping them gain the knowledge and skills necessary in today's society (Loughran J., 2014). The current research paper focuses on new developments in teacher training in the Azerbaijan context.

The aim of the study is to reveal some of the difficulties faced in the area of training secondary teachers, and to suggest solutions to these problems. The objectives of the study are:

- to give a short explanation of teacher development policy;
- to define the general context for teacher training policy in schools;
- to highlight the main challenges in teacher development in urban and rural areas and to check the validity of these findings;
- to present strategies to be implemented to overcome the challenges;
- to prepare recommendations to develop modern techniques, and to suggest directions in the evaluation of secondary school teachers' training and practice in Azerbaijan;

The research paper starts with a brief explanation of the concept of teacher-

training, and describes some factors in the teacher development process. In addition, to provide the background for the research, the general context for teacher training in Azerbaijan is given. The main body of the paper is devoted to a summary and critique of various teacher training policies. This is followed by the methodology and findings. The findings are analyzed, and some recommendations are provided based on the results.

2. Concept of Teacher Development

2.1. What is teacher training? In modern society, teachers need to be professionally developed with high standards, pedagogical and practical skills, and ethical and moral values. Teachers play a special role in developing and maintaining a school's identity, in facilitating students' achievements, and in promoting equality of education. In many countries, the quality of schools is ensured by implementing a school improvement plan, developing an effective curriculum, developing high quality teaching and learning, and ensuring fair and effective student assessment (Avalos, B. and J. Assael 2006; Flint, A. S., Zisook, K., & Fisher, T. R. 2011).

Therefore, the concept of teacher training is understood in many ways: engaging in productive learning as a successful and active participant, counselor, or policymaker (Barcan, A. (1995, Loughran J., 2014). Teacher training may be through professional local or international courses, gaining practical experience in other institutions, workshops or seminars, qualification programs developing collaboration within a school, teachers' observational visits to other schools, or working with others in a professional network. Teacher training is realized through mentoring, coaching, doing joint projects, planning syllabi, and sharing best practices. It is teachers who stand at the center of the learning process. Thus, teacher training policy is an area of modern education development and plays an important role in encouraging continuous learning (Russell, 1997, Loughran J. and Berry A., 2005)

Effective professional development: A professional teacher is a person who can make efforts to develop his/her own skills, knowledge, practice, and competences. Teachers' and students' changing expectations have led to various changes in schools: creating a positive learning environment; using communication technologies for teaching; conducting live classrooms with student-centered participation; applying modern techniques; and assessing students' achievements (Garat, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Suk Yoon, K. 2009).

Effective teacher development is an on-going process, involving workshops, trainings, collaborative work, and feedback. Only with time and support can it lead to gradual improvement. Successful teacher training program include

various learning activities that teachers can use with their students, and also develop communities with shared interests which support the teachers' development. Our society needs teachers who can play a crucial role in providing their students with social and emotional support and in creating a positive learning environment. Thus, teacher development is important as it has a significant impact on teaching methods, skills and, therefore, helps them achieve the best possible outcome for their students (Murray, Frank B. (Ed.) 1996, Loughran J 2014).

3. The Context of Teacher Training (TT) in Azerbaijan

3.1. New perspectives in teacher development: In recent years, a number of projects have been developed to improve the professionalism of teachers in secondary schools in Azerbaijan. According to the program of the World Bank in the Ministry of Education, different NGOs have implemented a wide range of training on teaching standards and the programs of different subjects (General Education Teaching Standards and Program (National Curriculum) 2010 Ministry of Education). Teachers from urban and rural areas are involved in working collaboratively to learn about modern conceptual frameworks. In order to continue the implementation of the projects many instructions and resources are provided for teachers (Curriculum Framework ME, 2010).

Furthermore, there are some international projects run by the British Council, the Azerbaijan English Teachers' Association, the Teacher Development Center, and Innovative Technologies in Education (ITE). These operate within a country-wide network which aims to develop teacher-training courses.

Currently, teacher-training courses are being run in some schools; as additionally, pilot projects focused on strategic targets have been developed by the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, the results of teachers' diagnostic tests reflected teachers' knowledge and skills, meaning that interventions can be targeted and, therefore, the training made as effective as possible (ME 2017).

Nevertheless, the new Teacher Training policy in Azerbaijan faces some issues in the following areas: the selection processes for teachers; recruitment; teacher retention; teachers' status; teachers' qualifications; rankings; the salary system, etc. There are some limitations and shortcomings in implementing diagnostic tests on teacher development; such tests could find opportunities to understand the importance of teaching. All these factors aim to develop effective teacher preparation, and Azerbaijani society has increasing interest in and increasingly positive attitudes towards TT policy. The majority of parents and community members are eager to see teachers in schools who are trained, qualified, and have good practical experience. Adequate teacher preparation has a great impact on solving the problems in various areas, and, in doing so, can lead to professional

teaching and learning (Kwakman, K. 2003; Jurasaite-Harbison and Rex, 2010). However, without governmental and systemic change, teachers lack the authority and competence to bring about the necessary changes.

4. Methodology

The aim of this research was to conduct short investigations to examine some areas of the teacher-training (TT) process. The study engages teachers and school principals in discussions about their current experiences. Furthermore, the research describes their opinions, their responsibilities, what they have to do, the challenges they face, etc. To fulfil the aims of the study, data was collected through using qualitative methods, namely interviews, some observations, and focus group discussions.

4.1. Quantitative Methods: The survey was distributed in five schools (three urban, two rural). Participants were divided into two groups: 1) seven teachers and three supervisors 2) a focus group consisting of seven teachers and two principals.

Additionally, representatives from NGOs and some schools, as well as five parents, were interviewed to elicit their opinions.

4.2. Qualitative Method: After collecting the survey data, six schools were selected for the collection of the qualitative data. The qualitative methods were as follows: 1) Classroom observation by supervisors after training; 2) Observing the classroom management skills of four teachers; 3) conducting interviews with two supervisors, two school principals, and four parents; 4) A focus group discussion with seven school teachers from four schools to determine teachers' opinions on the benefits of training, and of gaining teaching experience.

4.3. Research questions: The research questions aimed to investigate teachers' different skills. Firstly, the inquiry focused on information about the participants and their subject knowledge and competences. The next questions were about the new pedagogical approaches, teaching standards, and program (curriculum) in schools. The main questions were about teachers attending trainings, conferences, workshops, and seminars; however, some were about teachers' visits to other schools to learn from each-other's' experiences.

4.4. Limitations: The research sample included rural schools (Buzovna and Kurdakhani) and teachers from Baku city schools (school # 5; # 26). Those teaching in rural schools may encounter more difficulties in finding the time to attend teacher training courses and may be more likely to misunderstand the content of the new curriculum. All school teachers face challenges in applying ICT skills and in collaborative learning. Additionally, the need to apply standard-based teaching and learning caused panic among teachers.

5. Research Findings

5.1. Understanding of Teacher Training policy. Findings suggest that teaching standards are recognized as another administrative request coming from the policy makers. The survey results indicate that the majority of teachers have no clear vision of the future development of the educational system, and that is why they think that every innovation is likely to be short-lived. They need to understand the meaning of the concept of "ongoing teacher development". They are eager to find new ways of teaching strategies based on the curriculum. Farmer. F. (2009) states that many teachers are unable to do collaborative work for practical and personal reasons, but they are interested in exploring the processes of teaching and learning (p.18). However, teachers are unwilling to collaborate with each other. Feiman-Nemser (Feiman-Nemser, S. 2001) mentioned that teachers should be engaged in professional development on different objectives: analyzing student work; using materials; and examining students' thinking and learning in school-based training. Teacher training aims to foster ongoing professional development, during which teachers can reflect on: *instruction, concept formation, reflection, observation, coaching, mentoring, goal-orientated learning peer learning, metacognition, problem-solving, and practical teaching.*

5.2. Effectiveness of teacher training.

The introduction of teacher training led to a number of positive changes in the participating schools. Some classes were observed throughout this research to investigate improvements in teachers' practical skills in the classroom.

Firstly, workshops and trainings with teachers have had some positive effects. Previously, teachers had limited communication and classroom management skills. They had not developed the skills to work with students, nor were they good at fostering motivation and, and they struggled to involve students in learning actively. Some teachers have enough knowledge about dealing with disruptions, applying active learning principles, encouraging effective group or peer work, and using appropriate methods and strategies to address students' needs and interests. Schools are open to all new ideas in learning. In addition, the interviewees, particularly the teachers and supervisors, suggest that school is the right place for exploring the talent of students who are ready to make good changes in life. Teachers need to motivate them to achieve as much as they can.

Secondly, the most important requirement for teachers was to adapt to the process of self-development through networking, joining online courses, as well as participating in some school projects. The new teacher development was provided with consideration of teachers' needs. Teachers had classroom management tips explained to them and suggested attending school-based trainings that suit teachers' schedules and training needs (Guskey, T. R. (2002).

Table 1. **Teachers' professional development needs for 2016-2017.**

Types of areas	Developing skills in TT	Urban teachers	Rural teachers
Subject knowledge	Reflecting on new theory on subject-specific areas, getting new knowledge and subject implications	48 %	22 %
Personal competences	Adaptation to new situations, being flexible, implementing productive options or activities at school	49 %	24 %
Social competences	Having communication skills and co-operating at work, attending conferences and trainings	58 %	32 %
Methodological competencies	Applying strategies on developing management, using target-oriented methods, and assessment techniques	48 %	26 %

5.3. Challenges in Teacher Training in Azerbaijan.

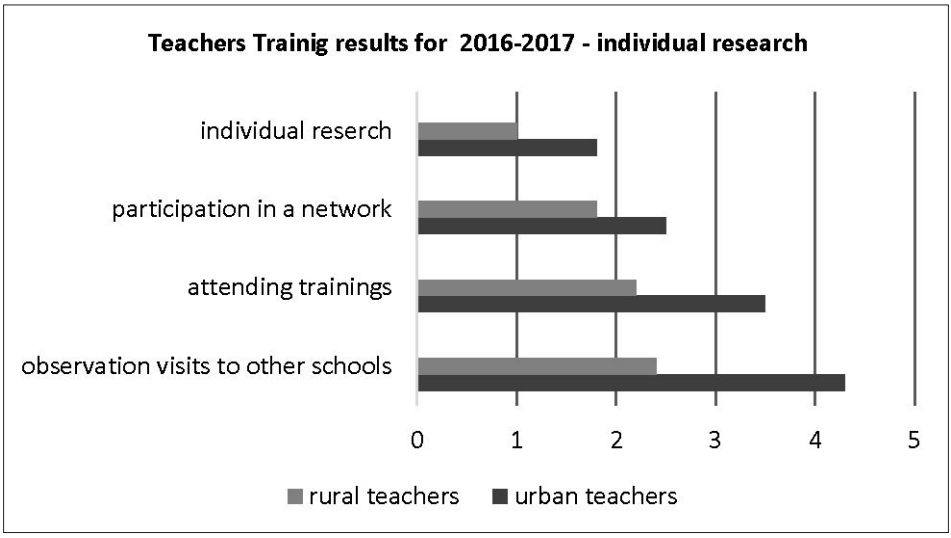
This paper draws a critical distinction between teacher education and teacher training, and discusses changes both to initial teacher education and to training offered to teachers in-service and pre-service (Loughran J., 2014). Teacher development encompasses both pre-service and in-service training, and there should be some continuity in the aims of both of these types of training. Pre-service teachers feel unprepared for classroom teaching, and the pre-service education does not prepare teachers for contemporary classroom challenges (NEPS report, 2014). Training consists only of some theoretical pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills as well as subject knowledge of pedagogy and teaching strategies. During pre-service teacher training, teachers only have a short time to practice teaching and to demonstrate effective teaching and learning processes.

5.4. Urban and Rural teachers' challenges.

Ongoing teacher development needs differ according to the teachers' geographical location, culture, and life skills. Nevertheless, teachers are eager to continue developing the knowledge and skills needed to build their teaching careers. Teachers from both urban and rural schools take refresher courses, and the majority of teachers from both kinds of school face challenges in taking teacher-training courses with varied content. Urban teachers need to attend short in-service training courses because of their schedules. Then, the participants were asked about their further steps for improvements. Data collection was related to some of the challenges and four types of question were asked.

Moreover, there is a distinction between urban and rural teachers regarding whether they develop or engage in individual research, participate in networking, attend conferences or trainings, observe each-other's classes, and are willing to work collaboratively with other teachers. In this case, the situation is different

Table 2. **Teachers' pre-test and post-test results for 2016-2017.**



in urban schools than it is in rural schools: but tutor at home, either because of the low income they receive for school teaching, or because of the students' lack of effort and engagement with the learning process (West, E., & Jones, P. 2007). The majority of rural teachers have misunderstanding of competency-based learning and its application in teaching. They have difficulties in using ICT in teaching, and in choosing appropriate strategies and assessment techniques to meet the teaching standards, and have struggle to demonstrate collaboration in the learning process (Richard, Ingersoll, M, Smith, Thomas 2004). The findings suggest that it would be beneficial to introduce a new teacher training model to develop teachers' professional development in some respects.

5.5. Teacher Recruitment challenge.

The teacher recruitment process is one thing that ensures a number of quality applicants to the profession. Applicants need to pass three levels of the Teacher Recruitment Exam, meaning that they take exams based on subject knowledge and skills, curriculum development, pedagogical approaches, and doing logical tests within a short space of time. The round involves an interview, in which the candidate responds to questions on professional development and teaching approaches in the classroom, etc. Thus, many new teachers attended preparation courses with the sole aim of passing the examinations quickly. This does not give any practical experience, only theoretical knowledge. In addition, school principals require only the high-quality employees from among these applicants.

Hiring, supporting, and sustaining effective teachers is one of the challenges faced by school principals. Principals want to see well prepared teachers, but they need to understand that for this, it is necessary to develop in-service training that offers teaching practice, explores effective learning, and offers guidance on how best to meet curriculum requirements. If the principals believe that teaching is at the core of schooling, then they will understand why good teacher selection is indispensable in ensuring high-achieving schools. Teachers need to have a long time to develop and improve their practical skills (OECD, 2015)

5.6. Challenges for the Teaching Program.

The main challenges for schools are working under centralized and underdeveloped systems, ineffective teaching programs, and low rates of teachers' participation in trainings, workshops, seminars, and qualification programs (Willemse M, Lunenberg M, Korthagen F 2005; OECD review, 2015). Furthermore, there are no effective teaching programs in subject knowledge; rather, lessons are planned only on textbook content. Nevertheless, there is a shortage of teachers that results in ineffective teaching. Schools have subject-based programs that do not meet the needs of teachers in a classroom. The new perspectives of the teacher training policy require a modern teaching program that sees them as innovators. The new challenges for in-service teacher training are underdeveloped practice and a lack of supplies and resources. Therefore, newly qualified teachers taught about modern teaching methods and the.

Schools have no academic teaching programs which target different areas of subject-learning, such as improving subject knowledge skills, social skills, communication skills, critical thinking, problem solving, and creative skills (Farmer, F. 2006). There are no training courses with module credits in initial teacher training programs. Therefore, teachers don't know their professional levels and tend to be satisfied with implementing only the requirements of textbooks; only a few teachers find online resources that are interesting for students. Most classes focus only on subject knowledge, and do not consider other learning outcomes. Thus, teaching programs are limited to the subject matter and to planning practice exam tasks and questions to prepare students for important tests. Schools have no authority to adapt the teaching program according to the school culture, profile, or the level of the students and teachers. Moreover, the teaching program doesn't focus on either teachers' or students critical thinking, communication, or problem-solving skills.

Based on the above, it can be seen that teachers face great challenges due to the program with its lack of new content, strategies, and assessment of learning. To fill the missing gaps in pre-service education, there should be framework or document outlining teachers' standards. Teachers' standards provide an opportunity to rank teacher development. In order to develop the quality of teaching,

we should learn from the best practice of other countries and consider recommendations of teachers' associations.

6. Recommendations on analysis

The findings indicated that there are several key aspects to be focused on in finding solutions to the challenges in faced in implementing Teacher Training in Azerbaijan. These are:

- Targeting strategy requirements of modern education
- Developing Teacher Training Framework (TTF)
- Preparing a teaching program (Curriculum)
- Shifting to a new training method
- Time scheduled for a training
- Supporting factors of conducting training

6.1. Target requirements of modern education: The important aim of the National Education Development Strategy of Azerbaijan for the period 2011-2021 is developing Teacher Development quality indicators. The Ministry of Education adopted legislation on teacher development which aims to introduce pre-service and in-service training to improve effectiveness. The current gap in this document is the lack of national standards for Teacher Development. There is also the need to ensure the opportunity to train in different settings, and initial teacher education (ITE) and teacher induction should be reformed. Teachers should understand the qualifications they need to become a teacher.

6.2. Teacher Training Framework (TTF): Reviewing international experiences, other countries have frameworks for Teachers' Professional Development (TPD). For the most part, teacher development stands beyond the macro level policies of government, as it has own specific mechanisms. Changing TPD so that it is part of the broader educational reform process might be a successful step in the development of the country. The findings show that schools need a systematic framework for teachers' professional standard. This is a strategic priority for the country's social and economic development (West, E., & Jones, P. 2007). The issues with the teacher training process under a centralized system will remain unresolved. In some developed countries, teacher training has been implemented effectively with decentralization, though TT has some issues (Wagle, M.P. 2010). Schools should have a free choice of how to develop teachers' professionalism according to their culture, teachers' activities, beliefs, social problems, and the teaching process at the school. There is a need for adequate infrastructure and strong communication.

6.3. Applying the Teaching Program (Curriculum): Developing the teaching program is another crucial area to be focused on. The main challenge was

that schools have no rights to improve the teaching program. This issue affects the teaching process, as well as teacher development in the school context. Teachers have limited knowledge and skills which means that they find it hard to evaluate different teaching programs, but also that they have difficulties with planning lessons or syllabi (Guskey, T. R. (2002). It is easy to prepare an annual planning document or a daily outline for teachers. However, this type of short designed "program" cannot help teachers to achieve all the learning outcomes. Teachers have to attend a subject-specific teaching program that can cover all of the content, as well as all the key aspects of the teaching process.

To meet the program requirements, teachers must learn new subject knowledge, develop skills, learn about various aspects of teaching. They must also develop thinking skills, meet the social and economic requirements of the labor market, meet community needs and interests, consider learning strategies and styles, think about management issues, learn new techniques in teaching and students' assessments, etc. However, research suggests that the development of the teaching program of any subject ultimately allows schools to address all issues related to the teaching process, as well as ensuring teacher development.

6.4. Shifting to a new training method: Teachers have lack the ability to use newer techniques or methods, which is necessary if they want to change the teaching (Wagle, M.P. (2010). Most of the teachers stated that there was a lack of practice focused on teaching methods during their training. While developing skills, feedback is crucial. Training materials should be reliable, should be effective in practice, and should meet teachers' needs. Sometimes teachers complain that the content of the training materials is too theoretical, and that they could have found it themselves. Therefore, training should involve many discussions, opportunities for group work, and debates on devoted to ensuring effective practice. Demonstration of skills during training would also be useful. The findings suggest that practice-oriented training programs during the training process are important.

6.5. Time scheduled for a training: Arranging a schedule is the most important factor for the teacher-training process as most teachers have busy schedules. They think that training is a process that should occur out of school or that it should be run privately. The majority of teachers had been involved in trainings run at the request of the school principals or because their qualifications were due to expire. It is likely that they take training courses to fulfil the requirements of a task or to pass teacher training because they complain of having heavy workloads and of having too little time for training. If they do participate in training, they looked tired and are passive in the classroom. The Education Regulation (194. 2015) has declared that every school teacher has to teach a minimum of 18 hours per week. However, the research showed that that most teachers teach

more than 24 hours a week. Teachers' workloads should not be so heavy that it prevents them from using their new skills in the classroom. It is highly recommended that all teachers teach hours that make them comfortable and feel enthusiastic about participating in the training courses they need. In some countries, school-based trainings function as part of module-credit system, with a small time commitment for teachers. They have sessions once or twice a week after school and they can gain credits for this. After each session, teachers could demonstrate what they have learned, either in the classroom, or as a short report or reflective essay. This would improve the effectiveness of training. Additionally, school-based training should encourage support and develop a collaborative culture (OECD report, 2015).

6.6. Supporting factors of conducting training: Some findings reveal that problems with the teacher training process lead to the fact that teachers lack skills and do not implement suitable strategies in the classroom. The inquiry shows that there was inefficient training and that there was inefficient training and that the training provided did not provide teachers with enough subject knowledge". Two out of seven teachers stated that they get confused using too many techniques or by the superior methods suggested in the training. Additionally, they mentioned there was neither sufficient time nor a comfortable place for their them to prepare their classes adequately, as many schools have an untidy learning environment, and lack instructions and materials. Another point was trainers' poor organization or management problems. Therefore, the findings suggest that each school should have a comfortable training room with modern technologies and reliable supplies to implement trainings successfully. Wagle (2010) notes that a significant factor in improving the education system is financial investment for both trainers and teachers.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were made to regarding the future of teacher training in the secondary schools:

1. Teacher development has clearly not led to the implementation of effective teaching in the secondary schools. The teacher training program to be developed and to take teachers' needs into account. There is also a need to establish a set of key skills to be developed throughout the teacher training process. This process should be based on the requirements set out in a teacher development framework that includes different elements of professional competencies.

2. Teachers in both urban and rural schools have some challenges with due to a lack of time, their workload, and the lack of instructional materials for adequate preparation in their schools. It is important to establish school-based

trainings, which save both money and teachers' time. Furthermore, teacher training should include mentoring and should be planned on a long-term basis. This should involve taking school-based trainings that offer module credits, rather than short term preparation for exams. Therefore, school principals should also be involved in developing an effective teaching program.

3. The research revealed that teachers are confused by trainers' suggestions on classroom management and using modern techniques and technology. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the effective skills developed during training sessions are transferred into the classroom. This means that teachers should be provided with appropriate teaching instructions and materials so that they can apply the skills in the real classroom situation.

4. The research reveals that collaborative culture is lacking among teachers. There is also aa lack of discussion and little opportunity to learn from international experiences during the training. Teachers need to participate in online forums and international exchange programs to improve their communication skills. Furthermore, teachers should have the opportunity to visit other schools and to observe each other's classes, or to improve their own individual research to gain new knowledge and explore innovations in teaching.

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