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In-service Teacher Training Programmes: the case of Palestine

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ABSTRACT This research aims to assess the effectiveness of the in-service teacher training programme in Palestine, based on the opinion of the teacher participants in order to improve future in-service programmes. The Spearman's coefficient of rank correlation ρ test has been used to examine the stated null hypotheses. It indicates that the participants considered the concept of planning a lesson plan as the most important competency. The research found that there is a positive association among all groups of teachers (except one group) concerning the importance of the listed objectives of the in-service programme, at a significant level of .05. Finally, the study recommended that in-service teacher programmes should place more emphasis on class applications and teaching techniques using different training programmes.

This paper describes some aspects of the in-service training of teachers in Palestine and recent work to evaluate the provision of programmes in the country with a view to informing developments in future in-service programmes.

Palestine refers to the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip. These geographically separated areas form an emerging political entity of some 2.5 million people. The total number of students enrolled in the three levels of Palestinian schools, preparatory, primary and secondary, was about 530,000 students in 1991. There are 1800 schools and 15,000 classes; of this total, about 48% of the students were female. There are, within the levels of schooling, three types of schools. First, there are the government schools which make up about 64% of the educational system's provision, secondly there are the United Nations (UNRWA) schools which provide about 23% of the student places and teach the Palestinian refugee students. The third part of the system comprises the private schools, owned by the non-profit making organisations, which provide about 13% of the places in the educational system (Sabri, 1996). There are about 19,200 Palestine schoolteachers. It is estimated that about 25% of the total teaching force needs to be enrolled in upgrading programmes relating to the specific content of the curriculum and/or educational and instructional

aspects (Sabri, 1996). During the last 30 years, there have been no teacher training programmes to upgrade teachers' skills and competencies, in either government or private schools. However, there have been limited training programmes to upgrade some of the teachers in the UNRWA schools in recent years. This brief description helps to provide part of the context for the work described in this paper.

To address this problem the Higher Education Council in Palestine conducted the first national in-service teacher training programme to upgrade a group of teachers from different districts, levels of schools and specialist areas. The first programme started in 1991 and was funded by a grant from the European Union (EU). Further upgrading programmes have been implemented in the last 3 years, also funded by the EU. This first programme was evaluated in order to guide and direct future teacher training programmes.

The training was designed to encourage teachers to adopt new methods of teaching, integrate new knowledge and explore the uses of new technology. It is of critical importance to develop the human resources in the school system and the pedagogical process. The programme aimed to introduce new models of teaching proven to have positive effects on the learning environment in general and in daily teaching situations in particular. There are contradictory arguments about which are the best methods, models, times, conditions and environments in which to carry out in-service teacher training programmes in order to change teachers' attitudes and behaviour positively and it was these that the research set out to explore.

Opinion surveys have been widely used to assess and evaluate the most effective ways of delivering in-service programmes. Innovative programmes have been developed and trials conducted to search for effective in-service programmes. It is important, as Fullan (1985) has emphasised, that in-service teacher programmes should lead to educational changes, through the use of new learning skills and the development of an understanding of the rationale for change. Hodgson & Whalley (1990) have argued that in evaluating the effectiveness of in-service education one should include the purpose of the course and indicate the direct evidence of developments which subsequently occur in the school. Joyce & Showers (1980) found that to improve in-service training there should be a theory, a model of teaching, to be practised in a simulated classroom setting, structured and open-ended feedback and strategies to coach for the application of what had been learned. Bines (1989) and Wedman & Martin (1991) concluded in their work that student teachers must be taught both reflective thinking, including questioning, evaluating and reconsidering schooling practices, as well as routine actions including accepting and reporting on schooling practices. Backhouse (1987) emphasised motivation, trying out and reporting back to lead teachers to change their teaching methods. A wide range of other studies were examined in the process of deciding which approach to adopt.

Objectives of the Research

The research undertaken aimed to assess the effectiveness of the first national in-service teacher training programme conducted in 1991-92 in the West Bank and Gaza. The enquiry was based on the opinion of the teachers who were participants. The following aspects were considered:

- x The importance of the stated objectives of the in-service teacher training programme as perceived by the Palestinian teachers.
- x The importance of the listed competencies of the major educational courses of the in-service teacher training programme as perceived by the Palestinian teachers.
- x The extent to which preparatory, primary and secondary Palestine teachers agreed with the objectives of the in-service teacher training programme.
- x The extent to which Palestinian teachers agreed with the objectives of the in-service teacher training programme in relation to number of years of teaching experience.
- x The extent to which Palestinian teachers agree with the importance of the listed competencies of the major educational courses of the programme which was implemented.
- x The extent to which preparatory, primary and secondary Palestinian teachers agreed to the importance of the listed competencies of the major educational courses of the implemented programme.

I considered four possible hypotheses in my investigation:

- x There is a *positive association among* the different groups of school level teachers concerning the rank of the importance of the listed possible objectives of the in-service teacher training programmes.
- x There is a *positive association among* the different groups of teachers with different years of experience concerning the rank of the importance of the listed possible objectives of the in-service teacher training programmes for Palestinian teachers.
- x There is *no significant difference* in responses between the different groups of teachers working at different levels concerning the importance of the listed competencies and topics for each of the cores of five courses of the in-service teacher training.
- x There is *no significant difference* in responses between the different groups of schoolteachers with different years of experience concerning the importance of the listed competencies and topics for each of the cores of five courses of the in-service training programme.

Methodology

The Population

The total number of teachers participating in the national in-service teacher training programme was 700, enrolled in six universities in the

West Bank and Gaza Strip. All of the participants were graduates or were in the process of graduating in sciences, languages or humanities. The participants were selected from the three levels of schools in Palestine. There were two identified groups in the project, 70% of the teachers graduated in summer 1993, while the others expected to graduate at the end of the academic year 1993-94.

The selected sample for analysis contained all the participants who had graduated in summer 1993 from Birzeit University. The reason for this selection was to eliminate inter-university variation, that might occur as the result of possible different emphasis put on parts of the programme by the participating universities. However, the students enrolled in the programme were from different schools, levels and districts.

Upon completion of the programme, the participants filled in the evaluation instrument which had been piloted and revised prior to its use.

Analysis of Data

Spearman's coefficient of rank correlation p test was used to examine the data concerning the objectives of the in-service programme in order to indicate whether there was a positive association among the perceptions of the groups of teachers, school levels and teaching experiences. For the second part of the instrument the average means of the given weights for each competency and for each group of participants were computed based on the stated weights (from 1 point as the least important to 5 points as the most important), in order to indicate the importance of the listed competencies and courses by the different groups of teachers.

The Findings

The presentation of the findings is organised according to the stated purposes of the study.

First, the ranking of the importance of the stated objectives of the in-service programme showed that the most important objectives were, in order: improving teaching methods and techniques; updating knowledge and information in participants' specialisation and considering it as a step for graduate studies (MA degree). On the other hand, the increasing of satisfaction and fulfilment in teaching, creating new friendships and enjoying the social advantages, and the exchange of educational experience among participants and professors were perceived as the least important objectives by the total participants. They were ranked eighth, seventh, and sixth respectively.

Consideration of the opinion of the teachers' groups shows that improving teaching methods and techniques was ranked first by preparatory and primary teachers, while secondary teachers considered the programme as a step for graduate studies (MA degree) as the most important objective. The three groups of teachers with different years of experience ranked improving teaching methods and techniques as their

most important objective for the in-service programme. The teachers of 10 years' or less experience considered updating knowledge and information in participants' specialisation as the second most important objective. The teachers of more than 10 years' experience ranked considering the programme as a step for graduate studies as the second most important objective of in-service training programme.

Second, there was no significant difference in responses between the different groups of school levels and years of experience concerning the importance of the listed possible objectives of the in-service training programme.

Third, the listed competencies and topics of the major courses of the in-service programme based on the competencies set out in the introductory education course indicated that most of the teachers considered the objectives of education as the most important topic and the discussion of the duties and responsibilities of teachers and the philosophical base of education as the least important topics. A comparison of the six groups of teachers showed that the secondary teachers considered the course to be more important than the preparatory and primary school teachers.

The importance of the competencies of the second course (general methods of education) showed that planning a lesson for the class and the process of preparing a relevant lesson plan were the most important competencies, while the least important competencies were the concept of behavioural models of teaching and models of teaching and inductive thinking.

The competencies of the third course (educational media) showed that introducing types of instructional media and skills of using media techniques in education were considered to be the most important competencies.

For the curriculum course, the philosophical elements of curriculum decisions and processing of curricula change and development were rated as the least important topics by the participants.

Conclusion: remarks and implications

The study revealed a significant measure of agreement in terms of objectives, courses and competencies amongst all groups of teachers. We also found some differences among groups of teachers, related to their unique needs and interests. In addition the study indicated that competencies related to the practical issues of classrooms are more important than other theoretical issues of education. Some relevant implications may be drawn out from this study and these are summarised as follows:

- x In-service teacher programmes should place more emphasis on class applications and teaching techniques rather than concepts and theories of learning.

- x Teachers from different school levels may need different training programmes.
- x The content and the competencies included in the courses of in-service programmes should be different in some aspects to reflect the experience of teachers.
- x Secondary school teachers are more interested in participating in developing the curriculum.

These findings relate to our developing system, which has many changes and problems to confront.

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