



Mentoring Process of the South Asian Teacher Educators Fellowship

A Multi-Modal Approach to Teacher Professional Development in Low Resource Settings

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1. Introduction

The South Asian Teacher Educators (SATE) Fellowship was conducted as part of the project 'A Multi-Modal Approach to Teacher Professional Development in Low Resource Settings' Project. For the fellowship, 45 teacher educators were selected from Afghanistan, Maldives and Nepal. As a fellow they were required to attend face to face training, complete courses via TISSx platform, attend online webinar sessions and conduct an action research with school teachers.

For the successful implementation and completion of action research, mentors were designated to guide and support the fellows. Additionally, during the implementation of action research, fellows themselves were required to mentor the school teachers with whom they collaborated. Therefore, fellows played the dual role of being both mentees and mentors throughout their fellowship journey.

2. Purpose of Mentoring in the Fellowship

The fellowship was designed to equip fellows with the skills to incorporate reflection, adaptable distance teaching and learning tools, and mentoring into their approach to working with teachers. Thus, one of the objectives of the fellowship was to develop mentoring skills among fellows to support teachers collaboratively. To achieve this objective fellows were mentored by academic and field mentors throughout the designing and implementation of their action research projects.

Similarly, the purpose of fellows themselves mentoring school teachers is to ensure the successful completion of collaborative action research, to guide and support teachers in classroom implementation, and at the same time, to enhance teachers knowledge and skills.

3. Roles and Responsibilities of Mentors

a. Academic Mentors

Academic mentors were assigned from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), one of the consortium members of the project, and each academic mentor worked with three to four fellows from three countries. The roles and responsibilities of academic mentors are to:

- Guide the fellows in selecting the problem for action research, refining the problem, and coming up with an action plan.
- Guide in selecting the site of action research, and guidance during the execution of the plan.
- Conduct regular meetings with fellows to discuss the progress on action research and reflection on it.

b. Field Mentors

Field Mentors were assigned from the fellows' respective countries to ensure a deep understanding of the local country context. The roles and responsibilities of field mentors are to:

- Provide support to fellows in terms of finding the right site of action research, guidance in the selection of teachers,
- Provide inputs to the action research plan and execution of the plan based on their contextualized knowledge of the country context. (*e.g. rules and structure of education system, timetables, and calendars of the schools, addressing challenges related to infrastructure, accessibility to technology, resource or personnel in the system*)
- Advise the fellows in defining and solving the problem based on their own knowledge of the country's context and the education system.

c. Fellows as Mentors

The fellows roles and responsibilities as mentors are to:

- Guide and support teachers (*this includes conducting professional development sessions*) in implementing the innovative approaches in the classroom.
- Observe the classroom implementation, identify areas for improvement, and advise teachers on enhancing their practices in the next cycle of implementation.
- Assist teachers to reflect on the implementation process, what worked well and what did not, and why.

4. Mentoring Process

For the face to face training sessions, fellows from Maldives traveled to Mumbai, India, along with fellows from Nepal. During this trip they interacted with the assigned academic mentor from TISS for in-person guidance on the conception of their action research. Fellows were required to select a thematic area of their preference for the action research and were paired with the suitable academic mentors accordingly. This interaction with academic mentors facilitated the identification of a potential topic and a concept for their action research project.

Post to the face to face training sessions fellows designed their action research under the guidance of the assigned Academic Mentor and a local field Mentor. The fellows

were required to have regular meetings with both their academic and field mentors, as per the schedule given to them.

Though separate meetings were held with academic and field mentors at different stages of action research majority of the time, some fellows managed to have a meeting with both the academic and field mentors, when necessary.

The concept of action research in the education setting was fairly new in the three countries. Therefore, fellows mentored school teachers in implementing the action research. Firstly, fellows conducted professional development sessions for teachers on the innovative approaches that will be implemented. Secondly, school teachers were guided in the implementations and assistance provided when required. Lastly, they held reflective discussion sessions with teachers.

5. Lessons Learned and Implications from the Mentoring Process

- Majority of the Mentoring sessions were conducted online, since the academic mentors are from TISS, India. Similarly, online mentoring sessions were held with field mentors, despite them being from the same country as fellows. However, in instances where fellows were from outer islands in Maldives, and in other remote areas of Nepal and Afghanistan, online mentoring was the only option. Nonetheless, the virtual mentoring sessions are more convenient for both parties due to their busy academic schedules and it is preferred. This implies that virtual mentoring works and should be practiced in the future.
- Some of the fellows do not have much research experience. Thus they struggled a bit during their action research. However, with the right guidance through mentoring received, fellows were able to successfully complete their action research. This indicates that mentoring is effective in enhancing one's skills and practices.
- There were some challenges in having two mentors, academic and field mentor to one fellow. There were instances where advice from both mentors did not align, mainly because the academic mentors were not from the same country as fellows and they did not really understand the country context. However, having two mentors also was at an advantage for them in terms of having one with expertise and one from the country context. Therefore, it is important for the mentors to have the relevant knowledge and understanding on the matter.
- Though virtual mentoring is effective and more convenient, there were few instances that fellows had a hard time to contact and schedule meetings with

academic mentors. The mentoring process to be successful there should be mutual respect and understanding between the two parties. It is, therefore, recommended to have a pre-planned and agreed schedule for mentoring.

- Many successful completions of action research from the SATE fellowship is proof that the mentoring done by fellows for school teachers worked well. This would not have been possible without the support and guidance from fellows. A practical implication stemming from this is that mentoring could be used in school settings to improve teachers' skills and practices related to teaching and learning.

6. Conclusion

The advice and guidance from the academic and field mentors was found to be extremely useful for the fellows, likewise for mentoring from fellows to school teachers. According to past studies, mentoring is found to be effective in enhancing one's professional development, more specifically to enhance pedagogical practices and as psychological support to manage the work with guidance from mentors. Although mentorship services are not available at the school level, the SATE fellowship confirms that online mentoring can be an effective option for sustainable teacher professional development.

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