



CASE STUDY

Journey of a Research Fellows in the South Asian Teacher Educators (SATE) Fellowship Programme

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

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JOURNEY OF A RESEARCH FELLOW IN THE SOUTH ASIAN TEACHER EDUCATORS (SATE) FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

I. Introduction

This case study is based on an interview with Afghanistan research fellow, Fazila Muruwat, and showcases her journey through the South Asia Teacher Educator (SATE) fellowship programme under the ‘A Multi-Model Approach to Teacher Professional Development in Low Resource Settings (MATPD) project. It highlights Fazila’s experiences during the fellowship, and how learning fresh approaches impacted her own professional development, improving her understanding of effective classroom teaching, and strengthening her leadership skills as a teacher educator.

II. Background

Fazila Muruwat obtained her master’s degree in teacher education from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai – India and holds a bachelor’s degree in science from Nangarhar University – Afghanistan. Fazila taught at Kunar Teachers Training College (TTC) and served as head of the TTC. She has worked as a lecturer at Kunar University in Afghanistan and has first-hand knowledge of the difficulties and limitations teachers in Afghanistan struggle with and understands the importance of continuous professional development. Currently, she works as an Education Technical Extender at UNICEF in Kunar province of Afghanistan. As a technical assistant in education, she works with local stakeholders, educators, and communities to implement projects that aim to create an improved quality of education. She supports teachers, organizes training programmes for teachers, and promotes new approaches to teaching.

III. The SATE Fellowship Programme

Fazila Muruwat was formally introduced by the Ministry of Education to the South Asia Teacher Educator (SATE) fellowship programme implemented by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) in Afghanistan. During the fellowship programme, she engaged in a diverse set of activities for her professional learning, including:

- Asynchronous distance teaching-learning courses on ICT, mentoring, and action research
- In-person and online one-week teacher professional development (TPD) workshop at in Kabul on concepts such as action research, mentoring, inclusion, TPD challenges and issues, the well-being of teachers, and exploring open educational resources (OERs).

- Practice-based collaborative action research with teachers to address local contextual issues.
- Mentoring experience as a mentee and mentor; she was mentored by a team of an academic mentor (TISS faculty) and a field mentor (SCA Education Programme) and transitioned into the role of mentoring the teachers she worked with for her action research project.
- Enrichment webinar sessions on various themes such as literature review, data collection and analysis, building rapport with teachers, classroom observations, etc. to help fellows with their action research project.
- Reflection sessions with the core project team to reflect on their action research and address challenges.

Despite the barriers and challenges posed by the current Taliban government on women's work, she was active as a participant, and successfully completed all fellowship tasks. She found the fellowship to be a good opportunity for teacher educators like her, in Afghanistan:

“I knew that this was the first attempt to implement Action Research in teachers’ education in low-resource environments. The SATE fellowship was fruitful in effective teacher professional development. It was also a chance to cooperate with teachers so that they could create links between content, pedagogy, and technology, and to improve one’s skills, knowledge, beliefs, and practice by making attempts and efforts”.

Furthermore, she also mentioned that, in order to motivate interest among the students in being involved in learning, it was important that the students were involved in the implementation of action research/research.

During the SATE fellowship, she got an opportunity to practice action research in girls’ schools in Kunar Province. The research experience enabled her to interactively explore different strategies of effective teaching and to adapt such teaching to the unique characteristics of the students. It enabled her to understand how research methods are implemented in the teaching of physics and their influence on physics learning.

The SATE fellowship programme offered Fazila an opportunity to introduce ICT and educational technology in her teaching. She experimented with new ways of utilizing technology in the classroom, which made learning interesting and interactive for her students. Educational technology tools/resources made her students more engaged in their study of physics and improved comprehension of physics concepts. Fazila learned how to use ICT so that there were better outcomes for her students.

Her involvement in the SATE fellowship increased Fazila’s professional growth by providing an opportunity to interact with a transnational community of practice from

India, Maldives, and Nepal. This global pool of educators engaged in collaborations, exchanged ideas, and shared their respective experiences from which to draw lessons. Interacting with other educators gave her a different viewpoint and enabled her to share ideas and expand her knowledge of good teaching methods.

IV. Learnings and Experiences

Fazila said that the SATE fellowship helped her evolve as a practitioner, as it enabled her to engage in Action Research across three girls' schools in the Kunar province of Afghanistan, working with eight teachers. She was able to experiment and evaluate teaching strategies aimed at improving physics learning by students. Secondly, the fellowship provided her with mentoring and also showed her the possibility of use of ICT in education. She adopted other new approaches, which enabled her to develop her skills and come up with innovative methods to involve her students.

“The SATE fellowship provided me the opportunities to grow personally and professionally in a low resource-setting country like Afghanistan in the field of education. The program provided me the opportunity to work in action research which is the key to teacher professional development, and the use of ICT in education which can help us in facilitating access to quality education in Afghanistan”.

Her action research was on Misconceptions of Students in Thermodynamics and Heat Transfer. She worked with teachers and students for two cycles of implementation. The key aspects and milestones of her journey in conducting action research include:

Cycle One:

Fazila started the first cycle of the action research implementation with the following activities.

Selection of Context and Area of Interest: Conducted practice-based action research that focused on three schools namely, Bibi Farima, Kerhala, and Nawabad Girls High Schools, which are located in Kunar province.

Meetings with Teachers: Meeting with eight physics teachers from the chosen schools each of whom had a Grade 8th class. Such meetings focused on highlighting the situation in teaching and learning.

Interviews with Teachers: In order to find out more about their opinions, perspectives, and knowledge about the issue, interviews were conducted with the selected teachers.

Classroom Observation: To this end, she visited the teacher's classrooms to gauge the level of understanding of the student's concerning thermodynamics and heat transfer as well as to identify misconceptions in the same subject.

Discussion with Teachers and Students: Fazila engaged in discussions and reflections with teachers and students to enhance her comprehension of the issues and promote collaborative learning.

Identification of Problems: Through these contacts and observations, she realized the misconceptions and peculiar challenges that the student encountered while comprehending the concepts of thermodynamic physics.

TPD Workshop: Upon completion of the first cycle, Fazila organized a Teacher Professional Development (TPD) workshop for the teachers. The workshop was centered around active teaching methods and offered basic ways of practicing TPD.

Cycle Two:

In cycle two, she continued with classroom observations and interventions where she worked closely with teachers and students in order to resolve the misconceptions and problems arising.

In addition, she developed upon the experience and findings of cycle one to help students participate and learn effectively in the classroom.

To enhance active learning among the pupils, Fazila applied different methods of teaching. Student participation was promoted through group discussions as well as the provision of questions for students' responses. To enhance participatory learning, the students were put in different groups to have discussions about various types of heat transfer processes that they could then explain.

She emphasized how one should relate concepts to real-life scenarios throughout the second cycle of action research. She aimed to make the subject of thermodynamics more approachable and interesting to students by relating it to practical scenarios.

Through working as a mentee (with academic and field mentors) and as a mentor (working with school teachers) in the fellowship programme, she learned about mentoring in the fellowship. Initially, Fazila did not have a clear distinction between mentoring and monitoring. Through the fellowship, she realized that mentoring is providing instructions, positive feedback, and solutions to teaching practice problems.

Additionally, she stated that reflection was critical in her career growth during the fellowship. It helped her to learn from past mistakes and improve the practice of teaching, mentorship, and research.

“It is like a mirror someone sees and observes their own performances and sees the effectiveness and the points that should be improved, So, it is also an interesting way of improving the practices”.

The other crucial component of the fellowship was the meaningful use of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) in Education. According to Fazila, appropriate utilization of ICT would be useful in developing and improving teacher educators'

professional development. She emphasized that pedagogical and technological knowledge should be combined to establish the link between content and learning techniques. The integrations will contribute to improved educational experience among teachers and students.

V. Challenges Encountered during the Fellowship Programme

During the fellowship programme Fazila faced different challenges due to the low resource context, closure of girls' schools and ban on women's work by the De Facto Authority (DFA) in Afghanistan.

“Being a woman in the education field comes with its own set of barriers in Afghanistan, but how to overcome these barriers, especially in low resource setting countries where education is the only way to success, through programs like SATE fellowship we can overcome the challenges”.

Due to the DFA decision on the closure of schools for girls beyond grade six, the implementation of action research was challenging in the school for Fazila. She used a creative approach that enabled her to work with secondary-level teachers and students for her action research project. She organized work opportunities partially in the school (inviting students informally to school) and mostly outside the school with teachers and students.

It was not easy for her to use TTC facilities or get support from other colleagues in fulfilling the assignments that were part of the fellowship programme, because no woman teacher educator was allowed to visit the office due to a ban policy for women. Despite these challenges, Fazila was able to make some progress with support from SCA and support from her family members. Fazila was able to surmount all these barriers to successfully run through her fellowship program with the help of others and her own initiatives.

“Despite the social and cultural barriers for women in Afghanistan currently the Taliban government banned women from work and education, programs like SATE fellowship helped us to use ICT in education, make online educator’s communities from different countries for teacher professional development, and conduct action researches as a key component in changing believe attitude and skills of teachers and students”.

Ms. Fazila also mentioned particular challenges women experience in this area such as the shortage of ICT resources including digital libraries, access to high schools, colleges, and universities, and TPD programmes for women. Her resilience despite these barriers was evident in her flexibility in collecting data and involving and working with students and teachers under constraining circumstances.

VI. Conclusion

The SATE fellowship changed the professional life of Fazila. Despite the challenges caused by school closures and restricted education and work opportunities for women, she persevered in pursuit of knowledge. Completing two cycles of action research, she was also successful in bringing about positive changes to the teacher's capacities in the teaching and learning process. Through this fellowship programme, she gained important knowledge in mentoring, ICT, and reflective learning practices for professional development. Using digital tools and alternative ways, Fazila overcame her obstacles and showed that she was really committed to enhancing the student's learning experience.

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