



From Blueprint to Building: How Headquarters Scaffold Mentor Teacher Program Implementation in Schools of India

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ABSTRACT

The mentor teacher program introduced by several state governments in India, has emerged as a promising approach to improve the quality of education in government schools. The Directorate of Education (DoE), Delhi launched the Mentor Teacher Program (MTP) in 2016 as a key initiative to enhance teacher quality and student learning. The program identifies and trains selected teachers as Mentor Teachers (MTs) who support and guide other teachers in their assigned schools. This paper examines the critical role played by the headquarters in ensuring the effective implementation of the mentor teacher program across diverse school settings.

Keywords: Mentor Teacher Program, Mentoring, Implementation, Headquarter, School.

Introduction

Researchers believe that mentoring can be a valuable process in educational reform for beginning teachers as well as veteran teachers (Ganser, 1996). Supporting beginning teachers at the outset contributes to better learning by the students. Formalising the role of mentor for experienced teachers creates another niche in the career ladder for teachers and contributes to the professionalism of education. Without this focus on professional improvement for teachers, some researchers believe that educational reform efforts will eventually fail (Dilworth and Imig, 1995). In recent years, many state governments in India launched the mentor teacher program as a key strategy to enhance teaching and learning outcomes in their school system. For example, the Delhi Directorate of Education (DoE) launched the Mentor Teacher Program (MTP) in 2016 as a key initiative to enhance teacher quality and student learning (DoE circular dated 29/02/16) and mentioned the key aspects of the program including tasks of mentor teachers, new learning opportunities available to them and also the selection process of 200 teachers as Mentor Teachers who were given the responsibility to support and guide other teachers in their assigned schools (cluster of 5-10 schools) which they had to visit weekly to observe classes, provide feedback to teachers and provide best possible coaching to TDCs to improve their teaching skills (TDC Program: An Evaluative Study, 2019). The core idea behind this program is to leverage the expertise and leadership of experienced, creative, innovative, high-performing, teachers to provide on-site academic support and guidance to their peers in other schools.

The program operates through a three-tier system at the headquarters, district, and school levels where MTs act as a bridge between the government and schools, bringing feedback from schools to the government and communicating the government's directions to schools (Indian Express Updated Nov.22, 2022). The objective of the program is clear from the letter of the Deputy CM which was written to encourage TGTs/PGTs (Post Graduate Teachers) to join the Mentor Teachers' Group (MTG) to strengthen the academic and pedagogical capacities of other teachers by utilising the expertise of motivated and dynamic educators. The program offered mentor teacher group members opportunities to develop their own skills while supporting colleagues through workshops and on-site assistance (DoE Circular dated 29/02/16).

In this research paper, we are highlighting the role of Headquarters in implementation of the Mentor Teacher Program from issuing calls for volunteers to establishing the overall program framework at the headquarters level and facilitating the formation of the Mentor Teacher Group by recruiting volunteers from schools and giving them various opportunities to develop their skills. The implementation at such a large-scale, decentralised program poses significant challenges. This paper also argues that the headquarters addressed

these challenges to some extent and thus played a crucial role in the implementation of the mentor teacher program.

Sampling and Methodology

This research employed a qualitative approach, utilising semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders concerned with the Mentor Teacher Program. All the participants who gave their consent for an interview were contacted. A convenient sampling method was used and data was collected with the help of semi-structured interview schedule from key stakeholders at all three levels of the Mentor Teacher Program: Education Minister; Director SCERT; Principal Advisor to Director Education; Two DDEs of the Directorate of Education, Three DIET Principals, Five SCERT/ DIET Coordinators; Ten Head of Schools; and two Focus Group Discussions were conducted with Mentor Teachers. The participants were both male and female and had varying experiences in administration, teaching, and mentoring.

Interviews were conducted, recorded, transcribed, and analysed. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and patterns in the data, highlighting the various ways in which the headquarters played crucial in the successful implementation of the Mentor Teacher Program. During the analysis, themes were identified as representative of the qualitative findings and were exemplified with quotes from the interviews in the subsequent descriptions of the findings. In each category, researchers found various challenges faced at every level and the steps taken to overcome those challenges. It was found that some challenges still need to be focussed and required to be overcome in the near future. These insights for improvement are also suggested by the researchers with scope for improvement in its successful implementation.

Findings:

The Role of Head Quarter - Without careful planning, support, and goal setting, formal mentoring programs are “destined to fail” (Hansley, 1990). Four major tasks that schools and districts must deal with in starting a mentoring program are: (1) selecting and training individuals to serve as mentors; (2) matching mentors with protégés; (3) setting goals and expectations; and (4) establishing the mentoring program (Janas, 1996). The Directorate of Education, Delhi and SCERT Delhi at headquarters level has set the stage for implementation of the program and develops plans to successfully carry out these functions:-

- **Establishing the Mentoring Program:** Planning of the development of the mentoring program was initiated in 2015 when the Delhi Education Minister along with the Educational Advisor of the Director of Education decided to start this new initiative to institutionalise the form of on-site support, enhance teacher quality and student learning in Delhi government schools. To establish the program, the three-tier system involved, roles, reporting, and review systems for mentor teachers are decided and explained in detail in DoE Circular dated 23/05/2018. It includes some important points like:

a) Mentor Teachers (MT) shall continue to be on the rolls of the schools to which they are currently posted. The school to which they are currently posted shall treat them "On Headquarters Duty."

b) The Mentor Teachers (including those assigned to Specific Projects) shall report to the OSD (MT) at the School Branch of DoE.

c) OSD (Mentor Teacher Programme) shall be the reporting officer for Annual Performance Assessment Report (APAR) and the concerned DoE (Zone) shall be the reviewing authority.

d) The Mentor Teachers must maintain a diary/register of observations suggestions and action taken by their mentee schools. They must share about the progress made by the schools during review meetings.

e) Based on their observations and inputs from schools, the MTs will prepare training modules and facilitate the SCERT organised workshops for teachers on improving their content and pedagogy knowledge.

- **Rigorous Selection:** Key to the success of any mentoring program is the competence of the mentor who must possess the expertise, commitment, and time to assist novice teachers (Stan Koki, 1997). There is no fixed rule about which traits or circumstances are most critical in a given mentoring situation (Gray and Gray, 1985). Freedman (1993) reports that the most frequently mentioned characteristic of effective mentors is a willingness to nurture another person. So, individuals recruited as mentors should be people-oriented, open-minded, flexible, empathetic, and collaborative. Asking for volunteer mentors is an effective way of recruiting mentors (Stan Koki, 1997). The Directorate of Education set up an selection process by first inviting applications from teachers to apply for the role of Mentor Teachers for every term and then identifying the most suitable mentor teachers from the pool of applicants. The criteria for shortlisting Mentor Teachers include the suitability of the applicants for the role of Mentor Teacher assessed through their participation in various group and individual activities during the workshop and district-wise required number of Mentor Teachers i.e. about 1 Mentor Teacher for 5 schools (DoE Circular dated 15/03/2016). The shortlisted teachers go through a meticulous selection process to identify highly motivated and skilled teachers for the MT role. This involved personality assessments, interviews, individual activities, and group discussions to ensure the selected mentors possess the right mix of pedagogical expertise, leadership skills, and a growth mindset, ensuring a pool of qualified mentors with the potential to inspire and guide their colleagues. Furthermore, the headquarters designed and delivered

comprehensive training programs to equip the mentor teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively coach and support their peers.

- **Targeted Training:** Mentors are enrolled in an ongoing mentoring training program like training in communication and active listening techniques, relationship skills, effective teaching, models of supervision and coaching, conflict resolution, and problem-solving etc (Head, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall, 1992). Through their participation in professional learning communities fostered by mentor education, mentor teachers not only develop as mentors but also experience growth and change in their teaching (Arnsby, Aspfors, & Jacobson, 2023). The State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) provided comprehensive training for Mentor Teachers. The training focused not only on pedagogical knowledge but also on crucial coaching skills and effective feedback mechanisms to equip them to become successful mentors who can empower their peers. The training modules covered other areas such as instructional strategies, data analysis, and school management. Apart from SCERT, it was managed that they get the best training organised by various reputed institutions like IIT, RELO, British Council etc. The skills and knowledge gained, such as in areas of communication, relationships, and reflective practice, are transferable and applied by teachers in their classrooms and broader school contexts (Arnsby, Aspfors, & Jacobson, 2023).

- **Providing Ongoing Support and Program Management:** The headquarters maintain regular communication and coordination with the mentor teachers deployed across the district through a dedicated team at SCERT, along with Program Managers in each District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) who provide ongoing support and monitor program progress to ensure consistency in implementation and address any emerging challenges faced by the Mentor Teachers. This includes organising periodic review meetings, facilitating peer-learning sessions, and addressing the challenges faced by the mentors in the field. The headquarters also develops comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track the progress of the mentor teacher program. This involves collecting and analysing data on various indicators such as teacher attendance, student learning outcomes, and school improvement plans. The insights from this data are then used to refine the program's strategies and provide targeted support to different schools.

- **Setting Goals and Expectations:** The importance of setting goals and expectations for the mentoring program cannot be overemphasised (Janas, 1996). Clear goals and expectations must be articulated that are specific to both the types of mentorships to be developed and what is intended to be accomplished (Freedman and Jaffe, 1993). Roles and functions to be served by the mentor are clearly stated in the DoE Circular dated 08/07/2016. It also includes administrative arrangements for Mentor Teachers and specific functions of Mentor Teachers to be performed like Mentor Teachers regularly visit their assigned schools, provide academic support to the teachers of that school, and explain the concept of Chunauti 2018 to teachers. The Head of the school to which the mentor teachers are assigned are required to maintain an attendance sheet/ register, in lieu of the Mentor Teacher, the planning branch of the Directorate of Education, Delhi (DoE) shall appoint a guest teacher to the schools of current posting at the earliest, etc.

Later activities of Mentor Teachers are summarised in DoE Circular dated 22/11/2017 i.e., apart from their capacity-building sessions and directly supporting the teachers in their assigned schools, Mentor Teachers are also involved in the creation of support material (Pragati series and online training modules) and conducting workshops for other teachers, they attend monthly sessions under Principal Leadership program organised by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). They are also assisting the Exam branch in preparing the question papers for class 6 to 8 for Summative Assessment 1 and Summative Assessment 2. They are engaged in Teacher Development Coordinators (TDCs) capacity development and feedback workshops. The summarisation of activities in circular form, shows that headquarters not only focuses on setting goals and expectations but also keeps an eye on the tasks accomplished by the Mentor Teachers.

- **Incentives given to Mentor Teachers:** Various incentives are given to MTs to attract best teachers to join this programme like:

- a) They will be a part of the learning enhancement workshops on different training methodologies, teaching practices, and onsite support techniques regularly.

- b) They will be sent on an exposure trip to observe the best practices of teaching and learning in different parts of India or abroad.

- c) It was not possible to put them on a deputation basis being in the same department so they are kept on diverted capacity so that they will be designated as Non-Vacation Staff and thus entitled for thirty days Earned Leave per year.

- d) They will be working for 40 hours a week with the second Saturday off. Working hours would be flexible depending upon the timing of allotted schools (DoE Circular dated 10/03/2016).

- **Fostering a Culture of Collaboration and Innovation:** The headquarters tried to cultivate a collaborative and innovative environment within the mentor teacher program. This included creating platforms for mentor teachers to share best practices, discuss challenges, and develop solutions together. The headquarters also encouraged the mentor teachers to experiment with new pedagogical approaches and engage in action research to address the unique needs of their schools. The successful innovations were then documented and disseminated across the program to promote cross-learning and scale-up.

- **Huge amount of inter-institutional collaboration:** For the implementation of Mentor Teacher program, Directorate of Education, Delhi and NGOs/ private sector organisations work on the same platform e.g. The selection criteria for the first batch of mentor teachers were developed in collaboration with the Creatnet Education and later STIR Education along with the Creatnet Education members are also engaged in the MT interviews. After the selection of mentor teachers, DoE invited several NGOs to conduct training of mentor teachers on various aspects like mentoring, feedback, subject-specific training. Higher authorities proudly mention that now our education system is not deprived of the best practices being adopted by private players as it is very essential to have a mutual collaboration and understanding of public-private partnership to provide the best quality in the education system. Moreover, Mentor teachers are sent to different states during national exposure visits. Most of those programs were led by NGOs (Booklet AAP).
- **Aligning the Program with Broader Education Reforms:** The headquarters tried that the mentor teacher program is closely aligned with the state's broader education reform agenda. This involved integrating the program's objectives and activities with other initiatives, such as various curriculum development and their implementation like Deshbhakti Curriculum, Happiness Curriculum, and Entrepreneurship Curriculum etc. By maintaining this strategic alignment, the headquarters is able to leverage the mentor teachers as change agents who could facilitate the implementation of the larger education reform efforts at the school level.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Developing a system to monitor program effectiveness across all levels is to be done at all levels which demands careful planning. This encompasses designing evaluation metrics, collecting data from MTs, TDCs, and participating teachers, and establishing a mechanism to analyse this vast amount of information. An OSD for Mentor Teacher Program has been deputed by the Directorate of Education to lead the Mentor Teachers. He supervises their work and helps them with corrective measures in teaching methodologies. He also acts as a liaison officer between the Directorate of Education and the State Council of Educational Research & Training. However, the function to monitor program implementation and success was not done in true spirit at all levels as no evaluation metrics to collect data has been developed till date.

Challenges faced at Headquarters level and Steps taken to overcome those challenges:

The Delhi Mentor Teacher Program (MT Program), despite its success, has grappled with various administrative hurdles throughout its implementation. Here's an exploration of potential challenges faced:

- Though Mentor Teachers were given various opportunities for their professional growth like attending national and international training programs but no financial aid was provided to them though they spend their own money to travel to different places and perform various tasks assigned to them. As said by Education Minister, "Securing sufficient funding for the program's long-term sustainability was a concern to encourage participation and recognise their valuable contribution."

So, apart from providing them an opportunity to attend various training programs from institutions of national repute, every mentor was given Rs. 20,000 to purchase books, e-books, Journals, Periodicals, Research papers and membership of reputed research institutions and reputed library societies etc based on their needs (DoE Circular dated 24/02/2022). The objective of this grant was to enrich the academic leaders in the Education Department of Delhi government with the latest developments in the field of education across the world. Further, to scale up their skills as leaders and mentors, a culture of continuous reading and learning was promoted which would ultimately transform into quality education in the Govt. schools of DoE. The Mentor Teacher attended training at NIE Singapore (SCERT, Delhi Circular dated 22/06/2017). The result shows that it influenced those teachers who would not have considered taking mentor teacher program to take it as there was a drastic increase in number of applicants (more than three times) in 2021 -23 session i.e. 390 from 121 in 2019 - 21 session.

- Streamlining communication and collaboration between the three levels (Headquarter, District and School) to ensure program implementation and teachers' apprehensiveness about additional workload was the biggest challenge for Directorate of Education, Delhi.

The Nodal Officer of the Mentor Teacher Program, played an important role in streamlining communication and collaboration between the three levels and ensured smooth program implementation. In the words of Educational Advisor to the Director of Education, "The Mentor Teacher Program's success hinged on the exceptional leadership of the Nodal Officer as he streamlined communication and collaboration between the program's three levels." The Educational Advisor to the Director of Education elaborated, praising the Nodal Officer's dedication: "He has revitalized the program through his personal investment. He led the team admirably, treating the mentor teachers 'like family'. This had both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, his strong sense of personal connection drew out the best in most mentors. However, this same investment may have caused him to overlook some shortcomings. The Advisor added, "There's room for improvement in how the program can further develop and nurture new talent."

- Teachers selected for mentor teachers were deputed to the Special Task Force (STF), School Branch, Directorate of Education Headquarters on diverted capacity which created a vacancy for that subject teacher in school creating a gap in the classroom and causing several issues: the curriculum got slowed down, potentially affecting the entire class's pace of learning and remaining teachers need to take on additional responsibilities, impacting their own teaching time. Guest Teachers were assigned to take over the classes left vacant. However, a significant issue arose that the guest teachers assigned were not specialists in the subjects

that the mentor teachers taught. This mismatch created several problems for the Head of School (HoS) and the overall functioning of the school.

- No Scaling Up - The program should motivate the Directorate of Education to consider expanding it to a larger group of teachers or different grade levels but here Directorate of Education failed as few mentor teachers are added every year in this new journey as 205 mentors were selected in the beginning for 2016 to 2018 session whereas only 86 and 41 mentors were selected for 2018 to 2020 and 2019 to 2021 sessions respectively. The Directorate of Education, Delhi needs to carefully consider factors like ensuring adequate resources available to support a larger program, and adapting monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to accommodate the increased number of participants.
- Data-Driven Decision Making - Regular monitoring and evaluation of the program provide data that can inform educational policy decisions within the DoE but such data collection is missing in monitoring and evaluation.
- Equal opportunities were not given to all subject mentor teachers, for example, in comparison to other subject teachers mentor teachers of English got more opportunities to attend training programs from internationally recognised institutions like Regional English Language Office (RELO), US Embassy.
- Integration with Broader Education Reforms - Mentors had to align their efforts with broader education reforms and initiatives to maximise their impact. By addressing these potential administrative challenges throughout the program lifecycle, the Delhi government was able to ensure the implementation of the Mentor Teacher Program. Mentor teachers were trained to have close coordination with other stakeholders and a deep understanding of the education policy landscape was developed among them sharing the reasons and benefits of new educational reforms so that they can share these at a ground level resulting in the successful implementation of educational reforms.
- Fostering a Culture of Collaboration - Individual mentors faced difficulties in expanding their reach due to limited conventional techniques like through posters, organising meetings. But mentors had to create a culture of collaboration and peer learning among teachers, encouraging them to share best practices and support each other in their professional development.

To fulfill the purpose of creating a culture of collaboration and peer learning among teachers, all mentor-teachers were trained about the use of social media effectively and their accounts were opened on 'X' previously known as Twitter where they could share the best practices of different schools and motivate teachers to learn from them. It also involved creating a network of committed teachers, who used technology and became a part of a culture of learning and collaboration.

Conclusion

The findings of this research highlight the pivotal role played by the headquarters in the successful implementation of the mentor teacher program across diverse school settings. The headquarters' focus on rigorous selection, comprehensive training, ongoing support, fostering collaboration and aligning the program with broader reforms has been instrumental in driving the program's impact and sustainability but some important challenges still need to be overcome in the near future. As the state government continues to invest in the mentor teacher program, it is crucial that the headquarters function is strengthened to ensure the program's long-term success and its ability to transform the quality of education in government schools.

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