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In-service advisors as action researchers

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To build the capacity of In Service Advisors (ISA), the link agent between the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Education (NIE) at the center, and the teacher at school, through action research (AR), a project was started in 2007. Twenty five ISA's from different subject areas were selected from a group of 100 applicants for a newspaper advertisement. The layout and the strength of the content of the bio data sent by applicants and marks gained for an assignment completed by applicants were used as the selection criteria. ISA's visited the NIE on three occasions to gain theoretical knowledge on AR and to refine their AR reports. They sensed the problems for AR and found facts about the identified problems at their Zonal or Divisional education level work places. They reflected on the selected problems to develop action plans that can be implemented flexibly in their working environments. In the process, the practitioner-based problem identification techniques, their competencies in interpreting their own professional roles and contextual influence on ISA on the process of AR could be identified. The impact of implemented action plans was assessed using qualitative criteria. The capacity of ISAs in identifying problems and preparation of plans as remedial measures was depicted by interventions of AR, ranging from 'zonal level general intervention plans' to 'teacher focused specific remedial measures'. Necessity of a zonal and school specific diversified and creative role, free from existing monotonous office work was felt by the ISAs. They were able to explore hidden patterns of their own professional practice and could unblock the areas of their capacity in their respective subject areas. AR programmes revealed the need for ISAs to be innovative practitioners rather than merely acting as a link agent to transmit centralized curriculum content piecemeal from center to periphery. AR suggests the need for identifying new techniques and strategies in implementing curriculum at zonal / school level using AR process, rather than conveying the content directly to the teachers. The necessity of being a researcher and a reflective practitioner to identify specific problems based on data and generic to schools was confirmed by the research series. The importance of grass root level modifications in implementing the centralized curriculum to achieve the national goals and objectives too was confirmed.

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