

# Issues on Implementing Lesson Study in Bangladesh Context

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## Abstract

Japanese lesson study, a teacher-led, school-based continuing, professional development approach, has been widely practiced in different countries in Asia, Africa and North America for teachers' professional skill development. A decade before, it was adopted as a means of teachers' professional skills development in Bangladesh as on a pilot basis. By experiencing real lesson study in a Japanese's context, as well as a JICA technical support team member of lesson study in Bangladesh, the researcher is interested in exploring issues on implementation lesson study in a Bangladesh context. The study aims to explore the factors that support or hinder the implementation of lesson study in the Bangladesh context. A qualitative research design was employed to carry out this study. Data were gathered from participants' group discussion notes in a workshop of various stakeholders regarding lesson study along with semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically. The study revealed that time, teachers' workloads and perceptions of teaching observations are the main constraints. The lack of awareness of professional development and the examination-oriented culture rooted in the education system are the main challenges in implementing lesson study. The study also indicated that the lesson study provides a promising scope and opportunity for the teachers to collaborate, discuss and share their teaching experiences towards qualitatively improving a lesson.

Keywords: Lesson Study, Teachers' Professional Development, Qualitative Research Design, Bangladesh.

## Introduction

Japanese Lesson study is a teacher-led, school-based, collaborative professional development approach that aims to enhance teaching and learning through the methodology of professional sharing of practice (Burghes & Robinson, 2009). It was devised as a tool for teachers' professional

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development in Japan more than 100 years ago and has come under increasing attention from educators in the West and throughout Southeast Asia since it was revealed outside Japan through the release of the TIMSS Video Study (Stigler, Gonzalez, Kawanaka, Knoll, & Serrano, 1999) and Yoshida's doctoral dissertation (Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004). This form of professional development is no longer restricted to Japan. Mathematics lesson study groups have formed in the United States for over ten years and now numbers more than eight hundred. In the United Kingdom, there has been growing interest in, and government support for, Lesson Study as a powerful form of professional development (see, for example, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008). Lesson Study has also been introduced in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia (White & Lim, 2008), as well as in South America, South Africa (Ono & Ferreira, 2010), and Australia (Hollingsworth & Oliver, 2005). China also has a long history of improving teaching and learning through school-based professional learning communities named Teacher Research Groups (Yang, 2009). Now it is a widely held perception and belief that this would impact teachers, and in turn, change and enhance their practices.

The National Education Policy 2010 in Bangladesh emphasized several issues in the country's educational system to be reformed. One of the major issues was the quality of teachers', which is closely related to professional development. To overcome the deficiencies and weaknesses of teachers' teaching, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) has been conducting various in-service programs and courses aiming to improve teachers' teaching knowledge, skills and competencies. A decade earlier, lesson study was adopted as a means of teachers' professional skills development in Bangladesh on a pilot basis. Having a positive and encouraging result of the pilot program, with technical support from JICA Support Program, it is being conducted in the primary teacher training program under the direct supervision of the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE). However, the status of implementing lesson study practices at the school level is not up to the required standards. The lack of continuity and support for the teachers in their professional development were argued to not have produced an effective change in teaching (Loucks-Horsley, Stiles & Hewson, 1996). Therefore, it is important to analyze the situational context and identify the issues that might have influenced the effectiveness of the in-service program like '*lesson study*' conducted for teachers in Bangladesh.

The researcher is interested in exploring issues on implementing lesson study in Bangladesh. Specifically, this study aims to explore the factors affecting the smooth implementation of lesson study in school-level contexts.

## Methodology

A qualitative research design was employed to carry out this study. It is known that qualitative research is able to provide rich and deep understanding of social phenomena compared to quantitative research (Silverman, 2005; Mils & Huberman, 1994). The focus group method as suggested by Kitzinger (1995) was mainly used to collect data. This method was appropriate to capture participants' experiences and views regarding specific issues, such as 'lesson study implementation at school level'. Focus group data collection methods is the most suitable for types of studies where multiple perspectives need to be obtained regarding the same problem. In addition, a semi-structured interview suggested by Yin (1994) and Creswell (2003) was adopted to focus on certain aspects of interest that were relevant and important for this study.

## Setting and Data Source

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Bangladesh, organised a Kick-off and Planning Workshop at the National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE) in 2017. The main objectives of the workshop were two-fold: To understand the basic concept and philosophy of lesson study and to develop an effective plan of implementing lesson study at the school level. The three-day workshop was conducted in two batches from 07–09 and 11–13 February 2017. Various stakeholders from 10 sample <sup>1)</sup>Upazilla under 10 Districts related to primary education including 10 policy level officers [Directorate of Primary Education, (DPE)], one district level officer [District Primary Education Officer, DPEO], 68 field level officers [Upazilla Education Officer (UEO) and Assistant Upazilla Education Officer (AUEO)], 20 head teachers, one Primary Teacher Training Institute (PTI) superintendent, eight Upazilla Resources Center (URC) instructors and 14 NAPE specialists participated in this workshop (Table 1).

The workshop consisted of eight sessions, which covered various topics that included: concept and philosophy of lesson study, examples of the different approaches of lesson study, experience of lesson study in Bangladesh, problem and situational analysis of teaching and learning issues in each area, identifying the roles of each stakeholder to implement lesson study, identifying particular issues related to teachers' professional needs to be solved through lesson study, identifying the linkage of lesson study with the Teacher Education Development (TED) program and developing a lesson study implementation plan in each Upazilla.

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1) Upazilla is the third administrative unit of the county after division and district. There are 490 Upazillas in Bangladesh.

**Table 1:** Demography of the participants

Batch & date	Sample Upazilla	Participants category								Total
		Head Teacher (HT)	AUEO	UEO	URC Inst.	DEP officers	DPEO	PTI Sup.	NAPE specialist	
1 <sup>st</sup> Batch 07-09 February, 2017	Barisal, Bogura, Comilla, Chittagong, Gazipur	10	27	5	3	5	1	1	7	59
2 <sup>nd</sup> Batch 11-13 February, 2017	Mymensingh, Jessor, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Sylhet	10	33	3	5	5	0	0	7	63
<b>Total</b>		20	60	8	8	10	1	1	14	<b>122</b>

The data for this study were gathered from the session number four- the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the three-day workshop- participants' group discussion notes. The discussion topic was conceptual and implementation linkage of lesson study among teacher Education Development Programs (TED). After describing the basic ideas of Teacher Education Development through Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development programs, the participants, in groups, were guided to identify the challenges of implementing lesson study at the school level, and how to address those challenges. Altogether there were 16 groups in two batches. Each group consisted of 7-8 members. The time allotted for the group discussion and summary presentations were four hours (9:00~1:00 pm). Group discussion notes from 16 groups were collected and preserved for further analysis. In order to obtain more detailed views regarding implementing issues on lesson study, the researcher purposively chose 10 head teachers (five from each batch coded as T1, T2 ... T10) out of 20 for interview. During the interview, teachers were asked to respond to the following questions:

- What are your views regarding lesson study for teachers' professional development?
- What are the challenges you think to be faced at school level for implementing lesson study?
- As a head teacher of a school, how will you address those challenges?

The duration for each of the interview lasted about 15 minutes. It was audio-taped and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

## Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis is an on-going process in qualitative research (Creswell, 2003). The researcher performed the roles of a resources person as well as a workshop facilitator. He tried to engage the participants to generate an implementable model of lesson study at the school level. During the workshop, the groups were guided to focus and conceptualize key emerging issues, in particular, the constraints and challenges to implement lesson study. The researcher reviewed group discussion notes and interview transcripts several times to synthesize the information in order to obtain a general idea that reflected the whole study as suggested by Creswell (2003). In reality, each group's note and interview transcripts were read repeatedly until the ideas were clearly understood. The qualitative research stresses on the findings from empirical data (Richards, 2005), the researcher, thus, focused on data related to research questions were identified and gathered as codes. At this step, relevant and appropriate quotes and words from each note and transcript was extracted and placed under major themes of the research questions. In this process, some data were reduced in importance if deemed irrelevant in the view of the researcher.

As the quotes and words relevant to each theme were extracted, domains initially began to emerge from the data. The quotes were then re-examined whether they appropriately fit the domain when new ones were created. In reality, many of the domains were interrelated and could not be clearly distinguished. Moreover, data from the two sources were compared, analyzed and contrasted to enhance its reliability. The cross-case analysis allowed the researcher to identify and conceptualize the emerging themes from the study. Since this study is qualitative, and thus interpretative in nature, the researcher explained the findings on personal views on each theme and quoted directly from the interviews.

## Results

### *Issues on Implementing Lesson Study*

Altogether, the participants of the study identified 10 most crucial issues on implementing lesson study at a school level in Bangladesh. They are categorized into (a) school-based factors and (b) teacher-related factors (Table 2). The school based factors include time constraint, tight class schedule, teacher shortage, pressure on covering syllabus, teachers' workload, supportive environment while teacher-related factors are lack of teaching knowledge and confidence, culture of lesson observation, unable to identify the lesson study problem, traditional attitude of professional development. The results were organized according to category of the factors with direct quotations selected from

interview responses of the participants regarding each factor.

**Table 2:** School and teachers related factors effect on lesson study implementation by group and interview

Category	Factors	Derived from no. group (%)	Confirmed by the no. of HT (%)
School- based	Time constraints	16 (100)	10 (100)
	Tight class schedule	14 (87.5)	9 (90)
	Teacher shortage	10 (62)	8 (80)
	Pressure on covering syllabus	16 (100)	10 (100)
	Workload / Class load	16 (100)	10 (100)
	Lack of supportive environment	10 (62)	6 (60)
Teacher-related	Lack of teaching knowledge and confidence	16 (100)	10 (100)
	Culture of lesson observation	15 (93.7)	9 (90)
	Unable to identifying issues on Lesson Study	16 (100)	10 (100)
	Traditional attitude of professional development	13 (81.25)	7 (70)

### (a) School-based factors

#### *Time constraint*

Time constraint was restated and depicted by all the 16 groups' discussion notes (Table 2). This finding was confirmed with the interview results. Ten out of ten teachers raised the issue regarding time as a crucial factor for practicing lesson study. From the analysis, it was inferred to be a major constraint for lesson study implementation at the school level. As quoted by the teachers 1, 2, and 3 from the 1st batch and teachers 6, 7, and 10 from the 2nd batch:

*... we don't have time, we have to do many other things such as, vaccination, updating voter list, participating and organizing teaching aids fair, surveys and other professional training and so on (interview 1<sup>st</sup> batch: 08/02 & 2<sup>nd</sup> batch: 12/02)*

#### *Tight class schedule*

Having a tight class schedule was reiterated and summarized by the 14 groups (Table 2). It was confirmed by the interview results. Nine out of ten participant head teachers recognized tight class schedule as a constraint factor for implementing lesson study. As quoted by the teachers:

*... there is no scope for giving extra time to do lesson study because from January to December there is no room for doing any other things: January will completely spend to giving new textbook, making class routine, and so on, from February to March we have to take class and will have 1<sup>st</sup> quarter examination (interview teacher T2 1<sup>st</sup> batch: 08/02 & teacher T6, 2<sup>nd</sup> batch: 12/02)*

#### *Shortage of teachers*

Ten groups recognized teacher shortage as a constraint factor for lesson study implementation (Table

2). It was confirmed by the interview findings. Eight out of ten participant head teachers identified teacher shortage as an important impeding factor for school level lesson study implementation. As quoted by the teachers:

*... if one teacher participates lesson study, we may stop his/her classes, we don't have extra teachers who can be replaced while one can take part in lesson study (interview teacher T4 1<sup>st</sup> batch: 08/02 & teacher T8, 2<sup>nd</sup> batch: 12/02)*

#### **Pressure on covering syllabus**

The participants of the all 16 groups depicted 'syllabus covering' as a vital impeding factor for the lesson study implementation at school level (Table 2). This group consensus was confirmed by all the participant teachers (10) of the interview. As quoted by the teachers:

*... look if we don't cover the syllabus, I mean teaching everything of the syllabus, the students will not do better in the exam, you know, 'the name and fame' of our school depends on the results (interview teacher T3 1<sup>st</sup> batch: 08/02 & teacher T7, 2<sup>nd</sup> batch: 12/02)*

#### **Teacher's workload**

Heavy workload was restated and depicted by all 16 group discussion notes (Table 2). This finding was confirmed with the interview results. Ten out of ten teachers raised the issue regarding workload as crucial factor for practicing lesson study. As quoted by the teachers:

*... besides scheduled classes a primary school teachers have to do many other non-teaching task: the administration reports and paperwork which have to be submitted to the educational authorities periodically. Not only that every government development works primary teachers involve: child survey, casting vote from local to national, birth registration, yard meeting, and so on (interview teacher T3 1<sup>st</sup> batch: 08/02 & teacher T7, 2<sup>nd</sup> batch: 12/02)*

#### **Lack of supportive environment**

Ten out of 16 groups reiterated and depicted 'supportive environment' as a vital limiting factor for the lesson study implementation at school level (Table 2). Six participants teachers raised the issue regarding environment as crucial factor for practicing lesson study. As quoted by the teachers:

*... So far it is known that there is need for extra place for teacher to plan the research lesson, and discussion, but we don't have even our sitting place, the room for teacher is so crowded, I think it's not a supportive environment for lesson study (interview teacher T5 1<sup>st</sup> batch: 08/02 & teacher T9, 2<sup>nd</sup> batch: 12/02)*

### **(b) Teacher-related factors**

#### **Lack of teaching knowledge and confidence**

Teachers' teaching knowledge and confidence was restated and depicted as a constraint factor by all the 16 groups' discussion notes (Table 2). All teachers interviewed confirmed this finding. As quoted by the teachers:

*... Lesson study undoubtedly an outstanding technique for teacher's professional development, but due to teacher's mentality it may not successful, Most of the young teachers don't have confidence to share their experience with others (interview teacher T4 1<sup>st</sup> batch: 08/02 & teacher T10, 2<sup>nd</sup> batch: 12/02)*

It is speculated that teachers who lacked teaching knowledge and confidence felt threatened and perceived the lesson planning, demonstration lesson, and the discussion as a challenge that could undermine their credibility. In short, the whole process of lesson study (plan-do-see) could expose their weaknesses to their peers and this was threatening to them.

### ***Culture of lesson observation***

Teachers usually take part in lesson study to improve their teaching skills. They learn from each phase of the lesson study cycle. They learn through making lesson plans, conducting lessons, observing lessons and discussing after lessons. However, participants of this study viewed the lesson demonstration and post lesson discussion as a constraint for them. Fifteen out of 16 groups raised the issue during their discussion. It was again confirmed by the nine participant head teachers. As quoted by the teachers:

*... since it is a new technique for Bangladesh, teacher is not use to conducting lesson in front of others, actually they are not ready to accept the criticism. Their worried, other will say that he or she is stupid and do not know the contents, they are unwilling to admit own weakness (interview teacher T2 1<sup>st</sup> batch: 08/02 & teacher T7, 2<sup>nd</sup> batch: 12/02)*

### ***Unable to identify issues on lesson study***

Lesson study is an exclusively lesson-based problem-solving tool that is related to long-term and short-term goals of the educational process. For example, achieving scientific literacy is a long-term goal that can be achieved through promoting thinking skills in a child-centered teaching approach. All 16 groups and interview teachers of the study reiterated that issue identification for lesson study is a constraint for the teachers (Table 2). As quoted by the teachers:

*... teachers do not know what topic/ matter should select for demonstration lesson, umm. I don't know how to select them, I just understand it could be something different, not as usual. (interview teacher T3 1<sup>st</sup> batch: 08/02 & teacher T8, 2<sup>nd</sup> batch: 12/02)*

Through data analysis, it is assumed that participants of the study are not cognizant about selecting the content and issues for lesson study. In Japan, there is a provision for an outside advisor, usually a university teacher or researcher, who provides new thoughts and ideas for lesson study relative to the country's long-term and short-term goals. Since lesson study is just beginning, there is no such provision in Bangladesh. Therefore, the researcher highly recommends that a provision for a lesson study advisor be created to help teachers set long-term and short-term goals, lesson planning, selecting topics, and assessment methods, and organizing fruitful post-lesson discussions.



### ***Traditional attitude of professional development***

Lesson study is a teacher-led, school-based professional development (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999; Yoshida, 2004). The teachers' attitude is perhaps the most crucial and important factor for lesson study implementation. This study revealed that a teacher's traditional attitude is a key factor of constraints related to lesson study implementation. Thirteen out of 16 groups of participants and seven teachers out of 10 felt that a teacher's traditional attitude toward lesson study was a constraint factor. As quoted by the teachers:

*... it is group benefits so some teachers will not only think for themselves first. They are not willing to sacrifice their time for others, they feel like it's a traditional workshop for teacher training, rather than thinking for self-learning through the process of lesson study (interview teacher T1 1<sup>st</sup> batch: 08/02 & teacher T9, 2<sup>nd</sup> batch: 12/02)*

The findings indicated that the participants of the study lacked the core principle of the lesson study. Lesson study is not a supply driven approach of professional development rather as a demand driven school-based, teacher-led collaborative approach (Yoshida, 2004).

However, head teachers and group discussions to address the challenges for lesson study implementation at the school level provided suggestions. These include reducing teaching load, non-teaching tasks, recruiting new teachers, conducting awareness meetings with school supervisors and parents, pervading lesson study with the on-going teacher education development program, and creating providing of an outside advisor.

## **Discussion**

The study revealed that many factors contributed to the smooth implementation of lesson study at a school level. These include: time, tight class schedules, teacher shortages, heavy workload, supportive environments, pressure on covering syllabus, lack of teaching knowledge, culture of lesson observation, professional skills for problem identification, and traditional attitude towards professional development. The findings of this study substantiated the studies conducted by Chiew, Mohd and Lim (2016) and Rahman, Mitu and Salimuzzaman (2015). Chiew, Mohd and Lim conducted a study to explore issues relating to lesson study implementation in Malaysia. They found that there were four constraints, namely time, teacher's workload, the awareness of professional development, and exam-oriented culture rooted in the education system. Similarly, Rahman, Mitu and Salimuzzaman found that lack of teachers' motivation, naïve epistemological belief and professional knowledge are some of the challenges teachers face when implementing lesson study in their school.

The participants of this study perceived that time were a major constraint for lesson study implementation. Therefore, school administrators and educational authorities are strongly encouraged to

provide support to reduce teachers' workloads so that they will have time to participate in lesson study. In comparison, Japanese teachers do not face such a constraint as lesson study has been incorporated into the schools program (Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004).

The findings of this study indicated that participants considered lesson study is an additional task or extra work. They need extra time as well as a supporting environment to conduct lesson study. Japanese elementary teachers, however, never feel lesson study is an extra or additional task. Lesson Study in Japan is neither funded nor mandatory. Essentially, it is school-based and organised by teachers themselves. It pervades primary school education across the country with teachers researching their own practices in school-based communities of inquiry (Groves & Doig, 2010).

The findings indicated that participants' idea about professional development is very superficial. They treated lesson study as another on-going, in-services programme like a one-size-fits-all supply driven workshop approach model. Whereas, Japanese lesson study is a school based, demand driven, professional model that demonstrates all good features of professional development, as summarized by Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, and Hewson (1996). Good professional development programs: are driven by a clear, well-defined image of effective classroom learning and teaching; provide teachers with opportunities to develop knowledge and skills and broaden their teaching approaches, so they can create better learning opportunities for students; and build or strengthen the learning community of science and mathematics teachers.

Moreover, Hattie (2009), when looking for the characteristics of teachers who students claimed were the best, quotes Pehkonen (1992) as saying that these characteristics include "teachers who helped students to have different and better strategies or processes to learn the subject" (p. 108), thus indicating that professional development that provides teachers with these skills would be of benefit to students. Lesson study is a practical collaborative model to meet, share and work together to maintain the core idea of students' learning in its heart.

Primary teachers in Bangladesh must understand the practical model of lesson study to receive the highest benefits for shaping their classroom teaching. Policy makers and teacher educators should find a feasible strategy to infuse lesson study into the on-going teachers' support network program.

As teachers are the key role players for implementing lesson study at school, education authorities and school administrators could certainly cooperate and help teachers by reducing their non-teaching tasks to maximize the opportunity for teachers to take part in lesson study.

According to Stigler and Hiebert (1999), a teaching system, like other complex systems, is composed of elements that interact and reinforce one another; the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Changing individual elements or features to change teaching is impossible. The system recognizes the individual change as 'damage'. Therefore, a holistic understanding about teaching and learning as well as its elements is imperative. Lesson study is a tool to understand the whole system of education,

rather than the individual parts of the system.

## Conclusion

Despite the number of issues and challenges encountered in implementing lesson study in Bangladesh, there is no or little doubt of the influence of lesson study on teachers' professional development, in a sociocultural learning arena. The practice of lesson study has worked well for decades in Japan, and this has become eventually embedded as part of the teaching profession's culture. Thus, lesson study is a worthy program to promote as an innovative, school-based, teacher professional development tool in the long term in Bangladesh. Therefore, if implemented, lesson study in the Bangladesh would mark a major paradigm shift for teacher professional development.

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