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Challenges and Realities of Professional Growth in Madrasa Institutions: A Case Study from Aligarh

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explores the nature and impact of professional development among teachers and administrators in Madrasa institutions, focusing on how initiatives such as training programs and conferences influence teaching practices and classroom management. The study was conducted in four Madrasa institutions in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India, involving eight participants, two teachers and one administrator from each institution. The study considered variables such as motivation, competence, experience, and job satisfaction, alongside external factors such as the integration of ICT in professional practice. Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and observation to gain insights into participants' engagement with, and perceptions of, professional growth. Thematic analysis of the data revealed five recurring themes: *lack of awareness, shortage of funding and resources, inconvenient scheduling, language barriers, and limited opportunities for meaningful professional growth*. The findings highlight that teachers' professional growth is closely linked to the administrators' own development and institutional support. The study also indicates that

professional growth programs in Madrasa institutions are infrequent, often lack relevance to mainstream education, and are constrained by limited budgets and rigid curricula.- These results highlight the need for contextually relevant, well-funded, and sustainable professional growth initiatives to enhance teaching quality and institutional effectiveness in Madrasa education.

Keywords: Administrator development, educational challenges, madrasa education, professional development, qualitative case study, teacher training

Introduction

Madrasa institutions in India play a crucial role in modifying the behaviour and intellect of the Muslim young generation. They have their own traditional curricula and teaching methods which are different from the government curricula. In today's fast-changing world of high demands, these institutions need to enhance their professionalism to remain competitive. Over the years, the traditional madrasa institutions have remained ineffective. Amid rapid social, economic, and technological changes, they are confronted with issues in updating their teaching to be relevant and productive. The debate over the need for madrasa education reform is becoming more prominent. The contemporary madrasa system encounters significant difficulties to remain pertinent. These institutions must make a concerted effort to overcome these issues (Ahmad, 2023). The professional growth of madrasa teachers and administrators should involve staying updated with contemporary problems in the madrasa education system.

Proper education accelerates logical thinking, analytical review, rational judgment and wise decision making skills. Skill development programs boost peoples' potential to overcome

contemporary and forthcoming hurdles in their work. These programs are vital in madrasa institutions too (Tambak, 2025). Madrasa teachers and administrators should up-skill themselves to keep pace with evolving practices and emerging technologies. Regular professional growth programs strengthen madrasa educators' teaching practices and develop proficiency in academic areas. To fund these programs, madrasa administrators arrange the amount from the students' minimal fee and donations. They carefully schedule the routine by ensuring no disruption to students. They collaboratively discuss the effective strategies and try to manage pedagogical challenges in weekly meetings and after school hours which serve as a forum for them to collaboratively pursue self-directed professional enhancement. They develop an environment of lifelong learning by encouraging teachers to pursue higher studies and get enrolled in diploma or certificate courses in order to boost their pedagogical proficiency. A key strategy used for the professional growth in madrasa institutions involve urging the teaching staff to identify and apply creative instructional methods. Moreover, expert-guided training serves as the mechanism for achieving substantive professional growth in these institutions.

High-quality professional training depends on effectively tackling principal issues that disrupt both teaching and learning. ICT use in these educational centres provide more experiences and opportunities to the teachers and the administrators for enhancing teaching and leadership skills. It is observed that their adeptness with computers and the ICT use is notably low. So, instead of enabling ineffective teaching, well-planned lessons can consequently improve teachers' professional growth.

Madrasa students low or no tuition fee is inadequate to cover all institutional expenditure requiring other funding sources like donations and solicit contributions. Due to limited funding, majority of the madrasa institutions are unable to invest in basic infrastructure, modern educational technology and teacher-training programs. Hence, it is crucial to analyze these factors more thoroughly.

Statement of the Problem

The aim of this study was to investigate challenges and realities of professional growth in Madrasa institutions in Aligarh.

Research Questions

The following research questions are framed:

1. How do low budget and institutional frameworks become obstacles in the professional growth of madrasa teachers and administrators?
2. What type pedagogical improvement strategies are currently available to madrasa teachers and how profoundly they have access to them?
3. How do madrasa teachers perceive the relevance and effectiveness of the professional development strategies they have access to in improving their pedagogical skills and aspirations?

Objectives of the Study

The research aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify and record the systemic and institutional hurdles that hinder the professional growth of madrasa educators and administrators.
2. To review current professional growth initiatives accessible to madrasa teachers.
3. To analyze the perspectives of madrasa institutions' teaching staff on professional growth alongside their needs interests and objectives.

Methodology

Design of the Study

The study was undertaken using the method of investigating qualitative data to understand the current challenges and realities of professional growth in Madrasa institutions. The population of the study was teachers and administrators of four Madrasa institutions in Aligarh. The purposive sampling technique was used and a sample of eight teachers and four administrators of those institutions participated in the study. The data was collected through a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and an observation schedule.

Tools

The data collection process utilized the following tools:

(a) Questionnaire: For the purposes of the study, the authors developed a self-structured and open-ended questionnaire, "*Professional Growth in Madrasa Teachers and Administrators*". The questionnaire comprises qualitative and process-oriented questions. It was also translated into Urdu for the understanding of the respondents. It comprises of two sections. The first one

was for the teachers having nine questions, and the second one was for the administrators consisting of ten questions. It was administered to understand their perception of professional growth, engagement, challenges, and educational implications.

(b) Semi-structured Interview: Semi-structured interviews were administered with madrasa teachers and administrators to examine their unique narratives on professional growth at their workplace. Respondents should prefer to narrate the specific events, interactions, or experiences that shifted their awareness. They were encouraged to narrate specific events, interactions, observations or experiences, and choices that shifted their awareness or viewpoint. Consequently, the questions in the interview were based on the respondents' awareness, knowledge, perception, experiences, opportunities, challenges, application, and suggestions. Before embarking on this research project, the research purpose was clearly communicated to all the participants. Verbal permission from the participants was taken for conducting interviews and recording audio. The interview schedule was finalized after participants had given their consent. The interviewer assured the participants that their data would remain confidential and be used exclusively for academic research. While twelve interviews were ultimately conducted over two weeks, the last six required an additional week to complete. This delay was caused by participants' emotional distress and demanding exam schedules. All questions were framed in English as well as in Urdu but were asked in Urdu language to get comprehensive responses from the participants. Each interview concluded with an expression of sincere appreciation for the participants' time and cooperation. The data collected from the interviews were processed by

translating and transcribing the recordings. The transcribed data were checked for translation accuracy in a series of meetings involving the authors.

(c) Observation: Naturalistic and unstructured observation was done by the researcher to observe the attitude of the Madrasa teachers and the administrators regarding all the relevant aspects of challenges and realities of professional growth in Madrasa institutions. Due to poor financial status, these institutions lack basic infrastructure. There were inadequate classrooms, improper furniture, poor sanitation facilities, and no use of modern educational technology. **Administrators** determine the professional growth needs of the teaching staff by observing the effectiveness of classroom teaching and learning outcomes. There is a strong spirit of cooperation and teamwork among madrasa colleagues, all striving to enhance their teaching practice. Motivation for further professional growth is essential in encouraging madrasa teachers and administrators to keep participating in professional growth activities like workshops, conferences, seminars, symposiums, webinars, and writing & presenting research papers.

Data Analysis

The study used qualitative coding and thematic analysis to analyse the collected data. The primary purpose of coding is to identify recurring ideas, patterns, and themes related to how educators learn and grow professionally. The study focused on the thematic analysis of the participants' experiences regarding their professional growth, as represented in the collected data. The data analysis process led to the emergence of five major themes that described participants' experiences on the challenges and realities of professional growth in Madrasa institutions. The

study was conducted with strict adherence to confidentiality and anonymity protocols. To preserve confidentiality, all participants' names used in this study are numbered.

Results and Discussion

Based on the experiences of madrasa teachers and administrators, this research revealed the realities of professional growth in Madrasa institutions in Aligarh. Continuous professional training in these centres of learning remains underdeveloped and inconsistent, though efforts are being made by the administrators and government schemes, like introducing modern subjects and vocational training. The integration of traditional religious extended lectures with modern professional growth programs faces significant challenges, including a lack of awareness, resistance to modernization, a shortage of funding and resources, inadequate infrastructure, integration and use of ICT, a lack of standardized curriculum, less support from the students, inconvenient scheduling, language barriers, and limited opportunities for meaningful professional growth.

During the analysis process, several themes were found, some of which were entirely new, while others were connected with one another. The themes for further investigation were explored and finalized, namely *lack of awareness, shortage of funding and resources, inconvenient scheduling, language barriers, and limited opportunities for meaningful professional growth.*

The first theme explores the varied perceptions among madrasa teachers regarding the concept of "professional growth of a teacher" and how this influences their future professional

endeavour. The initial finding highlights the varied interpretations that madrasa teachers hold regarding the meaning of professional growth of a teacher. Certain madrasa administrators prioritize the cultivation of a teacher's moral character as a key component of their professional growth. Some madrasa leaders believe that the ethical and moral development (*tarbiyat*) of their teachers is as important as their pedagogical skills for professional growth.

According to Participant 1, "*The professional growth of teaching staff depends on the effectiveness of the administration.*"

To successfully merge moral and modern subjects, administrators must invest in teacher training and capacity building programs. They should encourage teachers to sharpen their professional skills through workshops and training sessions that focus educational technology. The outcome of professional growth initiatives in Madrasa institutions is that their alumni have secured prestigious roles in academia & research, medicine/healthcare, business & finance, technology & engineering, law & judiciary, and civil services. Therefore, with the efforts of Madrasa administrators, their staff as well as students are qualifying national level exams like NEET, IIT JEE, CUET, UGC NET/JRF, IAS, SSC CGL, etc.

The second theme addressed the *financial and resource limitations* in Madrasa institutions.

These institutions are independent, philanthropic organizations funded by donations from well-wishers, philanthropists and NGOs, and they provide free education, as well as free boarding and meals (Kosar, 2020). However, many madrasa institutions, especially those not

formally recognized by the government, are heavily dependent on charitable donations from the Muslim community, including *zakat* and *sadaqa*. These funds are often limited and irregular, with reliable inflows mainly during religious festivals like Ramadhan. [Rizal, R., Ghofur, R.A., & Utami, P. (2023)]

In the words of participant 2 “*Since madrasa institutions are funded by the Muslim community, they are seen as representing the community's voice and interests.*” These madrasa institutions lack basic infrastructure, like adequate classrooms, lightening (bright classrooms), proper furniture (chairs, tables, benches) and sanitation facilities (safe drinking water, sufficient number of washrooms, and wash-basins with soap and clean towels). There is a need for well-stocked libraries, language labs, science and computer labs, and reliable internet connectivity, which are critical for teaching contemporary subjects (Sanjana, Shalem, & Zhang, 2014). The poor financial condition leads to low and irregular salaries for teachers, which fails to attract and retain qualified educators. Teachers often lack training in modern pedagogical techniques and may be forced to teach subjects outside their expertise, like Science and Mathematics (Denysenko, 2022).

Participant 3 added a new insight by stating, “*Besides Arabic, madrasa teachers' proficiency in English and computer skills are essential requirements for contemporary teaching.*”

Difficulties in implementing ICT in the classroom were noted by the teachers and the administrators, and almost all teachers indicated the necessity of using information technology in

the educational process. Madrasa teachers face challenges in adapting to digital technologies due to irregular & insufficient training and experience.

The third theme examines the *challenge of inconvenient scheduling* in madrasa institutions, which impacts both teachers and students. This can be better explained in the words of participant 4 "**Whenever teachers are sent for the professional growth program, there is a shortage of teachers in our madrasa, and ultimately our students' learning suffers.**"

Teachers in madrasa institutions often have heavy workload and multiple responsibilities, with little or no time for lesson planning or professional growth during the day. Inconvenient scheduling ultimately creates a barrier to innovation. Without the time and flexibility for professional growth, madrasa teachers cannot improve their skills or update their teaching methods to align with modern educational standards (Malik, 2023).

The fourth theme can be best explained in the words of participant 5 "**Generally, madrasa curriculum prioritize only religious education. Not much attention is given to school subjects like English language, Science, Social Science, and Mathematics**". The main objectives of madrasa education system are **to teach the essentials of the Islamic faith, focusing on the Quran, Hadith, and Fiqh**. This helps students **to develop spiritual and moral character, and to preserve Islamic culture and identity**. The theme that emerged was about how poor linguistic abilities affect madrasa teachers' access to modern resources and training.

Many madrasa teachers lack strong English language skills, which are required for understanding modern pedagogical approaches and educational research. A lack of English proficiency can prevent teachers from pursuing higher education or participating in teacher training programs that are predominantly conducted in English (Pandey et al., 2021). Training

and professional development programs for madrasa teachers are usually not offered in their native language. This forces teachers to learn complex modern concepts in a language they are not fully proficient in, making the training less effective. Also, financially challenged madrasas often lack the funds to hire qualified teachers for modern languages or to invest in language training programs for their existing staff (Tambak et al., 2023).

The Fifth theme looks at *limited opportunities for meaningful professional growth*. Participants 1 and 3 had the same viewpoint “*The workshops and lectures in a madrasa are notably more effective at knowledge transfer than* for developing skills.”

This theme examines the lack of incentive structures that would encourage madrasa teachers and administrators to pursue further education or training. The madrasa teachers do not receive formal pre-service or in-service training in modern teaching practices. They stick to traditional ways of teaching like rote-based teaching methods, which led to few opportunities to learn new educational approaches and engage in research. Madrasa administrators **lack leadership skills and knowledge of current educational policies**. There are few, if any, formal training programs to help madrasa leaders improve their management skills. They may lack experience in modern management, financial oversight, or educational planning, which hampers the institution's ability to evolve (Tatawi et al., 2022).

The first theme describes the diverse understanding of madrasa teachers about Islamic professional madrasa teachers in the process of future professional development. Islamic professional teachers influence every action taken by teachers based on Islam. The first aspect explains that madrasa teachers express various views on what is meant by the CPD of

madrasa teachers. Some madrasa teachers cannot separate the meaning of CPD and their influence on the development of the teaching profession. The first theme describes the diverse understanding of madrasa teachers about Islamic professional madrasa teachers in the process of future professional development. Islamic professional teachers influence every action taken by teachers based on Islam. The first aspect explains that madrasa teachers express various views on what is meant by the CPD of madrasa teachers. Some madrasa teachers cannot separate the meaning of CPD and their influence on the development of the teaching profession

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Conclusion

The findings show that madrasa teachers and administrators widely recognize that professional growth in the current climate is hindered by a number of real challenges. Professional training plays a key role in building a culture of continuous learning, modernizing madrasa education, and elevating the quality of instruction and leadership. Through regular professional training, madrasa educators can access learning materials, cultivate lifelong learning desire, and prepare for evolving challenges. However, they face notable challenges, such as unfamiliarity with new educational research, ignoring modern technologies and current teaching methodologies, resistance to modernization, insufficient funds and resources, lack of standardized curriculum, inconvenient scheduling, language barriers, and limited opportunities for meaningful professional growth. These challenges highlight the urgent need for a strategic and deliberate approach for incorporating professional growth of educators and administrators in Madrasa institutions.

Recommendations

- Government financial support for madrasa institutions would allow for the creation of language and computer labs, which are vital for training teachers and administrators in modern tools and resources.
- It is recommended that Madrasa institutions should hire professional trainers to provide instruction to educators, administrators and learners on the judicious use of educational software that complements the curriculum, with the goal of fostering a more interactive learning environment.

- Madrasa administrators should provide extrinsic motivators, such as well-defined career paths, promotions, and societal acknowledgement, to ensure that teachers feel valued and are driven to excel.
- The administrators should implement a strategy of continuous professional development to build the capacity of their teaching staff, introducing them to the latest educational trends, enabling them to pursue their professional goals and contribute to the institution's strategic direction.

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