

## **Bridging Policy and Practice: Investigating Non-Compliance with School-Based Professional Teacher Development Guidelines in Sri Lankan Schools**

Sureka Fernando\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Professional Development Center for Teachers, Bolawalana, Negombo*

Corresponding Author\*: [surekafernando@gmail.com](mailto:surekafernando@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

School-Based Professional Teacher Development (SBPTD) plays a crucial role in improving instructional quality and promoting the continuous professional growth of educators. When implemented systematically, SBPTD fosters a culture of reflective practice, collaboration, and ongoing learning, ensuring that teachers consistently refine their skills to meet evolving educational needs. In Sri Lanka, despite comprehensive national-level planning and the introduction of a mandatory SBPTD handbook, school-level implementation has remained inconsistent, with only 8% adherence recorded within a selected Education Zone. This study investigates the reasons behind such non-compliance and proposes structured, context-responsive interventions to bridge the gap between policy and practice. Guided by three core research questions: what factors contribute to non-compliance, how schools deviate from official guidelines, and what interventions can enhance compliance. A mixed-methods approach was adopted; quantitative data from 117 schools were analyzed alongside qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews (SSI) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with education administrators and In-Service Advisors (ISA). The study revealed critical performance gaps in three SBPTD components: need-based topic selection, annual scheduling, and implementation of follow-up mechanisms. Interventions included standardized needs analysis tools, planning templates, real-time reporting systems, and digital supervision platforms. The findings suggest that structured support, accountability mechanisms, and digital integration significantly enhance compliance with SBPTD processes. The study concludes that improving compliance requires both systemic policy reinforcement and school-level operational reforms. This research contributes practical strategies for strengthening teacher development frameworks in decentralized education systems.

*Keywords:* School-Based Professional Teacher Development; compliance; school-based management; teacher development; implementation gaps

### **Introduction**

School-Based Teacher Development has become a key strategy in global education reform, promoting localized, teacher-driven growth to enhance teaching quality (Pillay et al., 2017). Countries like Finland show that structured, teacher-led development could significantly boost student achievement and teacher satisfaction (Barrera, 2016). Sri Lanka adopted this model in 2012 as School-Based Teacher Development (SBTD), later formalized as SBPTD in 2019 under the key guidance documents '*Our Strength for Our School*' and Circular No. 26/2018, which support school-level implementation. SBPTD emphasizes decentralization

and school autonomy to foster continuous, collaborative improvement in Sri Lanka (National Education Commission, 2016). Although the initiative focuses on improving classroom practices and institutionalizing peer collaboration, schools reveal a stark gap between policy and practice (Wijekoon & Kumari, 2021). Compliance is widely seen as central to the effectiveness of a program, and strong compliance with handbook guidance can improve the performance, retention, and engagement of programmes (Kjøbli et al., 2012). Poor compliance due to inadequate training, unclear roles, and misaligned resources leads to inconsistent and ineffective outcomes (2020, Smith & Gillespie, 2023). Although other countries have implemented SBPTD programs with structured planning, digital tracking, and rigorous monitoring over the adherence to guidelines (Bunting & Klerk, 2022), Sri Lanka's SBPTD monitoring system remains inconsistent (Wehella, 2014). Therefore, this study addresses a key knowledge gap: why Sri Lankan schools fail to comply with SBPTD guidelines?

This study aims to:

1. Analyze deviations from the official SBPTD guidelines.
2. Identify key factors behind school-level non-compliance.
3. Propose evidence-based strategies to improve compliance.

This study is significant because it sheds light on the persistent implementation gap within Sri Lanka's SBPTD framework. By exposing the barriers in systemic issues such as limited needs assessment, poor integration into planning processes, and the absence of monitoring mechanisms, the study provides timely evidence for policymakers, zonal authorities, and school leaders to rethink how professional development is operationalized at the school level. Beyond identifying challenges, the study also proposes a set of practical, scalable solutions that can transform SBPTD from a compliance-driven activity into a purposeful and sustainable development process. The suggested interventions are not only relevant to Sri Lanka's decentralized education system but also provide transferable lessons for other contexts where teacher development is hindered by weak process management.

### **Research Design**

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to diagnose root causes, develop target interventions, and evaluate their effectiveness in improving adherence to MOE standards. The study used a combined sampling strategy for comprehensive data collection. Purposive sampling targeted ISAs and administrative officers for qualitative insights in SBPTD implementation. For the quantitative phase, census sampling included all 117 schools in NEZ, ensuring full representation and eliminating sampling error.

### **Data Collection Tools and Techniques**

**Qualitative** – The study used multiple data collection tools to gain a comprehensive view of non-compliance with SBPTD guidelines. Semi-structured interviews with administrative officers provided insights into systemic and school-level barriers. A document review of policy circulars, the SBPTD handbook, school plans, SBPTD sub-committee reports, and attendance records further enriched the analysis. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with ISAs helped to triangulate findings and capture collective perspectives.

**Quantitative** – Surveys and questionnaires were distributed across all 117 schools in the NEZ to collect quantitative data on planning, topic selection, scheduling, and follow-up.

## Data Analysis

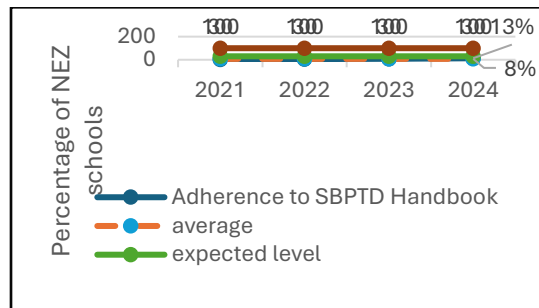
**Qualitative** – Data from interviews, document reviews, and FGDs were transcribed and analyzed using thematic coding. FGD data were coded alongside individual interview data to identify converging and diverging themes, ensuring collective perspectives were integrated into the final thematic framework. Triangulation across these sources strengthened the validity of findings.

**Quantitative** – Survey data were subjected to performance gap analysis to measure deviations in SBPTD implementation. Pareto analysis was applied to prioritize the most critical causes of non-compliance, while Ishikawa (fishbone) diagrams were used to map root causes systematically. The integrated analytical framework was structured around the three selected components.

### Procedure

#### 1) Need Analysis of Identifying Key Factors Behind School-level Non-compliance

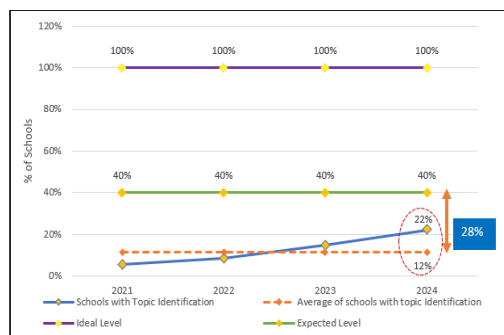
**Adherence to SBPTD Handbook-** Despite the mandatory nature of the SBPTD handbook, only a small number of schools demonstrated adherence to SBPTD guidelines, as shown in Figure 1. This result supports the need for targeted interventions to bridge policy and practice, validating the main objective of increasing adherence from a baseline of 8% to at least 30%.



**Figure 1**

*Performance Gap in Expected Adherence to SBPTD Handbook (2021–2024)*

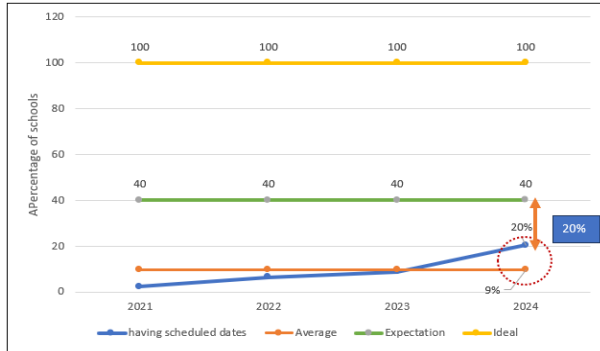
**Topic Selection in SBPTD Programs** - The study found that the majority of schools do not conduct proper need analyses for selecting SBPTD topics, as shown in Figure 2. Interviews and focus group discussions confirmed that schools often select topics arbitrarily or based on School Evaluation Quality Indicator (SEQI) evaluation priorities rather than staff development needs. This finding directly aligns with the objective of improving systematic topic selection processes.



**Figure 2**

*Performance Gap in Needs-Based Topic Selection (2020–2024)*

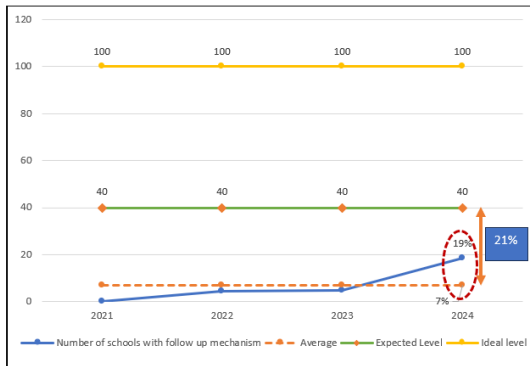
**SBPTD Date Scheduling Practices-** Another critical shortcoming identified was the absence of date scheduling within annual school plans, as shown in Figure 3. The findings indicate reactive, last-minute planning in most schools, undermining the effectiveness of SBPTD activities. The proposed planning framework directly addresses this issue.



**Figure 3**

*Performance Gap in Scheduling SBPTD Dates (2021–2024)*

**Follow-Up Mechanisms in SBPTD-** Follow-up processes were identified as the most underdeveloped area, as shown in Figure 4. Qualitative responses highlighted that many schools conduct SBPTD sessions without any subsequent evaluation or feedback, limiting long-term impact. This aligns with the objective of increasing follow-up practices and justifies the introduction of new digital tracking and supervision tools.



**Figure 4**

*Performance Gap in SBPTD Follow-Up Mechanisms (2021–2024)*

The results underscore systemic inconsistencies in SBPTD implementation. These insights validate the design and necessity of the proposed interventions and support their broader scalability.

## **2) Implementation of Strategies**

The study adopted a component-based intervention strategy to address each of the identified weaknesses. For Data Collection and Needs Analysis, structured workshops were conducted using Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), accompanied by training timetables and feedback forms to ensure consistency and quality. Under Process Management, a planning framework was introduced, supplemented by customizable Google templates, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and process flowcharts to support efficient planning and documentation. To improve Monitoring and Evaluation, several tools were deployed, including digital follow-up systems using WhatsApp groups, a centralized Learning Management System (LMS) platform, and school-level bulletin boards for transparency and communication. These interventions were initially tested in a selected group of schools to assess feasibility and make necessary adjustments before wider implementation.

## **3) Evaluation and Validation of Intervention Effectiveness**

Intervention effectiveness was evaluated using feedback forms, structured checklists, and supervision visits to ensure implementation fidelity. Standardized digital templates enabled real-time reporting and progress tracking. These measures ensured reliability, scalability, and supported continuous improvement within the SBPTD framework.

## **Discussion**

Despite the mandatory nature of the SBPTD handbook, compliance among schools remains critically low, averaging just 8% over four years. This aligns with previous literature suggesting that low compliance with educational frameworks is often linked to insufficient training, ambiguous accountability structures, and the absence of continuous supervision (Smith & Gillespie, 2023). The findings reveal persistent non-compliance across three critical areas: topic selection, date scheduling, and follow-up mechanisms; each of which has significant implications for the effectiveness of teacher development programs in Sri Lanka. This demonstrates that many schools are treating SBPTD as a “nice to have activity” rather than a structured, data-driven process.

The finding that only 22% of schools selected SBPTD topics based on actual needs underscores the limited use of needs assessment tools. This reinforces the argument that whether the professional development, not grounded in systematic needs analysis, can improve instructional quality (Taherdoost, 2021). The absence of scheduled SBPTD activities in school annual plans further indicates a lack of process management and planning culture, reflecting Lovanella’s (2024) view that process inefficiencies in education often stem from weak leadership accountability and inadequate stakeholder alignment.

Moreover, the near absence of structured follow-up mechanisms calls into question the sustainability and effectiveness of existing teacher development sessions. As noted by Naik et al. (2020), monitoring and evaluation systems are essential for ensuring training relevance and impact. Without these, SBPTD sessions risk becoming isolated, one-time events with no long-term benefits, as also emphasized by Rosenberg and Kotschy (2020).

To strengthen Compliance, schools should move beyond a compliance mindset toward purpose-driven professional development. Embedding SBPTD into School Development Plans (SDPs), supported by structured SOPs and clear timelines, can facilitate this shift (Garcia & Lee, 2020). The positive uptake of digital tools—such as Google templates, real-time feedback systems, and LMS platforms—highlights technology’s potential to reduce administrative inefficiencies and improve monitoring (Costa et al., 2020). Sustained implementation also requires coordinated support at both zonal and national levels, with localized initiatives reinforced by adaptable central policies (Bunting & de Klerk, 2022). Additionally, applying a Value-Added Model (Hansen, 2013) could offer a data-driven approach to measure the long-term impact of teacher development. The study underscores that weak

compliance with SBPTD guidelines is primarily due to implementation barriers rather than deficiencies in policy. While the MOE provides directives, schools often fail to operationalize key elements.

Practical interventions—such as SOPs, KPI frameworks, Google templates, and digital platforms—can enhance clarity, accountability, and consistency in execution. Aligning CPD with real-time reporting systems further strengthens stakeholder engagement and continuous evaluation.

Overall, this research proposes a scalable framework for improving CPD within decentralized education systems. By addressing implementation gaps, it contributes to improved teaching quality, greater equity in learning opportunities, and the long-term development of human capital, aligning with Sri Lanka’s vision for inclusive and sustainable education reform.

## Conclusion

The study revealed that while SBPTD is a critical mechanism for enhancing teacher development, its implementation in Sri Lanka faces significant challenges due to weak needs analysis, poor process management, and inadequate monitoring. By combining survey data with qualitative insights, the research identified systemic and school-level barriers that hinder compliance. The proposed interventions—standardized planning tools, digital reporting systems, and stronger accountability measures—highlight practical ways to bridge the policy–practice gap. Strengthening these areas can foster more consistent compliance with SBPTD guidelines.

## References

- Bunting, J., & de Klerk, M. (2022). Strategies to improve compliance with clinical nursing documentation guidelines in the acute hospital setting: A systematic review and analysis. *SAGE Open Nursing*, 8, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23779608221075165>.
- Barrera Pedemonte, F. (2016). *Teacher professional development: a cross-national analysis of quality features associated with teaching practices and student achievement [Doctoral dissertation, UCL (University College London)]*.
- Costa, L. A., Pereira Sanches, L. M., Rocha Amorim, R. J., Nascimento Salvador, L. D., & Santos Souza, M. V. D. (2020). Monitoring academic performance based on learning analytics and ontology: A systematic review. *Informatics in Education*, 19(3), 361-397.
- Garcia, M., & Lee, D. (2020). *Strategic performance management*. Business Insights.
- Hansen, M. (2013). Anticipating innovation in teacher evaluation systems: Lessons for researchers and policymakers. Teacher Quality 2.0. Special Report 4. *American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research*.
- Iovanella, A. (2024). Exploiting network science in business process management: A conceptual framework. *Chaos, Solitons & Fractals*, 178, 114344.
- Kjøbli, J., Bjørknes, R., & Askeland, E. (2012). Adherence to brief parent training as a predictor of parent and child outcomes in real-world settings. *Journal of Children’s Services*, 7(3), 165-177.
- Ministry of Education. (2020, March 3). *Our Strength for Our School: Guidebook on school-based teacher development (SBPTD Guidance Manual)*. Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka.
- Ministry of Education. (2018). *Circular No. 26/2018*: Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka.
- Naik, G., Chitre, C., Bhalla, M., & Rajan, J. (2020). Impact of use of technology on student learning outcomes: Evidence from a large-scale experiment in India. *World Development*, 127, 104736.
- National Education Commission. (2016). *Study on the professional development of teachers and teacher educators in Sri Lanka (Research Series No. 02)*. National Education Commission. ISBN 978-955-9448-39-6.

- Pillay, H., Muttaqi, I. A., Pant, Y. R., & Herath, N. (2017). *Innovative strategies for accelerated human resource development in South Asia: Teacher professional development-Special focus on Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka*. Asian Development Bank.
- Rosenberg, E., & Kotschy, K. (2020). Monitoring and evaluation in a changing world: A Southern African perspective on the skills needed for a new approach. *African Evaluation Journal*, 8(1), 10.
- Smith, C., & Gillespie, M. (2023). Research on Professional Development and Teacher Change: Implications for Adult Basic Education. In *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy, Volume 7* (pp. 205-244). Routledge.
- Taherdoost, H. (2021). Data collection methods and tools for research; a step-by-step guide to choose data collection technique for academic and business research projects. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management (IJARM)*, 10(1), 10-38.
- Wehella, M. M. (2014). *School-based management initiatives in Sri Lanka: policy into practice* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sussex).
- Wijekoon, K. M. J., & Kumari, H. M. L. (2021, November). Examining the teachers' perception of the School Based Professional Teacher Development Programs. *International Research Symposium* (pp. 387-392).