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Technology-led Professional Development for Teachers: Challenges and Possibilities

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Abstract:

In present times teachers are expected to play multiple roles such as materials developer, evaluator, facilitator, Instructor and task-giver. All these roles are demanding and a teacher has to stay updated and much supported to not only implement but also get desired results for each assigned role. This raises a question regarding the training or support extended to teachers. Even after formal training is given by many educational institutions, teachers are caught in professional stress and lack of updation. Teachers need to tackle many day to day classroom problems. At this juncture, teachers need to collaborate, share and learn how they can contribute better to the profession. Though there are no quick solutions, some online platforms such as webinars, MOOCs and online Apps, platforms such as Google classroom, Google groups, Face book, Whats App, padlet can be used for professional development of teachers. This paper discusses the challenges that teachers face in using technology for professional development and how these can be overcome.

Key terms: professional needs, online platforms, online Apps, Professional Development

Role of ICT in formal courses designed for teachers:

ICT is introduced as a course by NCERT with the title 'Understanding ICT and its application'. This course aims at both theory and practice. This course is a very new addition to the curriculum of teacher education and only available for pre-service teachers at school level but there is no such type of awareness for teachers who teach graduates, undergraduates or university going students. It is all teachers' self interest, motivation and responsibility to get enrolled for ICT based courses to enhance their teaching skills and to develop in various aspects linked to language proficiency, pedagogy and content. Even with pre-service teachers there are questions regarding the application of their ICT backed knowledge in real classroom contexts.

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Challenges faced by teachers while using ICT for their professional Development:

Lack of motivation:

As in real classroom contexts teachers find it no need or less need to use apps or computer-based courses which is again due to various reasons:

1. Poorly equipped schools/institutes
2. Neglecting towards investment on ICT infrastructure in schools
3. Less projects taken up to see the outcomes of technological-intervention based programmes in schools/institutes with students
- 4.

Lack of awareness:

Many teachers lack awareness regarding the professional development courses offered online in specific areas. This is also due to lack of professional goals and teachers' unawareness regarding their professional needs.

Low Language Proficiency levels:

This is the most debatable aspect of professional development of teachers. Many of the courses offered by Edx, British Council requires B1 level proficiency from teachers. Many teachers lack language skills and they find the content too difficult to understand and implement in real contexts. This is not a problem with NPTEL courses but very less professional development courses are offered for language teachers regarding their field.

Differed interests:

Sometimes the online courses may not directly meet the varied interests of teachers. Let us know what those are:

1. Some teachers want to participate in oral discussions
2. Some teachers want to express their views in written form
3. Some teachers want to take more time on reflection and completion of tasks
4. Some teachers dislike assessment part of the course
5. Some teachers read and show interest in objective type of questions
6. Some teachers are not interested in collaborative tasks and vice versa

Ways to overcome:

There are no shortcuts when it comes to begin experimentation in educational field. But there are some better ways which always yield best results. The below measures looks at the step-wise model i.e. at the level of Individual, at the level of group and at the level of institutes.

Teacher-led initiatives:

Individual:

Teachers should be encouraged and motivated to recognize their professional needs. Time to time surveys should be designed to recognise what are the problems faced by teachers in classroom, what are the resources they require and

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what are the teaching skills they require. This is the first step in any process. But this process is often neglected or done in haste while designing courses for teachers. The one great app which is free and which can be used for this purpose is Survey Monkey.

Collaboration:

The next step after identifying individual needs is 'collaboration'. This has to happen among teachers across institutes. Teachers who share similar professional needs or aims or requirements can collaborate online and explore resources available to meet their needs. The apps or platforms which can be used for this purpose are: Blogs, Facebook, whatsapp. After identification of needs teachers can explore resources from free e-journals to study and understand their needs further. This task can be shared among teachers.

Institute designed courses:

This again runs into stages:

Mentoring:

It is the responsibility of the institute to allocate senior or experienced teachers as mentors to offer further advice for teachers on identifying and exploring professional needs. So, the mentors across institutes need to be in communication. Teachers and mentors of same institute or across institutes can use online platforms such as Google classroom, face book, e-mail.

Designing courses:

Though this is not an easy task, after identification of professional needs, collaboration and mentoring which is the main crux of the initiative, now mentors and teachers can together work to design short-term courses. These courses can be designed by using a few apps and platforms such as whatsapp (which encourages instant idea-sharing, raising questions, sharing links and information), Google classroom (this platform is convenient to share activities and discussions), Google groups (which encourages discussions, raising questions).

The course has to be designed with clear instructions where the online platforms can be put into better use or which aspect of the course goes with which online App or platform. Language proficiency of the teachers also should be kept in consideration to make any content or information accessible and understandable for them.

The above mentioned possibilities are not new, there are many short courses, projects launched by British Council for the benefit of teachers and students. But once again, we need to keep in mind that institution-led initiatives are important for any project or course to meet the desired results. Also, every institution needs upliftment which actually requires efforts

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and initiatives within institutes and also across institutes.

Conclusion:

Professional Development is a journey which includes identification of needs, exploring resources, collaboration, sharing information, guidance, support. If institutes are ready to initiate such journeys teachers can see professional growth happening in a right way and can come out of professional stress.

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