Online Teacher Development Programmes for English Language Teachers: A Study of the Perceptions of the Trainees

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Abstract

All of us know that people were asked to work from home to stop the spread of the deadly Corona Virus. The lockdown following the spread of pandemic affected almost all the sectors of life and education sector was no exception to it. One of the important domains in the educational sector is the professional development of teachers. During the lockdown period it was a challenge for the professional development institutes of India in general, and the Institutes of Kashmir valley, in Particular, to continue the training programmes in the physical mode. Given the lockdown, the training programmes were organised in virtual mode through various online platforms. In this backdrop the present paper aims to study the perceptions of the teacher trainees of English language regarding the virtual training programmes and the challenges faced by them during these programmes.

Keywords: - Teacher development, English teacher, Online training, perceptions, challenges.

Introduction

During the Covid-19 lockdown all the sectors of life were closed for onsite transactions and the only option was to go online, because no one was allowed to come out of their homes as a safety measure to stop the deadly corona virus. If we see all the sectors of life suffered and the education sector was not an exception to it. It causes loss to all the students of all the grades in terms learning, exposure, time(Shahzad et al., 2020). All the educational institutions of the world were closed for onsite teaching and learning process. The only option left was to switch on online mode. Research suggests that online learning is more effective than Offline learning because it provides the students the opportunity to learn from his own pace and they control their learning as compared to classroom learning(Azar & Tan, 2020). All the educational institutions start online teaching and learning process and one of the most important domains in the educational sector was the professional development or the teacher education of the teachers. The institutions which are responsible for the teacher's professional development also started the online professional development of the teachers in all the subjects in general and particularly in languages. There are many professional development institutes in India who are responsible for these trainings like the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) at the national level, State Council of Educational Research and Trainings (SCERT) at the state level and District Institute of Education and Trainings (DIET) at the district level(Recommendation & Taken, n.d.). Jammu and Kashmir are the Union territory of India and the institutes who are responsible for the professional development of teachers are the State Council of Educational Research and Trainings (SCERT) and District Institute of Education and Trainings (DIET). All these institutes started the online professional development of the English language teachers in the valley so that teachers of English may not face any problem in the development of the four skills of English language among the learners. During the online professional development of teachers, the training institutes as well as the teachers of English language faced a lot challenges and problems because this was totally the new experience for them especially the teachers of government schools. The challenges were ranging from using the different educational technological tools and gadgets to technical problems. The paper is an attempt to capture all those problems faced by the English language teacher educators and the English language teacher trainees in the online professional development and an attempt will also be made to recommend some solutions for the problems. The perceptions of the teacher trainees regarding the online professional development will also be discussed.

Methodology

For the current study a sample of 50 English language teachers were selected who are teaching the English language subject in the different schools of Pulwama and Anantnag districts and have received the online teacher training and two District Institutes of Education and Trainings (DIETs) of Pulwama and Anantnag were also selected for the study. A well-designed questionnaire was framed to collect the data from these teachers and due to the lockdown, the questionnaire was created using the google form and was shared with the teachers through their WhatsApp numbers and emails. Some teachers were contacted telephonically to record their responses. After collecting the responses from the teachers, the data was tabulated, codified and analysed to see the results.

Research Questions

The paper is based on the three research questions

- Which were the challenges and problems faced by the training institutes and the teacher trainees.
- What are the perceptions of teacher trainees regarding the online professional development?
- How can we improve the online professional development of English language teachers?

Challenges and Problems faced by the Training Institutes

- Training institutes faced a lot of problems during the Covid-19 lockdown because they had to Manage the trainers who can train the English Language Teachers. Handling the different online platforms and creating and presenting the content online was a novel experience for the trainers and as well as for the teachers of English language. It was a challenge for the Institutes to get those Trainers for Training who have the knowledge of educational technology and are proficient and well qualified to train the English language teachers. In fact, it is the duty of the Training institutes and teacher trainers to help the teachers in removing the barriers like the internal barriers like anxiety, negative perceptions towards technology lack of competence etc.(Razak et al., 2015)
- To coordinate with the different English language trainees was another issue, because many teachers were not able to handle the online platforms which was becoming the hectic problem for the Teacher Educators.
- Good internet connectivity was another issue for the training institutes because the trainer who was selected for the trainings was giving the trainings from his home and

many at times the internet services were snapped and due to which the full training programme used to be cancelled. When the whole world was taking the benefit of the digital classrooms the fate of Kashmiri students and teachers was dilemma because of the shutdown of internet connectivity or only low connectivity of 2G service(Nadaf, 2021).

- Non active participation from the teachers was another issue for the institutes, Both the training institutes included in the study said that many teachers used to log in from the zoom classroom or Google classroom but were not actually present in the classrooms.

Challenges and Problems faced by the English Language Teachers

- English language trainees were the main focus of the professional development programmes and they learned a lot of things as well as faced many problems in the online professional development programmes. The most important issue before the teachers was to handle the different online tools and gadgets because it was totally a novel experience for them to use the online teaching and learning gadgets.

- Needs analysis of the teachers is the part and parcel of the professional development programmes and due to Covid-19 it was not possible for the training institutes to do the Needs analysis of the teacher trainees and due to which the needed training hotspots of teachers were not included in the training modules. Needs analysis serves as an important initial step for curriculum design in further developments in teaching materials, tests, programme evaluation(Kusumoto, 2008).

- Connectivity was a big issue for the teachers because in the Kashmir valley the internet connectivity remains barred for most of the times due to the law and security reasons. Due to internet connectivity issue teachers were not able to join the training secessions all the time.

- Professional development demands the onsite training practice and the feedback for the same in order to improve the skills but the actual practice in the classroom was not possible in the online professional development programmes.

Suggestions to improve the Online Professional Development of English language

Teachers

Professional development of teachers is essential component of the teaching learning process in general and professional development of English language teachers in particular. During the Covid-19 all the training institutes were closed for offline trainings and the only option was the online professional development of teachers. It was very challenging in the Indian scenario to go for the online trainings because switching to online mode was a novel experience for both teacher educators and English language teachers especially for the teachers of government schools. It is the responsibility of the professional development institutes to train all the teachers especially the English language teachers to handle the different online teaching platforms so, that in the future they may not face any problem in handling the online tools and gadgets which may hinder their professional development and the teaching learning process in their respective schools. The institutes need to bring some innovative strategies to improve the professional development of teachers(Barron & Chandler, 2019). An important responsibility lies on the government of jammu and Kashmir to provide sufficient funds to the training institutes so, that they may not face any difficulty in arranging the different hardware's and softwares of educational technology and to hire the IT experts for the development of different apps and programmes. One of the important challenges for the government is to manage the internet connectivity in the Kashmir valley in times of lockdown because online education is not possible without the good internet connectivity to both the teachers as well as the students. School education department also has the responsibility to introduce smart classrooms in the schools, so that the taste of educational technology can be developed among both the teachers as well students.

Perceptions of the English Language Teachers towards online professional development

Some questions were asked to the teachers of the English language in order to see their perceptions regarding the online professional development programmes they attended during the covid-19 lockdown and on the basis of the responses below tables have been created to present their responses.

The contents of the online professional development programmes were according to my needs.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	7	14
Agree	10	20

Undecided	1	2
Disagree	21	42
Strongly disagree	11	22
Total	50	100

Table 1.1

In table 1.1 above teachers gave their opinions regarding their training needs in comparison to the trainings they received. According to the data 14% of teachers choose strongly agreed, 20% agreed, 2% undecided, 42% disagree and 22% strongly disagreed. From the data it can be concluded that majority of the teachers that is 64% of teachers are of the opinion that the professional development programmes were not according to their training needs.

The teacher trainer had enough knowledge and experience to train the English language teachers.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	27	54
Agree	11	22
Undecided	2	4
Disagree	7	14
Strongly disagree	3	6
Total	50	100

Table 1.2

In table 1.2 above teachers gave their opinions regarding the knowledge and experience of the teacher trainers who gave them the trainings. According to the data 54% of teachers choose strongly agreed, 22% agreed, 4% undecided, 14% disagree and 6% strongly disagreed. From the data it can be concluded that majority of the teachers that is 76% of teachers are of the opinion that the teacher trainers of the English language had enough knowledge and experience to train the English language teachers.

I experience no difficulty in using the different online tools and gadgets during the trainings.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	4	8

Agree	10	20
Undecided	1	2
Disagree	16	32
Strongly disagree	19	38
Total	50	100

Table 1.3

In table 1.3 above teachers gave their opinions regarding the ease of handling the online tools and gadgets during the online professional development. According to the data 8% of teachers choose strongly agreed, 20% agreed, 1% undecided, 32% disagree and 38% strongly disagreed. From the data it can be concluded that majority of the teachers that is 70% of teachers claimed that they face difficulties in using and handling the online tools and gadgets during the professional development.

I didn't face any issue of internet connectivity during the online trainings.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	3	6
Agree	6	12
Undecided	3	6
Disagree	25	50
Strongly disagree	13	26
Total	50	100

Table 1.4

In table 1.4 above teachers gave their opinions regarding the internet connectivity in the valley. According to the data 6% of teachers choose strongly agreed, 12% agreed, 6% undecided, 50% disagree and 26% strongly disagreed. From the data it can be concluded that majority of the teachers that is 76% of teachers claimed that they faced internet connectivity issues during the online professional development.

How can we improve the online professional development of teachers in future (comment)?

An open-ended question was asked to the teachers of English in order to improve the online professional developments in the future. The teachers gave their opinions like, before organising the different professional development programmes needs analysis of the teachers should be conducted, so that the training modules will be designed accordingly. Teachers also

felt the need for the training on handling the different online tools and gadgets of educational technology, different softwares, hardware's and the online apps. Internet connectivity issues should be resolved and a good internet connection should be provided to each and every teacher. Teacher also responded that only the teachers who have English language teaching qualification and knowledge should be given the trainings because many teachers claimed that they have been recruited as the general line teachers and they have no extra specialisation of teaching English language. The teachers also responded that the recorded sessions of the trainings should be shared with all the teacher trainees so, that all the missed sessions due to internet connectivity and other issue can be played again and teachers may take full benefit of these sessions. Some other issues raised by the teachers were the incentives for those teachers who are always ready for the professional development as compared to those who are left behind due to one or the other reason. Some teachers claimed that sometimes the trainers of the different training programmes are from the local schools and don't have the expected qualification and knowledge for training the teachers of English. There should be a separate recruitment for the trainers of English teachers so that the quality of the professional development of the teachers may not get degraded.

Conclusion

Covid -19 gave many lessons to the world and at the same time the importance of communication and information technology can't be overlooked. The world witnessed the use of information and communication technology in all the spheres of life including the use of educational technology in the educational sector. The professional development of the teachers also took the online mode and the professional development of teachers including the English language teachers took the online shape. The training institutes and teachers of English in the Kashmir valley faced many challenges and problems which are ranging from the availability of the English language teacher trainer who is well equipped with the educational technology and the knowledge of English language to the issue of internet connectivity. coordination between the teachers, active participation of teacher trainees, inability to handle the different online gadgets and tools, onsite practice sessions for the teachers were the other issues during the online professional development of English language teachers. Regarding the perceptions of the teacher trainees regarding the professional development the teachers showed positive attitude until the problems and challenges they are facing like needs analysis, handling the online tools, internet connectivity etc. can be resolved in the future professional development programmes.

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