Professional Development - Current Trends in Teacher Education
(With Reference to ELT and Computer Science)

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Abstract: Professional development refers to the development of a person in his or her professional role. The purpose of this paper is to do just to: Analyze the trends in teacher education and professional development, to extrapolate these trends in an attempt to predict the future of teacher quality. In this paper efforts have been made to analyze the present situations in order to identify the constraints and possibilities in the teacher education, teaching profession and the professional development.

Keywords: Teacher quality, Teacher Education, Teaching-Learning, Profession, Knowledge, and ICT based teaching, Professional Development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Teacher Quality is critical in honing various skills to make the learners to be responsible citizens of the nation in order to contribute in its development. The need for policies and strategies to strengthen teacher preparation is being well recognized issue and hence, Teacher Education, the current trends in Teacher Education and Professional Development have become vital in Teaching Profession. This paper makes an attempt to study the current trends of Teacher Education for Teachers dealing with ELT Teacher education refers to both pre-service and in-service programmers which adopt both formal and/or non-formal approaches. It is a continuing process which focuses on teacher career development Teacher education encompasses teaching skills, sound pedagogical theory and professional skills.

Teacher education generally includes four elements: improving the general educational background of the trainee teachers; increasing their knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are to teach; pedagogy and understanding of children and learning; and the development of practical skills and competences. The most effective teaching is that which results in the most effective learning. Therefore it is necessary to study about the need of Teacher Education and Professional Development.

II. BACKGROUND

The process of teaching and learning and creation of knowledge is carried on from the very first day of human history. As the body of knowledge grew bigger and bigger with varied dimensions the process of teaching and learning became formal and systematic. Need for methods and strategies to enhance the quality of learning originated. Over centuries educators have been concerned with the issue of increasing the efficiency of teaching and learning experience. According to Glattenhorn (1987), by gaining increased experience in one's teaching role they systematically gain increased experience in their professional growth through examination of their teaching ability.

A. **Personal and Professional Use of Technology**: Teachers should apply tools for enhancing their own professional growth and productivity. They should use technology in communicating, collaborating, conducting research, and solving problems.

In addition, they will plan and participate in activities that encourage lifelong learning and will promote equitable, ethical and legal uses of computer technology resources. Teaching-learning process is a means through which the teacher, the learner, the curriculum and other variables are organized in a systematic manner to attain pre-determined goals and objectives. Structure of a standard teaching-learning process includes:

B.   **Teacher as independent variable**: The teacher plans the role of an independent variable. Students are dependent on him in the teaching process. The teacher does the planning, organizing, leading and controlling of teaching for bringing about behavioural changes in the students. He is free to perform various activities for providing learning experiences to students.

III. NEED OF TEACHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teacher education is concerned with the aspects such as, who (Teacher Educator), whom (Student teacher), what (Content) and how (Teaching Strategy). It empowers the student teachers with the skills (teaching and soft skills) that would enable them to carry on the functions in the most efficient and effective manner. Teacher education therefore pays attention to its content matter. Teacher education has become necessary for the effective teaching and learning process. Here are some of the aspects which explain the need of teacher education is: Complexity of the profession, To improve the quality, Improves efficiency, Makes innovative, Brings changes and up-dates, To Meet the Changing needs, To address the theory-practice gap, Preparing Teachers for Diverse Learners, Developing ICT Literacy.

IV. CHANGING PARADIGM

There is a visual change in the paradigm of teaching and teacher education in the following:

1.   **Teacher centered teaching to learner centered teaching**:   There is very clear change in the teaching approach. Previously, the classes were teacher centered. The teacher would be the center of the class. The active role was played by the teacher and the learners would observe the teacher and follow the teacher. The modern classes are being more and more learner centered**.** Interest in learner centered approaches is high on many agendas. This includes attention to learner styles, self direction, self evaluation, multiple intelligences, affective factors in learning, etc. the growing interest in learner centeredness indicates a new and emerging valuing of diversity and difference.

2.   **Theoretical to practical approach**: In olden days the classes where more theoretical. Teachers would read the lesson from the book and explain the contents in simple and easy language**.** A persistent issue that has plagued teacher education is the disconnect between theory and practice. The theory-practice gap was identified as a serious concern by all Alliance members (Cho, 2008; Farrington, 2008; Gambhir et al., 2008; Husbands, 2008; Rasmussen, 2008). Today there is concentration on the practical approach. The discontinuity between coursework and practice is also evident to teaching candidates as there is a disparity between the theoretical works they are taught and their observations of teaching practices in schools (Russel et al., 2001, as cited in Gambhir et al., 2008). Moreover, Gambhir et al. also notes a disparity in how candidates are supported in applying theories they learn to practice in meaningful, critical and explicit ways. The lessons should be designed in such a way so as to reduce the theory-practice gap. Clearly research on teaching could and should inform the content of teacher education – what gets taught, how and for what purposes.

3.   **Book oriented to task and activity oriented approach:** Today activity and task based teaching approaches are being used more in the classes. Books are just the supporting material. The theoretical concept is taken from the book and the teacher makes tasks and activities on the concept to make is clear and interactive**.**

4.   **Teaching with the help of the book to ICT based teaching**: Developing ICT literacy not only allows for the access and navigation of information but also self-directed learning, as it has the potential to free students from the constraints of time and space. It includes the ability to search for, manage and retrieve information rapidly and to work collaboratively with others. ICT literacy also includes the ability to dialogue, learn and chat in cyberspace (Pang,

1999). ICT Based teaching and the use of computer and electronic equipment like the smart board, e-podium, internet, etc have replaced the book based teaching and learning**.**

5. **Book and pen/pencil to e-books:** The use of electronics and technology is increasing day by day. The hard copies of text books and notes are now being replaced with e-books, e- podium and smart boards. The teachers who till now are accustomed to the hard copies must adapt themselves to this new technological method of teaching. However, it has reduced the burden of carrying number of books to the class room. As a teacher you just need to have your material in your system and flash memory.

V. CURRENT TRENDS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Teacher education refers to both pre-service and in-service programmers' which adopt both formal and/or non-formal approaches. It is a continuing process which focuses on teacher career development. An amalgamation of teaching skills, pedagogical theory and professional skills would serve to create the right knowledge, attitude and skills in teachers, thus promoting holistic development. Keeping in view the above changing paradigms of teaching, the teacher education has undergone a change in various areas making the Teacher Education and Professional Development important in various areas like:

1. **Teaching and learning methodology:** There has been a visual change in the modern teaching and learning methodology. There is shift from book and teacher centered teaching to learner centered teaching. Where the diverse needs of the learners are analyzed and then a suitable teaching method is adopted. Task based, activity based, ICT oriented are some of the teaching methods of the modern age. The use of computer and electronic devices has become very common in today's educational system, where in e-classes are increasing day by day and the modern teacher needs to learn this new way of teaching.

2. **ICT based teaching:** ICT increases the flexibility of delivery of education so that learners can access knowledge anytime and from anywhere. It can influence the way students are taught and how they learn as now the processes are learner driven and not by teachers. This in turn would better prepare the learners for lifelong learning as well as to improve the quality of learning. In concert with geographical flexibility, technology-facilitated educational programs also remove many of the temporal constraints that face learners with special needs (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Students are starting to appreciate the capability to undertake education anywhere, anytime and anyplace.

3. **Use of smart boards in the class, Use of E-podium:** all in one, integrated solution - Built in computer, Microphone, Speaker, Audio/video output and input channels. Integrated Control System through Network - Can control max 900 e-Podiums as well as the devices in the lecture rooms. Writable screen that enables presenter to deliver a lecture or presentation while writing or drawing onto the screen (Quality software for writable screen makes the difference among others) Dual Monitor - While delivering a presentation, the monitor can be used for the next presentation. The product can be configured according to the size of room, requirements of audio output power, and size of the screen.

4. **The Trend of Mobile Wireless Technologies in Higher Education**: A number of different mobile wireless devices are being used in higher education. These include web-enabled wireless phones (e.g., smart phones), web-enabled wireless handheld computers (e.g., palmtop, and tablet computers), wireless laptop computers, and Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs). Benefits: increasing speed in teaching and learning; allowing teachers to keep up the new educational subjects for future education.
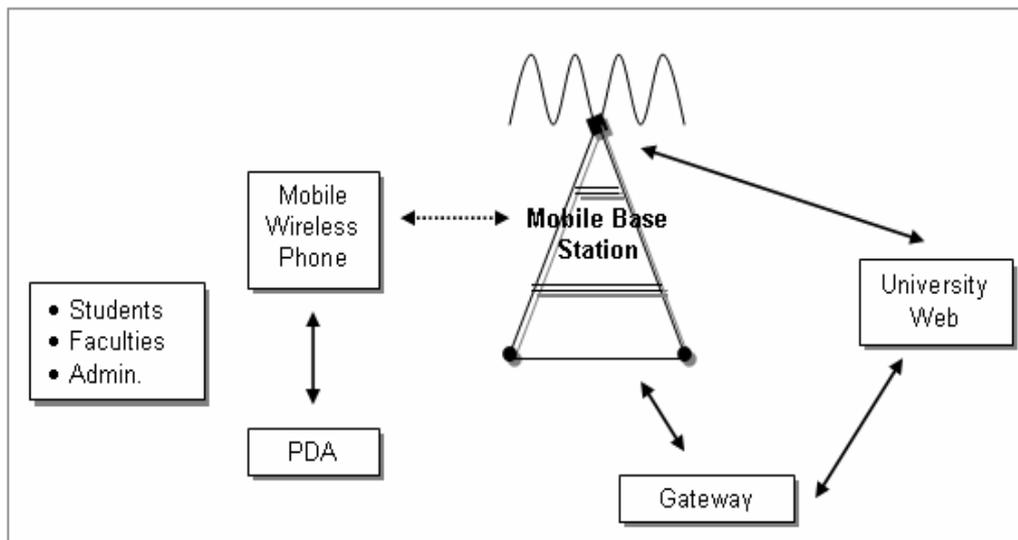
(Fig. 1 Mobile Wireless Technologies)

5. **Language and literacy development:** The development of effective language and literacy is crucial to living and learning. Language is used to communicate with people, to share and express feelings, to give and obtain information and understand ideas and develop thoughts. The teachers must be educated about the importance of language and literacy development in order to keep the learners motivated and minimize the dropout rate and maximize the learning efficiency. The teacher needs to adopt various techniques to do the same.

6. **Making interactive, task/activity based lessons:** The role of task-based activities is to provide learners with opportunities to use the target language contextually, and to explore the target language through situational activities. In this way, the language lab can serve as an invaluable tool in the language learning and teaching process, for it provides opportunities for learning that cannot be duplicated in the classroom.

7.   **Curriculum development:** Curriculum takes content (from external standards and local goals) and shapes it into a plan for how to conduct effective teaching and learning. It is thus more than a list of topics and lists of key facts and skills (the "input"). It is a map of how to achieve the "outputs" of desired student performance, in which appropriate learning activities and assessments are suggested to make it more likely that students achieve the desired results (Wiggins and McTighe, 2006: 6).

8. **Maintaining balance between theory and practical:** A persistent issue that has plagued teacher education is the disconnect between theory and practice. The theory-practice gap was identified as a serious concern by all Alliance members (Cho, 2008; Farrington, 2008; Gambhir et al., 2008; Husbands, 2008; Rasmussen, 2008). Some argue that more credit hours should be spent on ensuring mastery of content knowledge and less in pedagogy, while others assert that the teacher candidates will recognize the value of education studies later in their teaching careers. There are also calls to make the practicum more effective and make more diverse and meaningful learning opportunities available to trainees**.** The discontinuity between coursework and practice is also evident to teaching candidates as there is a disparity between the theoretical works they are taught and their observations of teaching practices**.** Grossman (2008) calls for a stronger connection between research on teaching and research on teacher education. Clearly research on teaching could and should inform the content of teacher education – what gets taught, how and for what purposes.

9. **Evaluation and assessment process:** Another issue of concern in teacher education is the evaluation and assessment process. As a teacher one needs to adopt proper and fair evaluation and assessment process to test the learning capabilities of the learner and teach accordingly.

10. **Teaching according to age (children, young learners, adult):** There is a lot of difference it teaching kids, adolescents (young learners) and adults. Before you start your class it is essential to know to which age group you are teaching and prepare accordingly. It needs mastery to adopt different techniques and methods to different age group according to their level of understanding and maturity.

VI. Ways to Continued Professional Development

Continued Professional Development is necessary in every profession; its vitality is felt more particularly in the teaching profession. This helps you update the knowledge and keeps the teacher on roll. But, the big question that comes before is how can we achieve this? There is no one particular method that ensures the professional development. However, there are some ways which would be helpful in achieving this. Let us consider some of the ways:

1. **INVOLVING EXPERTS:** There is a lot to be learnt through taking advantage of all the experienced and expert practitioners in the field of ELT, by attending sessions they may give at conferences, talks that are available in their vicinity. Reading readily-available articles and books written by 'experts' and participating in online events or blogs with invited professionals is an alternative if 'experts' are not available physically.

2. **WORKSHOPS:** Similar to the above, but not necessarily with known ELT professionals. Often teachers get a lot more out of smaller, more intimate workshops where there is the opportunity to discuss and debate ideas and opinions and take away ideas for classroom activities and to reflect on.

3. **ONLINE GROUPS/COMMUNITIES:** These may include an interactive virtual conference such as the annual IATEFL online conferences sponsored by the British Council, or the blogs on the Teaching English website, or other forums and discussion boards set up to encourage participation around ELT topics by teachers from all over the world.

4. **INFORMAL TALK:** Joining other teachers in the staffroom discussing their next lesson or the materials they are using is one of the easiest and most effective ways of developing, especially if you borrow the ideas and try them out in your own classes.

5. **SELF STUDY/ INDIVIDUAL PREPARATION:** Another easy way to learn that can include internet materials and journals as well as actual books, which can be expensive and difficult to obtain in some parts of the world. We can read anywhere in any short piece of snatched free time.

6. **PROGRAMMED RESEARCH:** You may be lucky enough to have a head of department or principal who wants research results which shed light on what is going on in his or her institution, and is prepared to provide time for teachers to provide the evidence. This is one interpretation of programmed action research, though there are lots of others, and teachers cannot help but learn from the experience and the results.

7. **INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH:** Similar to the above, but teacher-directed and not 'imposed'. Often very small scale, nevertheless so much can be learnt from studying your students or yourself in the classroom, and there is a huge range of aspects of teaching which you can put under an action research microscope.

8. **GIVING SESSIONS:** This can range from a small in-school meeting where teaching ideas are shared right through to a session at a large international conference. All conference speakers started small and all teachers have something to say. This is a particularly effective way to develop due to the planning and research which takes place before the session as well as the discussion and feedback which it provokes.

9. **WRITING:** Similar to the above, writing ranges from short articles right through to books. Keeping a diary and reflecting on your teaching is a good way to start and there are plenty of models out there to learn from, while the preparation and research necessary teaches you as much as the writing and rewriting itself.

10. **FORMAL EDUCATION:** This is often the first thing people think of when they think about professional development. But it is often the most prohibitive due to time and expense, and often courses do not provide exactly what is needed. If you are lucky enough to be able to follow a course, however, make the most of the time you have laid aside for thinking and learning, because doing a course is a great way to develop.

11. **MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL BODIES:** This can provide opportunities and facilitation of many of the areas above, and although subscriptions can appear expensive, there is often so much offered by a professional body that it justifies the expense. Prepare to be active though, as so often you will get more out of it the more you put in yourself.

12. **OTHER WAYS**: Apart from this t it is identified that there are other ways helpful in achieving professional development which include: engaging in new professional activities, doing things for the first time, peer observation, trying out different methods/approaches in class (sort of like action research), reflective and exploratory practice, though not programmed or formally monitored, being trained up as a teacher trainer, completing an online course to be an e-tutor, participating in projects in a group with fellow professionals, forming a local group: to discuss issues and take turns to lead sessions.

VII. CONCLUSION

As you see there are plenty of ways to keep up your continuous professional development. This is the age of technology. Everyone and everything seems to have something to do with computers and communications. Our future generation is already showing signs of becoming totally computer and technology dependent. It is a fact that over the years, education has become increasingly complex, with more and more information communicated to the student. In this environment it is important for students to have an interesting, interactive and experimental mode of instruction that will make learning enjoyable and easy. ICT based education is definitely the direction towards which the whole world is progressing. However, ICTs should be used currently in conjunction with well planned classroom teaching.

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