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26 Teachers' Professional Development through Integrating ICT in English Language Education: a Case from Pakistan

AYESHA BASHIRUDDIN

Introduction

Recently a lot of importance has been given to professional development of teachers and teacher educators through the use of ICT especially in the developed world. According to O'Brien and Weiner (2007) "ICT is now ubiquitous in the lives of educators and we rarely stop to ponder what we did before computers and related technology, and in particular the Internet, became so readily available and commonplace; particularly in educational systems in the so called developed world" (p. 385). If we look closely at the situation in Pakistan, we can see that ICT revolution has made its mark both on society and on the school system to a large extent. It has become a national priority to meet the challenges and opportunities provided by globalization. However, in teacher education institutions which are in public sector technology and E-learning are still at an embryonic stage and opportunities for teachers' professional development are scant.

Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) is a private international university in Karachi, Pakistan. Its aim is to improve the quality of teacher education in the developing world. It has also taken a significant initiative of Open Learning (OL) which started in 2002 so that access to learning and teaching can be provided to teachers and educational leaders who are not able to attend its full-time programmes on campus. The main two aims of OL is to help faculty in designing and developing materials for distance education courses and to support faculty members in using information and communications technology for teaching and learning (eLearning). Several innovative ways of integrating e-learning have been implemented. Currently Moodle is being used in nine M.Ed. courses. However, very little research has been done to see how ICT helps in teaching and learning. There is one research study which is of particular value carried out at AKU-IED by Retallick and Shamin (2005) to investigate the possibilities and problems in using Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) for facilitating learning in a developed world context. In the context of AKU-IED the study pointed out two issues in using CMC, which are: a) encouraging learner involvement; and b) sustaining learner interest and constant engagement with courses content and peers. Thus, they carried out a small scale study to investigate the use of carefully designed CMC tasks for enhancing student learning outcomes. The findings of the study reveal that "well-designed CMC tasks can provide the necessary structure for learner mainly accustomed to the face-to-face mode of delivery. More specifically, carefully planned CMC tasks could lead to the following student outcomes: 1) deep leaning through knowledge construction and knowledge sharing, both through individual interaction with content (a text, ideas on a web-site) and follow up online discussion; and 2) positive interdependence, through sharing of resources and exchange of ideas with peers online. The role of the tutor was found to be central in online leaning both in designing challenging pedagogies tasks and in 'scaffolding' learning for successful completion of the tasks".(p.2).

With this background of ICT at AKU-IED this particular paper reports the impact of integrating ICT as a means of teachers' professional development in English Language Education programmes offered at AKU-IED. Over the years in English Language Teacher Education programmes various ways of using

ICT for professional development of in-service teachers have been employed. This paper first describes the various ways of integrating ICT in these programmes such as reflecting on teaching English in various contexts by using technology, developing and pasting video clips from the classrooms on discussion forum for critique, using Moodle threaded discussion forums for reflecting and developing teaching practices through microteaching. The paper then presents the analyses of teachers' reflections on the use of ICT for their professional development. In the end the paper presents a summary.

What are the innovative ways of integrating ICT?

There have been trends of integrating ICT in teacher education programmes in general and in teacher education programmes in teaching of English in particular, all over the world mostly in various developed world contexts but such examples are negligible in Pakistani contexts. Therefore there is significance in discussing the ways in which innovations were introduced in a teacher education programme and how the learning took place and what were some of the challenges. I have used various ways of integrating ICT for teachers' professional development in teacher education programmes. Here I will discuss three innovations which are specifically related to the professional development of teachers of English. In these innovations asynchronous discussion forum was used as the main source for teachers' professional development.

Innovation One: using videos of classroom practice

Keeping in mind the multilingual/bilingual contexts in which English is either taught as a second or foreign language an Advanced Diploma in Education: English Language Teaching was designed in 2007 to address the needs of in-service teachers from varied backgrounds. The aim of the programme was to enhance the teachers' pedagogical content knowledge with an emphasis on 'reflective practice' and 'constructivism' for change in teaching practice. The underpinning assumptions, then, were that teachers of the programme will learn through active and interactive engagement in the programme and their learning will be maximized within the classroom realities. Hence, the programme took into account the classroom settings of the teachers. The facilitators' role was to provide the teachers with stimulating and innovative ideas and suggestions to reflect upon and internalize. The teachers were encouraged to critically review their knowledge, skills and values about teaching of English as a second or foreign language and further build on their learning from the programme. To do this, the professional development team members have drawn on the literature of TEFL /TESL /TESOL, teacher education and contextual realities of schools and took into account the express needs of the course teachers. This enabled the teachers to understand the issues related to teaching of English in bilingual/ multilingual settings.

A significant part of the effort was to introduce and/or consolidate teachers' knowledge and skills of using technology in English language teaching. An important and innovative feature of the program was using videos of own classrooms for reflection as part of Action Research Portfolio (ARP) development. To encourage the CPs to take responsibility of their own learning and to help them reflect better, they were supported to have their classes (one in the first cycle and two in the second) video-recorded. They wrote reflections based on their observation of their own classes and also prepared a video clip of a critical incident or teaching moment from their class. For, this they were taught, through a special workshop, how to create a video clip by using Microsoft Movie Maker. In this way technology was integrated in the program for promoting reflective practice which enhanced teachers' professional development.

Other ways in which technology was integrated into the programme were showing them videos of classrooms where teachers were using different teaching methods, using websites for accessing

information on the content knowledge and pedagogy, using computers for power point presentations and using computer technology to edit video clips.

Innovation Two: using videos to observe classroom teaching

In masters of Education a specialization course is offered for teachers of English which focuses on the theoretical and practical aspects of English language teaching at the lower secondary level. The aim of this course is to enable the in-service teachers' to understand the principles and practice of teaching and learning English at the lower secondary level (classes VI-VIII) in a bilingual/multilingual context such as Pakistan. It is expected that by the end of the teachers will be able to develop an understanding of principals and uses of English for language planning and policy; develop awareness of key developments in ELT methods and approaches to teaching English; identify and analyze variables that affect learning and teaching in one or more teaching and learning contexts at the lower secondary level; demonstrate their ability to select, adapt or develop methods appropriate to their respective contexts using innovative approaches to language teaching and learning through preparing and teaching lessons focusing on one or more language skills (grammar and literature); select, adapt and design curriculum and learning materials for the above using well-defined criteria; develop tools for assessing the above, suitable to age, level and context; demonstrate their ability to work with teachers for improving their content and pedagogy and develop understanding of using technology for professional development.

Twenty five percent of the total contact time during the course is usually devoted to practical work throughout the course. As part of their professional growth, teachers are encouraged to develop an attitude of collaboration and therefore, worked in pairs and groups. In this particular course (2008) the teachers were engaged in two activities, one was microteaching which was a face to face activity in which the teachers worked in pairs. The purpose of this pair work was to enable CPs to gain an understanding of the content area, prepare and execute micro lessons. This activity gave them an opportunity of teaching and receiving feedback from peers. This also enabled them to learn to give feedback to peers and reflect on their own teaching. The purpose of micro teaching was to enable CPs to examine and experience the teaching and learning process and to practice different skills such as working collaboratively with peers and reflection.

The other activity in which ICT was integrated was to reflect on teaching English in various contexts by using technology. In this activity the teachers were given an opportunity to observe teachers of English teaching in real classroom by using videos. These videos were produced by teachers in Advanced diploma (see innovation one). After the teachers whose videos were uploaded for the teachers taking this course. Using a framework for reflection the teachers reflected on the teaching and learning processes.

Innovation Three: videos for self and peer reflections

This particular innovation was designed for masters' students (in-service teachers) who were taking English as specialization designed for lower secondary classes. The details of the overall programme are given above in innovation two. In this particular course which was offered in 2009 Moodle was used since this is introduced in the university recently and teachers were also given orientation about its use. The task for this cohort was to follow the cycle of microteaching (Plan, teach, critique and re-teach). In the first cycle the teachers planned their lessons in pairs by integrating at least two skills. These plans were shared with the tutors. The teachers incorporated the suggestions given by the tutors and then these lessons were posted on the course web page for all the teachers to see. In the second cycle they taught and their micro lessons were video-recorded. Next, in the third cycle these video clips were available on the discussion forum set up on model for self, peer and tutors feedback which was posted on the forum. Each teacher received structured feedback from four sources (self, peer, senior colleague and tutor). The form for feedback was also made available on the web page. In the last cycle the CPs were required to revise

their original micro lessons in view of the received feedback and re-teach the revised micro lessons. The revised lesson plans were posted on the web page. Based on the experience the teachers were required to produce a reflective piece of writing in which they were required to address questions such as: Why did they choose to integrate the two skills? How did the micro teaching help or hinder their teaching learning process? Did the feedback help them in reconceptualizing the lesson more effectively? How? Technology was an effective way of learning how to teach. Comment.

What did the teachers learn from integrating ICT?

The findings show, as elaborated in teachers' reflections which they wrote with each new innovation, that overall the teachers found the creation of a virtual environment very facilitative for their professional development since it gave them opportunities to see themselves and other teachers teaching and they could critique and receive feedback from peers and tutors. There are three major findings. The first is self-directed learning in which teachers had opportunities to direct their own learning by reflecting and by giving feedback to each other through discussion forums and video clips on the website in their own flexible time within the stipulated time for each stage. The second learning was use of alternative mode of classroom observations in which the student did not go to school but could see the clips of teaching in various contexts of Pakistan on the website and critique the teaching and learning. They also could see their own clips of microteaching and learn from their own teaching and learning and by feedback from peers and tutor. The third is that teachers were able to give feedback virtually because sometimes face to face feedback becomes difficult even if it is a constructive feedback. The teachers also learned how to handle feedback and improve their teaching practices. They developed critically thinking skills.

Teachers became self-directed learners

The analysis of teachers reflection based on the above mentioned tasks reveal that teachers took charge of their own professional development through tasks given for e-learning. The teachers reported that the tasks were designed in such a way that they encouraged self-directed learning which is very much relatable to adult education (Brockett and Hiemstra 1991; Caffarella and O'Donnell 1988; Candy 1991; Long 1989; Mezirow 1985). The ICT based tasks provided them with learning and professional development associated closely to self-directed learning in which they could take responsibility and independence in learning.

The teachers found that overall their learning was encouraged because their learning orientations and that of the course facilitator matched and also because they were inspired to broaden their learning orientations, especially in the direction of personal interest-oriented learning (Lunenberg, Mieke and Korthagen, 2005). This was done in a very systematic way. The first step towards encouraging their learning orientation was a clear understanding of the tasks and preparation for the tasks. The tasks required them to understand and the various stages of the tasks which became the reference point for both the facilitator and the teacher. Most of them point out that the task given to them were new there was a lot of use of ICT involved, there were certain prerequisites of the tasks. One of them reported that:

They could participate in these tasks because of the virtual environment and support of the e-learning team and their tutor. The support included the availability of resources, the physical layout, and support.

This could be substantiated with what actually was done before the teachers were expected to engage in professional development. Before each task the teachers were given an orientation of how they can use ICT for e-learning.

For example, before the teachers were asked to make a video clip of a critical incident or teaching moment of their class, they were given an orientation of the discussion forum, how they can view and

reflect on their own videos and see their development over time. Some teachers in this regard commented how “tedious it was to learn how to use computers and discussion forums” but later they found that it was “worth the effort” since it gave them the required skills needed to access the discussion forum. They were also introduced to the process of creating a video clip by using Microsoft Movie Maker through a number of workshops which were conducted by OL team at AKU-IED. Once they developed the required skills they were ready to learn independently. However, some teachers had difficulty in creating a video clip because their lack of prior knowledge, they were helped on one to one basis. One of the teachers comments in her reflections about this:

I am really thankful to the OL team to help me learn how to make a video clip, I required a lot of help and they never refused to provide the help and support, but they did not make a clip for me, they helped me to do it myself.

In the same way for the two other innovations provided above, orientation sessions were held for accessing the discussion forum on AKU-IED website and on Moodle. This orientation is extremely important to empower the teachers to work through e-learning since the teachers are not very familiar with using ICT for their professional development; some lack the basic skill of using internet and discussion forums. This has also been discussed by Sile'n (2000, 2001, 2003). She points out that there are two important factors that help self directed learning. One is that the teachers feelings of being responsible for their own learning which have an impact on the learning situations because that generates the desire to take the responsibility. Secondly, the feelings of being in charge are connected to understanding the demands of the learning context, experiences of managing and getting feedback.

These tasks provided teachers to take responsibility to plan and manage their own so that it gives them personal autonomy to organize (Caffarella, 1993) and to develop professionally at their own pace. Most of the tasks were based on experiential learning, learning from their own teaching practice. Through technology based tasks they could do that. For example, in innovation three given above the teachers were required within a time frame to plan and manage microteaching and reflect on their teaching which was video recorded and put on the forum. They had to ask a peer from their own class to give them feedback and ask a peer from a senior class to give them feedback on their teaching. Later after receiving feedback they had to re-teach, this lesson was also video recorded. They found this to be very empowering experience. Many of the teachers commented on how it became their responsibility to take charge of their own professional development. They had opportunities of interacting with each other and working collegially on the discussion forum. Teachers also exchanged knowledge by pooling their expertise within their groups. Some quotes provide evidence of this. One of them wrote: “The task was set but still there was a lot that I had to do on my own. I found it very effective in my own development as a learner. I had to plan, think and develop a strategy to work online, but I was not limited to use computer in the class, I could use it any time”. Another student wrote: “This was the first opportunity for me to use ICT for my professional development. Microteaching task which was given to us required a lot of responsibility and freedom to work on my own pace, it gave me time to think, write feedback and write my own reflections”. Another student commented: “Using ICT helped in viewing my video several times; every time I looked at it I realized my strengths and weaknesses. I learned how effective it was to observe myself and write reflections on the discussion forum. I also felt that I have a responsibility in this ICT learning community to give feedback to my peers so that everything is managed within time”.

In all the ICT integrated tasks many ways of reflections were encouraged. This also provided to promote self-directed learning. All these task were clearly stated so that they were congruent with the facilitators' pedagogical choices. (Lunenberg, Mieke and Korthagen, 2005). Many of the teachers point out that the tasks for reflections were clearly stated and the facilitator helped them to reflect in a very systematical way, provided feedback and guided them to write better reflections and learn as professionals.

For instance, in innovation two, the teachers were given at least two weeks within which they could watch senior colleagues teaching video and critique on their teaching and also reflect on how they would have taught the same lesson. Many of them appreciated the flexibility of time to watch the videos on the discussion forum and also that they could view it several times. One of the student sums it up in this way: "It was good that there was enough time to watch the videos, I watched each one of them several times and this helped me in reflecting and writing critique in my own time". In another task the teachers were asked to comment on their own videos and questions for reflections were provided. The teachers found them to be very good guidelines to "not only reflect but also to raise questions of their own professional development".

Use of alternative mode of classroom observations

The use of alternative modes of classroom observation was an innovation which came out of the necessity. The teachers in their specialization courses are supposed to do some teaching practice in schools where they can translate their new knowledge into practice. For the last two years because of the change in academic calendar by the government we could not provide the teachers opportunities to teach in real classroom in schools since they are busy in preparing their students for examinations. Therefore alternative modes of engaging them in translating their knowledge to teaching skills were provided.

The teachers in general felt that ideally they would have liked to teach in the real classroom but appreciated these alternate opportunities which enhanced their professional development. Many of the teachers felt that ICT was a real advantage of bringing real classrooms on their computer screens. One of the teachers for instance recalls: "It was so amazing to see someone teaching in a real classroom from our own context. It seemed so real and I could watch the video several times and learn different things. If we had gone to a real classroom we would not have this opportunity of re-visiting the video".

One aspect of using e-learning that has been identified by the teachers as important is that they could observe, read the lesson plans, and write their critique in the virtual environment, there were no distractions and helped them in their learning.

These clips were a selection from the video clips which were made by the teachers in their advanced diploma as discussed in innovation one. After taking the consent of the teachers we used them for the masters' teachers. They were from the teachers to the teachers.

These video clips as pointed out by most of the teachers gave them opportunities to view as many times as they possible could and then write a critique which was very structured. Many of them pointed out that initially they were skeptical and disappointed that they will not be doing practice teaching but after being involved in the process of observing and critiquing the teachers teaching they realized that this was an important part of their professional development since it helped them to see how their knowledge and beliefs about teaching for example a particular skill was challenged or was presented.

As regards innovation three in which the teachers had to look at themselves teaching during micro-teaching and write reflection as well as give feedback to each other the teachers found using the discussion forum very educative. One of the reflections substantiates this:

The use of video recording is also an effective opportunity in the process of microteaching. We mostly criticize others for their strengths and weaknesses. It is because we observe them. But to observe one's own teaching was strange and new learning for me. By the help of technology this was made possible.

Another such comment was made by a teacher:

The most important thing during the whole process of microteaching was technology. It was only because of the of the posted video recording that I was able to observe my teaching and also the senior course teachers were able to watch and give us feedback. Technology has really helped me reflect on my teaching and then improve it. I feel that effective use of technology in the field of teacher education can help teachers improve their teaching by reflecting on it.

On the whole the teachers reported that the use of technology in the process of microteaching was very helpful. They found it effective because of the advantages to improve their teaching. By posting the developed lesson plans on the forum they were able to get feedback from different sources conveniently. Also the micro teaching was video recorded which gave them an opportunity to see themselves teaching which allowed them to closely observe their style. Because of the video recording and the posting on the discussion forum the senior teachers were also able to critique their teaching which was noted to be very productive.

Giving feedback and reflecting online

The teachers talked of many benefits of giving each other feedback and reflecting on their professional development in interaction in an asynchronous discussion forums. The teachers found that the threaded discussion forum gave them the opportunity for deeper reflection and more thoughtful feedback than real time discussions (Kirk & Orr, 2003). They also pointed out the inherent convenience and flexibility that online forum offered.

For example, as mentioned in innovation three, during microteaching sessions there were opportunities to provide feedback in class but the time was very limited and many of them could not give feedback to each other. But through the threaded discussion forum they had the opportunity to give feedback after watching the videos. Similarly in innovation one where the teachers were teaching themselves and could not reflect on their teaching, afterwards teaching and watching their videos helped them as some of the teachers reflected: "it was a good experience of reflecting and giving each other feedback through threaded discussions on the forum because it provided us enough time to watch our videos and that of other colleagues, we learned not only from our own experience but also from our colleagues. This was a very good way of professional development". The teachers were given the opportunity of becoming learning teams (Klemm, 1998) in which they can develop a collegial relationship and can help or in a way pressurize each one to do their part of the task. For example in innovation three where teachers were microteaching, they had to work in learning teams both for teaching and for giving each other feedback.

Teachers also found facilitators participation in the threaded discussion forum and in giving feedback on reflection online as helpful and empowering. Many teachers in their reflections have commented that the facilitator empowered all of them to become part of the discussion, and that she was not the only one providing feedback. However they still considered tutors feedback to be of a greater value because of her expertise and experience in the field. For example in the innovation one where teachers had to go to their own respective schools and teach, constant feedback from the facilitator was given online which was very much appreciated since meeting each teacher face to face was not possible. One of the teachers wrote: "all this was done in a very systematic and professional manner through the use of ICT".

The teachers in each one of the innovations stated very strongly that the tasks given were systematically arranged and well thought through by the facilitator; they had clear goals, purpose, outcomes, and were engaging and dynamic. Taking this point forward (Kirk & Orr, 2003) states that if we want to make the

use of threaded discussions useful need to think very carefully how active learning can take place between the group. They further state: "Discussion forums are the enabling tools for those teaching in the e-learning area to build greater student learning outcomes by engaging students in productive discourse." (p.5).

Conclusion

In this paper I have looked at some innovations for teachers' professional development through integrating ICT in English Language Education. This was to develop a better understanding for myself and others by analyzing the teachers' reflections after being involved in different innovations.

The preceding examples and findings show how teachers' who had come from various diverse backgrounds were able not only to use technology but also learn from the tasks given to them. This was primarily because all the teachers who join AKU-IED as M.Ed. course participants are given orientation in using technology in the pre-session courses and then ongoing support is provided because the institution recognizes the importance and necessity of using technology. Many face to face courses also integrate e-learning so teachers are familiar with the virtual environment. However, there were some of them who struggled to write online. Such professional development can only be made possible if the virtual environment is supportive, and if the facilitators know how to engage in tasks which will develop them professionally. Therefore the role of the facilitator is very important in fostering professional development by integrating ICT keeping in mind the course objectives.

For me as a teacher educator and originator of the innovations there lies great value and significance of the analysis that this paper contains. It has given me a deeper understanding of what works and why using ICT in the professional development of the teachers can only be of great benefit to all concerned. Though at times I felt overwhelmed by responding to reflections and feedback of the teachers and was glued to the computer for hours but that itself was a learning experience for me. This gives insights into the emerging ways of professional development, how ICT can be integrated and a repertoire of practices can be developed and how universities in mostly developing countries can benefit from such research findings.

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