TANULÓ TÁRSADALOM
OKTATÁSKUTATÁS JÁRVÁNY IDEJÉN

Kattein-Pornói Rita – Mrázik Julianna – Pogátsnik Monika
(szerk.)

IX

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OKTATÁSKUTATÁS JÁRVÁNY IDEJÉN

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HERA ÉVKÖNYVEK IX.

TANULÓ TÁRSADALOM
OKTATÁSKUTATÁS JÁRVÁNY IDEJÉN

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Win Phyu Thwe

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER TRAINERS IN MYANMAR DURING THE PANDEMIC

ABSTRACT

To place great emphasis on the continuous professional development of teacher trainers, the Ministry of Education in Myanmar arranged trainings and workshops for teacher trainers to improve their pedagogical skills, English skills and ICT skills. Win (2015) also suggested that professional development based on the responsibilities and roles of each staff member is necessary in the higher education sector. During the pandemic, workshops and trainings for teacher trainers were swiftly moved from face to face to online mode. The main purpose of this paper is to investigate the continuous professional development of teacher trainers in Myanmar during the pandemic. Two questions are answered: (a) which challenges did teacher trainers overcome during the pandemic? and (b) what are the advantages of the continuous professional development of teacher trainers during the pandemic?. The findings were based on the experience gained by participating in online trainings. The teacher trainers faced power outage, poor internet connection and difficulty in the use of learning apps. Despite some obstacles at the start of online learning, there were developments in ICT abilities, communication skills, life skills, and confidence in implementing online teaching. It can be concluded that the continuous professional development of teacher trainers was implemented even during the pandemic. It can also be supposed that these professional developments will lead to the lifelong learning of teacher trainers.

Keywords- Continuous Professional Development, Teacher Trainers, Pandemic

Network: Vocational training and employment/ Vocational Pedagogy and Vocational Teacher Training Division

1. INTRODUCTION

The need for teachers to continue their professional development has never been more crucial. Gall and Renchler (1985) identified the continuous professional development of teachers as “efforts to improve teachers’ capacity to function as effective professionals by having them learn new knowledge, attitudes and skills” (p. 6). Smith (2015)

conceptualised the continuous professional development of teachers as all formal and informal learning events on and off-site that are available to professionals such as teachers and academics. The OECD (2009) stated the purposes of professional development that are to upgrade academic knowledge, skills, attitudes, and teaching methodologies in light of advancements in instructional approaches, as well as providing a forum for peer groups to share knowledge and information. To place great emphasis on the continuous professional development of teacher trainers, the Ministry of Education in Myanmar arranged trainings and workshops for teacher trainers to improve their pedagogical skills, English skills and ICT skills. Win (2015) also suggested that professional development based on the responsibilities and roles of each staff is necessary in the higher education sector. The National Teacher Competency Standards Framework is made up of four key domains: professional knowledge and understanding, skills and practice, values and dispositions, and professional learning and development. The last domain deals with teachers' continuing professional growth and development (Dabrowski & Spink, 2020). The new curriculum for four-year Education Colleges is also based on the National Teacher Competency Standards Framework for Myanmar. Smith (2015) contended that teachers' professional development is linked to systemic change, whether through the introduction of new curricula, material, policies, or just attempting to improve the efficiency and efficacy of the educational system. Postholm (2012) suggested that a positive school culture with a good atmosphere and understanding of teachers' learning, in addition to co-operation with external resource persons, may impact the professional development of teachers.

Training programmes such as the TREE (Towards Results in Education and English) project support teacher trainers to develop their teaching competence and English proficiency, before moving on to improving their teacher training and communication skills and implementing the new curriculum. All teacher educators and education degree college staffs are provided with professional development opportunities, and all have equal access to opportunities. As a compulsory requirement in the competency standards, all teacher educators need to attend at least one professional development programme each year. Depending on their proficiency and needs; some teacher educators are actually supposed to attend more than just one. Professional development allows teacher educators to pursue areas of particular interest such as inclusive education or language teaching, and to reflect on and improve their own knowledge and skills.

Education system and teacher training are also affected by the Covid-19 epidemic. Consequently, the epidemic changed the way teachers taught and communicated with their students. In this time of crisis and uncertainty, ICT technologies have shown to be a lifesaver not just for the IT industry and businesses, but also for the disciplines of education and training (Asgar & Ratra, 2020).

It drove the educational sector towards internet learning and tutoring. Online teacher training has been primarily supported during the pandemic. The majority of the teacher trainers used technologies such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Google Classroom to create dynamic sessions. Our education policies and methods of teacher training and development must be modified to be more informed and relevant if we are to escape from the pandemic better and stronger than before (Cambridge, 2021).

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The National Teacher Competency Standards Framework promotes the importance of all teachers being conscious of their position as leaders within the community and emphasizes the need for active research to support teachers' classroom success and continuing professional growth. When Covid-19 shut down all schools in Myanmar in March 2020, professional development programmes still continued to be implemented in different ways. Teachers' continuous professional development has become more important in this age of paradigm change, which has occurred as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, in order to upgrade their teaching abilities, proficiency, and efficiency level to fulfill current criteria (Asgar & Ratra, 2020). During the pandemic, workshops and trainings for teacher trainers were swiftly moved from face to face to online mode. The scenario was described by Mishraet al. (2020) as a methodological change from the traditional approach to a current approach to teaching learning; from the classroom to a virtual platform; and from seminars to webinars. According to a Myanmar Ministry of Education publication named "'Myanmar COVID-19 National Response and Recovery Plan for the Education Sector" (2020), a countrywide response and recovery strategy was devised to preserve educational continuity during the COVID-19 outbreak. This strategy is divided into two parts: a response phase and a recovery phase. During the response phase, the Ministry of Education intends to use a variety of distance education methods to keep lessons going.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Higher education institutions are expected to remain closed during the response phase to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and specific measures will be required to assure education continuity during the closure period. The Department of Higher Education also intends to continue reforming the pre-service teacher education curriculum and will give further support to education degree colleges to guarantee that the curriculum reform is successful. In accordance with the instructions of the Ministry of Health and Sport, education degree colleges must continue to play an important role in COVID-19 prevention.

In addition to developing learning materials for both current and new curricula for the e-learning platform, teacher educators will be prepared to provide online education and assistance to student teachers. An ICT/distance learning module for teacher educators is also being developed by the TREE Project or other development partners supporting the pre-service teacher education sub-sector. Thus it becomes necessary to examine the continuous professional development of teacher trainers in Myanmar during the pandemic.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This paper focuses on the continuous professional development of teacher trainers. Postholm (2012) recommended that teachers can learn through participation in various courses, reflecting on their own teaching in school, and observing and reflecting on others' teaching in collaboration with colleagues. Teacher collaboration is important for their development, and some teachers are capable of leading such learning activities.
The main research questions for this study where the aim was to investigate the continuous professional development of teacher trainers in Myanmar during the pandemic are

(a) Which challenges did teacher trainers overcome during the pandemic?
(b) What are the advantages of the continuous professional development of teacher trainers during the pandemic?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 RESEARCH METHOD

In this study a qualitative research design was adopted to address the research aim and questions. The epistemological underpinning of this study is based on constructivism. From this perspective, knowledge is perceived as the construction of meaning and understanding within social interaction. The individual's social community is thought to have a significant impact on how he or she learns and grows. It is argued that courses and lectures, and teachers' development of a metacognitive attitude are critical aspects for teachers' learning within a constructivist frame of reference according to Postholm (2012).

2.2. PARTICIPANTS

The simple random sampling technique was applied to select the participants in this study. There are 60 teacher trainers from various departments in Pyay Education Degree College. Generally these departments can be classified into three main categories, namely: Education departments, Methodology departments and co-curricular departments. Two teacher trainers from each main department were randomly selected to participate in this

study. The purpose of the study was explained to them clearly as well as the reason why we needed them to participate in our study. It was guaranteed for them that their demographic data and responses to other questions would be used anonymously for only academic purposes and their information would be kept confidential.

2.3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The main method for collecting qualitative data was the individual interview (Gay, et al, 2006). The data collection method for this study was making in-depth semi-structured interviews with individual teacher trainers. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to prompt the interviewee if he/she seeks more information or find what they are saying interesting (Smith, 2015). The open-ended nature of the question provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to go deeper into particular issues. The semi-structured interview in this study was conducted with the following questions.

1. What is your understanding of continuous professional development?
2. How do you usually improve your continuous professional development?
3. During the pandemic, what are the activities of your continuous professional development?
4. How do you feel about attending workshops/ training online?
5. Would you elaborate on the barriers you faced?
6. After attending the online continuous professional development programme, what are the changes?

Before the participants were interviewed with these questions, the experts suggested that the interview questions were relevant to collect the information about the continuous professional development of teacher trainers. “One-on-one interviews were conducted so that participants will not be hesitant to speak, articulate, and share ideas comfortably” (Creswell, 2012, p.218). The interviews were recorded with permission, and then transcribed and edited for further consolidation. The collected qualitative data were coded and analysed inductively.

3. FINDINGS

The findings were based on the experiences of teacher trainers gained by participating in online trainings. As shown in table 1, the main challenges teacher trainers overcome and the advantages of the continuous professional development of teacher trainers are also found out during the pandemic. The detailed results will be described in a narrative form.

Table1: Challenges and the advantages of the continuous professional development of teacher trainers during the pandemic

Challenges	Advantages
electricity off	improvement of ICT skills
poor internet connection	better communication, life skills
difficulty in the use of learning apps	confidence to implement online teaching

3.1 PERCEPTION OF TEACHER TRAINERS OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Regarding the two questions: What is your understanding of continuous professional development?, and How do you usually improve your continuous professional development?, all of the participants responded that continuous professional development means keeping their professional skills upgraded, namely teaching skills, management skills, subject mastery and all competencies that can be applied in their work.

They gain pedagogical knowledge and skills through reading books related to education, learn from other teacher trainers and sometimes attend the workshops such as Training of Trainers for the New Curriculum workshop organised by the Ministry of Education and the TREE project, which support English proficiency and inclusive practices.

Half of the respondents said they also learn English as a second language, focusing on academic writing and speaking skills, by enrolling in a course taught by specialists during their time off and paying the tuition costs. Few respondents mentioned that they upgrade research skills and also study further in PhD programmes. With regard to professional improvement, a respondent admitted that teaching and learning techniques can sometimes be learnt through movies.

3.2 CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER TRAINERS DURING THE PANDEMIC

The activities of continuous professional development, the feelings about attending online workshops and/or trainings, the barriers they faced and advantages they gained were investigated because workshops and training for teacher trainers were swiftly moved from face to face to online mode during the pandemic.

Because the education degree colleges are closed and there is no course for student teachers in the pandemic, teacher trainers have enough time to improve their professional and personal skills. Therefore, they can upgrade their ICT skills that can be used in their teaching and managerial tasks. Some participants learn other skills that are not related to their profession such as working with a sewing machine, knitting or learning a new

language. Before the pandemic, they were always busy therefore they had less opportunity and no time to improve their personal and professional skills but only profited from the professional development given under the arrangement of the Ministry of Education.

As soon as the online trainings started, a few respondents felt unconfident and excited to learn something new, especially to use Zoom app and Microsoft Office. They worried that unlike face to face learning, they would not comprehend online trainings well. Most of the teacher trainers were afraid of power cuts and they faced the problem that the internet connection was slow while they were attending online trainings for their professional development. Some teacher trainers stated that they had joined other local and global online courses such as Future Learn based on the experiences in the online workshop and trainings under the arrangement of the Ministry of Education. As a result, they started to communicate better with other academics all around the world. The significant change in their teaching profession during the pandemic will be that they can deliver teacher education to student teachers online and can integrate ICT skills with their teaching skills. Most of the respondents said that now they have confidence to teach student teachers both online and offline.

Although they faced challenges such as power cuts, poor internet connection and difficulty in the use of learning apps to continue their professional development, they discovered they had improved. They also mentioned the advantages of the online programmes. Their ICT skills are upgraded and they can communicate with national and international experts and academics during the pandemic. Finally, they have become confident to deliver teacher education to their prospective teachers.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed that the teacher trainers understand continuous professional development as all formal and informal ways of learning in which they acquire new knowledge, attitudes and skills. This view is supported by the conceptions of continuous professional development proposed by Gall and Renchler (1985) and Smith (2015). According to their responses, the challenges teacher trainers faced during the pandemic were addressed and they profited from advantages for their continuous professional development. Mohapatra (2020) also presented that the education industry has turned obstacles into advantages.

Professional development is only as good as the programs and the feedback and follow-up support they provide (OECD, 2021). Although technology has been a saving grace for many educational systems, this has not been the case for emerging and developing countries. Many teachers in underdeveloped nations lack the appropriate internet tools and technology to teach online, in addition to connection limitations with their region's ICT infrastructure (Cambridge, 2021).

During the pandemic, although all schools close down, teachers and students do not abandon the learning process. Teachers have to work from home and teach and learn online. The silver lining is that teachers have the access to attend online training provided by local and global learning centres. In addition, not only professional development but personal development can also be achieved.

The findings of this study may serve as a reminder to educational stakeholders, including policymakers, that broad and rigorous professional development programmes for teacher trainers are needed. Governments encourage teachers to participate in professional development by providing funding for training and financial assistance to cover lost wages, linking training to the certificate of higher qualifications, and making professional development a requirement for salary increases or career advancement (OECD, 2021). It will be critical to adapt to new regimes and training plans. Teachers used to be trained in institutions of education, taught face-to-face, and learned how to teach at the front of the classroom. In the context for online teacher professional development, there are a couple of difficulties to be solved, particularly in developing countries in the field of online training (Asgar & Ratra, 2020). Teachers now need to be educated how to teach in an online classroom as a result of COVID-19 (Cambridge, 2021). The COVID-19 epidemic is the nature's method of preparing us for the future, has launched us into the digital age, resulting in the digitization of training and an increase in the use of online learning (Ahmed& Ikram Khan, 2020; Asgar & Ratra, 2020). The post-pandemic education system is expected to be extensively digitized and digitally skilled (Ahmed& Ikram Khan, 2020). It can also be concluded that continuous professional development of teacher trainers was implemented even during the pandemic although there were some difficulties at the beginning. Online teaching and teacher training become more prominent in the next years and global education policy is necessary to prioritize complete access for developing countries as well. It can also be supposed that this will lead to lifelong learning for teacher trainers. Lifelong learning may be understood as the continuous pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional objectives. Lifelong learning promotes personal development, active citizenship and employability. This implies that professional development linked to lifelong learning involves professional learning that leads to a critical stance towards current thinking and practices thus enabling teachers to engage in the process of collaboratively seeking novel solutions to educational problems.

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