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Reviewing the Evidence of Professional Development that Makes Most Difference to English Teachers in India

Atiya khan
B.A. (English), M.A. (English), B.Ed. (English),
M.B.A. (Education Management), P.G.D.I.D. (Instructional Designing)

M.Ed. Research Scholar,
RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

Abstract:*The adoption of current technologies for teaching by English teachers in India is at the initial stage, as teachers require encouragement, opportunities and guidance to utilise innovative forms of professional development (Patel, Darji, & Mujapara, 2013). Moreover, long established, formal, and large-scale professional development workshops for English teachers in India leave little room for them to use ICT effectively for teaching their particular subject and in their particular teaching contexts (Prince & Barrett, 2014). As long as effective change in professional development is not achieved, ICT investments in Indian schools will continue to be largely ineffective. This paper reviews understandings and practices of the professional development of English teachers in different settings in India. It represents a broad spectrum of issues that are of concern for the professional development of English teachers in India, the issue of endangered praxis, challenges in the use of ICT in ESL classrooms, recent initiatives in teacher professional development, and the importance of school support in innovative professional development of English teachers in India.*

Keywords: *English teachers, ICT, professional development, teacher collaboration*

Endangered praxis:

The goal of India's education reform in ICT is to improve student performance through changes in teaching practices, and changes in teaching practices are likely to result from changes in professional development (Gupta, 2014). Better student outcomes are the end result of better teaching skills (Bolitho & Padwad, 2012). From a policy context, professional development is observed as pivotal to advancements in the standard of teaching and learning in schools all over the world (Ingvarson, Meiers & Beavis, 2005; Muijs & Lindsay, 2008). But, teachers time after time end up getting professional development that they just do not value, that they believe has minor bearing (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008), and that investigations prove does not succeed (Burns, 2007). The majority of the world's teachers, irrespective of the diversity of their professional contexts, engage in a particularly patterned model of professional development—the workshop or training—despite research illustrating that this sort of a model is less likely to have an impact on teacher practice or student achievement (Dumont, Istance, & Benavides, 2010; Mattson, 2008; Rönnerman, 2008; Timperley, 2011, Wei, Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2010). In that case, professional action becomes a stubborn structure operated by government, state, district or school policies, mandating a conventional

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culture of professional compliance, instead of fostering a culture of professional learning (Padwad & Dixit, 2008).

Research asserts that the usefulness of professional development has a bearing on the adoption and integration of ICT in classroom practice (Prestridge, 2008). But, several professional development initiatives for English teachers in India have failed to generate their anticipated outcomes; they highlighted the drawbacks of traditional ICT training, but presented little assistance in transforming what happens in the classroom and afforded no opportunities for teachers to practice what they learn (Padwad & Dixit, 2008). In a typical short-term ICT workshop for teachers in India, an external trainer models instructional practices for teachers so that teachers can then adapt the model to their own situation. Such workshops are often ineffective because of the lack of contextual considerations before modelling and the overreliance on teacher adaptation of existing practices (Prince & Barrett, 2014). This narrow yet long established practice of professional development also misses a crucial point – the need for teachers to take responsibility for their own learning. Informal contributions to teacher learning are rarely recognised in India as professional development; teachers' roles, responsibility and agency in their own professional development are disregarded (Stannard & Matharu, 2014). As a result, officially sanctioned professional development programs obtain recognition and support in India, even if they may not be related to teachers' needs; whereas new forms of professional development, based on teachers' own initiatives, needs and interests, are not recognised or supported (Bolitho & Padwad, 2012). In such compliant contexts, praxis is, indeed "endangered" (Kemmis & Smith, 2008, p.5), and is slowly amounting to an educational practice which is simply following the rules; preventing teachers from consciously reflecting on what they have learned. Praxis requires teachers to reflect beyond convention; it demands their creative thinking, judgement, involvement, and critical consciousness (Kemmis & Smith, 2008). Kemmis (2008) argues that these issues "cannot be closed once and for all by the answers given in any particular time or place" (2008, p. 29). Education should attempt "to continually review and revise past answers in the light of changed historical times, and changed social circumstances" (Kemmis 2009, p. 29); the practice calls for a consistent interpretive breakdown of the present using the knowledge gained from past experience.

Schools in India can no longer separate professional development activities from the on-going realities of teachers' work and their workplace (Raval, McKenney, & Pieters, 2012). Particularly in the world's developing countries like India, where the need for quality teaching is greatest, the frequency of professional development is episodic, its quality variable, its duration limited, and support or follow-up for teachers is almost non-existent. Also, the teachers who might need the most professional development, teachers who are novice to the profession, who are under-qualified, or who teach outside their content areas, receive the minimum professional development (OECD, 2008). Further, they get involved in formalised learning opportunities not when and where it matters most, in their classrooms as they are teaching, but away from their school contexts and outside of their school schedule (Bolitho & Padwad, 2012). A study by Khan (2015) on ICT enabled professional development of English teachers in the Mumbai region of India reveals that most teachers viewed their professional development practice as a series of

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inadequate, inappropriate and ineffective activities that were detached from their actual classroom teaching practice. They wanted an environment where their school recognised the importance of teachers' subject-specific needs, and the importance of teachers' involvement in professional development decision-making and implementation. To sum up, a 'narrow' view of teacher professional development still prevails in India (Bolitho & Padwad, 2012), which is solely focused on face-to-face training programs. A shift in attitudes and actions is necessary, and teachers are the primary means of addressing and resolving this professional development crisis in India. However, their current (passive) roles in their own professional development in India are not essentially the best means to realize this transformation.

Barriers to ICT integrated teaching of English - From professional development to practice:

In a global research survey conducted by Pelgrum (2001), of nationally representative samples of schools from 26 countries including India, 38 barriers for employing computers in the classroom were revealed. These obstacles were both material and non-material conditions. The major five barriers in his list were limited number of computers, school teachers' inadequate knowledge/skills, challenges in merging ICT with instruction, arranging computer time, and insufficient peripherals. Pulist (2005) in an exploratory study on secondary and senior secondary level schools of Delhi identified that lack of computers with Internet connection, pressure of curriculum on teachers, lack of teacher motivation, lack of technical expertise, regular power cuts were seen as barriers for the use of web-based technology in the classroom.

There is a common understanding that exposure to technology does not necessarily lead to the most effective uses of technology (Dawson, 2006). At first, teachers may start using an ICT tool, but never develop beyond basic use of it. Surveys of teachers employing new ICT tools demonstrated some ICT adoption by them, but oftentimes the exercise did not broaden their higher level understanding or performance (Dawson, 2006). In the findings from case studies of the introduction of the Intel Teach Essentials Course—a professional development program focused on integrating information and communication technologies (ICT) into project-based learning—into six schools in India, Chile, and Turkey, Light (2009) suggested that mere introduction of a new tool, new practice or new policy in the classroom is not enough. Light (2009) further claimed that change is essential and possible only "by deeply reshaping life in the classrooms—from educators' beliefs about learning to the relationships that make up the school community." (p. 12).

Until teachers realize the need, and more importantly, the ease of accessing ICT and the benefits thereof, no amount of training or infrastructure can help. A survey carried out by Uniyal and Pandey (2008) on teachers of the Uttarakhand region of India, found that even if there is availability of computers, the teachers did not make use of it. Rajasekar and Vaiyapuri (2007) studied computer knowledge and attitudes towards computers of 670 higher secondary school teachers in the Cuddalore district of Tamilnadu, India. Their survey demonstrated that 60% of the teachers had positive attitude towards computers however teachers' computer knowledge was

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low. Teachers become effective ICT integrators in the classroom through positive teacher attitude, thereby feeling more comfortable with using and integrating ICT into their teaching (Kumar & Kumar, 2003). Positive attitudes typically persuade teachers missing ICT know-how to gain knowledge of the competencies for implementing ICT in the classroom environment (Narasimham, 2012). Teachers' positive attitude towards ICT is a catalyst to make changes in their professional learning more inviting for them (Khan, 2015). Also, a lack of positive attitudes may give rise to stress, anxiety and absence of confidence; as teachers may feel uncomfortable with technology (Rajasekar & Vaiyapuri, 2007).

An ICT enabled English teaching environment also cannot be created overnight: teachers need to experience appropriate input so that they can become engaged with ICT enabled teaching strategies. But teachers of English who do not possess the required ICT skills, knowledge, and attitudes cannot create such an environment (Rajasekar & Vaiyapuri, 2007). Research demonstrates that teachers generally use ICT to support their administrative and assessment practices, rather than use it to transform their teaching at a more deep-seated level (Khan, 2015). Major factors that influence the extent of English teachers' ICT integration in both classroom teaching and professional learning are lack of time and resources to develop new pedagogical practices, and unenthusiastic school culture (Khan, 2015).

English teachers in India (and all over the world) have busy days full of teaching, assessment, parent communication and extra duties (Raval, 2014). There is precious little time to acquire information about subject-specific pedagogical applications of ICT through training by an ICT expert (Prince & Barrett, 2014). Teachers, in addition to completing given teaching workload, also overwork in planning and managing both curriculum-related and unrelated actions along with other administrative load. For many teachers, using ICT is extra burden that is simply considered if there is time to spare. A study by Bhalla (2012) on 20 schools of the Delhi region of India reveals that time was perceived to be the strongest barrier to computer use by school teachers in teaching-learning process. Other barriers were access, support, training and competence. Various aspects related to characteristics of students and attitudes of teachers were also considered to be the barriers to computer use by a few respondents.

The time challenge for ICT integration, to certain degree, continues to be overlooked in the Indian framework. The adoption of new technology tools and strategies is an ongoing effort in Indian schools. Schools obtain LCD projectors, computers and Internet connection, and then send their teachers for short-term professional development workshops that train them to use ICT in teaching (Bolitho & Padwad, 2012; Menon, 2012; Mohanraj, 2009). It is common for schools in India to have a short faculty session for their teachers that introduces a new tool, software or ICT application, but then gives little or no time for teachers to reflect, discuss and develop new ideas for applying ICT in the classroom (Bolitho & Padwad, 2012; Menon, 2012; Mohanraj, 2009). In many cases, the knowledge from this formal and traditional experience is short-term as teachers hear ICT ideas, but rarely apply what they were exposed to and reflect on the experience (Padwad, 2008). Moreover, there is limited face-to-face time in a typical school calendar for

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teachers in India to follow-up formal ICT training sessions, and share, collaborate and design collectively (Bolitho & Padwad, 2012). If teachers don't get time to reflect on their learning, they are much less likely to use those new ICT ideas (Padwad, 2008).

Research literature on effective professional development supports practices that are teacher-centred, teacher-controlled, supported by the school, and done collectively by all teachers (Ingvarson, Meiers & Beavis, 2005; Timperley, 2008; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2008). In India, what teachers use ICT for and whether they use it collaboratively for directing their own professional development is not addressed adequately (Mitakshara, 2009).

Professional development through teacher collaboration:

A body of international research (Phelps, Graham & Kerr, 2004; Phelps, Graham, Watts & O'Brien, 2006) claims that competent and skilful teachers learn ICT mainly through self-directed professional development, at the same time being stimulated by co-workers, instead of remaining reliant on traditional professional development. Researchers emphasize that collaborative reflection with peers benefits everyone and enhances professional knowledge, competence and awareness. Even though workshop based approaches can furnish ways of integrating ideas, undoubtedly the most beneficial learning for teachers is one which is controlled and sustained by the teachers themselves. Developing communities and motivating communication between teachers needs to be viewed as essential, not simply in transferring of skills and knowledge but additionally as an approach to deal with subject related issues and having an impact on ICT beliefs and practices. As has been discussed in various other studies (Phelps, Graham & Thornton, 2006; Phelps, Graham, Watts & O'Brien, 2006), specific collegial consultation concerning ICT strategies can encourage risk taking and promote more ICT hesitant teachers to learn with and from their co-workers. Day (2004) proposed that pre-service and in-service educators should welcome an agenda that acknowledges the value of continued collaboration, teachers' functions as knowledge suppliers; their requirement to maintain change, along with a mutuality of ICT practice.

Motivating a teacher in using ICT is more crucial than acquiring a large number of computers and exhausting resources on their formal ICT training (Prestridge, 2012). Reducing trainer talk and encouraging teacher collaboration is important to empower English teachers in India (Padwad, 2006). Teacher professional development is most successful when it is decentralized, so that the teachers have some element of command, control and ownership. Previous investigations on teachers' ICT beliefs ignored the social aspects of learning and the social contexts in which the teachers work (Bate, 2010; Darlington-Hammond, 1996; Lim, Lee, & Hung, 2008). To continue the learning process, teachers must control their professional development; make it more real, attainable, challenging, yet stimulating and not intimidating (Padwad, 2008; Padwad & Dixit, 2008). Bedadur (2012), researching on the use of mobile phones by rural teachers of English in Karnataka, for their professional learning, described that "the pedagogical design of a professional development plan has to be collaborative to succeed. Moreover, it has to be an initiative driven by the participants" (p. 94). Somekh (2008) considers

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the integration of ICT as much as a social process as it is a technical process. Recent research in India, on the professional development of teachers, is starting to yield a consensus concerning the social characteristics of effective teacher learning (Gupta, 2014). Teacher interaction is what drives real learning and change in the teacher professional development of teachers in India (Gupta, 2014; Mahajan, 2009). Increasingly, researchers have revealed that like all types of learning, teacher learning is not only individual, but 'social' as well (Lieberman &Miller, 2008; Lieberman & Pointer-Mace, 2010). Teachers who learn together over time feel committed, not only to each other, but also to further learning (Stannard & Matharu, 2014). Moreover, teachers' engagement and collegial discussions in networked professional learning communities develops improved practices of teaching and professional development (Borko, 2004). Most notably, strong professional learning network and collaboration of the teachers within their schools contribute to better student achievement and performance (Timperley et al., 2008).

The World Bank (2013) stresses that while traditional teacher practices are still important, teachers must also have access to innovative, appropriate and on-going professional development, and the time and resources to explore this new learning base and develop new skills collectively. For many teachers India, teaching can be a solitary practice with not many chances for professional discourse, reflective inquiry and collaboration with one's colleagues. Professional learning communities of teachers could offer an opportunity to leverage this strength of contribution, group interaction and collaboration.

The importance of school support:

According to Padwad and Dixit (2012), the professional development of teachers in India is largely controlled by the school administration. Moreover, schools are usually indifferent to, and sometimes even discourage, professional development activities which teachers undertake on their own and in collaboration with other teachers. Padwad and Dixit's (2014) 'Think Tank' project in India revised the role of teacher professional development in India from something controlled by the state to a more relevant and comprehensive practice in which teachers took centre stage. Prince and Barrett (2014) explained that: ''In an Indian teacher's case, the school principal, the block or district education officer, the state machinery or even national policy might man the travel desk'' (p. 23). Teacher professional development thus needs to be seen as holistic and decentralised, with a focus on professional discourse and a climate of interaction for the system as well as for individuals (Light, 2009; Padwad & Dixit, 2012). Collaboration between teachers is not yet a critical component of teacher professional development in India, maybe because schools are too hierarchy-oriented to allow teacher-directed and teacher-controlled professional development (Khan, 2015). The conventional school culture usually considers a teacher's proper place during school hours to be in front of a class and isolates teachers from each other and discourages collaborative work. It is a culture that does not set a premium on teacher learning and in which decisions about professional development needs are certainly not expressed by teachers, but by state, district, and school managers (Khan, 2015). The absence of school support is not a simple issue, and it is limiting many innovative forces in the pathway to effective professional learning, in addition to frustrating already demotivated teachers (Somekh, 2008).

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School leaders in Mumbai should practice a changed vision for professional development, that nurtures their teachers' involvement in decision-making, ownership, responsibility, and development of their professional learning. They must remind themselves that motivating teachers in using ICT innovatively is more crucial than acquiring a large number of computers. Pandit-Narkar (2012) proposed a teacher-driven and teacher-centred approach which strives to develop lifelong collaborative learning strategies in teachers. An important characteristic of this approach of professional development is that, rather than imposing school determined objectives and expectations on teachers, the school encourages them to collectively achieve subject relevant knowledge and understandings; those related to their ICT skills, attitudes, confidence, and school environment.

Most importantly, the policy makers and educational administrators in India must envision their teachers as they do students—as learners with their own individual learning styles and backgrounds; who, like their students, need continuous school support, ongoing feedback and ongoing interaction with each other, so they can constantly improve their expertise (Khan, 2015). A change in professional development could be possible with a change in attitudes and perceptions of both teachers and their schools; when all the agents of change would be involved to bring about the change (Khan, 2015).

Recommendations and conclusion:

Investigations on international practices of teacher professional development suggest there cannot be a 'one size fits all' policy for every case. The review also shows that professional development takes many forms, but there appear to be key universal concepts for effective professional development. For instance, there is significant evidence to advocate that collegiality and collaboration in professional development tend to be crucial, and numerous studies have established that 'sharing of practice' is one of the most well-liked forms of professional development.

This review reiterates that instead of an authoritative structure of professional development controlled by less representative and less inclusive groups like the 'expert committees' (which are so typical in the Indian scenario), a collaborative structure of collective professional development involving all possible stakeholders is an effective way of making better sense of the challenges and solutions in professional development. Moreover, professional development initiatives such as this will be more relevant when they are strongly influenced by local cultures and situated appropriately in the socio-cultural environments of the school. The literature also suggests that it is necessary to give teachers adequate time and possible choices to reflect on teaching and to share best practices with their co-workers. Regarding the effectiveness of professional development in changing practices, there is an increasing concern for accountability, with many educational policy-makers and administrators seeking to quantify the effectiveness of professional development. Conversely, it can be construed with this review of related literature that it is only when policy makers, schools, administrators, and teachers

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collectively change the long established practices, the possible benefits of innovative professional development, could be achieved. “You can dream, create, design, and build the most wonderful place in the world . . . but it requires people to make the dream a reality” (Walt Disney as cited in Schermerhorn, 2011, p.208).

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