

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS AND THE ROLE OF MOOCS

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ABSTRACT

Development in the quality, efficiency and equity of education, to a major extent depends on the nexus of teaching and learning, in turn influenced by the quality of teachers. Teacher is a significant factor influencing the quality of education. Thus, professional competence of a teacher can play a significant role in enhancing the same. Teachers are expected to keep themselves updated with advancements in their subject, pedagogy, technology and other relevant parameters of teaching learning process. To realize this goal, teacher education programmes (both in-service and pre-service) can integrate resources not only textual, but also the accessible open educational resources, thus equipping teachers to face challenges and meet demands of education system. In this context MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) are a recent addition to online learning opportunities. It is a new online medium for course delivery and learning, thereby enabling individuals to participate in the same course with good quality content and interactive tools for learning. This paper focuses on the role of MOOCs towards teacher's professional development.

MOOCS is an emerging technology that has caught the attention of corporations, administrators, educators and learners alike and has compelled them to look at learning, teaching, and education through a different lens. MOOCS can help educators learn some fundamentals about online learning and apply what they learned to the courses they will teach. MOOCS can also bridge the gap for the areas that have limited resources or lack funding for professional development. MOOCS can provide opportunities to educators and give them access to knowledge, skills, and learning opportunities. MOOCS can promote professional growth while providing new knowledge or skills for employers. Although MOOCS introduce pedagogy differently than in person training, educators must remain motivated to learn so they can share their knowledge with their students. Performing professional teacher development via MOOCS can provide an extended network in which to create a community for learning with like-minded peers in similar situations. In this way these courses can provide an extended peer community that can further increase the learning effects of a course. The potential for community building and exchange of ideas, best practices, and lessons learned increases significantly. MOOCS providers are starting to create courses specifically for professional teacher development. However, specific course offerings for teachers will need to increase in order to ensure success.

Key Words: *MOOCS, Online Courses, Professional Development, Teachers.*

I. INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of new society in the form of knowledge society, many societies are engaging in serious educational reform. One of the key element for reformation is the professional development of teachers, societies are finally acknowledging that teachers are not only one of the variables that need to be changed in order to improve their educational system, but they are also the most significant change agents in these reforms- both being subject and objects of change. In the present scenario when the knowledge is at the finger tips of the learner, the teachers are expected to play a much wider role. They need to keep themselves abreast with the latest knowledge in their respective field, and also need to have the knowledge about the innovative pedagogies and approaches in teaching. The teachers are required to possess the required knowledge, skill, attitudes, expertise, values and other characteristics so that they can excel as teachers and thus may help in the development of their learners. Hence this makes the field of teacher professional development a growing and challenging area and one that has received major attention during the past few years.

Professional development can be provided in many ways, ranging from the formal to the informal. It can be made available through external expertise in the form of courses, workshops or formal qualification programmes, through collaborations with other institutions (e.g. observational visits to other institutions or teacher networks in the form of faculty exchange programmes). The development can also be provided through coaching/mentoring, peer observation collaborative planning and teaching, online courses and the sharing of good practices.

II. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development is the strategy to ensure that educators continue to strengthen their practice throughout their career. The most effective professional development engages teams of teachers to focus on the needs of their students. They learn and solve problems together in order to ensure all students achieve success. The development of teachers beyond their initial training can serve a number of objectives including:

- To update individuals knowledge of a subject in light of recent advances in the area;
- To update individuals skills, attitudes and approaches in light of the development of new teaching techniques and objectives, new circumstances and new educational research;
- To enable individuals to apply changes made to curricula or other aspects of teaching practice;
- To enable schools to develop and apply new strategies concerning the curriculum and other aspects of teaching practice;
 - To exchange information and expertise among teachers and others, e.g. academics, industrialists; and
 - To help weaker teachers become more effective.

Professional development enables educators to develop the knowledge and skills they need to address students learning challenges. To be effective, professional development requires thoughtful planning followed by careful implementation with feedback to ensure it responds to educators learning needs. Educators who participate in professional development then must put their new knowledge and skills to work. Professional development is

not effective unless it causes teachers to improve their instruction or causes administrators to become better school leaders.

For effective professional development of teacher, it is essential that the changes should be made at the grass-root level. The need of the hour is that all the variables i.e school plant, administrators, teachers, learners, parents etc. should facilitate the process of development. All educational institutions should be places where both teachers and students learn. Teachers and administrators who routinely develop their own knowledge and skills are models for students that learning is important and useful. Their ongoing development creates a culture of learning throughout the school and supports educator's effort to engage students in learning. Effective teaching does not occur accidentally, all effective teaching is the result of study, reflection, practice, and hard work. A teacher can never know enough about how a student learns, what impedes the student's learning, and how the teacher's instruction can increase the student's learning. Professional development is the only means for teachers to gain such knowledge. Whether students are high, low, or average achievers, they will learn more if their teachers regularly engage in high-quality professional development.

III.ROLE OF MOOCS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCS) are currently one of the most discussed and debated topics in education. Researchers and practitioners fervently study outcomes and participation of these courses, and higher education institutions keenly attempt to determine the effects of this latest educational revolution. MOOCS can provide resources for 21st century professionals. MOOCS are free of charge, delivered to the masses and accessible anywhere around the world. MOOCS can serve as a unique professional development opportunity for professionals in higher education settings (Ferdig, 2013). MOOCS can give educators opportunities to learn new concepts in various subject areas and enhance their skills within those subject areas (Davis, 2014). Professional development can allow educators to teach an innovative curriculum that will promote engagement and progress among learners (Donaldson, 2011). MOOCS are an emerging technology that has caught the attention of corporations, administrators, educators and learners alike and has compelled them to look at learning, teaching, and education through a different lens (Fischer, 2014).

MOOCS can help teachers develop innovative ways to enhance the online learning experience in higher education. According to Wolf (2006), online or distance learning is used as a cost-efficient way to train professionals. She further explains that instructors who are teaching online do not have to necessarily have face-to-face teaching experience but ideally should feel comfortable with the technology (Wolf, 2006). MOOCS can combine the most effective aspects of online learning and personal learning networks within learning communities (Clarke, 2013). MOOCs encourage cooperation among participants and can also promote social constructivism and connectivism. (Clara & Barbera, 2013)

Professionals from the educational setting who need a boost of motivation or simply value the essence of learning about education from observing other teachers can get resources from taking a MOOC. If a MOOC is taught well and designed appropriately, professionals can truly enjoy the entire course experience (Nkuyubwatsi, 2013). Furthermore, professionals can acquire knowledge on how MOOCs are designed and taught, while instantaneously learning from other participants (Meister, 2013). Wolf (2006) indicates that

educators who teach in higher education should be competent in using a computer, the Internet, and online applications before enrolling in training to teach online. Furthermore, online learning environments such as MOOCS can give working professionals the opportunity to get professional development when it is convenient for them. MOOCs continue to transform the way faculty members and students interact (Morris, 2013). Obtaining professional development on emerging technologies allows educators to acquire new teaching techniques that can promote an engaging learning experience for their students (Bali, 2013).

Another benefit from MOOCS is the ability for professionals to join community conversations about topics that interest them. MOOCS can provide professionals an abundance of resources on their topics of interest (Aguaded-Gomez, 2013) and can create a large community of teaching professionals (Ferdig, 2013). Moreover, MOOCS can allow professionals to learn from other participants and experts in the field and adopt new ideas from those teaching the MOOC (Nkuyubwatsi, 2013). Because different professionals from all over the world can sign on to take a MOOC, they can have discussions that are directly related to the online course or are generated from the students participating in the course (Clarke, 2013). MOOCs promote professional development to be done in communities of practice, while connecting professionals with other like-minded people like themselves (Ferdig, 2013). Educators that receive professional development are motivated to help their students improve their outcomes (Wolf, 2006). Additionally, MOOCs can allow professionals to gain a student perspective and experience what it is to be on the receiving end of online learning, which can prepare them to create better online learning environments for their students (Nkuyubwatsi, 2013).

MOOCS can provide opportunities to educators and give them access to knowledge, skills, and learning opportunities. MOOCS can promote professional growth while providing new knowledge or skills for employers. Although MOOCS introduce pedagogy differently than in person training, educators must remain motivated to learn so they can share their knowledge with their students. The eventual acceptance of MOOCS by elementary and secondary level educational institutions as quality replacements for traditional professional development is crucial factor for long-term success and viability. Another potential benefit for using MOOCS for professional teacher development is that they offer increased exposure for teachers to different resources, which make blended learning and flipped classroom type efforts more accessible. Also, teachers themselves develop an understanding for MOOCS and studying online that they can then bring into the classroom. Additionally, teachers increase their professional network drastically by following courses that can include participants from all over the world. Performing professional teacher development via MOOCS can provide an extended network in which to create a community for learning with like-minded peers in similar situations. In this way these courses can provide an extended peer community that can further increase the learning effects of a course. The potential for community building and exchange of ideas, best practices, and lessons learned increases significantly. Finally, an existing problem for using MOOCS for professional teacher development is that many courses may be more general in nature and not be specifically directed towards teachers.

IV. CONCLUSION

The long-term effects and sustainability of MOOCS are debatable, but a general consensus exists that such courses are here to stay, regardless if they are disruptive or merely transformative. The utilization of MOOCS for professional teacher development is relatively novel and uncharted. The combination of MOOCS and teacher development seems to offer an obvious win-win situation. Teachers can receive high quality professional development for free, and MOOC providers can expand their user base with motivated, educated learners. However, only time will tell if MOOC providers concentrate on this market, and whether teacher and employers value and accept these courses as satisfactory teacher development. The combination of MOOCS and professional teacher development warrants more empirical and analytical research in the future in order to better study the potential successes and hazards.

In conclusion, educators can use MOOCS as a professional development tool. If a teacher is looking for ways to improve their professional practice or increase their knowledge in the subjects they teach or areas they would like to explore, MOOCS Can be a resourceful tool. Distance learning can provide ongoing faculty support in the form of continuing education (Wolf, 2006). Educators should keep up with emerging trends in the educational field through professional development. MOOCS can help educators learn some fundamentals about online learning and apply what they learned to the courses they will teach. MOOCS can also bridge the gap for districts that have limited resources or lack funding for professional development.

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