Necessity for Teachers' Professional Development: Vis-a-vis Learner Needs

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ABSTRACT

The research paper aims to establish the necessity and importance of effective teacher training and teacher education programmes to boost teachers' professional development. English language having attained the position of the Lingua Franca in India, has become a much-needed skill without which, attaining professional identity has become an impossible phenomenon for anyone today. Teachers must foster their skill sets and enhance their grasp of the content in order to enable their target learners to achieve their prospective English language needs. Through this research paper, the author aims to create awareness regarding the necessity of CPD (Continuing Professional Development) as an unavoidable necessity for teachers' professional existence in today's world.

Keywords: Professional Development, Teacher Education, Teacher Training, Learner Needs, Teachers' Needs

Introduction:

The importance of the English language in today's world is quite indisputable. Irrespective of what our backgrounds, needs, and necessities are, we all feel the need to achieve a good command over English language. In this regard, ELT exponent Penny Ur (2012) mentioned that teaching *priorities in English language teaching have varied over the years: fashions are constantly changing. It is important* as Ur further stated, *for our students to learn to use English both fluently and correctly so that they can get their message across effectively (p.1).* In the same context, Penny Ur expressed her views that gone are the days when English language was recognised as the native language for English people. With changes in its demand and international recognition, the English language today is considered as the language used by educated speakers across the globe for international communication (Penny Ur, 2012, p.1).

It is a matter of pride to be able to speak fluently in English. Learners today, irrespective of their discipline of study, educational backgrounds, or geographical references, feel it is important to speak in the English language in order to survive in today's competitive world. From the time of its inception, the English language has gained much popularity across the globe, and the same is the case in India and in its North Eastern states. Irrespective of the age, cultural backgrounds, caste, and creed, we all feel the inherent need of the ability to speak fluently in English language. The recent generations, especially the youth, who are the nation's future, feel it as a matter of pride to be able to speak fluently in English language. Our learners consider being fluent and confident while speaking in English as a crucial threshold to build their career in the respective fields of their study. This specific reason is the determining factor for a huge population of English Language Learners (ELLs) across the world. The National Council of teachers of English (USA) in its policy

report mentioned that, *some reports portray English learners as a new and homogeneous population. Ells are highly heterogeneous and complex group of students, with diverse gifts, educational needs, backgrounds, languages, and goals. Some Ells come from homes in which no English is spoken, while some come from homes where only English is spoken; others have been exposed to or use multiple languages (2008).* The English language teachers, in this context need to balance all these heterogeneous natures while handling the ELLs.

Previously, the teaching of English was more concerned with teaching literature and grammar. 'It was assumed that the study of core literature and grammatical forms will add in the learners' all-round development. However, as the world shrunk, the position of English language in the curriculum changed, a need for learning **English for Specific Purposes** (ESP) (Hutchinson & Waters; 1987) was felt. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) in this context remarked, *new studies shifted attention away from defining the formal features of language usage to discovering ways in which language is used in real communication (p.7).* Learners of different groups/areas had varied English language learning needs. These needs require to be fulfilled by the English teachers. As a result, a changing pressure was felt by the English teachers. They had to come out of their comfort zones to meet the needs of their learners which would enable them to cope up with the fast changing and shrinking world. This, in corresponding time was taken as a serious issue by language educators. Hence, research on developing the standards and pedagogical aspects associated to the teaching-learning of English language was initiated at the onset of the 21st century. English language teachers, throughout the world were being served with professional development or teacher education training to enable them to meet the changing and growing needs of the new age Ells. For language teachers today, to meet the learners' needs it is absolutely necessary to groom themselves up so that they can empower the learners in becoming more skilled and professionally ready for future challenges. Through Continuing Professional development, i.e. *CPD* (S. Brog, 2015) the teachers can bring in a systematic change in their perspective by adapting newer strategies of teaching and help learners develop the skills that will enable them to mend themselves professionally.

By grooming the author does not mean teachers need to attend professional development programs frequently, and that is the only way for CPD. *Classroom observations, publishing research papers, action research, peer observation* etc. also add in the teachers' CPD. In this research paper, the author would put more emphasize on the aspects of *teacher training* and *teacher education*, and teaching methodology as if we consider the learners' needs, these are the most important factors that would add to their learning.

Furthermore, teacher development programs are not only and necessarily attending so-called teacher training sessions only, the author is not of the view that the English teachers need to go out and attend training sessions inside a training room very often, it can be held anywhere, even inside their own classrooms. *Teacher collaboration, self-reflection, self-directed learning*, etc. (Richards & Farrell.2005), are some of the ways in which teachers can develop themselves as in-service teachers. A professional, in Penny Ur's words is *someone whose work involves performing a certain function with some degree of expertise* (Richards & Renandya.2002, p.388).

Defining Professional Development

School systems throughout the world

acknowledge that quality of teaching is the most critical in-school factor impacting on students' outcomes (Darling Hammond.2000, Hattie.2008, Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development) (OECD). For any society to achieve success, and rise to the contemporary world, the role of the teachers cannot be overlooked. The workability of a curriculum depends upon the effective delivery by the teacher (Emannuel.2013).

Professional development is a must for every professional from any fields. Be it a technical expert, a physician or the language teacher, it is a must for all to cope up with. They need to be updated about the newer trends and research outcomes in language teaching across the world. Learners today possess high expectations from their teachers, and thus to meet those expectations one must keep themselves updated with the newer trends and techniques in language teaching. A language teacher's responsibilities as mentioned earlier, are much higher than other subject teachers as their job is to develop language abilities in the learners.

Teacher Education is such an aspect that, according to the language educators, can continue even after ones' formal education period is over. Richards and Farrell (2005), in this context remarked that, *the need for ongoing teacher education has been a recurring theme in language teaching circles in recent years and has been given renewed focus as a result of the emergence of teachers led initiatives such as action research, reflective teaching and team teaching (p. 1).* A teacher according to the new approaches should be a dynamic entity who is continuously involved in discovering and exploring newer trends and opportunities, following which they can both facilitate their learners' development as well as add to their own development as

professionals. Penny Ur (2002) defines a professional, as someone who possesses a certain expertise in the respective field and their work involves performing functions with expertise (p. 388). It (professional development) is, in short, an aspect greatly influences quality of teaching and the teachers' individual growth as a professional.

Why do teachers require professional development? Significance & relevance

English language Teacher education programs tend to cater to the individual teachers and their learners' language development needs. Teacher education programmes are meant for teachers to develop their skills of teaching. This development can continue even after one's formal education. N.S. Prabhu (2012, ed. Francis Peter) views teachers' *growth as something that arises from the ongoing activity of teaching—from the daily engagement in the classroom—rather than from any professional inputs to the teacher from the world of professional specialism (p.1).* Teachers today, are supposed to update their knowledge in areas such as curriculum design, selection of material, evaluation and assessment process. Teacher education is a process that takes place over time rather than for a specific period. The process can both be supported at the institutional level and be taken forward by the teacher herself. Programmes to support teacher education at the institution level include attending Faculty Development programmes, workshops, seminars, attending lectures by experienced teachers which eventually add in the respective teachers' professional development. At individual level, teachers can do self-reflection practice, publishing research papers, record their own classes, ask a colleague to observe while they teach, peer teaching etc.

In most schools and institutions today, language

teachers are expected to keep themselves updated with developments in the respective field. This is required to review their teaching skills and to take up new challenges according to the changing needs of the learner and the situation at regular intervals. Teachers, today need to be dynamic in terms of planning lessons, adapting material and engaging learners while teaching a specific content. Richards and Farrell (2005, p.1) in this context commented that *the need for ongoing renewal of professional skills and knowledge is not a reflection of inadequate training but simply a response to the fact that not everything teachers need to know can be provided at pre-service level, as well as the fact that the knowledge base of teaching constantly changes.*

Teacher education programmes are meant for teachers to develop their skills of teaching. This development can continue even after one's formal education. The need for ongoing teacher education programmes is a recurring theme in the field of language teaching (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) in the recent years and has been given much importance due to the emergence of various teacher led initiatives such as action research, reflective teaching, team teaching, and so on. Teachers have different kinds of needs at various point of time. They have individual professional needs, needs of the institution they are associated with, and needs that change according to time. N.S. Prabhu (2012, ed. Francis Peter) views teachers' *growth as something that arises from the ongoing activity of teaching—from the daily engagement in the classroom—rather than from any professional inputs to the teacher from the world of professional specialism (p.1).* Teachers today, are supposed to update their knowledge in areas

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The term *Teacher Education* can be divided into two broad categories and be represented through the following diagram
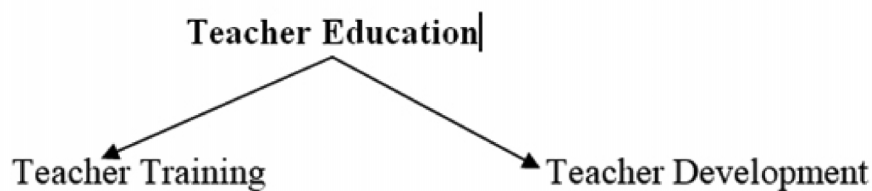
Teacher Education

Teacher Training ← → Teacher Development

Fig. 1. Richards and Farrell's (2005) types of teacher Education

a. Teacher Training

According to Richards and Farrell (2005. p. 3), *training refers to activities directly focused on a teachers' present responsibilities and is typically aimed at short-term and immediate goals.* Teacher training programmes are often seen as preparation for induction into first teaching experience or to take new teaching assignments by practicing teachers. These trainings involve understanding of the basic concepts and principles as a prerequisite to apply them to teaching and the abilities to demonstrate and practice these principles in the classroom teachings. It also implies trying out new strategies inside the classroom related to classroom supervision, monitoring of the learners and getting feedback from colleagues on one's teaching practices. The contents used in the trainings are designed or chosen by experts and are often available in prescribed textbooks as methodology in language teaching. Richards & Farrell (2005. p.3) mentions the following examples of goals from a training perspective,

- learning how to use effective strategies to open a lesson

- adapting a textbook to match the class

- using effective questioning techniques

- using classroom aids and resources

- techniques for giving learners feedback on their performance, and so on.

The goals mentioned above focus on enabling the trainee teachers with techniques that will facilitate them to handle classes in better ways. Language teachers, especially English language teachers today, have specific professional development needs which requires to be met. Unless these needs are met, the new age teachers wouldn't be able to meet the learners' language needs. With changing times, learners today, are no more confined with sitting inside the classroom as passive recipients in the teaching-learning process. They (learners) have become vocal in terms of expressing their wants i.e., their expectations from a specific course and lacks i.e., their deficiencies in relation to the target language. The role of a teacher in the traditional approach to teaching was confined as knowledge giver. Teacher was recognised as the supreme authority in the teaching-learning process. But with changing time and learner attitude, it is imperative that teachers must adapt themselves with the changing needs. As rightly stated, dignity of a teacher lies in the success of a child (Dr.Samuel.W. Amadioha, et. Al. 2014).

Teacher training programmes need to be designed keeping the aspects mentioned above in mind. Training sessions that provide hands on training to the trainee teachers on developing strategies to handle mixed ability classes, learner with specific needs, adapt lessons according to the level of understanding of the learners, different methods of teaching, and so on. However, Penny

Ur (2012) in the context of teachers' professional development stated that the main tools for professional development of teachers are available within the respective teachers' own teaching routine; in their own teaching experience and own reflections on their teaching; discussion with fellow teachers and learner feedback (p. 289). Growth of a teacher arises and sustains by experience, not by training or knowledge (N.S. Prabhu, 2012)

Training is an abstract concept and many associate it with sitting consciously within a confined room with someone (a senior colleague/ expert) appointed as the training consultant providing lectures on the underlying theme. The individuals attending the session sit with an expectation to learn newer theories in relation to the topic and carry those to their respective classes and implement them. There are instances where the author had personally attended such training sessions entitled under the theme 'skill development' that deal with theories of language teaching and learning, with no hands-on practicum. In the North Eastern states of the country, especially in Assam, there are common instances of such practices. In the name of teacher training or refresher courses, sessions dealing with only theoretical knowledge with no practical implication are served. The in- service teachers are in no way benefitted attending these.

b. Teacher Development

Teacher Development on the other hand refers to general growth of the teaching-learning aspects not focusing on the development of any specific job or issue (Richards & Farrell, 2005; p.4). It serves long-term goals and facilitates growth of the trainee teachers understanding of teaching as a course process and themselves as teachers. H.H. Stern and Peter Strevens (GURT,

1983) expressed their views in relation to Language Teacher Education (LTE) where they mentioned that, *the goal of teacher development programmes is to move towards a rational for teacher education —not immediately to come up with a full-fledged rational.* The underlying principles behind any teacher development programme is to help the in-service or pre-service teachers to improve their cognates in understanding the mechanics of teaching in a broader picture. Along with this, such initiatives also aim to develop the trainee teachers' abilities to self-reflect, critically analyse their teaching and evolve as better practitioners of the teaching-learning process. Lado (1964; p.8) compared a professionally developed teacher with a medical practitioner. He said, *when a better way to teach something is reported the teacher incorporates it into his courses. Just as a physician incorporates into his practices new and effective ways of treating each disease as reported in medical literature.* Regarding goals of a teacher development programme, Jack.C. Richards (2005, P. 4) mentions the following,

- understanding how the process of second language development occurs

- understanding how our roles change according to the kind of learners we are teaching

- understanding the kinds of decision making that occur during lessons

- reviewing our own theories and principles of language teaching.

- developing an understanding of different styles of teaching

- determining learners' perceptions of classroom activities

Teacher development programmes adapt strategies like documenting various kinds of teaching practices, reflective analysis of teaching practices, collaborating with peers on classroom projects and so on (Richards & Farrell, 2005). However, no one can deny the significance of self-observation and critical reflection as many aspects such as subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical expertise and understanding of the curriculum and the syllabus can be realised only through such personalised practices. Teacher development processes often derive their rational from assumptions about the nature of teacher development and how do these take place. Freeman & Richards (1996) call this as teacher learning. Where questions related to the nature of teacher education, involvement of cognitive process while teaching and learning to teach, etc. are explored.

Any professional development course/ programme, should be a combination of aspects from both *teacher training* and *teacher development*. Focus must be on developing the trainee teachers' short-term goals like techniques to adapt a lesson, handle mixed ability classroom etc. to understanding the underlying principles behind teaching a second language, developing understanding towards different styles of teaching etc.

An experienced teacher Vs. a novice teacher

Another dimension to consider while discussing teacher education, is the difference between teachers with certain period of teaching experience with one who has entered the profession very recently. Some of the differences between a novice and an expert teacher lie in "the different ways in which they relate to their contexts of work, hence their conceptions and understanding of teaching, which is developed in these contexts" (Tusi, 2003). Expert teachers exhibit different ways in which they perceive and understand what they do. Some notable differences between a novice and an expert teacher can be as:

- a more rich and insightful knowledge base

- ability to make sound and valid judgements based on past experiences

- deeper and better understanding of students and their learning

- better use of different techniques and strategies of teaching

- better ability to handle learners with different needs and aspirations with a vast teaching experience of teaching different kinds of learners.

(Richards and Farrell. 2005; p. 7-8)

An experienced teacher is more efficient in introspecting issues like classroom activities, learner behaviour, and expected problems in comparison to a novice teacher who perhaps with limited teaching experience may not be able to handle such issues as expected. They are less familiar with the subject matter, strategies for teaching and different contexts of teaching. An experienced teacher with adequate experience in the teaching-learning context can develop individual methods and techniques to adapt lessons, resolve classroom issues and cater to learners' needs. A novice teacher is always dependent upon the experienced teacher and can gain knowledge on classroom pedagogy and learner behaviour. Experienced teachers with considerable teaching experience in the field respective are capable of viewing issues and problems in better ways than someone with less experience. A teacher inside the classroom enjoys freedom to take decisions and make changes

when and where necessary. However, some teachers may not be able to utilize the opportunity as expected. Teachers' pedagogic decisions (Prabhu. 2012) are often a reflection of their thinking and decision-making abilities. In a particular class a teacher may experience the actual events not matching the predictions or expectations of how things develop in the classroom and how the learners respond at a particular stage or step (Prabhu. 2012. p.3). Such occasions demand on–spot decisions from the teachers' end, and such situations, perhaps are better handled by an experienced teacher when compared to a novice teacher.

Often teachers teaching adult ESL learners face several issues which may be of various kinds. Some may feel that the learners' involvement in the class is not satisfactory, some may find it difficult to explain a specific notion to the students relating to their (learners) real life context, sometimes their perceptions do not match with the learners, the textbook content may not be facilitating, they might even feel their method of teaching is not appropriate, hence they seek for solutions. N.S. Prabhu (2012) in this context suggested the novice teachers to approach specialists or experienced teachers for solutions to such issues. The perceptions and beliefs of the experienced teachers in this regard is more valuable than the practicing teacher. They, with more insight and understanding of the teaching-learning processes, learners' needs and expectations, and teaching techniques, may come up with solutions to be adopted by the novice teacher. The success of a teacher derives from the knowledge he/she possess in the respective subject and their ability to share the knowledge with the learners. It is obvious that, the experienced teacher who has acquired the language intensively for several years and have sufficient teaching experience is supposed to be better prepared in comparison to someone who is exposed to the target language for a shorter period with approximately three/four hours per week exposure in the target language (Penelope. Alatis. 1983). In such contexts the later often suffer feelings of inadequacy and insecurity that the former may not face due to the amount of teaching experience they have. However, intervention of the former in showing solutions to the later in such contexts may bring a difference. The more the experience, the more confident the teacher would feel while handling learners. throughout the world Senior experienced teachers are appointed as mentors to guide teachers who have joined the profession recently and are facing issues while handling classes. For instance, in Singapore and Shanghai senior teachers are supported in developing their expertise who are eventually appointed as mentors to other teachers and lead action research (Darling Hammond, Hyler& Gardener 2017; Darling Hammond, Burns, Campbell, Goodwin, Hammerness, Low, Zeichner 2017). In Canada, experienced teachers are supported to lead professional development and enquiry projects with effective enthusiasm about professional learning from fellow colleagues (Campbell et.al,2016) (Cited in Anne Podolsky et.al,2019 *does teaching Experience increase teacher effectiveness? A review of US Research).* Teachers, with adequate experience and having attained professional grooming can certainly add in the teaching learning process thus can empower the learner with required skills to fight their English language needs today.

Conclusion:

Considering the discussions made in the previous sections and sub-sections of the present study, it can be inserted that, the necessity and importance of teacher

development courses for both pre- and in-service teachers irrespective of what and where they teach can never be underestimated. The relevance of an effective teacher development course is a boon that enables the trainee teachers develop professionally and inculcate effective teaching-learning practices in their respective classrooms. J.C. Richards (2005) emphasizing the need for professional development courses, rightly mentioned that, *the need for ongoing teacher education has been a recurring theme in language teaching circles in recent years and has been given renowned focus as a result of the emergence of teacher-led initiatives(p1)*. Similarly, English language teachers' responsibilities have also been changed to a great extent due to the changed learner attitude in relation to their English language needs. Hutchinson & Waters (1987), in this context mentioned that, a language teachers' role is not limited inside the classroom. Keeping the learners' needs in mind, language teachers are expected to be a facilitator, guide, motivator, needs analyst, course developer and so on. Acquisition of a language is a complex process. Penny Ur (2012) in this relation citing Richards and Rodgers (2001) stated that, *a wide variety of approaches and methodologies has been used for language teaching in the last century and continue to be used today*. Ur emphasizes that language teaching is a dynamic process where learners' skills of acquisition are cultivated hence, the teaching methods and approaches applied to teach language should be adaptive and flexible in nature. Learners need to develop their LSRW skills in order to enhance their abilities in the target language. The language teachers in this context need to take additional responsibility. They must take language teaching as a means to create efficient users of the target language.

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