[Software Review]

Technological Tools to Empower Teachers in Third-World Countries: Mobile Teacher App

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Abstract

Teacher professional development programs are, by and large, offered by international associations such as TESOL. Alternatively, schools might have their programs to help faculties hone their teaching skills. During these programs, language educators are familiarized with the state-of-the-art instructional strategies as well as cutting-edge technologies in language education. A major theme of these sessions contains teaching novel instructional strategies as well as classroom management. These concepts are long-standing topics in professional development sessions. However, language teachers in developing countries or countries under sanctions and travel ban are unable to travel and attend these sessions. More often than not, language teachers from these regions (Asia and Africa) are required to bear the travel costs to America and register in specialized courses and/or workshops to learn novel instruction strategies. In this article then, to bridge the gap, I set the tone to corroborate the need for professional development sessions for language teachers. I introduce the developmental stages of teachers (Rashthi & Khoshnevisan, 2019) and I segue into detailing a software—*Mobile Teacher*—crafted and developed to help language teachers professionally develop their arsenal of didactic strategies. I then detail the affordances and constraints of *Mobile Teacher* and how language teachers can contribute to this software. I finally conclude this article with the pedagogical implications related to the utilization of *Mobile Teacher.*

Keywords: developmental stages of teachers, Mobile Teacher, technology, teacher education

Introduction

Professional development programs for language educators are offered by a variety of academic institutions such as international associations—TESOL, for instance. This, however, comes as no surprise that educators from developing countries may not be able to matriculate in these programs to acquire state-of-the-art instructional strategies. It is roughly estimated that the professional development sessions cost 1-4 billion dollars in the United States alone (Wilson, 2013). Teachers in developed countries such as the United States have access to a multitude of professional development opportunities including national, state, and local conferences. These coupled with school-based sessions, summer institutes, and research experiences facilitate the process of

professionalism (Pianta, 2011; Wilson, 2015). Not only can't these educators leave their countries to learn novel strategies due to its costs but also, they are deprived of local professional development programs owing to a lack of easy and free access to the professional development sessions. Notwithstanding the high travel costs, another demerit of these international professional development programs stems from the fact that the international solutions might not be appropriate for local issues.

Developing countries have made a concerted effort to establish their local branches of TESOL or pertinent ELT organizations to promote the best practices amongst language teachers. These sessions have a variety of affordances to offer. However, one of the demerits of these professional development programs is that they are prescriptive and inherently impose instructional strategies or technologies on language teachers. Language teachers cannot afford to take prescriptive didactic strategies without questioning their usability for their classrooms. Accordingly, the workability of these strategies offered in these professional development sessions is under question. In addition, during professional development sessions, instructional strategies are not taught in action. Teachers, thus, do not have the opportunity to observe and examine the modus operandi of these strategies to gain hands-on experiences. To adopt working instructional strategies, language teachers need not only to see the strategies in action but also, to localize these strategies. Localization of the strategies coupled with the acquisition of the modus operandi to implement them is the both sine qua non. As discussed above, the need for professional development that is descriptive and brimmed with local solutions is on the rise.

Technological advances, if incorporated effectively, have dramatically changed the educational landscape worldwide. The impact of technology in language education has been scrutinized in multiple studies: literacy and augmented reality (Park & Khoshnevisan, 2019); augmented reality and teacher education (Khoshnevisan, 2019); animated pedagogical agents (Khoshnevisan, 2018a); augmented reality (Khoshnevisan & Le, 2018); audiotaped dialogue journals (Rashtchi & Khoshnevisan, 2008) to name but a few. However, the impact of technology in teacher education has not been fully investigated (Graham, Culatta, Pratt, & West, 2004; Ludlow, 2001; Moursund, & Bielefeldt, 1999). In this regard, only recently has the impact of technology in teacher education come to fruition. Emerging technologies have the potential to harness and facilitate the professional development process for language educators in underprivileged societies. However, Khoshnevisan (2019) contends that the utilization of technology in teacher education is an oft-neglected topic. He further calls for the inclusion of emerging technologies such as augmented reality (AR) in language education and details how technology can inform teachers' everyday practices. Technology is not a novel topic in teacher education, though (Khoshnevisan, 2020; Khoshnevisan & Park, 2020). Theoretically speaking, there is a myriad of models concerning the developmental stages of teachers (Fuller, & Brown, 1975; Katz, 1972; Whitworth, & Chiu, 2015).

Mobile Teacher

As discussed above, many language teachers are deprived of professional development opportunities due to a variety of reasons. Drawing on prior studies (Khoshnevisan, 2019; Khoshnevisan, 2020; Khoshnevisan & Park, 2020), the use of

technology in language and teacher education can facilitate the professional development process. In this section, I dedicate my efforts to delineate the *Mobile teacher* (henceforth *MT*) app (as a form of technology) and detail how it can catalyze the teacher professional development process. *MT* is software to democratize the language educators' access to professional development free of charge. *MT* is a software that is structured to aid language educators in honing their skills and deepening their understanding concerning novel methods in language teaching.

Figure 1
*Source: **http://www.mobileteacher.org***
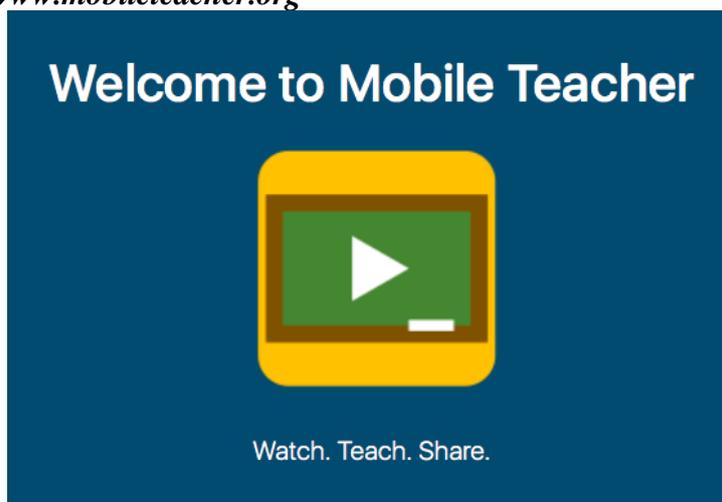
This app contains an arsenal of teaching tips in short-video formats. These short videos are supplied by teachers for teachers in developing countries. Teachers who have outstanding teaching tips can submit their videos for review. Alternatively, users can submit short videos from other teachers in developing countries. *MT* is freely accessible in the form of an Android app. This app includes the best teaching tips from Google, Android, and UNESCO. Employing Google Drive, this app enables teachers to use the videos without the need for a reliable Internet connection, which is hard to earn in developing countries in the world. One of the prominent advantages of the app is that teachers can view and download teaching tips before downloading them.

Objectives of *MT*

The overarching goal of the software is crafting a professional development app for teachers in developing countries. Teachers in developing countries might not be able to have access to professional development progress. However, this app aims to supply teachers with the best practices in the field, for free. This app helps to build a community of educators with the best practices so other educators in developing countries who are deprived of professional development programs can connect with the professionals of the field and share their expertise in a cost-free manner.

Scorecard

MT crafted a novel digital scorecard consistent with Google, Android, and UNESCO. The scorecard is the initiative taken to congregate the best practices in designing digital tools. This synthesis is shaped by prominent players to showcase evidence-based practices. The scorecard contains 186 specifications in detail. These technical specifications and instructions fall under 15 different topics. This state-of-the-art tool enables users to cast a cursive glance at the best practices. This tool allows users to watch the working practices in action without the need for navigating through and across resources.

Affordances of *MT*

MT spares no effort to exploit the user-created videos about the instructional strategies for the betterment of the teachers' practices. As such, language teachers are not encountered with a myriad of imposed strategies. In contrast, language teachers can employ localized expertise of other language teachers in their area or employ one or several solutions proposed by language teachers through *MT*. *MT* —as a teacher development app—is designed by educators for teachers who are in underprivileged regions like developing countries. *MT* aims to provide educators with the required expertise, so the urgent need for external scholars is minimized. Teachers in developing countries might not have access to emerging technologies and reliable Internet connections. The majority of the teachers in developing countries, however, have cell phones. This app sets out to freely provide teachers with instructional videos without the need for the Internet.

MT does not need Internet connectivity and teachers in far off places that have no access to the Internet can harness this app to learn new strategies offered by teachers, especially local teachers. This app is the first step to democratize access to professional development regardless of the region where educators live. The existing digital divide in developing countries aside, MT has the potential to offer free professional development to educators in a democratic way. Expressed another way, these ideas for professional development are not imposed on educators from external experts of the field. Conversely, these ideas are democratically introduced by both international and local educators to learn novel ideas to manage classrooms free of charge.

How to contribute

MT is a free-to-access app that provides teachers with the following features:

- Make short teaching-tip videos
- Watch inspiring videos about the best practices
- View and share videos in an offline mode

Teachers have the opportunity to share videos of the best practices via *MT*. These videos need to meet the following requirements:

- Shorter than 3 minutes
- Depicting a teacher in a developing country
- Showcasing the best practices in different subjects, across levels, and languages

- Is shared on YouTube

To be able to harness these shared videos, teachers are required to have Google Drive so they can download and play the videos. Google Drive enables teachers to primarily view the videos and then watch or download them, if interested. Teachers can, through this app, receive more videos shared by their friends (For ample samples, see *https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUf686hLeAq64s0nps7KOUg?view_as=subscriber).*

Discussion

As discussed earlier, the developmental stages of teachers is a nonlinear and cyclical process. A teacher—by and large—experiences 5 stages to accomplish the cycle and ultimately forms a tentative identity as an in-service teacher. This, however, does not imply that teachers may not change. On this account, the stages detailed above are nonlinear. These stages are inherently cyclical, and the frequent reoccurrence of the stages is possible. Khoshnevisan (2017) posits that teacher educators may see the wax and wane of different stages in their path of professional development. It then comes as no surprise that coercive changes after the first cycle are likely and reoccurrence of the stages even after the first cycle is natural. According to Khoshnevisan's (2018b) model of DST, different developmental stages are likely to arise at every moment, so teachers move toward a more professional milieu. In this sense, teachers need to be abreast of novel instructional strategies to be able to survive in their workplace. In addition, the app can be exploited by teachers in areas other than in developing countries. In this regard, teachers who are cooperating with exchange programs, Peace Corps, English language fellows can utilize the app to enjoy the expertise of teachers in local areas. It then comes as no surprise that non-local teachers can utilize the app to earn the first-hand experience of the local teachers concerning the culture, teaching methods, and other success factors. If they intend to teach in developing countries, study abroad, and the like, this app can bridge the likely cultural divide. This section of the app is parallel to and contributes to the third and fourth part of the developmental stages of teachers to shape a professional identity at the workplace regardless of the typology or geographical location of the institution. More often than not, language educators may fail to develop a professional identity owing to a slight change in the workplace, material, unknown policies, or culture. This app, however, aids teachers in adapting themselves to different local cultures to develop professionalism. This app helps teachers develop and enrich their arsenal of tools in the last stage of professionalism, building trust, and confidence. Watching videos of the best practices produced by local teachers can bestow nonlocal teachers hone skills and familiarize themselves with the best local solutions to the issues that may arise in the context of the physical classroom in that specific region. This app has the potential to help teachers complete the developmental stages of teachers. The app can catalyze to learn effective teaching tips. Khoshnevisan (2017b) argues that preservice teachers need to observe the physical classrooms to become acquainted with what is going on in the classroom. Additionally, teachers may suffer from a paucity of instructional strategies to tackle the possible issues in classrooms. This app facilitates the process to visually observe the best practices in different parts of the world. It then contributes to enriching the repository of the instructional strategies. This, in turn, helps teachers smoothly accomplish the developmental stages of teachers.

Another prominent aspect of this app could be its role in the 5th developmental stages of teachers. Building trust and confidence wrap up the first cycle of the developmental stages of teachers. This confidence is fortified through years of experience. It may be destabilized for some reason: a change in material, course, audience, and institution, to name but a few. However, for the most thing, this confidence is a sine qua non for professional teachers. As the model claims, teachers may be bound to go back and forth through the stages. However, MT can facilitate moving smoothly through the stages and building confidence as teachers can exploit the app to expedite their speed in and across the stages.

Practical Implications

MT can serve as an assistant for both teachers and language educators to facilitate the process of completing the Developmental Stages of Teacher (DST). Parallel to language teachers, language educators can and should exploit the software to pave the way for educators. *MT* not only establishes capacity-building potentials in language teachers but also helps teachers in developing countries not to lag and develop the needed skills. Teachers in underprivileged areas do not have to pay and learn strategies that may not align with their local practice. But rather they learn best practices from their colleagues in the same region. It is evident then this app contributes to and emanates from the teachers' performance. There is no one-size-fits-all instructional strategy and this app opens a new venue to realize this statement.

This app bridges the existing gap between the current knowledge of preservice teachers and what they need to learn to tackle issues in classrooms. This app not only provides language teachers with effective instructional strategies but also helps teachers skip one or several developmental stages to become confident in their practices. This confidence, ultimately, helps teachers shape their professional identity for a rather larger amount of time. Learning novel didactic instructions emanates from and contributes to in-service teachers' professionalism. In this sense, this app increases the odds for language teachers to survive in a professional milieu.

The app can effectively integrate the experiences of more professional and successful teachers into everyday practice. For instance, during the current pandemic (COVID-19), many teachers were struggling to provide their students with a better instructional strategy. This app is a great forum and repository of successful teaching techniques so other preservice and in-service teachers can learn and tailor them to cater to their students' needs.

Conclusion

This article portrayed the current situation in teacher professional development programs offered by both local and international associations. Having critically scrutinized the affordances and limitations of these programs, I delineated the impediments and obstacles in the way of language teachers in developing countries. These contentious issues include travel expenses, countries under the economic ban, countries under the travel ban. I detailed that language teachers from the countries under sanctions and travel ban do not have the opportunity to attend the professional development sessions

to hone the skills and learn novel didactic strategies. Beginning with the limitations of these sessions for teachers in underprivileged regions, I introduced a new app—*MT*—created to help language teachers to develop their practices and enhance their understanding of instructional strategies. Created by teachers for teachers, *MT* is fed by local language teachers. This article revisited the developmental stages of teachers and made a case for the use of *MT* to pave the way for language teachers to professionalize. I concluded the article with the pedagogical implications. As such, it is recommended that both teachers and language teachers utilize this app to catalyze the developmental stages of teachers to survive in the professional milieu. It is suggested that teachers in developing countries with weak or no internet connection use this app, so they become abreast of the novelty in teaching tips by their colleagues in the same area. Another merit of this app is that it provides local solutions to the language teachers' issues rather than providing them with one-fits-for-all solutions. Additionally, it provides solutions in a descriptive method. Said another way, language teachers are supplied with a repository of teaching tips and they have the freedom to select the appropriate one based on the issue they have encountered. Taking the cultural issues into consideration, this app observes the cultural divide/issues as the teaching tips are provided by the local teachers.

As discussed earlier, this app has a myriad of merits that can be harnessed by language teachers. This, however, does not mean that the app has no demerit or there is no weakness in it. To confirm or disconfirm the mentioned merits and demerits of this app, it must await further empirical research. Future research can either corroborate or refute the tenets of the present article. As such, future research can explore the perceptions of language teachers about using and uploading teaching tips onto this app through qualitative methods. This type of research lends itself to qualitative research so the gleaned data from surveys and interviews can triangulate the collected data to come up with the most prominent themes. Until then, language teachers can harness and contribute to this app to enrich it with their novel instructional strategies.

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