Research Article

DIKSHA, NISHTHA and CPD: Experiences and Perceptions of School Learning-Facilitators

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Abstract

We live in the digital era and technology plays a vital role in it. We can witness new advances and improvements each day. To keep up with the trends, it becomes important for all of us to be aware of such advances. We can see developments and changes taking place in every field. The education sector is one of the most prominent sectors and is witnessing a lot of changes. The pandemic has put us in a situation where the only option we are left with is to integrate technology with education. We have been witnessing a number of technological innovations daily that are being used to make teaching and learning easier and more effective. More and more ways are being looked upon to reduce the efforts and make learning a joyful experience. Technology is not only helping in the classroom teaching, but also in the preparation of the teachers (learning facilitators) to teach. The role of the learning facilitator has shifted from being the central source of knowledge to being a facilitator. However, the role of the learning facilitator still remains a significant one. Therefore, it is expected that they should be fully prepared to deliver their hundred per cent in the classroom. To increase their efficiency, several professional development courses are taken up. Nowadays, technology is being used as an aid to conduct such training and workshops of the learning-facilitators and learning facilitator educators. The current study highlights the integration of technology in the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of the learning facilitators. It also takes into account their say on e-training. The perceptions of 20 government school learning facilitators currently undergoing the NISHTHA integrated training programme on the DIKSHA portal have been taken into account. The data was collected using a questionnaire which had open-ended as well as rating scale-type questions. The responses were collected with the help of Google forms. The responses reveal mixed perceptions of the learning facilitators on e-training.

Keywords: Continuous Professional Development (CPD), Technology, E-training, Learning-facilitators

Introduction

Education is a learning cycle and has no end. Education for one and all has been a matter of concern for ages. Making education a fundamental right was a major step towards the universalization of education. The universalization of education provides each and every child with an entitlement to education. As time progressed, more focus started being laid upon the quality and accessibility of education. With changing times, we can see changes in the mode of education as well. In the earlier times, the traditional method of education was prevalent, wherein the focus was on the transmission of knowledge from the learning facilitator (this paper uses the term learning facilitator for the teacher as a teacher facilitates the learning of students through instruction) to

the student. The learning facilitator was the central figure in the school and was considered to be the only source of knowledge. Gupta and Fisher (2011) quoted in their study about the importance of the learning facilitator's role in the classroom. According to them, the learning facilitator is considered to be the central figure in any classroom. This idea is more prevalent in Indian classrooms. Here, the learning facilitator not only controls the teaching-learning processes taking place in the classroom, but also directs the students on a day-to-day basis. The idea of learning facilitator being the central figure in the classroom has been diluted with time with the advent of constructivism and child-centred approach of teaching. With the change in the ideas, learning facilitators had to adopt the new ways of teaching and dealing with the students. The role of the learning facilitator slowly changed to facilitator or supporter. Now, the learning facilitator is not seen as the only source of knowledge, as the supporter of knowledge. Such changes are taking place very rapidly. New concepts and technologies are being introduced in this field each day. Therefore, it becomes mandatory for the learning facilitators to keep themselves updated with such changes.

The National Education Policy, 2020 (MHRD, 2020, now MoE, 2020) clearly highlights the changes that are going to take place in the education sector in the coming years. New ideas, techniques and plans of teaching in the classroom will be implemented which means that the learning-facilitators and the learning facilitator education institutions are in a great need of revitalization. Such changes highlight the necessity of professional development courses even more.

The professional development of learning facilitators is not a one-time thing, but a continuous process,

therefore, the term Continuous Professional Development (CPD). The CPD provides opportunities to the learning-facilitators to learn about the latest innovations and advances in their profession. CPD is not a new concept and has been conducted for the learning facilitators on a regular basis. The mode of CPD, however, had been offline majorly.

In the present pandemic times, everything is being switched from offline mode to online mode. Therefore, the CPD of the learning facilitators has also seen this shift.

The National Education Policy also lays special stress on the online mode for the training of the learning-facilitators. The learning facilitators are currently being trained under the NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement). As per the NEP 2020, every learning facilitator and head learning facilitator are required to participate in at least 50 hours of Continuous Professional Development opportunities every year for their own professional development. Currently, NISHTHA integrated training programme 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 are being conducted in online mode for learning-facilitators teaching at different stages of the school.

The NEP 2020 stresses the integration of technology in education, planning, administration and development of the education sector. The relationship between technology and education is bidirectional in nature. It proposes to set up an autonomous body known as the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to promote the use of technology in this sector. Online platforms will be developed where the learning facilitators can share their ideas for teaching and also the best teaching practices. Technology will also be used in the sharing of content and also the continuous professional development

of the learning facilitators. The content will be developed in a number of languages and will be uploaded on the DIKSHA platform. The same platform will also be used for the online training of the learning facilitators and the learning facilitator educators using e-content.

Currently, the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of the learning facilitators is being conducted under the NISHTHA training programmes (NCERT, 2019). NISHTHA 1.0, NISHTHA 2.0 and NISHTHA 3.0 training programmes are being conducted for different stages of school education.

NISHTHA 1.0 for the Elementary Level (Classes I to VIII)

NISHTHA 2.0 for the Secondary Level (Classes IX to XII)

NISHTHA 3.0 for the NIPUN Bharat (ECCE to Class V)

The training is conducted on a monthly basis through the training courses that are uploaded on the DIKSHA portal and app. The courses are divided into different modules, which in turn are divided into sub-modules. Each course has a variety of content including videos, script of the videos, activities for the trainees, assignments, and quizzes. Each training course remains open for one month. Therefore, the training is time-bound and the certificates are awarded to the trainees only if they are able to secure 70 percent marks in the final assessment.

Review of related literature

The National Education Policy, 2020 very correctly emphasizes on the fact that learning-facilitators play a very important role in shaping the children, and therefore shaping the future of a nation. It highlights how learning facilitators are the respected individuals of a society. However, there has been a subsequent decline in the status of learning facilitators and learning facilitator educators. The NEP 2020 envisages the importance of restoring this status and position of the learning facilitators. The learning-facilitators need to be motivated and encouraged to deliver their best to the children.

Some studies have been discussed further to highlight the importance of technology in the education sector in the present times.

Tunmibi and Aregbesola (2015) conducted a study in a Nigerian school to examine the impact of e-learning and digitalization in primary and secondary schools. The data was collected from both, learning facilitators and the students. It could be inferred from their study that the learning-facilitators as well as the students believed in the effectiveness of e-learning and digitalization in the classroom. The responses suggested that it was a productive way of teaching. The study shows that most students agreed that e-learning helps students to have access to unlimited sources of information. It also reveals connections between subjects, promotes critical thinking and encourages students' way of learning. The study further suggested that both, the learning facilitators and the students agreed that e-learning and digitalization help learning-facilitators and students to share accountability.

If we talk on a global level, to remain competitive in this era of the globalized period, the governments are trying to make moves towards the information society. The National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF, 2005, as cited in Ankita & Husain, 2017) also highlights the importance of ICT in the field of education. According to the document, it is important to inculcate the necessary ICT skills in the students. Affordable ICT tools and techniques should be integrated in the teaching-learning process from the beginning. With all

these changes coming up, the learning facilitators are required to be ready to adapt themselves to the changes taking place. They are required to be up-to-date, so that they can achieve their goals of teaching-learning.

We have termed technology as an aid in the classroom which helps the learning facilitator to deliver the content to the students easily and effectively. Learning facilitators are one of the major stakeholders in the education system and also the classroom learning. Their say in what has to be taught in the class and how it has to be taught is to be valued. This would not only make the learning facilitators empowered but also confident about their teaching.

Skenderi (2017) asserts the view that all levels of education are highly affected by the presence of technology in the classroom. She acknowledged the fact that irrespective of our views, we are closely connected to technology and we cannot change it. She addresses the differences in the nature of technologies being used by the developed and developing countries. Where the developed countries talk about artificial intelligence, the developing countries still struggle and talk about not having a sufficient numbers of computers in the labs. She took into account the views of the learning-facilitators on whether technology should or shouldn't be used in the classroom. There was a mixed response from the learning facilitators. They agreed upon the fact that technology enhances student Participation in the classroom, but remained unsure about its role in improving their communication skills.

Almekhlafi and Almeqdadi (2010) studied the perceptions of the learning facilitators about the technology integration in the United Arab Emirates school classrooms. They took into account the perceptions of 40 female and 60 male learning facilitators from two K-12 schools. The results showed that the learning facilitators were comfortable and integrating technology in their classroom teaching. However, the types of technologies used by males and females differed in their nature.

Another study conducted by Davies, Lavin and Korte (2009) took into account the perceptions of the students about how technology impacts the quality of instruction and learning in the classroom. They conducted a survey of students enrolled in business courses at Midwestern University. The overall response of the students towards the use of technology for classroom instruction was studied.

Rationale of the study

NISHTHA is one of the premiere ventures by the NCERT for the training and professional upliftment of the teachers. Though it caters to the needs of a large number of teachers across the country, the experiences and views of each and every teacher, who is undergoing these trainings is important and significant for the betterment of these programmes. Every programme has scope for further betterment; similarly the NISHTHA programmes also have such scope. The current study, believing in these two aspects that every teacher is important and there is always a scope for feedback and betterment endeavours to collect experiences of a group of teachers who not only underwent NISHTHA 1.0 training programmes but also applied the technology-integration at their respective workplaces after these training sessions. Moreover, it can be understood that the NCERT might have been collecting feedback from such NISHTHA trained teachers, but a third-party study about collecting experiences and feedback would have been more unbiased and fruitful in true manner for the betterment of such programmes. All these reasons motivated the researchers to conduct and execute this

small grouped but significant study.

Objectives

The current paper highlights the use of technology in the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of the learning-facilitators. Therefore, the objectives of the paper are as follows:

- To take a note of the technology integration experiences of the learning-facilitators on the DIKSHA portal in the NISHTHA programmes for the CPD.

- To suggest improvements in the training courses of NISHTHA programmes on the DIKSHA portal for a better impact on the CPD of learning-facilitators.

Methodology

The methodology is a very significant part of any study. It deals with the methods and tools employed for the data collection. The current study aims to study the experiences of the learning facilitators on e-training. The various elements of methodology are discussed further.

Sample and sampling technique

The learning facilitators for the current study were chosen using non-random purposive sampling technique. The data was collected from twenty learning-facilitators who have been working as Primary learning-facilitator (PRT) or Trained Graduate learning facilitator (TGT). These learning facilitators have been working for a period of minimum 2 years by the time when the study was conducted. All the learning facilitators have been working in the government schools and hence undergoing the NISHTHA integrated training programme in general and NISHTHA 1.0 in specific. The learning facilitators were not chosen subject specifically, but according to their schools. The study

believes that like every learner every learning facilitator is also important, hence even a small sample is significant. There were six Primary Teachers (PRTs) and fourteen Trained Graduate Teachers (TGTs) who responded to the Google form.

Tool

The data was collected using a questionnaire for the learning-facilitators. The questions were a mix of open-ended as well as a rating scale.

The questionnaire had five themes in all. The responses were collected using Google forms. The questions were framed under the following five main themes:

- Mode of training preferred

- Experience of using the DIKSHA portal for e-training

- Timely completion of the trainings

- Usefulness of the modules and their implementation in the classroom teaching

- Suggestions and improvements, if any, required in the modules

Procedure for data collection

The data was collected using Google forms from those selective Kendriya Vidyalaya PRTs and TGTs, who were connected with the NISHTHA training and afterwards for at least two years. For further insights, a few of them were informally consulted too on the various aspects of the programmes and their experiences.

Results, analysis, and discussion

The data collected showed various responses from the learning facilitators on e-training. The data not only revealed the individual perceptions of the learning facilitators, but also helped

in suggesting some improvements in the training modules. The data can be analyzed thematically.

Mode of training preferred

On being asked about the preferred mode of training, about 55 per cent learning facilitators preferred offline training over the online mode. The major reasons for the preference were that the offline mode gives opportunities to see the trainees in person and understand their responses through their facial expressions. Due to the digital divide, more people can attend offline training as compared to the online one. The offline mode also permits the conduction of workshops, where the learning can be implemented simultaneously. The offline mode also permits the mapping of the trainees, as to who is at what level. One of the biggest advantages of offline training, as cited by a respondent, is the on-the-spot clearance of doubts of the trainees. The ones that selected the online mode of training reasoned out that it is convenient in the current pandemic times. The same content can be revisited again and again at any point of time. There is no geographical barrier in this mode of training.

It was seen that the responses were mixed; however, more learning-facilitators were inclined towards the offline mode of training.

Experience of using the DIKSHA portal for e-training

When asked about their experience on the DIKSHA portal, around 78 per cent responded their experience was 'good' and about 22 per cent selected 'average' on the rating scale. This shows that most of the learning facilitators are satisfied with the features and functions offered by the portal.

Timely completion of the training

The training modules under the NISHTHA programme are time-bound. The learning facilitators are required to enrol into the courses and then they can finish the modules at their own pace by the end of that particular month. They are required to complete two courses each month.

On being asked about the timely completion of the training, all the learning facilitators responded on a positive note. The major reason for this could be the time-bound nature of the courses.

Usefulness of the modules and their implementation in the classroom teaching

This part is the most important part of this study. The respondents were asked if they can retain and implement their learning from the training in their classroom teaching. To this, around 77 per cent learning-facilitators responded with a 'yes', whereas around 23 per cent responded with 'sometimes'.

Suggestions for improvement

The learning facilitators responded that they do not get enough time to absorb their learning and implement them in the class. As soon as they finish with single training, they have to gear up for the next one. The training lacks processing time in between.

On being asked about the suggestions for the improvements, some of the learning facilitators responded that the video lectures should be of short duration and should be made more interesting. The training is of the same type and has thus become monotonous. They should therefore be made more interesting. One of the learning facilitators responded that instead of the lecture method in the videos, the trainers can use some other techniques to teach those concepts. Another useful suggestion given by one

of the respondents was that to make the training more interesting and to raise the motivation level of the learning facilitators, certain incentives can also be attached to each course.

Conclusion

DIKSHA portal is good for NISHTHA training programmes for PRTs and TGTs. They are good for retention of learning by the learning facilitators and application by them in the real teaching and learning in the school classroom activities after the training. These programmes are good for timely completion of a training programme. On the other hand, it can also be concluded that although the learning facilitators are being trained on the online portals, not everyone seems to enjoy such training (Kanvaria & Dubey, 2022). The possible reasons for this could be the monotonous nature of the training, lack of extrinsic as well as intrinsic motivation and the digital divide that is still present in our country. Many learning facilitators are still not comfortable in the use of technology. The training, however, can be made more and more interesting. Learning should be a joyful experience, not only for the students, but also for the learning-facilitators.

Recommendations and implications of the study

The output of the study gives an insight into the current NISHTHA programmes. Mode of training, using the DIKSHA portal for e-training, the timely completion of the training, retention of learning from and usefulness of the modules and their implementation in the classroom teaching and variation in various functional aspects of modules are important concerns for NISHTHA training programs. The offline mode may be preferred over online mode for training. DIKSHA portal is good for e-Training. DIKSHA portal is good for the timely completion of training. The retention of learning from the DIKSHA portal is at the higher end. Modules are implementable in the classroom teaching and learning later on after the training. Between two modules, a time period can be given for practice and implementation. The video duration can be decreased and a variety of presentation techniques can be used in the tutorial videos.

Scope for further research

The present study considered a smaller sample size (believing that every learning facilitator is important) to study the experiences of the learning facilitators. However, similar surveys and research can be conducted on a larger scale to take into account the experiences of the learning facilitators about such training. It is important for further improvement. The suggestions can be taken into account and the training can thus be improved so that the learning facilitators also enjoy them and deliver their best in the classroom.

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