Enhancing Self-Initiated Professional Development (SI-PD) Through Technology During COVID-19 Pandemic

Nur Leenna Abdul Rahman[1], Mahani Mokhtar[1] and Dayana Farzeeha Ali[1]

[1]School of Education, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
(E-mail: nurleenna@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has affected people around the globe, Self-Initiated Professional Development (SI-PD) has gained much attention by professional workers. This can be seen where teachers had suddenly compelled to start active learning that predominantly online to replace face-to-face learning. Temporary solutions to ensure that learning is not disrupted, they are being devised for distance professional development using tools like Google Meet, Zoom, podcast, social media and Webinars. They also collaborate with their colleagues and share online learning resources. It is important for teachers to stay motivated by participate actively with metacognitive skills for monitoring, evaluating and reflecting their professional development process according to their preference. Besides that, they need to develop new required skills to keep up with the rapid changes and global challenges. Thus, this is the perfect time for teachers to revolutionize their paradigm of professional learning to be more meaningful and effective. As the traditional professional development paradigm has flaws such as treat teachers as passive learners, no ongoing support and one-size-fit all format, they can begin taking steps to change them. This period has proven the importance of teachers to be lifelong learners as they need to be self-motivated, choose to engage in intentional learning, upskilling and retraining for both their professional development and personal enrichment. This concept paper outlines some suggestions how technology could aid the development of teachers' professionalism, so they can implement SI-PD more effectively and achieve desired goals.

Keywords: self-initiated, professional development, COVID-19, pandemic, technology

Introduction

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is impacting lives and will certainly have an impact on how teachers carry out professional development activities, as far as teachers concern they are seeking ways to maintain their 'business as usual'. Since mid of March, the Malaysian government through the Ministry of Health announced Movement Control Order (MCO) which all education institutions close from 18 March 2020 as social distancing has been identified as a crucial step to flatten the curve of COVID-19 from spreading. This has pushed schools, higher institutions and training providers to go for virtual learning and digital education.

Teachers, as the backbone and the frontliners in the education systems need to ensure that learning continues regardless situation. They rapidly mobilizing and innovating quality remote learning as a way to offer students the best possible educational experience (UNESCO, 2020). This 'new normal' education scenario where teachers and students are staying connected with or without using digital technologies. Hence, it is important that quality digital content is accessible especially during this MCO because technology seems can facilitate the face-to-face learning. However, this has left teachers with challenges to adapt to the new ways of working and learning remotely (Hodges et al., 2020). They also affected by school closures due to COVID-19 pandemic have been sudden just like the rest of students. There is little attention has given about on how to ensure that learning continues, or how to digitize their instruction effectively. So, as teachers focus on students, let's not forget to focus on teachers too.

During the uncertain, new and social distancing situation, teachers that less tech-savvy will left behind and struggle more. Not only that, to keep students motivated and engaged in their online learning is not a simple task (McDonald & McDonald, 2013). Working from home is also harder when they need to squeeze with all the daily home routines. As mentioned by Morgan (2020), many teachers are experiencing stress and anxiety due to uncertainties, school closures and online learning. To meet these challenges, COVID-19 pandemic should be the catalyst in moving the teachers to be more independent in their professional learning. Which means that they need to be the 'initiators of change' that responsible for their own learning and identify alternative ways for their self-directed learning (SDL) as they work in wider discourse of professional development (Govender, 2015). Self-Initiated Professional Development (SI-PD) is inculcating SDL which has been around for a long time, but currently it becomes the appropriate 'go-to' option to keep teachers engaged and stay motivated whilst working remotely. However, most teachers in Malaysia have not yet made the leap into SI-PD and this may be an ideal opportunity to take more control of their professional learning (Faizulizami, 2018).

Self-Initiated Professional Development (SI-PD)

In Malaysia, Ministry of Education (MOE) has introduced Pelan Pembangunan Profesionalisme Berterusan (PPPB) or Continuous Professional Development (CPD) masterplan in 2012 to transform teachers' professional development practice which to increase SI-PD and reducing ministry-led professional development from 16 percent to 60 percent by the year of 2025 (MEB, 2013-2025). The terms self-initiated, self-directed, self-development and self-regulated are interchangeable and has been defined in the literature from several different point of view. It is known as professional development that arises from teacher's own initiative which to develop their intellect, experience as well as attitude and internally motivated (Faizulizami, 2018; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009; Karaaslan, 2003). However, it not necessarily carried out in isolation or alone but also can be pursued in a supportive environment. Aligned to Louws, Meirink, Veen and Driel (2017), even though SI-PD encourages teachers to set their own learning goals and initiate their own professional development, they still need support and guidance in the process.

Teachers professional development should not be standstill during this pandemic. In contrast, it should be driving force to pursuit new sets of knowledge and skills that relevant to the current atmospheres. As many economy experts predict that the rate of unemployment will be increased due to the recession, it is the best time to continue upskilling and reskilling so they can prepare students that can keep up with industry demands. Soft-skills such as communication and presentation skills or courses on software or application for teaching and learning seems very useful during this pandemic. There are many available courses offered online by several platforms that teachers can pursuit. Some websites are even offered free courses and some with additional fees. They may also access to millions e-books, magazines, articles and other digital contents during this period.

In SI-PD approach, teachers can tailor the professional development according to their needs and preferences (Sariyildiz, 2017; Mora, Trejo & Roux, 2014). Even though there is no solid incentive such as rewards or appraisal for teachers when they implementing SI-PD, MOE desires to nurture teachers with self-satisfaction in professional development. Offering resources and support by school administrators is a great way to foster SI-PD among teachers. According to Slemp et al., (2018), school administrators should have autonomy-supportive leadership when promoting empowerment in teachers' professional development.

Even though to encourage teachers to fully embrace this new learning paradigm is not something that can happen overnight, taking small steps is a great first step. In other words, SI-PD provided teachers with autonomy because they are generating their own learning experiences at their own will, empowering experiences as they made professional judgements regarding the time, context and content of their professional learning experiences (Weir, 2018). Below listed the advantages of SI-PD especially during COVID-19 pandemic:

Minimize the ineffective and costly professional development
According to the OECD (2020), many teacher professional development programmes are underfunded. The current budgetary constraints led to the need for teachers to find new approach of gaining knowledge (Tripon, 2019). Teachers are multidisciplinary and vary in professional development needs. This require large provision and it is quite challenging for MOE to cater all the needs of each individual. As said by Ellinger (2004), flexible and versatile approach of professional development that integrate technology can build more responsive and economical learning atmosphere. SI-PD also can minimize the mismatch between the needed and the practice professional development (Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009).

Encourage active learning experiences

SI-PD learning paradigm emphasizes learners to actively participate rather than be passive learners because they need to direct their own learning. According to Bonwell and Eison (1991), active learning is where the learners actively or experientially involved in the learning process. Promoting active learning can be a distraction on keeping good mental health as social distancing causes implications such as fear, anxiety, worry and stress (Shanmugam et al., 2020). In virtual platforms, teachers can interact with one another across the country and the world and work collaboratively, despite the barriers (Powell & Bodur, 2019). Teachers can share their problems, debate current issues, provide solutions or even update their pedagogy (Liu et al., 2020; Avalos, 2011; Spottl, 2009; Karaaslan, 2003). These will make teachers felt occupied because isolation can make people feel less motivated and less productive.

Fulfill individual needs

SI-PD is professional development paradigm that giving teachers more 'voice' or autonomy to take control of their professional learning (Djatmiko, 2014). As according to Zerey (2018), SI-PD allows them to plan, do, monitor and evaluate their own professional development, means that they can customize it to suit their needs and institutionally. There is no 'one-size-fit-all' professional development programme. Therefore, their values, belief and assumptions need to be considered to make the professional development more meaningful (Beavers, 2009.

Open to all learning opportunities boundary

With the integration of technology, transmitting information and sharing materials in education is just one click away. The emergence of online professional development, Massive Online Open Courses, professional learning networks, wikis, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and other Web 2.0 applications provide an atmosphere for teachers to engage at anytime and anywhere (Miller, 2016). According to Haidari, Yelken and Akay (2019), the more frequent the learners utilize technology in their learning, the more self-directed they become. They also agreed that technology helps them to learn faster and easily but in an interesting way.

Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) Model and Self-Initiated Professional Development (SI-PD)

Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) Model by Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) describes the personal responsibility is the key element to guide learners in SDL process. It means that individuals assume ownership for their thoughts and actions. Through the concept of personal responsibility, there is strong relationship between self-directed learning and learner self-direction. This provides a fundamental to understanding the success of self-direction in learning context. The process orientation of SDL focused on the characteristics of teaching-learning transaction such as planning, implementing and evaluating learning. It refers to the personal attributes on how motivated the learner to be responsible towards personal learning activities. Next, the self-concept of adult learners shaped the personal orientation. The self-direction in learning use as an umbrella concept that recognized both external factors such as policy and institution roles that assist the learning to take main responsibility to plan, implement and evaluate learning. It means that the learner is able to overcome learning challenges without being pushed or persuaded by anybody else. Figure 1 below shows the PRO model.
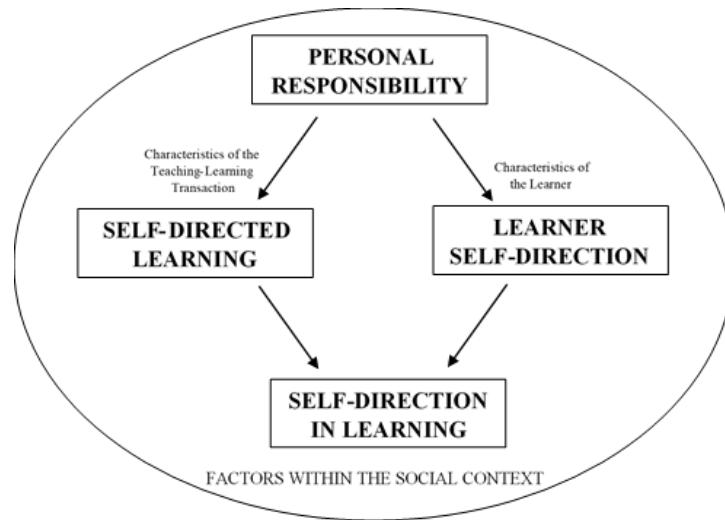
Figure 1. Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) Model

As compared to other models, PRO model provided a comprehensive framework for understanding self-direction in adult learning. Only PRO model has linked the external and internal drivers of self-directed learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). They believed that the combination of the external and internal factors of self-directed learning empowered the learner and led to the learner accepting responsibility for their learning (Stockdale & Brockett, 2011). Both of these elements are represented by a unidirectional cyclical and simultaneous flow of learning within the learning environment. However, the social aspect of SDL stressed by PRO model overshadowed the personal responsibility aspect, leading many researchers to misinterpret and misuse the PRO model (Nurfaradilla & Azlin Norhaini, 2016).

Online and distance learning are already SI-PD experience because technology is driving a new definition of accountability where they take control in planning their professional learning. It shows that they had ownership for their own thought and actions (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1994). A teacher who seeks to learn about through learning, for example, may be willing to hand over the learning control to the training coordinator for reasons of convenience or because of a personal lack of knowledge and experience in the area. This does not weaken the learner's level of self-direction, indeed, the decision to hand over the control was consciously made by the learner.

Discussion

As in current environment context, the spread of COVID-19 is beyond our control but we can avoid crowded places, confined space and close conversation. Same goes to teachers' professional development. As in this isolation and social distancing environment, teachers need to be responsible or take control of their professional development. OECD (2020) conducted a survey listed the resources that teachers used to run professional development during the COVID-19 crisis. Variety of resources mostly existing online learning platforms, tools that enable teachers to communicate with other teachers in same or other countries, virtual classrooms and educational television such as listening to podcast, reading online articles or watching educative videos on YouTube.

Based on PRO model by Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), the vital for SI-PD to work especially during this pandemic is personal responsibility. Accepting responsibility in learning is a necessary step if proactive learning is desired (Kohns & Ponton, 2006). It begins from an intrinsic desire to act in ways that benefit the individual itself. Teachers are expected to have knowledge, skills and ethics to conduct online learning and that calls for more flexible and dynamic post-pandemic teacher education (Zhu & Liu, 2020). Telegram, Kahoot, Mentimeter, Padlet, Zoom and Skype are basic tools they need to be familiar with right now. Some teachers may felt discomfort and insecurity in utilizing technology for their professional learning (Khuzainey et al., 2017). They need to change their mindset by valuing their initiatives, with no imposed goals or direction of MOE. They should identify what skills that they needed, have the proactive nature or initiative to learn because optimism and innovativeness toward learning technologies will make the learners more willing to adopt the online learning strategy (Geng, Law & Niu, 2019).

Being self-directed is a worthy pedagogical goal in itself and the ability to tackle and overcome a sense of boredom is a skill worth developing, one that will serve teachers much longer than the duration of this pandemic. As mentioned in PRO model, learners have full control over the response situation but not full control over the learning environment (Mentz et al., 2019). The accessibility issues like poor internet connectivity may come across for some teachers especially at some states such as Pahang, Kelantan, Sabah and Sarawak due to geographical factor (Gong, 2020). This learning environment will hinder the desire to implement technology-enhanced self-directed learning effectively. The external and internal factors will empower the teachers and led them accepting responsibility for their learning However, if the teachers are unwilling to learn or accept the personal responsibility, it can result failure to implement the whole process. More research on psychological factors contributing to teachers' willingness to use technologies for professional learning in the pandemic and beyond should be done.

Each individual has their own pace of learning and PRO model recognizes the attitudinal factors have influenced the teaching-learning transaction. These factors including learners' motivation, perceived effectiveness of technology for learning and adaptability of technology with the expected learning outcomes (Haidari, Yelken & Akay, 2019). According to Lai (2013), the degree of willingness of learners to apply technology-enhanced SI-PD related to their personal motivation. The most autonomous learners will presented higher values in learner autonomy components and dimensions, but the differences in motivation and initiative (Duarte, Leite & Mouraz, 2016).

As during this COVID-19 crisis, many teachers are experiencing burnout, anxious and overwhelmed. Working from home quite challenging for some of them. They are still looking for silver linings to strike balance between the responsibilities as they dig into this new norm, working, parenting and teaching from home. Therefore, time management is the key. As SI-PD allows for flexibility, create a schedule where teachers could apply it as routine. Setting a target everyday will dictate expectations and increase productivity.

Technology readiness is another critical dimension connected with teachers' learning in the self-directed learning environment. According to Geng, Law and Niu (2019), the learners' technology readiness can influence their success in the online learning. Therefore, MOE need to invest in ICT infrastructure and access to the internet for practical skills development also provide support, career guidance and digital skills development for teachers.

Professional development is intended to force teachers to keep up with lasts advances. But to excel in profession, keeping up is not sufficient is there is no role for self-directed learning in teachers' life. It is essential to provide a nourishing and encouraging environment for fostering self-initiated professional development as this will allow teachers to actively take responsibility for their own continuing lifelong learning.

Conclusion

This concept paper presents discussion on enhancing Self-Initiated Professional Development (SI-PD) through technology during COVID-19 pandemic. It is widely acknowledged that learning takes many forms. As unfortunate as the circumstances are, MOE need to recognize that this pandemic situation is the perfect opportunity to encourage more engagement for teachers on SI-PD as the alternative way to redefine their professionalism. Explaining to teachers that they need to turn this tragedy into lessons by converting the challenges into opportunities.

Acknowledgement

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