

# Train-the-Trainer: A Study of the Professional Skill Competencies and Psychological Qualities of Teacher Trainer

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**Abstract**—This study aims to explore the current challenges that teacher trainers are confronting and their training needs. Looking particular into the professional competencies and psychological qualities that teacher trainers need to possess, this study further examines the perceptions of the trainers' changing roles from subject teachers to teacher trainers. Interviews were conducted to collect data and Dempster's "expert judgment" technique was adopted as an evaluation method. Findings showed that 'facilitation skills', 'pedagogical knowledge', 'rich experience', 'good understanding of the participants' expectations', 'confidence' and 'self-regulation of emotion' are the most essential skill competencies and the psychological needs of the teacher trainers. A range of 'critical abilities' and 'reflective attitudes' would also ease the anxieties raised from the trainers' changing roles during their transitions from subject teachers to teacher trainers because teacher training is a much complex and demanding job.

**Index Terms**—train-the-trainer, teacher training, profession competencies, changing roles, psychological qualities

## I. INTRODUCTION

In response to new demands emerging from the education reform and continuous professional development of teachers, the train the trainers or teachers training has found its niche in the increasing number of teacher education places at higher education level. However, training programmes preparing subject teachers to become teacher trainers are sparse. Apparently, facilitation and transferrable skills are just two of the needs amongst the various competencies for teacher trainers, without mentioning the psychological readiness such as the confidence to conduct trainings to a group of experienced subject teachers. As the competencies of teacher trainers are much different from subject teachers, training programmes for teacher trainers to minimise their skill discrepancies has become an urge need. In view of the above, this study explores the current challenges that teacher trainers are confronting and the training needs for teacher trainers. This study also aims to find out the professional competencies and psychological qualities that teacher trainers need to possess in order to benefit their daily training practices. Furthermore, it is also

interesting to know the perceptions of the trainers' changing roles from subject teachers to teacher trainers for a better preparation of their psychological readiness. Given the shortage of studies on this area, findings of this study will make contribution to the knowledge of teacher training in higher education so as to shed light to researchers, educators and practitioners to advance knowledge, theory and skills in training as well as the development and design of train-the-trainer programmes. Last but not least, it is hoped that the results of this study will enable the researcher to reflect and improve their own training practices.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Paradigm Shift in Learning and Teaching in Hong Kong's Higher Education Institutions

There is a global major paradigm shift in the aspect of learning and teaching in higher education institutions. The report 'Education Quality Work: The Hong Kong Experience. A handbook on good practices in assuring and improving teaching and learning quality' published by the Editorial Committee for Education Quality Work steers the direction of learning and teaching reformation in the higher education institutions in Hong Kong. The report suggests that enhancement of teaching strategies and skills as well as the best practices of setting up Learning and Teaching Development Centres in Hong Kong's higher educational institutions [1]. The impact of the report has revolutionised the concept of learning and teaching in higher education. There is a paradigm shift with focuses on the learning experiences of students. "The fundamental task of the teacher is to get students to engage in learning activities that are likely to result in their achieving in those outcomes....What the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does" [2]. Biggs [3] further suggested using 'constructive alignment', a well design and structure of learning objectives, teaching and learning activities and assessments to facilitate better mutual learning and teaching experiences between students and teachers. The paradigm shift of the one-way teacher-centred teaching to the two-way student-centred learning becomes the urge need in higher education and therefore, teacher trainings are the means to promote the concept change in learning and teaching.

### B. Training Supports for Teachers in Hong Kong

Teacher training is commonly required as staff development to ensure teaching quality and as a means to promote better learning and teaching experiences. A number of studies show promising results of teacher training programmes (see [4] - [8]). Nadamuri and Rao found teacher trainings “help teachers gain confidence, update knowledge, content and pedagogy skills” [9]. Amongst the various post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong, the Vocational Training Council (VTC) introduced a mandatory programme for new teachers since 2009 to prepare and support teaching staff in all VTC’s provisions for sound learning and teaching. Programmes for teacher trainings are also popular amongst other higher education institutions. For example, the Faculty Professional Development Series offered by the Centre for Holistic Teaching and Learning at Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) and the Certificate of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education offered by the Center for Enhanced Learning & Teaching (CELT) at the University of Hong Kong. In view of the above, training supports for teachers have gained increasingly attentions to world-wide researchers and being recognised as a particular and complex stage of teacher learning [10].

### C. Training Supports for Teacher Trainers in Hong Kong

Paradoxically, while teacher trainings are emphasised in the higher education institutions, training programmes to prepare teacher trainers are in short. Compiling a list of teacher education programmes offered by degree-awarding higher education institutions in Hong Kong, there are more than 150 programmes offered. These programmes range from general education, administration, special education to subject teaching and subject knowledge stream, but none of which is prepared for training the (teacher) trainers. Train the trainers programmes are significantly important, Knowle [11], Leftheriotou [12] and Illeris [13] contended that adult come to training with experiences and expectations. They are ‘selective’ and ‘skeptical’ in working with trainers and only want to learn what is meaningful, relevant and practical to their daily work. Hence, trainers have to use a different set of pedagogy. Chatziefstathiou and Philips [14] also found critical abilities and reflective attitude are essential for trainers and most teachers regard the role of trainer is more demanding, he/she needs to build interactions with trainees on a co-equal relationship. In addition, Friis and Alberthe [4] pointed out the stage fright syndrome that when people perform, they confront “the form of fear, self-doubt, and confusion, and if it is too overwhelming, we will want to stop” [15]. Given the competencies, psychological qualities and knowledge of teacher trainers are different from subject teachers, enhancement in the different skill sets is essential for the readiness of teacher trainers. Regarding the rigorous demand, now the question remains, what are the skill competencies that teacher trainers have to be equipped with?

## III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the skill competencies and the psychological needs of the teacher trainers?
2. How do the teacher trainers without the prior train-the-trainer training prepare themselves both in the skill competencies and psychological readiness in order to take up their jobs?
3. To what extent will train-the-trainer programmes benefit and prepare the would-be teacher trainers?
4. What are the perceptions of the trainers’ changing roles from subject teachers to teacher trainers

## IV. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This empirical study adopted the “expert judgment” techniques by Dempster [16] as an evaluation method. It was qualitative in nature using a combination of interviews and case studies. Each participated expert was selected as an individual case study because of their distinctiveness and experience in the training industry. The experts were chosen from the teacher training sector and they were selected by the use of a number of pre-determined criteria as suggested by Dempster, including: 1) a minimum of seven years of direct work experience in the respective sector, 2) experience at a senior level of management in training programme development and delivery, 3) experience in working as a member in the training programme development teams, and working alongside with other teacher trainers and 4) experience in managing the training programme and the management of quality throughout the training process. A total of three interviews were conducted with three experts with respectively 17 years, 10 years and 8 years of experience in Hong Kong’s teacher training sector. The research questions were explained to the experts and they were asked to express their views from their rich experiences. The semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews (each interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes) were conducted with the use of the four open-ended research questions. Data collected from the interviews were transcribed, sorted and then categorised for analysis.

## V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

To answer the first research questions: What are the skill competencies and the psychological needs of the teacher trainers? All participants replied that ‘*facilitation skills*’, ‘*pedagogical knowledge*’, ‘*rich experience*’, ‘*good understanding of the participants’ expectations*’, ‘*confidence*’ and ‘*self-regulation of emotion*’ are the most essential elements. One of the participant said “excellent facilitation skills are necessary because it helps to draw sharing from teachers with different subject expertise across disciplines. A teacher trainer can’t have all the knowledge and be omniscient. It’s important that the teacher trainer can make use of the knowledge backgrounds from the participants and generate discussion and sharing from the audience”. Another participant said she uses facilitation skills to “create and maintain harmonious learning environments” and “facilitate participants to acquire contents”. It also related

to the participants' views of "understand how the participants and their students learn and expected". Obviously, for teacher trainers, it is their facilitation skills not teaching skills that play a more prominent role in the continuous dialogue and experience exchange among teachers. Rhodes and Bellamy claim that facilitation bears differences from teaching, such as the use of inquiries and the design of learning activities to facilitate two-way communication [6]. It is the facilitation skills of the trainer that enable the continuous dialogues between the participants for their sharing of experiences, especially when conducting training workshops for experienced subject teachers. All of the participants regarded that solid knowledge, such as "to conduct research on improving learning and teaching", "continually improve their professional knowledge and practice", "possess some kinds of trainers' qualifications" as well as "extensive experience and exposure in trainings" are beneficial. Addressing the psychological readiness, one participant suggested that "confidence and high EQ is needed" and the importance of "self-regulating of emotion". Interestingly, the only female participant expressed her view that "teacher trainers should keep physically strong, and keep themselves cool amidst the incessant stress, worries and frustration". Although this study is not looking into the gender issue but her response reflected that both physical and mental regulations are important especially to female trainers. Findings of the above coincide with Chatziefstathiou and Philips' views that teacher trainer "should combine an array of attributes such as leader, organizer, designer, inspirer, facilitator, research, counselor, innovator, presenter or evaluator" [14]. In sum, teacher trainers should be all-rounded, possessing a range of distinctive attributes and skills to prepare for the demanding training context.

To answer the second research question: How do the teacher trainers without the prior train-the-trainer training prepare themselves both in the skill competencies and psychological readiness in order to take up their jobs? The participants revealed that '*learning from experienced trainers*', '*mentorship*' and '*an open and reflective mind*' are the keys. Responses such as "learning from experienced trainers, working together with peer/mentors in the beginning", "mentorships by other experienced teacher trainers", "peer mentoring and co-teaching" and "participating in class observations and class visits" pinpointed the importance of learning from others. Suggestions such as "learning about the participants by profile search", "being proactive and willing to accept new stuff", "more practices for evaluation and reflection, and always think positive even though challenges ahead" indicated an open and reflective mind will also enable new comers to better prepare for themselves and their trainings.

To answer the third research question: To what extent will train-the-trainer programmes benefit and prepare the would-be teacher trainers? One participant considered that train-the-trainer programme would "fill the gap between professional work/field practices and context to

those in education", "prepare teacher trainers by providing them with scenarios and strategies to deal with possible questions and reactions that may arise during training" while the other participants stressed on the competencies and opined to "equip trainers' ability in training needs analysis, planning and developing training programmes and contents, delivery skills, appropriate use of aids, establishment of conducive environments, evaluation for training and networking for teacher trainers" and "prepare facilitation knowledge and strategies, psychological readiness as well as to enhance confidence". In general, the responses are in line with most of the studies on the effectiveness of training programmes in helping teaching to gain confidence, keeping abreast of the latest learning and teaching strategies and pedagogical skills (see [5], [7], [9]). However, the views should not only rest on the practical areas. As Ho, Watkins and Kelly [4] suggested, staff development programme would better promote conceptual change in teaching so that the staff would absorb what he/she has learned and then to improve teaching practice by changing teaching behaviour. It is crucial that train-the-trainer programmes should have a hidden curriculum of '*mind set and conceptual change*'.

To answer the last research question: What are the perceptions of the trainers' changing roles from subject teachers to teacher trainers? One participant said "It is a much difficult job" and "the trainer should be more knowledgeable than teachers". Another replied that as trainer, one has to "move on to a higher level profession with more responsibilities and expectations, e.g. from a practitioner to a practitioner and researcher". Other suggestions such as "teacher trainers need to alter their skills set in facilitation, classroom management and relationship building" and "despite serving the role as a facilitator, teacher trainers need to act as the coordinator and administrator of the training process" revealed that being a teacher trainer is much demanding. One noteworthy point from the response reminded trainers that he/she should "help, suggest instead of to teach and to instruct trainees" because most of the time teacher trainers "usually have a superior complex". Chatziefstathiou and Philips [14] in their study on the transition role of teacher to trainer also suggested that the trainer should build rapports with trainees, facilitate and inspire learning rather than adopting an authoritarian dimension of guidance. In sum, possess a range of '*critical abilities*' and '*reflective attitudes*' would ease the anxieties raised from the trainers' changing roles during their transitions from subject teachers to teacher trainers.

## VI. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The implications of this study firstly rest on future research, a thorough study across various training units and teaching departments with trainers and teachers will generate multi-dimensional and multi-perspective views as well as to enhance the reliability and generalisability. A further comparison between trainers' views in different countries will shed insights on the particular competencies and psychological needs of teacher trainers

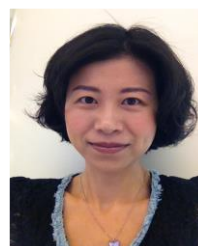
in a specific cultural aspect. To conclude, this study found 'facilitation skills', 'pedagogical knowledge', 'rich experience', 'good understanding of the participants' expectations', 'confidence' and 'self-regulation of emotion' are the most essential skill competencies and the psychological needs of the teacher trainers while 'learning from experienced trainers', 'mentorship' and 'adopting an open and reflective mind' are the keys for new trainers to prepare themselves. It is also learned that other than practical skills, train-the-trainer programmes should also have a hidden curriculum of 'mind set and conceptual change'. To ease the anxiety raised from the trainers' changing roles during their transitions from subject teachers to teacher trainers, one should possess a range of 'critical abilities' and 'reflective attitudes' since teacher training is a much complex and demanding job. Last but not least, this paper sheds light to researchers, educators and practitioners to advance knowledge, theory and skills in training as well as the development, design of train the trainer programmes to cope with the sector's needs.

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