THE TESS-INDIA PROGRAMME: STIMULATING AND SUPPORTING NEW TEACHING PRACTICE AND EFFECTIVE OER USE AT SCALE

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Abstract

The TESS-India programme is a multi-million pound project offering professional development for teacher educators in teaching and learning practice (www.tess-india.edu.in). Winner of The Guardian newspaper's Higher Education award for Best International Project, the programme has developed over 120 Open Educational Resource (OER) guides designed to support teachers and teacher educators in building their understanding of learning activities and approaches. In addition, over 50 videos of classroom practice have been professionally produced. The focus of the programme has been developing an effective methodology for raising awareness and helping embed new practice at scale. To-date, well over 100,000 educators have participated in programme activities or have accessed project resources. In this poster we will present a summary of the project accomplishments and how these were achieved.

The poster will focus in particular on two MOOCs that were run in English and then in Hindi. The programme aimed to use the affordances of the MOOC digital platform to extend the reach and impact of the TESS-India programme for teacher professional development in seven states in India. The MOOC was used to support capacity building of teacher trainers and trainee teachers and to contribute to the programme goal of pedagogic transformation in learning and teaching in elementary and lower secondary schools. All learning content, communication, and online forum discussion was in English for the first run of the MOOC and in Hindi for the second run. Over 30,000 learners registered for the course and 51% completed – a rate many times better than the average for MOOCs. The poster will draw on multiple sources of data to explain key features which stimulated interest in the MOOC and give examples of success in challenging and varied contexts.

Keywords: Teacher education, teacher training, MOOCs, OER, India, TESS-India, trainee teachers, video, classroom practice.

1 INTRODUCTION

TESS-India (Teacher Education through School based Support in India) is an award-winning multi-million-pound programme initiative that aims to strengthen and transform teaching practice and teacher professional development systems and processes in India (http://www.tess-india.edu.in/). It provides an innovative, comprehensive and scalable approach to teacher education, with an emphasis on inclusive child-centred pedagogy. Starting in 2012 and a recent winner of The Guardian Higher Education Awards for Best International Project, TESS-India has been developing its approach in collaboration with state governments in India. The programme has been operational across seven states in India: Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

National policy in India has constantly emphasised the need for change to improve the quality of educational provision and has advocated a child-centred pedagogy as a response to this for the last thirty years. Yet despite the policy reframing of teacher and student education [1] and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), movement forward into new practices has been the exception rather than the rule. It is argued that the urgency and scale of this challenge demands new approaches to teacher professional learning [2].

The goal of the TESS-India project is transformative pedagogic change at scale to address this complex problem of practice improvement. TESS-India works through bringing together researchers, stakeholders and practitioners from across the education system to collectively apply their diverse expertise to this goal. Understanding the interconnections within the education system and working within and across the different components is critical to sustainable holistic change and real improvements for students.

The key means for change developed by the programme are a set of Open Educational Resources (OER): 10 principles of practice resource packs, over 125 subject teaching resource packs available in
multiple formats and versions (linguistic and cultural) and videos filmed on-location in classrooms. This is a significant resource for teachers and teacher educators [3]. Through participation in the practices embedded in the OER, educators at different levels of the system are able to develop more learner or child-centred pedagogy. Hence the TESS-India approach is at once both system focussed – understanding how elements of the system interact, and local - devising local solutions appropriate to each context [4].

In 2015, the programme developed and launched a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to support teachers and teacher educators in using TESS-India resources and support their engagement with changing classroom practice. Those participating in the TESS-India MOOC were from difference demographic groups to those in India taking part in other MOOCs at the time [5]. This poster will describe aspects of the large-scale MOOC deployed in English, and then in Hindi by TESS-India.

2 METHODOLOGY

The TESS-India MOOC was designed and written by a small team of UK and Indian educators, the former from the Open University, UK. Critical readers were from both countries, bringing expertise in online learning, professional development and knowledge of the context to the task. The MOOC was launched at end of 2015 in English and attracted over 10,000 participants of whom approximately 51% completed the assessment [6]. In late 2016, a Hindi version of the MOOC was run, this attracted over 30,000 participants with a similar completion rate.

A task-oriented design was adopted where each week’s study centred on learning activities rooted in a local context, reflecting authentic challenges faced by teacher educators and which aimed to be personally meaningful and rewarding for participants [7]. The course lasted six weeks and included activities involving ‘communication’ – posting comments on forums in response to specific questions, consulting colleagues or giving and receiving feedback occupied a similar proportion of study time. Reflection was also a key element, with participants encouraged to draw on and make sense of their experience each week [6].

Participants were invited to respond to online pre- and post-course surveys. There were 6200 English responses and 21,000 responses in Hindi to the pre-course survey and 2500 English and 16,000 Hindi responses to the post-course survey. These data were analysed in SPSS by the project team after each presentation of the MOOC.

3 RESULTS

Over 90% of participants who responded to the pre-course surveys indicated that this was their first experience with a MOOC; for many this was their first experience of online learning, and for a few their first serious engagement with computers. Satisfaction was excellent with 98% rating the Hindi MOOC very good or good. A high proportion of participants also believed that the MOOC would benefit personal professional practice. Reasons for the MOOCs success include how well it was integrated into existing project activities and resources, an effective building of local logistical infrastructures, the translation into Hindi for the second presentation, and the intention to use the MOOC as an ‘event’ that would introduce, guide and support teachers in their use of the OER resources produced by the project [8]. It was only as the project progressed that the value of these elements became apparent.

The focus provided by the MOOC helped engage and enthuse educators at all levels of the education system from state officials and project nominated state representatives through to college directors, headteachers, teachers and trainee teachers. This helped provide an endorsement for the MOOC in the eyes of those taking part and to build the practical network within which local contact classes were organised. Almost 600 contact classes were offered across the participating states with an average attendance of 37 [5]. These provided a ‘real’ space for MOOC participants to meet – often to attend a session based on the MOOC activities, use an internet connection or meet with other participants. The classes were found to be an important element in creating impetus and engagement in the MOOC with discussions in class feeding into discussions online. However, power supply, computer access and connectivity were considerable issues for many participants; for example, around 75% of Hindi MOOC participants said that Internet connectivity had been a challenge while studying in the MOOC.

The conference poster will present further results and insight from participants. There will also be leaflets and examples of key project outputs.
4 CONCLUSIONS

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) represent one approach to engaging and raising awareness and, in the context of this study, helped provide a means by which to transcend traditional training processes and disrupt conventional pedagogic practices [6]. The results presented in the poster will highlight how a large-scale MOOC deployed in English, and then in Hindi, successfully contributed to achieving sustainable capacity building within the TESS-India programme.

Overall, the TESS-India programme has engaged over 100,000 teachers and teacher educators in India. As a result, more interactive and participation practices and enhanced digital literacies have been observed along. Programme evaluation also highlights participants’ awareness and acceptance of key principles in the TESS-India resources, stimulation in the creation of, and engagement with, learning communities, and use of resources by teaching training colleagues. For those supporting teacher, engagement with TESS-India has opened new opportunities in their academic support role [5].

The innovation in practice and transformation in pedagogy promised by TESS-India OER will continue after the project ends. For example, as a result of engagement with the MOOC and other TESS-India learning resources, evidence shows policy makers and lead teacher educators (for example SCERT Directors) are changing their thinking about teacher professional development. [5]. This represents a move away from cascade models to a focus on continuous professional development and learning of teachers in their classrooms with support from teacher educators/ experts, either virtually or face-to-face.

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REFERENCES


