# All things digital

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## Abstract

There are a number of challenges in the delivery of face to face (F2F) training which can prompt the move to online training and there are opportunities of online training. There are also different models of delivery of F2F and online training. By looking at examples from the British Council, lessons can be learned in order to better design projects in Sri Lanka.

## Introduction

Moving from F2F teaching to online training presents a number of challenges, not least the technology. This paper outlines the challenges and opportunities for online training, provides examples of successful online projects from British Council projects, describes some other technologies useful to online teaching and ends with some top tips to consider when moving online.

## Challenges and opportunities

### Reach

One huge challenge with F2F training is the reach. It is difficult to get teachers from remote areas to a training course. Hilly roads and long distances mean that the majority of teachers come from bigger towns with better transport networks. This has an effect of excluding teachers through geographical location.

### Time

Another challenge is time. Travelling long distances means that teachers are often tired on arrival to the training course and this affects retention of learning. Teachers often want to leave early at the end of the course in order to get home in good time. Being away from family for an extended period also causes issues in terms of childcare and caring for family members.

Another factor under time is that training is often conducted in blocks of time. It might be one day, two days or a week or longer. This means that a lot of information is provided at the same time and much of this is lost or forgotten on arrival back at school.

### Cost

Cost is another factor in F2F training. Providing accommodation, travel expenses, allowances, food costs and staffing costs all add up when running a F2F training course. There are also additional, more hidden costs around teachers being away from their regular teaching role and school. Cover is needed and classes are often combined which reduces the effectiveness of the instruction.

So, location, time and cost are all factors that prevent a wider access and provision of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for teachers. Moving training online can mitigate these factors and bring additional benefit to the participants.

## Benefits of online training

CPD is known to be a contributing factor to teacher development. The 'less is more' philosophy is one that holds true in this context. Having smaller chunks of input that teachers can implement has a deeper impact than a longer training workshop.

### Reach

Moving CPD online means that a lot more teachers can be reached. Teachers can access the training from their own locations meaning all the issues around travel are immediately reduced considerably. Teachers can undergo online training within their school or at home.

### Time

Teachers can learn in their own time and at their own speed if the training is asynchronous. This benefits those with different learning styles, different household and work routines and is fundamentally supported by research on self-directed learning.

### Cost

Without travel, accommodation, food and other costs, online training can be considerably cheaper and therefore more, shorter sessions can be run.

## Models of online CPD

Online training can be 100% online where the trainer and participants never meet. This model makes is harder to develop a community online.

Another option is blended training. This is where some sessions are delivered F2F, such as an introductory session, a final review and wrap up or a practical session. The rest is delivered online.

Both 100% online and blended approaches can be delivered in two ways, moderated or not. With moderation, the trainer meets the participants online for a synchronous, real time session. This could be to clear up any questions, develop more community and connectedness between participants, provide some input or try out some

activities. Having moderated, synchronous sessions can be the make or break of an online training course as it brings the course alive with the connection it brings.

**Platforms**

There are a number of different platforms to use for online delivery. A learning management system (LMS) is a platform where content is kept, organised and can be full of different type of activities such as gap-fills, quizzes, matching activities to help learning. However, this is only an interaction between person and computer. A deeper learning takes place when there is interaction between people. This is where a tool such as Zoom comes in with features such as breakaway rooms, shared screens and annotation, all making for an engaging and interactive training environment.

# Examples from around the British Council

There are a number of different projects using different models of online training, all successful in their delivery models and teacher retention.

**Teaching for Success Palestine** was an online CPD course for 561 teachers in 36 different groups. This was a blended approach with a monthly cycle on input and sharing.

Week 1 – moderated online learning

Week 2 – a synchronous session with a trainer

Week 3 – a second synchronous session with a trainer

Week 4 – a Teacher Activity Group F2F session with a local supervisor

**Teaching for Success Syria** used a 100% online delivery model, initially using English for Teaching (EfT) online modules. 94 English teachers participated in the online activities with 1 topic a month and 2 moderated Zoom sessions a month. The F2F materials were converted to online and translated. Videos had Arabic subtitles and moderated sessions were conducted by bilingual trainers.

This model was extended to Action Research for English and subject teachers. F2F materials were converted to be delivered by Zoom. A further project was General Methodology for subject teachers where F2F materials were converted for delivery by Zoom.

**BLF – Rwanda project** ran an online pilot course with 36 teachers with the view to comparing two delivery models: online activities plus Zoom sessions where teachers joined independently from their own locations compared to online activities plus Zoom sessions delivered to teachers who had gathered in the same training room. It was found that participants fared better with synchronous sessions when they joined from their own location rather than collectively in the same room. This has fed into the design of the main project to train 2000 teachers nationally through an online course with regular synchronous sessions.

The success of these projects has been in the design of the online materials, the building of an online community through the synchronous sessions and the delicate balance of self-study and the guidance of skilled moderators.

## The Teacher Educator Community

This is an online community of practice of teacher educators where there are articles and events thematically organised according to the needs of the teacher educator community based on a survey done in 2019. To find out more check out this link: https://teacher-educators.english.britishcouncil.org

Topics are organised with input in the form of articles and other resources, a webinar, forum discussions and a Teacher Educator Activity Group synchronous get together to discuss the topic from a teacher educator point of view. Sadly, at the time of writing, these have been suspended due to the Covid-19 situation.

## Other technologies

At the end of the Improving Teacher Educator in Sri Lanka (iTESL) programme, a 3-day workshop was delivered to teachers by In-Service-Advisors (ISAs). Following the training, ISAs observed teachers in the classroom to gather evidence of the success of the training. Survey Monkey was used to collect this observation data by adding a shortcut to a quick observation survey that the ISAs could use during the observation. It was found that those teachers who had undergone the 3-day training had dramatically improved their communicative teaching skills in terms of Reading, Maximising Participation and Teaching Grammar compared to those who had not had the training input. However, the results showed that including speaking as a post reading activity was still lacking in many lessons.

Survey Monkey is a useful tool for instantly collecting data where results are available without the need for paper or staffing hours.

### Conclusion

Moving from F2F to online training is not an easy process and there are a lot of challenges. However, thinking about what can be done rather than what can't be done is a step in the right direction. **Embracing the problem** and thinking creatively, using the tools available, will result in a more positive outcome for all involved.