Concept Note on

"Teachers Portal"

Teachers' Portal for Empowerment (TP4E)

Access to Information (a2i) Programme, Prime Minister's Office, Bangladesh.

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Background

Bangladesh's a large education system with 30 million students in the primary and secondary education levels, over 120,000 schools and over 900,000 teachers. It is estimated that, even with maximum utilisation of resources, it takes five to six years to bring new knowledge to every teacher while knowledge is created and replaced every moment. As the vessels of knowledge, teachers have the responsibility to not only be learned in their respective subject-matters but also be proficient in wielding modern teaching and learning tools. Thus, there is increasing pressure to devise superior alternatives to traditional teacher training methods. There is now demand to deliver teacher trainings in ways that are more far-reaching and time-efficient and make greater use of peer-to-peer learning and collaboration.

With rapidly expanding knowledge and modern technology, there is no greater demand in society today than enabling lifelong learning and continuous professional development of teachers. Bangladesh has already established internet-enabled classrooms called Multimedia Classrooms (MMC) in over 28,000 schools of the country. In these classrooms, teachers use digital content to teach various subjects ranging from sciences to humanities.

It is in this backdrop that the UNDP and USAID supported Access to Information (a2i) Programme of the Prime Minister's Office of Bangladesh, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, designed and developed an online platform named *Teachers' Portal* (www.teachers.gov.bd) as an alternative to traditional form of teacher training.

Administered in the vernacular to ensure maximum reach and impact, the teachers' portal has become the largest state-owned online educational content repository in Bangladesh. The Teachers' Portal wraps together access to quality content, peer-mentoring, self-paced learning through practice, peer-collaboration, motivation through healthy competition and constructivist activities into one attractive and highly effective teacher training package.

Goals & timeframe

The primary objective of the Teachers' Portal is to promote the acquisition of knowledge and skills among teachers for continuous learning and professional development. It functions on the principle to gradually eliminate knowledge gap and digital divide by creating and widening access to knowledge and educational opportunities. The specific goals of the Teachers' Portal are:

(a) To establish an online training and professional development platform for all school teachers;
(b) To develop an online repository where quality educational contents will be stored, accessed and shared freely by teachers;
(c) To formulate an idea generation and problem solving platform for hassle free service to teachers;
(d) To develop peer to peer and collaborative learning environment for lifelong support and to close the rural- urban knowledge gap in the process.

The portal sees to achieve long-term engagement of teachers by offering both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of human motivation. Teachers feel intrinsically motivated from greater skills and professional development due to association, content sharing and mentoring with thousands of teachers across the country. Teachers derive extrinsic motivation from external, tangible rewards like 'best-teacher competitions' and 'best teacher of the week awards' that are held and awarded through the portal.

This was launched in 2013. As of January 2016, there are over 100,000 members on the Teachers' Portal and 74,000 audio-visual contents uploaded mostly by teachers and development partners. The project aims to bring 3,50,000 teachers under this portal by 2018, break the digital and education divide and cover over 900,000 teachers by the year 2021 in line with the Perspective Plan of Bangladesh (2010-2021).

Results achieved and impact generated

The Teachers' Portal is contributing to both Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By ensuring equitable access to educational opportunities by teachers, the portal has paved the way to achieve universal primary education as per MDG 2. Moreover, by its concept and design, the Teachers' Portal is also directly contributing to the proposed SDG 4 by ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and

promoting life-long learning opportunities for all. Being inclusive in nature and by reaching the traditionally hard-to-reach communities, the Teachers' Portal is also ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples.

The Teachers' Portal is also supporting gender equality ending discrimination against female teachers and eliminating cybercrime against women as encoded in the SDG 5. At present, 45.85% of total members on the portal are female teachers. According to a study 80.7% of them said that instead of travelling to distant locations, they prefer to collect resources from portal[1]. Moreover, if online trainings are provided through the portal, female teachers would be the biggest beneficiaries, as women in Bangladesh often face numerous cultural and societal restrictions on their mobility and as such are often denied training opportunities that requires travelling to distant towns and staying overnight at unfamiliar locations. The portal brings all the tools for teacher empowerment, and by extension women empowerment, at teachers' doorsteps. A special documentary on International Women's Day was published where women empowerment through Teachers' Portal is highlighted (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TQdgmb_uYc).

The study shows that 62% teachers have benefitted by developing skills through communication and sharing over the Teachers' Portal, 55.4% teachers have achieved improved content development skills, 36.7% teachers have generated new ideas, and 22.3% teachers have improved their facilitation skills. Thus, this portal has turned into an online skill development platform.

The portal has used elements of 'gamification' in an attempt to create a virtual 'incentive' for the teachers to participate more actively. Every week three teachers are selected as the best content developer based on various criterions including the online rating by the users (showing a list of best teachers of the week: https://www.teachers.gov.bd/archive/list). The 85 'winners' of which 33 are women, not only get inspired by their recognition but also act as an inspiration for new entrants to the portal. In a recent satisfaction survey it is found that 89% among on 458 teachers say that best content developer feature is effective. The project also facilitates to spread these stories of success in national media. Recently, an annual national content competition is added to

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[1] Access to Information (a2i) Prime Minister's Office. (2015). *Teachers' Portal as Peer Learning and Online Training Tool for Teachers*. Retrieved from http://www.dshe.gov.bd/admin_section/c0a9f550e478c2975aaf01a36bc9cfe9.pdf

the system for the members of the Teachers' Portal to take this element further. Thousands of teachers participate in the competition and the finalists are rewarded through national and international events (National Teachers Conference 2014 http://www.a2i.pmo.gov.bd/42-teachers-awarded-at-teachers-conference). Teachers' Portal has increased the freedom of expression (FoE). 98% teachers say that FoE has increased. Hence the portal has become a leader-board and a motivational platform for all the teachers of Bangladesh.

Furthermore, the portal offered a way for the teachers in the rural areas to shine and earn national recognition. Thus far, for example, above 90% teachers who 'won' the best content award are from rural areas. The latent dedication and creativity of rural teachers has now been unleashed through this portal. A link to an awareness video on Teachers' Portal can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvJOoKZlYRA

Challenges

At the time of the project's implementation, one of the biggest challenges was the limited use of computers and internet due to lack of proper infrastructure and attendant high costs of access. As such, project implementers faced the challenge of lack of confidence among teachers in using ICTs (multimedia contents mainly), membership on the portal, slow decision-making process in the government level and lack of motivation among teachers. However, due to some strategic and informed policy interventions, Teachers' Portal has reached 9.34% primary and secondary school teachers within three years. However, a large number of teachers are yet to be reached. It is expected all teachers will be reached by 2021 through the accelerated expansion of high-speed internet and computing infrastructure in schools by the government and private sector telecommunications service providers supported by the forward-looking Education Policy and ICT in Education Masterplan.

Another significant challenge is appropriate design and quality assurance of the contents and training programme. Although these barriers often restricted progress being made at the field-level, but the high-level of acceptance of the initiative among the beneficiaries, i.e., the teachers, smoothened the implementation process to a significant extent. A special program has been designed to develop over 700 'model content' by teacher trainers and the best teachers by

February 2015. To date over 650 such contents has already been developed and featured on the portal.

Sustainability and Partnership

Today, Teachers Portal is a mandatory session in 14 days ICT in Education Training programme for primary and secondary teachers. Ministry of Education already has taken a five years project focusing on Multimedia Classroom and Teachers' Portal optimization. Performance in Teachers' Portal now has become one of the important criteria of district level best educator selection. Along with these sustainability strategies already all teacher training colleges, Higher Secondary and Primary Training Institutes, Institute of Education and Research, National Academy for Educational Management, relevant directorate and ministries are directly engaged with the Teachers' Portal. Besides government institutions the development partners like British Council with funding and Save the Children, BRAC, UNICEF, Dhaka Ahsania Mission and others with contents and events are driving this portal together.

Relevance of the project to the respective Action Line

Targeting the year 2021, the golden jubilee of the independence of Bangladesh, the Ministry of Education developed its ICT in Education Master Plan in 2013. Substantial importance has been attached to ICT in Education in the National Education Policy 2010. A significant part of the National Policy for Information and Communication Technology 2009 is devoted to the use of ICT in educational management. In the vision of primary and secondary education (p. 5-17, ICT in Education Master Plan 2013) online course contents, teacher training programme, subject based interactive multimedia content and education portal have been emphasized. For easy access of contents and training programme through teachers' portal and other ICT in Education initiative, the government is providing high speed internet connection in schools, training and resource centers through Public Private Partnership (PPP) models.

Teachers' Portal is also playing a vital role in establishing e-Governance in Bangladesh. It showcases the best ICT enabled teachers' database publicly. It publishes and shares national circulars, events and resources. Teachers can voice their opinions or provide suggestions regarding educational policy, teaching learning methods or any national issues and receive feedback from Ministry of Education and other respective authorities. This portal will gradually

be integrated with National e-Learning Platform being developed by Access to Information (a2i) Programme. This project has critical role in information and knowledge production, education and training, and to support the establishment of partnerships, cooperation and networking between other institutions like National Academy for Education Management, National Museum of Science and Technology and Directorate General of Health Services under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The Teachers' Portal also fits with the action line of cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content. It provides learners the opportunity to work with people from different cultures, thereby helping to enhance learners' teaming and communicative skills as well as their global awareness. All contents available here are developed by local teachers, thus local and regional socio economic and cultural context are maintained.

Teachers' Portal has good partnership with media. Some links are given here: http://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/?archiev=yes&arch_date=01-09-2014#(p.16), http://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/?archiev=yes&arch_date=27-08-2014#(p.16)

Conclusion

Teachers' Portal can be the model for other developing countries towards achieving 21st century education goal. For developing countries like Bangladesh, the Teachers' Portal promises to open access to knowledge in ways unimaginable not long ago. It has already started delivering on its potential through its existing collaborative learning features. It shows strong commitment to reduce time, cost and visit of a teacher in terms of developing his/her skill, solving problems and sharing resources. It creates a virtual community where everyone is counted and equally benefitted. To the end of achieving Sustainable Development Goals, it promotes equitable access to educational opportunities, gender equality and women empowerment. It creates global partnership through connecting all the education resources of international agencies. The portal has the potential to promote the acquisition of knowledge and skills among teachers by enabling active, collaborative, creative and evaluative learning.