Work Package 2 – Development I (Train-The-Trainer)

Validation of the Train-the-Trainer Program

Report on Findings from Expert Interviews in Cambodia and Sri Lanka

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1. Introduction

This report is part of the Erasmus+ project CONTESSA. CONTESSA–Contemporary Teaching Skills for South Asia–is a three-year project funded by the European Union. The aim of the project is to improve teaching skills in Cambodia and Sri Lanka by means of blended learning to foster contemporary teaching skills. In line with the EU's strategy to promote Capacity Building in Higher Education, the project is built on a collaboration between six partner institutions and sevel associate partner institutions across four countries including Austria, Cambodia, Germany and Sri Lanka. CONTESSA addresses topics such as contemporary teaching methodology and techniques as well as the requirements for the development of effective learning arrangements. The project is set within the context of primary education and addresses the following target groups:

- pre-service teachers (trainee teachers), referring to students who are currently qualifying for the teaching profession;
- in-service teachers, referring to the group of teaching professionals who teach in primary schools;
- teacher educators (teacher trainers), referring to professionals who train future teachers in settings of higher education.

Contessa provides five (online) modules, each module dealing with current and relevant topics in teacher education. These modules are developed by the University of Graz (KFU). In addition, Dresden University of Technology (TUD) developed a Train-the-Trainer Program (TT-program) for teacher educators that aims at supporting teacher educators in working, teaching and modifying the (online) modules in accordance with national and regional needs.

The CONTESSA Train-the-Trainer program consists of

- three blended-learning teacher training modules (TTM 1-3);
- face-to-face workshops for delivering the TTM contents and providing the platform necessary for in-depth discussions;
- tutorials explaining the objectives of the 5 (online) modules;
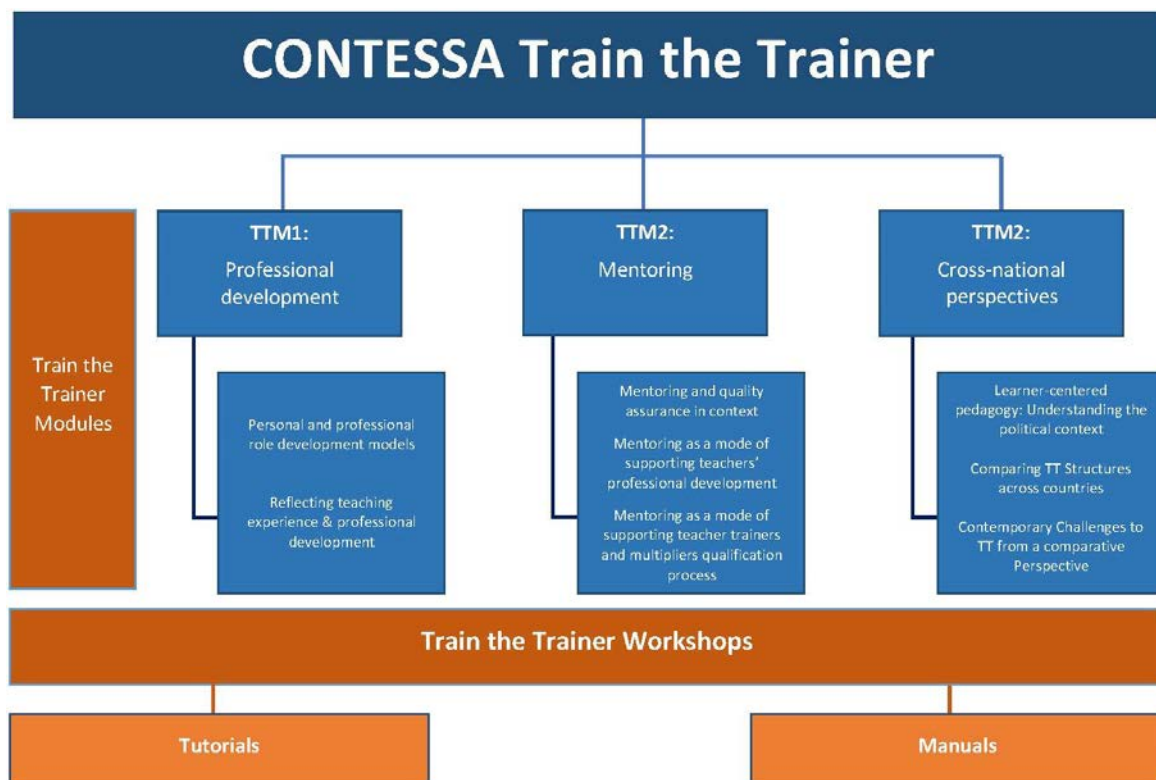- a manual explaining the application of the Learning Management System.

Fig. 1: Overview of the Train-the-Trainer program

To ensure that the Train-the-Trainer program structure meets national and institutional needs, development of the TT concept was validated by means of

a) a presentation of the draft structure to the project coordinator in November 2019 and online feedback discussions with all project teams in November/December 2019,

b) an online survey that was sent to all project partners in 2019. Its results were sent to all team members and it was published on the project website;

c) national experts from Cambodia and Sri Lanka who were interviewed face to face in both countries in February 2020.

This report refers to those interviews that aimed at validating the proposed structure of the TT-program and ran in February 2020. Team members of KFU and TUD visited experts and project team members in Cambodia and Sri Lanka including the University of Cambodia, Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia, the University of Colombo and the Open University of Sri Lanka. All Universities had arranged interviews with experts responsible for teacher education at governmental/provincial levels (representatives of the National Ministries of Education and of the National Institutes of Education)

and at academic levels (researchers involved with teacher education). The report summarizes findings from these interviews including challenges to teacher education in both countries.

Prior to the interviews, TUD developed interview guides for individual interviews and interview guides were adapted to national preconditions. An information letter covering the structure of the TT-program and providing additional information on the planned interviews was sent to all project partners and experts to ensure they were aware of the aims of the project progress and of the interviews' aims.

While running the interviews in Cambodia and Sri Lanka, it turned out some interviews had to be run as focus groups while some were conducted at individual level. Also, it was impossible to gain an equal number of interview partners across countries.

	Cambodia	**Sri Lanka**
Focus groups	1 (3 participants)	2 (3 & 2 participants)
Individual interviews	./.	3

Table 1: Overview of Interviews

A total of 11 experts participated in the interviews including 5 governmental representatives and 6 academic representatives. While some experts were well informed about the project's progress others had learnt only recently about its aims.

Interviews included validation of the following topics:

- structure and challenges to teacher education including current initiatives;
- role of NGOs and international stakeholders in teacher education (Cambodia only);
- structure and content of the Train-the-Trainer modules;
- structure, implementation of the Train-the-Trainer workshops;
- communication and networking among those involved in teacher education;
- recommendations on the TT-Program.

Data was collected by note-taking; depending on the agreement of interviewees and room acoustics, interviews were also audio-recorded.

2. Results

In this section, it seems relevant to present not only interviewees' feedback on the TT-Program structure but also their comments on current challenges to teacher education as these comments validate what TUD team members found in previous studies, both by desk research (Aldrian 2019; Bohlinger 2019) and interviews ran with project partners prior to developing the Teacher-Training Program (Bohlinger & Müller 2019).

2.1 Challenges to Teacher Education in Cambodia

Cambodian experts particularly point at the low number of teaching professionals in the country. Scarcity of teachers mostly affects primary education and Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) cannot supply trained teachers regularly. Experts explained that this is partly due to the government's strong regulation of the education system, particularly in primary and lower secondary education that allow no more than 1,000 teachers to be recruited annually. Also, the teaching profession is often considered unattractive due to low salaries and teacher allocation (see Bohlinger 2019), for many will be sent to rural areas, regardless of individual preferences. In addition, teachers often have to take more than one job. Although there are programs launched by the government such as upgrading the teaching qualification and increasing salaries twice a year, incentives are often too low to recruit a sufficient number of teachers. Experts estimated that approx. 13,000 teachers would need training to become certified teachers. Our interview partners also point at a weak cooperation between schools and private educational institutions though this is considered a reasonable mechanism for coping with teacher shortage. In Cambodia, private teaching institutions are seen an important provider of future teachers and of teaching qualifications.

The National Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports initiated several reforms to promote child-centred education. In that sense, interviewees state that many teachers are not able to apply this approach appropriately even though the MoEYS provided information and training on pedagogical skills, child-centred didactics and teaching methodology. Though the government increased the volume of in-service teacher training, experts doubt its impact as they still observe outdated modes of lesson planning and a low variety of teaching methods and working material. All interviewees agree that student-centred learning and problem-based learning would be more effective than 'traditional' modes of teaching.

2.2 Challenges to Teacher Education in Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan experts mostly point at the country's shortage of teaching professionals which is mostly due to the profession's low attractiveness, low salaries (particularly in public schools) and few opportunities to choose work placements. In addition, teacher education graduates often choose alternative pathways graduates to improve career chance.

National Colleges of Education (NCoE) are the main providers of teachers at primary educational levels as they offer National Diplomas including a one-year internship–the most typical qualification to become a teacher in primary education. As training capacities of NCoE are limited current government initiatives aim at raising the number of students recruited annually. However, the teacher training demand in this field is greater than its supply.

In Sri Lanka, only five universities are providing teacher training programs. Though the quality of subject (and theoretical) knowledge is considered sufficient, experts criticize that students lack practical experience and a sound knowledge of teaching methodology which are both regarded as basic requirement for entering the teaching profession. Weak linkages between (teaching) theory and (teaching) practice is a major issue mentioned in all interviews and some interviewees also criticize students' poor knowledge of conducting proper assessment.

Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) provide in-service teacher training leading to a post-graduate diploma and addressing what is perceived weak linkages between teaching theory and teaching practice. However, there are only few such Colleges and the College pathway is often considered too expensive and too extensive: TTC programs presuppose a 3-year training (National Teaching Diploma) and cover another 3-year Bachelor program plus a Master's program. Next, Sri Lanka's education system is said to be exam-driven. For instance, many students in primary education feel challenged by the scholarship examination to gain access to one of the country's national prestigious schools. Though optional at the end of primary education (grade 5), this exam is one of many elements putting severe pressure on students to improve students' achievements at school and thus, career chances. As to teacher training, interviewees state that pre-service students are often more concerned with taking exams and 'collecting' good grades rather than focusing on the true values of teaching.

2.3 Feedback and Comments on the Proposed Structure of the Teacher Training Program

In general, interviewees agree with the proposed structure of the TT-Program and recommendations refer to minor issues to be addressed when developing the program's contents.

With respect to Module 1, experts recommend integrating 'values of teaching' as additional topic and suggest adding it to Module 1 ('Professional Development'; TTM 1). In their opinion, this topic could contribute to enhancing teachers' 'mindset for teaching' that is often insufficiently developed as students' are mostly interested in receiving a Higher Education degree and less in actually becoming teaching professionals. Experts suggest that the TT-Program's contents should foster students' ability to reflect on their actions and their responsibility as teaching professionals.

With respect to Module 2, interviewees stated that multipliers should be selected in accordance with their qualification and experience. Sir Lankan experts point at difficulties with a similar model of senior students and teachers who are responsible for junior (pre-service) teachers. Experts point at difficulties with co-ordinating activities across institutions and a mismatch of students' needs and mentors' scope of practical experience.

It makes sense to assign one particular mentor to each student. They should be given a platform to discuss upcoming challenges, for example in classroom management and individual lesson planning on a regular basis. Unfortunately, mentoring in schools is not very attractive, for mentors do not receive any extra payment, nor do they acquire any kind of certificate, at least as far as Sri Lankan schools are concerned.

Implications for this module also aim at providing classroom discussions addressing the requirements set for high-quality mentoring with regard to students' needs. Furthermore, it is important to create scenarios of mentoring such as simulating classroom situations where participants adopt the role of mentors who provide profound feedback, which they share with the class. Mutual learning and formative (positive) feedback that helps build up confidence in teaching constitute some of the core principles in mentoring. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) which describes mentoring as an innovative concept in Cambodian schools, points out that mentoring should be student-centred and be applied to trigger life-long learning in terms of a continuous professional development.

Moreover, experts state that there should be a better mechanism to see whether teacher training has been implemented according to regulations and standards ('correct' implementation). This could be

achieved by arranging regular visits from representatives of the institution where the student was trained, for they are considered the right mentors to assess the future teachers 'work. This could also ensure that the different perspectives are embraced (the one of the training institution and the one of the particular school).

The National Institute of Education (NIE) in Sri Lanka is currently working on a curriculum for teacher training, putting emphasis on the idea of mentoring as well. Changes in the Curriculum are also being implemented in Cambodia.

There were no particular recommendations with respect to **Module 3.**

2.4   Recommendations for Workshops

Before the TT-program can be implemented, there is the task of finding the right group of teacher educators who will attend the workshops. Workshop participants should be motivated to go to a three-day course program. According to the experts, the most efficient way of finding teacher educators is to contact the Ministry of Education (Teacher Education Unit) and the corresponding National Institutes, for they know best how to forward requests to the teacher training institutions. Involving as many of these institutions as possible would also help to multiply the idea of CONTESSA throughout the country.

The workshops should be conducted in national languages (Sri Lanka: Tamil and Sinhala / Cambodia: Khmer). Although some of the participants are expected to have some sort of English language competence, chances are high that they will miss some of the instructions as well as they might feel not confident enough to share in verbal exchange. At the beginning of the workshop, there should be clear communication of what the participants are expected to do during the three days and that anybody is invited to contribute to the achievement of the workshop goals. Moreover, course instructors should be sensitive to gender issues; for it is often the female students who remain invisible behind their male counterparts.

Experts point out that teaching-learning arrangements at school as well as at university are often teacher-fronted, which goes along with a lack of interaction regarding the learning group. It is therefore recommended that the workshops be designed in order to trigger active participation. This could be achieved, for instance, by choosing the right classroom activities such as partner work, group work, role-plays, class discussions and approaches to learning like, for example problem-bases learning. Dealing with challenging situations that might came up in classrooms could be a good option

for getting the students involved. Generally speaking, workshop instructors are free to use the same activities as in their home countries, provided that the participants receive proper explanation of the methods introduced.

As far as the arrangement of the classroom is concerned, interviewees suggest organizing the classroom in a circle structure, so that the teacher/instructor can lead the interaction from the center. This would increase the chances of active participation.

It makes sense to provide the workshop participants with some sort of learning materials (e.g. handouts, worksheets, readers etc.). These materials should be published in local language. Experts stated that the printouts should also be available in an easy-accessible online version. In this way, participants might continue their learning after the completion of the workshop. In addition, a portfolio could be introduced at the beginning of the workshop and be kept and updated afterwards. In this regard, one of the interviewees suggested working with reflective journals that may cover a period of at least two months. Furthermore, there is also the opportunity to seek professional advice when designing these materials. Experts from the Open University of Sri Lanka referred to resources provided by CETMe[1] and DEMP[2]. Further suggestions point at the usage of online discussion forums, virtual meetings and virtual canteens where workshop instructors can monitor the students` interaction and be available in case any questions come up.

Another point mentioned in the interviews is the establishment of a feedback culture. Feedback should be provided among the participants (peer feedback) as well as between the participants and the workshop instructor(s). This may occur via oral feedback on a daily basis. Arranging skype-feedback sessions is also considered a rational option in terms of providing individual feedback for each participant.

3.   Conclusions

The validation study aimed at receiving feedback from national experts on the proposed structure of the TT-Program. Experts welcomed the proposed structure and provided valuable information who to

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[1] Centre for Education Technology and Media, located on OUSL Campus., which offers guidelines for developing educational media and provide assistance in designing, for example self-instructional materials and online courses (http://www.ou.ac.lk/home/index.php/ousl/faculties-institutes/cetme).

[2] Distance Education Modernization Predict, which results from a project (2006-2009) that provides resources and training for E-Learning

modify and implement it according to national, regional and institutional needs. Findings from the validation interviews will provide an additional fundament for the TT-program's module description and elaboration of the workshops.

TU Dresden team members are grateful to all project partners for their tremendous support of validating the TT-Program structure views and for providing access to all relevant stakeholders and resources.

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