Teacher development "How to" guides

IN LIGHT OF THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL CLOSURES DURING THE PANDEMIC, WHAT COMPETENCES DO TEACHER EDUCATORS UTILISE AND WISH TO DEVELOP FURTHER IN SUPPORTING TEACHERS ONLINE?

Introduction to the series

The British Council has produced a series of short evidence-based 'How to' guides for individuals and institutions who have a stake in designing and delivering professional development opportunities for English language teachers.

These short guides provide a series of **practical recommendations** and a list of key **associated research sources** designed to inform the organisation of professional development programmes and interventions for practising English language teachers. They also serve as self-access guides for teachers who are enrolling on formal professional development programmes or pursuing self-directed professional learning.

The guides are hosted on the British Council's TeachingEnglish website and complement the existing global and regional larger-scale research that provides the evidence base for what works in the teaching, learning and assessment of English.

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Introduction

While technology-mediated learning has been the focus of educational research and practice for well over 20 years, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to increased global interest in how learning can be supported online. In addition to recent discussions of online education generally (for example, Thornburg, Ceglie, & Abernathy, 2021), several studies examining how teacher education has responded to Covid-19 have also appeared. For example, Flores & Swennen (2020) edited a special issue of the 'The European Journal of Teacher Education' on this theme, while the 'Journal of Education for Teaching' (O'Meara & Hordatt Gentles, 2020) published a special issue with short cases of online teacher education from around the world. Online English language teacher education (ELTE) has also been the focus of discussion (Murray & Christison, 2018), though we will still know relatively little about the experiences of teacher educators in this field during the pandemic and the competences that they need to support teachers effectively online. Drawing on a review of selected recent sources and an online survey of teacher educators, this guide addresses the following two questions:

1. What insight does recent academic and professional literature provide into the competences that English language teacher educators need to work effectively online?

2. According to a sample of English language teacher educators, what competences do they utilise and wish to develop further in supporting teachers online?

The first question will be addressed in the second part of this guide (page 3), while survey responses to address the second question will be presented in the third part (page 10). To conclude the guide, part four (page 14) makes a series of recommendations for strengthening the competences of English language teacher educators who are required to support teachers online.

Online teacher educator competences

This section reviews some recent literature that addresses online teacher education, in particular the skills that teacher educators require to work effectively online in pre- and in-service contexts. This is not meant to be an exhaustive literature review, but a selective discussion of a small number of recent publications which are of direct relevance to the focus of this guide.

Competences for online educators

To start with online education generally, two detailed analyses are provided by Punie (2017) and Ní Shé et al. (2019). Both these sources examine the skills and knowledge that educators generally – and hence teacher educators too – require in order to work effectively online.
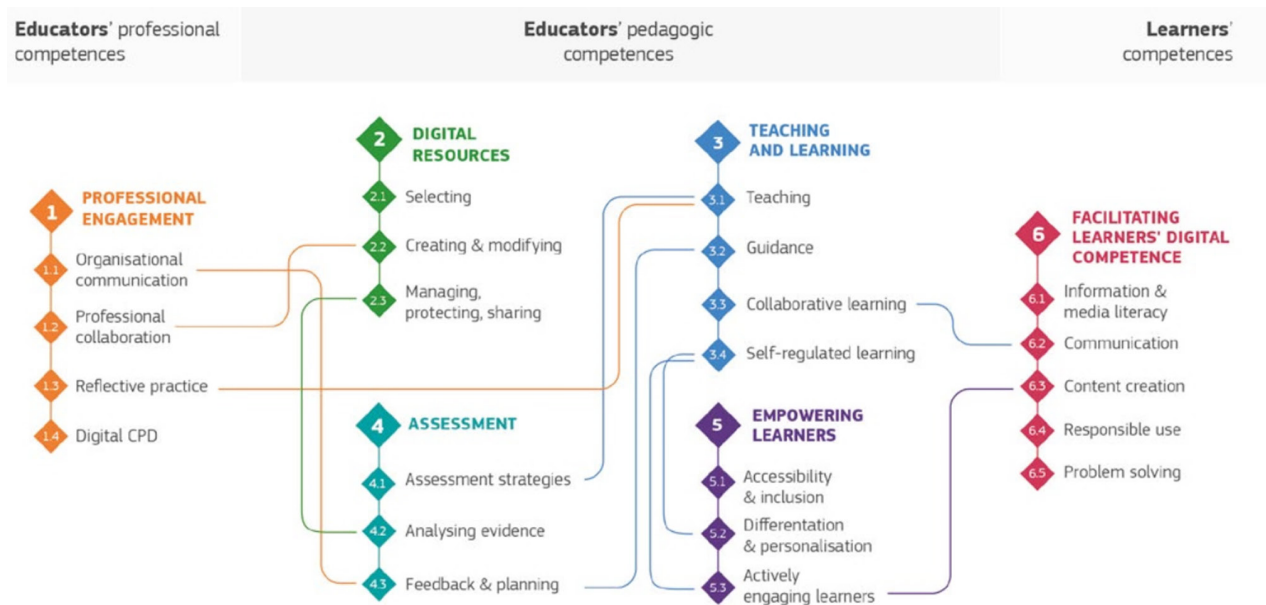
Punie (2017) presents a framework called DigiCompEdu. This is the EU Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators, and it proposes 22 elementary competences organised into six areas (see Figure 1). The six areas in the framework are:

- **Area 1:** Professional Engagement: Using digital technologies for communication, collaboration and professional development.

- **Area 2:** Digital Resources: Sourcing, creating and sharing digital resources.

- **Area 3:** Teaching and Learning: Managing and orchestrating the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning.

- **Area 4:** Assessment: Using digital technologies and strategies to enhance assessment.

- **Area 5:** Empowering Learners: Using digital technologies to enhance inclusion, personalisation and learners' active engagement.

- **Area 6:** Facilitating Learners' Digital Competence: Enabling learners to creatively and responsibly use digital technologies for information, communication, content creation, wellbeing and problem-solving.

Areas 2–5 are the core of the framework – they cover an 'educator's' digital pedagogic competence, i.e. the digital competences educators need to foster efficient, inclusive and innovative teaching' (page16). Each area is broken down into different elements (see pages 24–25 of the report for further details). This framework assumes that teachers have a basic foundation of general digital competence (such as knowing how to use email), but this cannot always be taken for granted.

Figure 1: DigiEduComp framework of educator digital competence (Punie, 2017, page 8)

Ní Shé et al. (2019) also provide a breakdown of online educator competences, as shown in Box 1.

Box 1	
Key elements	**Competencies**
Social presence	Communication skills, written and oral; modelling of good online behaviour; maintain a cordial learning environment.
Facilitation	Promoting interactivity within the group; facilitation of interaction; managing group work and building communities; advising/counselling skills; facilitating participation among students; resolving conflict in an amicable manner.
Supporting students	Creates and facilitates novel reflective pedagogically sound activities; utilises teaching strategies/models and general education theory; uses internet tools for instruction; accesses various technological resources; selects the appropriate resource for learning; suggests resources to the students.
Supporting students	Provides opportunities to perform and receive feedback; monitors individual and group progress; assesses individual and group performance; suggests measures to enhance performance.
Teaching presence	Time manages activities to provide student time efficiencies; manages the time and course; establishes rules and regulations.
Facilitation	Creates significant real-life problems with rubrics for guidance; demonstrates commitment and favourable attitude; sustains students' motivation, demonstrates leadership qualities; establishes rules and regulations.

Based on their analysis, these authors conclude that there are three key elements for effective online teaching: presence, facilitation and supporting students, and the competences associated with each are summarised in Box 2.

Box 2

Effective online teaching	Competencies
Presence	• Communication • Modelling online behaviours • Cordial learning environment • Expectations • Listening to students.
Facilitation	• Facilitate interaction • Promote interactivity • Encourage co-operation • Resolve conflict • Encourage active learning • Implement instructional strategies.
Supporting students	• Feedback • Monitor student progress • Time management • Manage learning environment • Content knowledge • Responsiveness.

This report also makes important points about the professional development of educators who move into online work, and which also apply to teacher educators.

Educators who move from traditional teaching to the online environment often bring their traditional pedagogies with them, which may not be as effective in the online environment; they need professional development on using online pedagogies. [Baran, et al., 2011; Bezuidenhout, 2018; Meyer, 2013] Moreover, teachers have traditionally been subject experts rather than pedagogical experts. [Bezuidenhout, 2018] In addition, educators who are confident in their abilities in face-to-face teaching may not bring this confidence with them to online teaching.

Northcote, Gosselin, Reynaud, Kilgour, & Anderson, 2015; Ní Shé et al., 2019, page 45

Together, the analyses in Punie (2017) and Ní Shé et al. (2019) stress that teaching online does call for an extended and different set of educator competences. These encompass both general digital competences and specific pedagogic competences, and, within the latter, creating positive interactive group dynamics and ensuring students receive appropriate support are seen to be particulaly important. The reference to various kinds of 'presence' in Box 1 and Box 2 draws on a model known as 'Community of Inquiry' (CoI) which is widely cited in the literature on online teaching. According to the CoI model (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000), learning is the result of the interaction of three 'presences'. These are summarised on the CoI website as shown in Box 3.

Box 3

'Presences' in online teaching[1]

Social presence (citing Garrison, 2009, page 352) is 'the ability of participants to identify with the community… communicate purposefully in a trusting environment and develop interpersonal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities'.

Teaching presence is the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realising personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001).

Cognitive presence is the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001).

Effective online learning environments will be characterised by all three presences – supportive social conditions, appropriately designed and facilitated teaching, and concrete, contextualised deep learning. Teacher educators will therefore require the competences to create learning environments that have such features.

Being an effective teacher educator online

As noted above, special issues of academic journals have appeared recently dedicated to how Covid-19 has impacted on teacher education. While these have typically reflected experiences from university pre-service programmes, the insights provided have implications for online ELTE generally too. One paper of particular interest (Carrillo & Flores, 2020) analysed 134 studies of online teacher education in relation to each of the presences in the CoI model just summarised. In relation to social presence, the following factors were found to contribute to the effectiveness of online teacher education: belongingness, cohesiveness, balance between support and student participation, interactivity and participation. Each of these elements is explained further in turn; for example, belongingness involves establishing shared values and interests and creating trusting human relationships. The implications of these conclusions are that online teacher educators need the competences to create these favourable social conditions. The analysis does in fact argue for 'the need to equip teacher educators with a set of competences in which the socio-affective is at its very core' (page 479).

In terms of cognitive presence, a key conclusion from the review is that online teacher education is enhanced when it promotes deeper levels of reflective and critical engagement. To achieve this, teacher educators need competences to enable the sharing and analysis of concrete experiences, to support teachers in making sense of ideas and experiences, and to facilitate their efforts to reflect critically on pedagogical practices.

Finally, a set of findings related to teaching presence was also summarised. These focused on the features of online teacher education environments that made them more effective and included 'an accurate pedagogical approach, relevant and authentic assignments, and appropriate tools and technology' (page 474). Once again, these conclusions have clear implications for the competences online teacher educators need.

Knezek, Christensen, & Furuta (2019) is also very relevant here. These authors developed a survey to measure the technology competences of teacher educators. The twelve items in the tool (Box 4) highlight several specific competences that can enhance the work of online teacher educators.

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1 https://coi.athabascau.ca/coi-model/

Box 4

Technology competences for teacher educators (Knezek, Christensen, & Furuta, 2019)

1. Use online tools to enhance teaching and learning.
2. Use technology to differentiate instruction to meet diverse learning needs.
3. Use appropriate technology tools for assessment.
4. Use effective strategies for teaching online and/or blended/hybrid learning environments.
5. Use technology to connect globally with a variety of regions and cultures.
6. Address the legal, ethical, and socially-responsible use of technology in education.
7. Engage in ongoing professional development and networking activities to improve the integration of technology in teaching.
8. Engage in leadership and advocacy for using technology.
9. Apply basic troubleshooting skills to resolve technology issues.
10. Design instruction that utilises content-specific technologies to enhance teaching and learning.
11. Incorporate pedagogical approaches that prepare teacher candidates to effectively use technology.
12. Support the development of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of teacher candidates as related to teaching with technology in their content area.

In comparison to more general and abstract discussions of 'presences' in online teaching, this list provides a very concrete set of competences that can guide efforts to develop the online skills teacher educators need.

Competences for online ELTE

Finally, work that focuses specifically on online teacher education in the context of ELT will be discussed.

An analysis of ELT practitioner experiences early in the Covid-19 pandemic was provided in British Council (2020)[2]. As part of this, over 1200 respondents who identified themselves as having a teacher educator role noted that they were reasonably confident in their ability to do their job remotely but also felt the need for support for this task. The survey included questions about these specific kinds of teacher educator needs:

- finding out what support and resources teachers need
- developing resources for teachers
- how to be inclusive online
- carrying out research projects
- giving training sessions live online
- working on their own professional development
- giving feedback sensitively online
- observing teachers.

Teacher educators indicated that they needed support in all these areas, particularly identifying and developing teacher resources. One (though quite general) recommendation from the report was to 'give support to teacher educators in remote teaching techniques and remote training pedagogy and practices' (page 5).

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2 See also the appendix for a summary of key conditions for effective online professional development identified in a more recent British Council report.

Two recent academic papers that have addressed online ELTE (both in university pre-service contexts) are Castañeda-Trujillo & Jaime-Osorio (2021) and Moorhouse (2020). The former examined the pedagogical strategies used by teacher educators on a programme in Colombia to respond to challenges created by Covid-19. This paper highlighted gaps in teacher educators' competences for working online and how they addressed these gaps by rapidly seeking to improve their knowledge of relevant tools and applications, such as video conferencing. Another important insight from this study was that Covid-19 forced teacher educators to become more aware of student teachers' needs vis-à-vis online learning; it had been assumed that student teachers would be comfortable learning in this mode but in fact they faced many challenges and frustrations that teacher educators had to take into account. This awareness is an important part of teacher educators' competences when they move to online work: 'TEs must recognise that PSTs [student teachers] are not entirely digital-natives and that they require training to use technologies just like them' (page 710).

Moorhouse (2020) provides reflections on his own experiences of modifying a face-to-face pre-service course for online delivery in Hong Kong. His initial approach of assigning materials to read offline followed by optional whole class video conference sessions to discuss these was not effective; attendance was low and interactive discussion minimal. In response to these challenges, the tutor adapted sessions in various ways: the video conference sessions were made mandatory, pre-session materials were modified to include a concrete task for students to complete and come ready to discuss, and breakout rooms were used during the videoconference sessions to give students more opportunities to interact. There is evidence here of development, based on reflections on experience, in the teacher educators' competence for working online. For example, he became more aware of the need for, and better able to implement, clear structure, concrete tasks and opportunities for students to interact. As a result of the changes made to the course, student participation and interaction improved.

Another study specific to ELTE is Borg (2022). This examined how, in response to Covid-19, ELTE providers with limited prior experience of working online adapted their courses and programmes. Participants came from nine countries and encompassed private, state and non-governmental organisations delivering pre-service and in-service courses. Through qualitative interviews, various insights into the impact of Covid-19 on these ELTE providers' online work emerged. In relation to our focus here on teacher educator competences, the study highlighted the following challenges that the transition to online delivery created for teacher educators:

- limited prior knowledge and experience of online teaching

- limited time to adapt courses, get access to new tools and platforms and master these

- covering the syllabus (in reduced time and a different format)

- monitoring and assessing student understanding

- lack of face-to-face interaction with students

- limited scope for practical sessions online

- reluctance by candidates to contribute actively during synchronous sessions

- lack of institutional support strategy.

These points signal key competences that teacher educators need to work effectively online; these include mastering new tools, monitoring the performance of participants and making online sessions practical and interactive. The importance of institutional support for teacher educators working online was also a strong theme in this study.

Summary

The recent studies discussed here signal very clearly that, in order to work effectively online, educators require an expanded repertoire of competences. This is an important point to acknowledge from the outset in order to counter any misconception that skilled face-to-face teacher educators will automatically be effective in an online environment. The CoI model - with its focus on social, teaching and cognitive presences - is one of the theories most often used to define the characteristics of effective online teaching, though the literature also provides other frameworks that include more detailed analyses of the skills and knowledge educators, generally, and online teacher educators, specifically, require. Overall, it is clear that effective online teacher educators require general digital competence and digital pedagogic competence, and that online learning will be enhanced particularly through the creation of a positive social environment in which participants interact in meaningful ways and receive appropriate support and feedback.

It is also important for online teacher educators to be aware of challenges that participants may face when learning online and to be able to respond constructively to these. Many of the competences highlighted in the literature discussed above are captured in the revised version of the British Council CPD Framework for Teacher Educators which will be published in 2022. This includes a new professional practice on 'supporting remote learning' which states that teacher educators should be able to:

- use different learning channels (F2F, virtual, hybrid), and synchronous and asynchronous tools and platforms, both generally and in order to support teacher learning

- identify, select and create digital content that supports teacher learning

- create a motivating, supportive and inclusive remote learning environment for teachers

- manage remote learning effectively, including basic technical troubleshooting

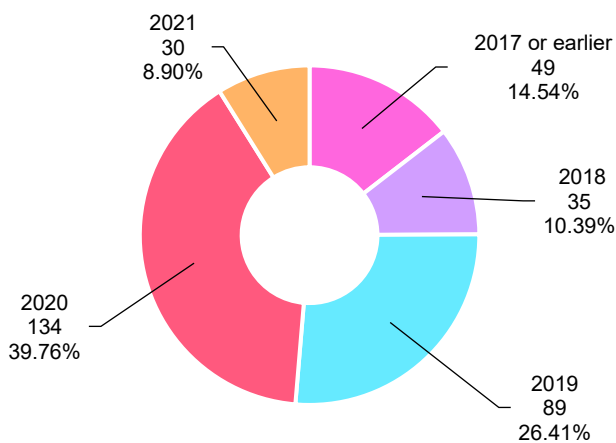- use technology in a way that is safe, legal, ethical and responsible.

Teacher educator survey

This section further explores competences for online teacher education by examining teacher educators' responses to an online survey. The survey was carried out in December 2021. Respondents were all members of the British Council's MENA online community for English language teaching professionals.

Respondent profile

Out of 766 respondents who started the online survey, 262 (34.2%) indicated that they had **not** conducted any teacher education online in the last two years. This is an interesting finding given that disruption to education has been ubiquitous since March 2020. It may imply that in many MENA contexts teacher education was suspended while face-to-face learning was not possible, but there may be other explanations for this rather unexpected finding too. A further 24 respondents said they did not work in MENA and were also excluded, while several others simply did not complete all the questions. The analysis below, then, is based on the responses of 362 teacher educators who had supported teachers online in the past two years and worked in MENA. The region (as defined by the British Council) consists of 17 countries and 14 of them were represented in this study, with largest numbers of respondents coming from Egypt (66), Iraq (47), Lebanon (36) and Libya (34). Respondents were asked when they first started working online as teacher educators and, as Figure 2 shows, just under 49% started in 2020 or 2021.

Figure 2: Experience of doing teacher education online (N=337)

- 2021 — 30 — 8.90%
- 2017 or earlier — 49 — 14.54%
- 2018 — 35 — 10.39%
- 2020 — 134 — 39.76%
- 2019 — 89 — 26.41%

Online teacher education activities

We asked respondents about the kinds of activities they did as part of their online work with teachers and Table 1 summarises what they said. Under 'quite often', communicating with teachers on social media was by far the most frequently chosen activity, followed by designing and sharing handouts and PowerPoints. Activities related to observation and recording training sessions were, in contrast, those fewer respondents said they did often. Overall, though, the majority of respondents said they engaged in the activities listed here either quite often or occasionally and the competences underpinning such activities would be an appropriate focus for professional development work with teacher educators in MENA (and more generally) who need to work online.

Table 1: Online teacher education activities (N=362)			
Activity	**Quite often**	**Occasionally**	**Rarely/Never**
Communicate with teachers using social media such as WhatsApp or Facebook	79.3	17.4	3.4
Design handouts or PowerPoints and share these with teachers	55.7	31.3	13.0
Communicate with teachers by email	49.6	36.1	14.2

Table 1: Online teacher education activities (N=362)			
Activity	**Quite often**	**Occasionally**	**Rarely/Never**
Moderate a social media group or online discussion forum for teachers	48.9	31.1	20.0
Conduct video meetings with teachers (for example, tutorials or discussions on Zoom)	48.4	36.9	14.7
Mentor teachers online or over the phone	41.9	40.7	17.4
Give live online presentations or workshops	41.2	43.6	15.2
Observe teachers' classroom lessons via video (in real time or recorded)	39.0	34.5	26.5
Observe teachers' online lessons	38.8	37.6	23.6
Record your online sessions and share them with teachers afterwards	28.4	35.4	36.1

Ninety-six respondents said they supported teachers online in other ways. While several of their comments overlapped with the activities in Table 1, a number of additional forms of support were specified, including:

- creating a website where resources for teachers are made available
- setting up 'a teaching online channel' (YouTube or similar)
- sharing soft copies of teaching materials with teachers
- 'radio instructional system'
- helping teachers prepare online lessons
- providing teachers with technical support
- sharing educational videos with teachers
- sharing links to online materials.

Teacher educator self-assessments

To gain further insight into teacher educator competences, respondents were asked to rate their ability to complete various tasks that doing teacher education online may involve[3]. Table 2 summarises their responses in terms of the percentage who said, 'this is a new idea to me' or 'I can do this but not very well'.

Table 2: Online skills teacher educators are less familiar with (N=352)	
Skills	**Percentage**
Work online with teachers in a way that minimises data usage	41.9%
Use a range of asynchronous tools and platforms to communicate with teachers	38.0%
Use a range of synchronous tools and platforms to communicate with teachers	34.9%
Solve basic online technical problems	33.1%
Use online tools to assess teachers' professional development needs	31.4%

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3 Respondents had the option to state that an activity was not relevant to their work.

Table 2: Online skills teacher educators are less familiar with (N=352)	
Skills	**Percentage**
Use online tools to conduct assessments of teachers and provide feedback	30.8%
Create an inclusive online learning environment	29.8%
Make online teacher education interactive	25.9%
Organise effective online discussions	24.8%
Create a motivating online learning environment	23.6%
Use online technology in a way that is ethical and responsible	18.8%
Identify and select suitable online resources	18.1%
Create digital content, such as handouts and PowerPoints	16.7%

While some element of unconscious inflation[4] is typically built into self-assessments of this kind, these responses shed light on the kinds of online skills that the respondents felt less confident about. Working online in a way that minimises data usage and using synchronous and asynchronous tools to communicate with teachers were the top three items here. Almost 30% also said that creating an inclusive online environment was not something they did effectively, whilst almost 25% did not feel they knew how to organise effective online discussions.

Professional development needs

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to comment on the skills and knowledge for supporting teachers online they would like to develop further, and 342 responses were received. Table 3 presents the seven key areas of online work that the teacher educators identified with illustrative quotations for each. Learning about and using online apps and tools such as Zoom, Teams, Padlet and Google was the need most commonly noted. Respondents were also very interested in selecting and designing materials they could use in online teacher education. Another popular request was learning how to make online sessions interactive, interesting and motivating. Improved technical troubleshooting skills was also a need mentioned by several respondents. Some noted, too, that they would like to improve their knowledge and skills in relation to the online assessment of teachers.

Table 3: Professional development needs for online teacher education	
Theme	**Quotes**
Using online tools and apps	'Latest technological digital tools'
	'More information and practice on the different programs and platforms in use'
	'How to maximise the use of platforms such as Google Classroom'
	'To recognise and use the most effective platforms that can help the teacher educator'
	'How to use more different educational technologies effectively'
	'Deeper knowledge and effective use of learning /teaching platforms'

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4 Unconscious inflation is when we over-rate our skills as a result of lack of awareness or a realistic reference point.

Table 3: Professional development needs for online teacher education	
Theme	**Quotes**
Locating, selecting and developing online materials and resources	'I want to learn more about selecting and creating content that is effective for online training' 'Effective online activities website' 'Accessible free resources for teachers and students' 'Creating digital content for lessons' 'Online materials preparations'
Making online sessions interactive, interesting and motivating	'I would like to learn more about making online tutoring more interactive' 'How to make online classes more interactive and interesting' 'Make students more excited about online courses' 'Organising their sessions and grabbing students' attention to enjoy and learn' 'Make the learners engage in the lesson in an enjoyable way' 'I need to know how to create a motivating online learning'
Online assessment of teachers	'Design and use synchronous or asynchronous digital tools to assess my trainees' 'I feel I need to know more about online assessment' 'Use online tools to conduct assessments of teachers and provide feedback' 'Online observation and assessment' 'Assessing teachers and providing feedback' 'Using online tool to assess teachers' 'Online assessment of teacher performance'
Technical troubleshooting skills	'Dealing with technical issues' 'The biggest challenge in one's teaching is to solve technical difficulties' 'Learn more how to solve technical problems while teaching' 'The technical issues are quite challenging to me' 'How to solve basic online technical problems'
Delivering online training	'Conducting online trainings and workshops' 'Designing online lectures' 'I would like to develop better training skills to train teachers' 'I would like to develop new skills and strategies for workshops' 'Conducting online seminars, workshops, and symposiums' 'Live workshops for English teachers'
Planning online lessons and courses	'Lesson planning for online courses' 'Online lesson planning procedures' 'Preparing courses for teachers' 'I would like to develop my skills in designing effective online lessons'

In addition to these major themes, respondents mentioned several other areas of online teaching they wanted to learn more about. These included 'How to run group discussions online effectively', how to 'manage online sessions', how to 'use online tools to assess teachers' professional development needs' and 'how to use less data while conducting online sessions' (and more generally how to work online in low-tech contexts).

Recommendations

The analyses of the literature and survey responses presented above provide insight into the competences teacher educators require to support teachers online. To conclude this guide, recommendations are now made for organisations and individuals who are setting up initiatives which involve the online delivery of teacher education, in pre-service and in-service contexts:

1. Teaching online involves more than replicating virtually what educators do in face-to-face contexts. While many of the skills they already possess will facilitate their work in an online environment, online teacher educators require an enhanced repertoire of skills and knowledge to support teachers effectively online. It is important for organisations to be aware of the range of competences that are required, to identify those (by conducting needs analyses) that are of particular relevance to specific initiatives, and to support teacher educators (through targeted training) so that they can develop the competences they need.

2. It is important to recognise that for many teacher educators, even those with high levels of experience and qualifications, the shift to online delivery will be challenging. Challenges will often be pedagogical but may also take the form of negative attitudes (for example, towards technology) or unhelpful beliefs (for example, about the value of online learning). When organisations are putting in place support for online teacher educators, it is important that opportunities are provided for teacher educators to become aware of, reflect on and, where needed, modify, their attitudes and beliefs.

3. The additional competences teacher educators require to function effectively online can be broadly divided into general digital competences, pedagogic digital competences and professional digital competences. The first of these encompasses the everyday use of technology, such as using email and social media or using word processing and presentation software. It cannot be assumed that teacher educators always possess a sufficient level of general digital competence, and this may need to be enhanced to prepare them to work online. Pedagogic digital competences relate to the use of technology to support teaching, learning and assessment. These are core to the work of online teacher educators. Finally, professional digital competences include teacher educators' ability to use online technologies to communicate and collaborate professionally and to support their own professional development. The support that organisations provide for online teacher educators should address all three of these broad areas of digital competence.

4. Research has identified several factors that influence the effectiveness of online education generally and online teacher education specifically. Organisations should address these in the developmental support they provide for online teacher educators.

    a. One factor that is repeatedly emphasised is a positive social online learning environment. It is essential, then, that online teacher educators understand how to create such an environment through, for example, effective communication and inclusive practices. Online teacher educators may understandably often be pre-occupied with the content they are teaching and the online tools they are using; it is important, though, that such concerns do not distract them from attending sufficiently to the quality of the online learning environment they create. Positive responses to any challenges participants face when learning virtually will also enhance the online learning environment.

    b. Facilitation skills are also essential in online learning environments. Online teacher educators thus need to be able to promote effective interaction (including through group work), active learning and collaboration among participants. Facilitation also extends to the way teacher educators structure learning, for example, through contextualised and concrete tasks that promote deep and meaningful teacher leaning.

    c. Support is a third critical factor that influences the effectiveness of online education. Teacher educators need the skills and knowledge to provide participants with effective support through, for example, monitoring their progress and providing timely and constructive feedback on their work and performance.

5. Recent studies of the experiences and needs of online language teacher educators provide valuable insight which can inform the focus of the support that organisations make available. For example, it is clear that online teacher education involves much more than the delivery of virtual workshops or training sessions. Teacher educators support teachers online in a wide range of ways and these often include less structured support work conducted individually or with groups via social media platforms. The preparation of online teacher educators should involve an analysis of the kinds of *feasible* online activities through which teachers will be supported. Feasibility is critical in the choice of online practices that teacher educators are expected to use. For example, it is unrealistic to specify that teacher educators and teachers spend long amounts of time working synchronously where internet connections are unstable and slow and where the costs of being online are high.

6. As noted in Point 1 above, needs analysis is an important strategy in understanding those areas of online competence that teacher educators need support with. On the basis of the survey results reported here, for example, teacher educators in MENA would benefit from learning more about how to work online in ways that minimise the consumption of data (this is often expensive, and a cost teacher educators and teachers are expected to bear). Expanding their knowledge of synchronous and asynchronous online tools would also be beneficial, as would improving their technical troubleshooting skills. Specifics will vary across contexts, but these results illustrate the importance of needs analysis and are indicative of the kinds of competences online teacher educators often need support with.

7. Teacher educators' online needs should not be assessed solely at the start of projects. Rather, organisations should provide teacher educators with opportunities to reflect on their professional development needs during and at the end of particular phases of their online work. Again, the results that emerge will vary across contexts, but the teacher educators who commented in the survey presented here were able to identify seven key themes they wanted to extend their knowledge of; these included general digital competences (such as technical troubleshooting) but focused largely on pedagogic competences such as planning online instruction, designing and selecting online materials, making online teaching engaging and conducting assessments of teachers online.

8. The evaluation of teacher development projects that are delivered wholly or even partly online should include a component that explicitly examines teacher educator preparation, performance, competence, needs and perspectives. Teacher educators' online practices impact significantly on project outcomes and organisations should review such issues as part of the evaluation work they do.

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Appendix

Key contributions to effective remote delivery (British Council, 2021)

While this study did not focus specifically on the competences teacher educators require to be effective online, its insights into effective remote delivery have implications for these competences. The following conditions were found to facilitate remote professional development for teachers:

- providing a regular structure in synchronous sessions, (e.g. review, warmers, input, open dialogue, demonstrations, video, tasks, breakout discussions)

- giving teachers the opportunity to experience digital tools in synchronous sessions and then encouraging them to try them in their own classrooms

- using a flipped model with at least some tasks being done before synchronous sessions

- having a well-organised asynchronous platform to support work in conjunction with synchronous sessions

- getting to know the teachers' needs and taking them into account

- giving teachers specific roles within the group

- creating opportunities in both synchronous and asynchronous environments for peer-to-peer sharing

- integrating video into synchronous sessions to make explicit connections to the classroom and for modelling

- integrating quizzes and polls, (e.g. Kahoot, Mentimeter, Wordwall, Nearpod and Flipgrid) which has a positive effect on engagement and interaction

- employing WhatsApp. This app plays a particularly important role in fostering interpersonal interactions, enabling flipped learning, and for organisational purposes, (e.g. information, reminders and resources)

- providing specific ideas and tasks for teachers to try out in classrooms (either F2F or online)

- providing basic digital induction and training.

About the author

Simon Borg has been involved in language teaching for over 30 years, working in a range of international contexts. He is recognised for his academic work on language teacher education and now works primarily as an ELT Consultant, with a particular focus on designing, facilitating and evaluating language teacher professional development programmes. Details of his work are available at http://simon-borg.co.uk.