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## **UPGRADING THE QUALIFICATIONS OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER IN THE ERA OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The coronavirus pandemic has brought about significant changes to the education sector, including the way teachers are trained and developed (OECD, (2020). With schools closed, teachers have had to adapt to new modes of teaching, such as online education. This sudden shift to online education has presented challenges to foreign language teachers who must ensure that students acquire the necessary language skills to succeed in a globalized world (European Commission, 2020). As a result, there is a need to improve the qualifications of foreign language teachers in the era of the coronavirus pandemic.

One way to improve the qualifications of foreign language teachers is through online professional development. Online professional development is a cost-effective and flexible way to provide training to foreign language teachers, regardless of their location (DeLucia-Waack, 2021). Online professional development can include webinars, online courses and coaching sessions. These programs can focus on different aspects of language teaching, such as curriculum development, assessment, and instructional technology (Parker, K., 2020). Online professional development can also be tailored to meet the needs of different groups of foreign language teachers, including novices and experienced teachers (Toquero, C. M., 2020).

However, online professional development for foreign language teachers during the coronavirus pandemic comes with its own set of challenges. For example, teachers may face challenges in creating an engaging and interactive learning experience in an online environment. They may also struggle with technology-related

issues, such as poor internet connectivity and limited access to digital devices. In addition, teachers may feel isolated and lack the support they need to implement the strategies and techniques they have learned through online professional development (Holmes, 2020).

To overcome these challenges, it is essential to provide foreign language teachers with ongoing support and mentoring. Mentoring programs can help teachers implement the strategies and techniques they have learned through online professional development. Mentoring can also provide teachers with a sense of community and support, which can help them cope with the challenges of teaching during the pandemic (European Commission, 2020).

In addition to online professional development and mentoring, foreign language teachers can benefit from resources that provide guidance and support for online language teaching. For example, the Ministry of Education in Singapore has developed resources for home-based learning during the pandemic. These resources can help teachers develop effective online language teaching strategies and techniques. Similarly, journals such as *Language Teaching* and *The Language Learning Journal* provide valuable insights into effective language teaching during the pandemic (Toquero, C. M., 2020).

Another way to improve the qualifications of foreign language teachers is through participation in international conferences and workshops. International conferences and workshops offer opportunities for foreign language teachers to learn from experts in the field and to network with other teachers from around the world. Many international conferences and workshops are held online in response to the pandemic, making them more accessible to teachers who may not have been able to attend in-person events due to financial or logistical constraints.

Moreover, foreign language teachers can also benefit from collaborative teaching and learning practices. Collaborative teaching and learning practices involve teachers working together to plan and deliver lessons, share resources, and provide

feedback to one another (DeLucia-Waack, 2021). Collaborative teaching and learning can be facilitated through online platforms, such as social media and online forums, and can provide foreign language teachers with a sense of community and support.

Finally, it is important to recognize the role of schools and educational institutions in improving the qualifications of foreign language teachers. Schools and educational institutions can provide funding and support for professional development opportunities as well as access to technology and resources that can enhance language teaching and learning (Toquero, C. M., 2020). Moreover, schools and educational institutions can foster a culture of professional development and continuous learning, encouraging foreign language teachers to take an active role in their own professional growth and development (Mifsud, 2020).

In conclusion, the coronavirus pandemic has presented challenges to foreign language teachers, but it has also provided opportunities for professional growth and development. Online professional development, mentoring, and collaboration have become increasingly important during the pandemic, allowing teachers to improve their teaching skills and strategies. The use of technology has also become essential for language teaching, providing teachers with the means to create interactive and engaging learning experiences for their students.

Foreign language teachers who are able to adapt to these changes and take advantage of the opportunities for professional development will be better equipped to meet the needs of their students in the current and future contexts. It is essential for educational institutions and policymakers to support the professional growth of foreign language teachers, particularly during the pandemic, as they play a crucial role in preparing students to become global citizens and to thrive in a multilingual and multicultural world.

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