RURAL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN A BLENDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR ENHANCING ICT LITERACY AND TEACHING PRACTICES IN GUANGDONG, CHINA

By

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In the context of digital age, integrating information and communication technology (ICT) into education is essential for improving educational quality and promoting equity. However, rural teachers in Guangdong Province, China, face significant challenges in ICT-Integrated teaching, limiting their professional development and the quality of education they provide. This issue reflects a broader global challenge of rural education lagging behind urban counterparts.

This study examines the Rural Teacher Replacement Training Program (RTRTP), a blended teacher professional development (BTPD) initiative designed to enhance rural teachers' ICT literacy and teaching practices. Grounded in the Diffusion of Innovation (DoI) and the Evaluating Professional Development (EPD) model, the research explores the program's effectiveness in fostering ICT adoption and addressing barriers to its implementation in classrooms. Based on this research aim, the study was guided by three research questions (1) how rural teachers in Guangdong perceive BTPD

programs, (2) how these programs influence their use of ICT in teaching and (3) how BTPD programs for rural teachers can be improved. A qualitative case study approach was employed, with a maximum variation sampling method selecting 20 participants to ensure the diversity and representativeness. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and document reviews, while an inductive analytical method was used to identify themes and construct an interpretative framework.

The findings highlight key themes corresponding to the research questions. For the first research question, three major themes emerged: bridging gaps in educational opportunities, ICT literacy, and urban-rural education disparities. The second question yielded two key insights: various ways ICT is integrated into teaching and the main factors influencing its adoption. Finally, six themes were identified for improving the effectiveness of the BTPD program: curriculum design, learning activities, learning communities, online platforms, management, and evaluation. The study's contribution lies in its comprehensive framework, which emphasizes continuous and progressive TPD through a gradient iterative curriculum model and spiral training system. These elements are crucial for rural teachers adapting to digital teaching needs and promoting educational equity.This study deepens the understanding of BTPD's impact on enhancing rural teachers' ICT literacy and teaching practices, providing valuable insights for educational policymakers and practitioners. It highlights the need for strong collaboration between education departments, teacher training institutions, and schools to improve professional development opportunities for rural educators. Future research should employ diverse methodologies to assess BTPD effectiveness across different contexts and explore policy and practice solutions to better support rural teachers in overcoming persistent challenges.

Keywords: Blended Teacher Professional Development, Diffusion of Innovation Theory, ICT-Integration, ICT Literacy, Rural Teachers

SDG: GOAL 4: Quality Education , GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

PENGALAMAN GURU LUAR BANDAR DALAM PROGRAM PEMBANGUNAN PROFESIONAL TERADU UNTUK MENINGKATKAN LITERASI ICT DAN AMALAN PENGAJARAN DI GUANGDONG, CHINA

Oleh

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Dalam era digital, integrasi teknologi maklumat dan komunikasi (ICT) dalam pendidikan adalah penting untuk meningkatkan kualiti pendidikan dan mempromosikan kesaksamaan. Namun, guru luar bandar di Wilayah Guangdong, China, menghadapi cabaran besar dalam pengajaran bersepadu ICT, yang mengehadkan pembangunan profesional mereka serta kualiti pendidikan yang mereka sampaikan. Isu ini mencerminkan cabaran global yang lebih luas di mana pendidikan luar bandar ketinggalan berbanding pendidikan di kawasan bandar.

Kajian ini meneliti Program Latihan Penggantian Guru Luar Bandar (RTRTP), satu inisiatif pembangunan profesional guru bersepadu (BTPD) yang direka untuk meningkatkan literasi ICT dan amalan pengajaran guru luar bandar. Berasaskan teori Penyebaran Inovasi (DoI) dan model Penilaian Pembangunan Profesional (EPD), kajian ini meneroka keberkesanan program dalam mendorong penerapan ICT serta menangani halangan terhadap pelaksanaannya di bilik darjah. Secara khusus, kajian

ini mengkaji: (1) bagaimana guru luar bandar di Guangdong melihat program BTPD, (2) bagaimana program ini mempengaruhi penggunaan ICT dalam pengajaran, dan (3) bagaimana program BTPD untuk guru luar bandar boleh diperbaiki. Pendekatan kajian kes kualitatif digunakan, dengan kaedah persampelan variasi maksimum memilih 20 peserta bagi memastikan kepelbagaian dan keberwakilan sampel. Pengumpulan data melibatkan temu bual separa berstruktur dan kajian dokumen, manakala kaedah analisis induktif digunakan untuk mengenal pasti tema dan membentuk kerangka interpretatif.

Penemuan kajian menyoroti tema utama yang sejajar dengan soalan penyelidikan. Untuk soalan pertama, tiga tema utama muncul: merapatkan jurang peluang pendidikan, literasi ICT, dan ketidakseimbangan pendidikan bandar-luar bandar. Bagi soalan kedua, dua dapatan utama dikenal pasti: pelbagai cara ICT digunakan dalam pengajaran dan faktor utama yang mempengaruhi penerapannya. Akhirnya, enam tema dikenal pasti untuk meningkatkan keberkesanan program BTPD: reka bentuk kurikulum, aktiviti pembelajaran, komuniti pembelajaran, platform dalam talian, pengurusan, dan penilaian. Sumbangan utama kajian ini terletak pada kerangka komprehensif yang menekankan pembangunan profesional guru (TPD) secara berterusan dan progresif melalui model kurikulum berulang secara berperingkat dan sistem latihan berbentuk spiral. Elemen-elemen ini penting untuk membantu guru luar bandar menyesuaikan diri dengan keperluan pengajaran digital serta mempromosikan kesaksamaan pendidikan. Kajian ini memperkukuh pemahaman tentang kesan BTPD dalam meningkatkan literasi ICT dan amalan pengajaran guru luar bandar, serta memberikan pandangan berharga kepada penggubal dasar dan pengamal pendidikan. Ia juga menekankan kepentingan kerjasama erat antara jabatan pendidikan, institusi

latihan guru, dan sekolah dalam memperkukuh pembangunan profesional guru luar bandar. Penyelidikan masa depan disarankan untuk menggunakan metodologi yang lebih pelbagai bagi menilai keberkesanan BTPD dalam pelbagai konteks serta meneroka penyelesaian dasar dan amalan bagi menyokong guru luar bandar dalam mengatasi cabaran yang berterusan.

Kata kunci: Pembangunan Profesional Guru Bersepadu, Teori Penyebaran Inovasi, Integrasi ICT, Literasi ICT, Guru Luar Bandar, ,

SDG: MATLAMAT 4: Pendidikan Berkualiti, MATLAMAT 9: Industri, Inovasi dan Infrastruktur

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BL	Blended Learning
BTPD	Blended Teacher Professional Development
CNKI	China National Knowledge Infrastructure
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CFT	Competency Framework for Teachers
DoI	Diffusion of Innovations
EPD	Evaluating Professional Development
GDE	Department of Education of Guangdong Province
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LMP	Learning Management Platform
MOEC	Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China
NIIT	National Institute of Information Technology
PGGP	People's Government of Guangdong Province
RTRTP	Rural Teacher Replacement Training Program
SDG 4	Sustainable Development Goal 4
STP	Strengthening Teachers Project
TDC	Teacher Development Center
TPACK	Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge
TPD	Teacher Professional Development
U-G-S	Universities, Government, and primary and secondary Schools
ZQU	Zhaoqing University

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Teachers are a fundamental agent to ensure the quality of education and the key to education reform (UNESCO, 2015; Datnow, 2020). Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are recognized as essential tools for educational development and a key driver in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) (Adarkwah, 2021). In addition to possessing both pedagogical and subject matter expertise, teachers must also be proficient in using technology effectively across various teaching activities. These include digital instruction, equipping students with ICT and other essential skills, and fostering students' personal and academic growth (UNESCO, 2018; Almazroa & Alotaibi, 2023). As technology develops rapidly, scholars and educators in various countries are actively exploring new teacher professional development (TPD) models to help teachers in solving various teaching problems in the future (Huang, Liang, Xiong, Wu, & Lim, 2024; Kintu, Zhu & Kagambe, 2017). In fact, many TPD strategies are designed to provide teachers with opportunities to update the current trend of technological pedagogical knowledge and skills that include teaching in the online and blended learning (BL) environment (Philipsen, Tondeur, Roblin, Vanslambrouck, & Zhu, 2019).

Today, BL is believed to be an effective and popular teaching model adopted by educational institutions because of its effectiveness in terms of pedagogy, convenience, access, and cost (Graham, Allen & Ure, 2005; Lapitan Jr, Tiangco, Sumalinog, Sabarillo, & Diaz, 2021). By combining the personal interactions of face-to-face

learning with the flexibility of online platforms, BL provides a comprehensive and dynamic approach to education. Moreover, the advantages and benefits of BL in optimizing the teaching and learning process are evident in numerous influential studies (Dziuban et al., 2018; Rasheed, Kamsin, & Abdullah, 2020). In fact, BL has become an essential trend in the reform of higher, primary and secondary education, and the new norm for learning and professional development among teachers (Fannakhosrow & Nourabadi, 2020; Li & Gong, 2020; Müller & Mildenberger, 2021).

Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations (DoI) theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how innovations—such as BL and digital teaching are adopted within a social system (Gogus, 2021). According to DoI theory, the adoption of a new idea or technology depends on five key factors: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability (Rogers, 2003). BL aligns with many of these attributes. It offers advantages over traditional face-to-face instruction, providing flexibility in time and location (Rasheed, Kamsin & Abdullah, 2020). It is compatible with existing educational systems and can be gradually introduced (Zagouras, Egarchou, Skiniotis, & Fountana, 2022). Advances in technology simplify implementation (Bizami, Tasir, & Kew, 2023). Furthermore, BL allows trialability and observability of success by examining the positive impacts on learners' learning and engagement, facilitating educator adoption and refinement (Müller & Mildenberger, 2021).

BL has been a widely accepted strategy in delivering TPD because it provides a valuable learning opportunity and practical path for TPD (Hu, Yuan, Luo, & Wang, 2021; Kim & Martin, 2020; Krasnova & Shurygin, 2020; Li, Qi, & Li, 2021). Evidently, studies have revealed that the application of BL in training for teachers positively impacts their academic performances (Boubih, Aidoun, El Alaoui, & Idrissi,

2020). Hence, this has made teachers feel more confident to apply ICT in their teaching practice (Zagouras et al., 2022), improve their professional skills and abilities, and create an essential link between K-12 schools and universities (Krasnova & Shurygin, 2020). Furthermore, it is also conducive to cultivate teachers' lifelong learning abilities, improve the quality of teachers, and play a role in promoting education equity and improving education quality (Mavropoulos, Sipitanou, & Pampouri, 2019).

In China, on-the-job training is an important form of TPD. Teacher on-the-job training, including ICT literacy training, usually adopts one or more of the following training modes: centralized face-to-face mode, job shadowing in other schools, school-based and/or online modes. In fact, existing research has also highlighted that fully online training can influence the ICT knowledge and attitudes of Chinese teachers, however, it has limited impact on the teaching practices of teachers and the learning among students (Li, Taconis, & den Brok, 2022). Influenced by the development of ICT, the China Ministry of Education has proposed to adopt a variety of teacher training models such as BL (Liu, Lu, Wu, Deng, & Wang, 2021). BL has been highly recommended from the national training program to the provincial, municipal, or school-level teacher training. It includes the ICT literacy training for teachers in rural areas, which is the focus of this study.

1.2 Blended Learning for Rural Teachers

Although the advantages of BL are widely acknowledged, its successful implementation remains challenging, particularly in ICT literacy training and teaching practices for teachers in rural areas. Educators in these regions often encounter significant barriers, including limited ICT proficiency, inadequate high-speed Internet

access, outdated hardware, and insufficient training in digital tools (Zhao et al., 2024). These challenges not only hinder the integration of ICT into teaching practices but also widen the digital divide between rural and urban schools (Adarkwah, 2021; Chisango et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2022).

Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to develop and implement effective TPD programs that cater to the ICT literacy needs of rural teachers. Flexible education necessitates redefining teacher training models to enable continuous learning anytime, anywhere (Valverde-Berrocoso, Fernández-Sánchez, Revuelta Dominguez, & Sosa-Díaz, 2021). TPD programs should not only equip teachers with the technical skills to use ICT tools effectively but also support them in integrating digital instruction into their teaching practices. Moreover, these programs must be accessible and affordable to ensure that all teachers, regardless of location, can benefit from the opportunities provided by BL (Li, Qi, &Li, 2021).

Against this context, the Rural Teacher Replacement Training Program (RTRTP) is an initiative led by the Guangdong Provincial Department of Education, with over 1,000 rural teachers participating annually. The program requires participants to complete 60 days of face-to-face learning and 180 credit hours of online learning over two years aiming to enhance their ICT literacy and teaching practice comprehensively. According to Graham (2013) learning experiences that integrate both face-to-face and online learning (instruction) are defined as BL. Therefore, this study classifies RTRTP as a BL program. During the face-to-face training, pre-service teachers temporarily take over classroom responsibilities. The program shares similarities with a national teacher training initiative introduced by Loyalka, Popova, Li, and Shi (2019), but features a longer training period and more flexible learning activities. The expansion

of professional development opportunities for rural teachers raises important questions about the most effective strategies for blended teacher professional development (BTPD) and which elements of BTPD programs best support the integration of ICT into teaching practices. Addressing these issues is crucial for optimizing the design and implementation of BTPD programs.

This study aims to contribute to this effort by investigating the impact of a BTPD program on the ICT literacy and teaching practices among rural teachers in Guangdong Province, China. Through the lens of the DoI theory, this study explores teachers' experiences and the program's outcomes, offering valuable insights into how BTPD can be optimized to better support rural teachers and help bridge the digital divide in education.

1.3 Problem Statement

In the digital age, integrating ICT in education has become a global priority, yet rural areas often struggle to keep pace with technological advancements. Despite the rapid expansion of educational technology, rural schools in Guangdong Province, China, continue to face significant challenges in accessing and effectively utilizing ICT resources (GDE, 2021). These limitations hinder both TPD and the overall quality of education. This issue extends beyond the local context, reflecting a broader global challenge were rural education lags behind urban counterparts, exacerbating educational inequities.

While China has made significant strides in upgrading ICT infrastructure in schools and expanding professional development opportunities for both urban and rural

teachers, rural schools remain at a disadvantage (Zhou, Wang, Liang, & Chen, 2020). Despite notable progress in building China's digital infrastructure, a persistent digital divide separates urban and rural regions (Li & Yang, 2022). Approximately 57% of rural teachers report insufficient wireless networks to support online teaching, while around 49.8% of rural schools lack the necessary systems and funding to maintain and upgrade ICT equipment. Additionally, rural teachers often struggle with limited training opportunities, a lack of peer collaboration, and insufficient technical support (Wang, Tigelaar, & Admiraal, 2022; Wu, Zhou, Liang, Li, & Chen, 2022b). Moreover, many rural teachers have not successfully improved their teaching practices despite participating in state-implemented TPD programs, ultimately hindering students' academic progress (Lu et al., 2019). As a result, the academic performance of rural students remains significantly lower than that of their urban counterparts (Sun & Du, 2021). This disparity not only limits teachers' ability to stay current with educational advancements but also affects students' preparedness for a technology-driven future.

The persistent underdevelopment of ICT literacy among rural teachers in China (Wang, Tigelaar, & Admiraal, 2021), remains a critical challenge, further compounded by limited access to high-quality professional development opportunities (Zhao et al., 2024). This issue is significant as it directly influences the educational outcomes of students in these regions. Research indicates that on -the-job training is a key determinant of teachers' ICT proficiency (Saikkonen & Kaarakainen, 2021). While over 80% of teachers receive some form of training (Liu, Liu, Chang, & Loyalka, 2016) and more than 70% of rural teachers have participated in online training (Feng, He, Guo, Lin, & Sun, 2023), numerous challenges persist. Many training programs fail to align with rural teachers' actual needs, and are costly (Li, Shi, & Xue, 2020; Liao &

Zhang,2024; Liu et al., 2016), and suffer from a lack of adequate resources (Weng, 2020). TPD in rural China faces a dual challenge: insufficient offline training opportunities (Liu, Lu, Wu, Deng, & Wang, 2021) and the limited effectiveness of fully online training (Huang & Cheng, 2020; Lin, Zhang, Liu, Zhou, & Li., 2023).

In addition, a review of existing literature reveals a growing body of research on ICT integration in education, yet studies focusing on the specific challenges faced by rural teachers in ICT-based professional development programs remain scarce. Furthermore, the effectiveness of BTPD in rural China remains largely unexplored. Perry, Findon, and Cordingley (2021), emphasize the importance of evaluating how teacher training affects instructional practices and student learning outcomes to develop effective TPD strategies. While several training initiatives in China have increased teachers' awareness of digital teaching and improved their ability to use digital tools and resources (Chen, Zhou, Man, & Li, 2022), not all teachers have successfully translated these skills into enhanced classroom practices (Unal & Cakir, 2021). Teachers require ongoing training and greater resource support to navigate the demands of digital education effectively (Rasheed et al., 2020). Despite these efforts, research remains limited on how teachers apply newly acquired ICT skills in their teaching practices post-training (Goos et al., 2020; Zhang & Dai, 2020).

Guangdong Province is at the forefront of China's economic development, yet a significant digital divide persists between urban and rural education (Liao, Du, Wang, & Yu, 2019). This study examines the RTRTP, a BTPD program for rural educators in Guangdong, using the theoretical frameworks of DoI theory and the Educating Professional Development (EPD) model. The research explores how BTPD programs enhance teachers' ICT literacy, improve teaching practices, and impact on both

organizational outcomes and student learning.

Using the DoI theory, this research explores how BTPD strategies can be effectively adopted and disseminated among rural teachers to enhance their ICT literacy, an essential factor in improving educational outcomes in rural areas. Adopting an exploratory, qualitative approach, this study seeks to uncover the complexities of rural teachers' experiences with BTPD programs. By examining their lived experiences, the research identifies key barriers and facilitators in their professional development. Specifically, guided by DoI theory, the study examines how the application of innovation in instruction through BTPD can lead to improved teaching practices, fostering educational equity and the sustainable adoption of technological innovation in rural schools.

This study examines several interconnected research problems, including the effectiveness of BTPD programs in enhancing ICT literacy among rural teachers, their impact on teaching practices, and the challenges educators face in integrating ICT into their classrooms. By addressing these issues, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of both the obstacles and opportunities in professional development for rural teachers in the context of ICT integration.

1.4 Research Questions

This study answered the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do rural teachers in Guangdong, China perceive blended TPD programs?

RQ 2: How can blended TPD programs affect the use of ICT in the teaching practices of rural teachers?

RQ 3: How can blended TPD programs for rural teachers be improved?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study aimed to explore BL approach in the field of educational technology. This study investigated the application of BL strategies in ICT literacy ability training programs among rural teachers. In addition, it helped as a supplement to the applied models and theories of BL and contributed to the ICT literacy and TPD knowledge system of teachers. At the same time, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature by exploring how DoI theory can illuminate the diffusion and adoption of effective BTPD strategies in rural educational settings.

1.5.1 Practical Significance

The findings of this study will assist the Chinese government and education authorities to formulate a policy framework for rural education. Firstly, this study provides actionable insights for Chinese policymakers aiming to bridge the urban-rural educational divide by guiding the development of ICT literacy programs for rural teachers. Additionally, by evaluating the impact of BTPD on ICT integration, it offers a strategic framework for designing and implementing future programs. The research underscores the need for continuous, accessible, and cost-effective professional development that equips teachers with the skills to effectively integrate technology into their classrooms.

More significantly, the findings of this study will help change the educational environment for rural students. Rural teachers are expected to improve their knowledge and skills in teaching, ICT literacy, and sustainable development abilities through BL. Ultimately, the study suggests that with the right support, rural teachers

can enhance their ICT literacy fostering a more equitable and digitally enriched learning environment for their students.

1.5.2 Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study enriches the body of knowledge at the intersection of TPD, ICT integration, and the DoI theory. It examines how rural teachers perceive and adopt BTPD to enhance their ICT integration in teaching, providing a theoretical framework to understand the diffusion of BTPD and the adoption of ICT-based instructional practices in rural education.

Gaining insight into the process of adopting digital teaching following rural teacher training will assist education departments and teacher training providers in enhancing the quality of blended TPD programs in subsequent endeavors. This study will build BL strategies for professional development programs for teachers in rural areas, especially ICT literacy training, and help deepen the theoretical research of BL in TPD. This shift will be based on the understanding of BL programs among participants. In addition, this study identifies positive and negative factors in blended TPD programs to ensure the effectiveness of mastery processes of ICT practices among teachers. Finally, the results of this study will also provide a reference for education equity in other regions with unbalanced development.

1.6 Definition of Terms

1.6.1 Blended Learning (BL)

BL systems combine traditional face-to-face learning systems and distributed learning systems (Bonk& Graham, 2006, p.66). The Internet and online learning platforms

should support online learning, and the proportion of credit hours is about 30% - 79% (Allen & Seaman, 2013, p.7; Huang et al., 2020). The online and face-to-face learning segments are not separated but complement each other. BL strategy aims to provide learners with diversified learning resources and learning paths to improve learning efficiency. In this study, Blended Learning (BL) is defined as a learning strategy that integrates online and face-to-face instruction to structure learning activities aimed at achieving specific educational objectives.

1.6.2 Rural Teacher

Statistical definitions of rurality have been based on different demographic, geographic and socio-economic factors such as population density, distance, or economic development (Echazarra & Radinger, 2019). In this study, rural teachers are the teachers of town and rural schools outside the county government (General Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2015). The rural teachers involved in this study mainly refer to rural basic education teachers, including primary and secondary school education.

1.6.3 Teacher Professional Development (TPD)

Teacher professional development is closely related to school reform, especially the practice of classroom reform. In this study, TPD is operationally defined as a structured series of activities designed to enhance teachers' pedagogical skills, subject knowledge, and professional expertise (OECD, 2016). These activities aim to drive practical improvements in classroom instruction, which is considered the core of TPD (Zhong, 2013). The study's approach to TPD encompasses both pre-service and in-service training initiatives, ensuring that teachers' practices remain aligned with

evolving educational standards and innovations.

1.6.4 Blended Teacher Professional Development (BTPD)

The TPD program is a formal teacher learning program organized and managed by the education department or institutions. Furthermore, BL strategy refers to a learning way of integrating online and face-to-face learning. In this study, blended teacher professional development (BTPD) refers to applying BL strategies in TPD programs (Owston et al. 2008). Furthermore, TPD facilitates knowledge creation through a blend of online and offline learning activities, transforming tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge through practical teaching applications.

1.6.5 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy

ICT literacy refer to using digital technology, communications tools, and/or networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information in order to function in education (Panel, 2007). ICT literacy encompasses technical proficiency and the ability to apply these skills to enhance teaching and learning. In this study, ICT literacy is operationally defined as a teacher's ability to effectively use digital technology, communication tools, and networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information. This definition aligns with the broader goals of educational reform and TPD, emphasizing the practical application of ICT in instructional settings.

1.6.6 Digital Teaching

Digital teaching is any pedagogical technique that employs innovative technologies for teaching and learning (Railean, 2020). In this study, digital teaching refers to the pedagogical methods and strategies that teachers use to facilitate learning through ICT

and other digital technologies.

1.6.7 Digital Divide

Due to the unbalanced economic development between different countries and regions, there are apparent differences in information technology promotion and popularization. The OECD defines this divergence as the 'digital divide' (OECD, 2001). In this study, the digital divide refers to the gap between urban and rural school teachers and students' opportunities to access ICTs and the levels of using ICT and the Internet.

1.6.8 Educational Equity

An equitable education system is fair and inclusive and supports students in reaching their learning potentials without pre-setting barriers or lowering expectations (OECD, 2012). Therefore, to narrow the gap between urban and rural education and promote equity in education, society and the government should provide rural teachers and students with suitable opportunities and resources. In this study, educational equity refers to the principle of ensuring that all students, regardless of their personal or social circumstances, have access to opportunities, resources, and support to succeed academically and attain high level skills.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has delineated the entire focus and significance of this study. With ICT development, BL has become an essential trend of education in schools and professional development for teachers. In fact, the BL strategy is widely used in ICT literacy training for rural teachers. However, there are still some problems of unsatisfactory teaching practices and difficult development of professional abilities for

rural teachers in Guangdong Province. The problem statement suggested that BTPD programs for rural teachers in China should be explored to propose effective training based on empirical findings. In line with those mentioned above, three research questions were raised.

In the following chapters, the proposal of the study is organized as follows: Chapter 2 provides an overview of the summary of related literature including theories of BL, BL in TPD, and an evaluation of BTPD. Next, Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology that includes the research design, sampling, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical measures. This is followed by Chapter 4 that highlights the findings from the data collected. Finally, as the final chapter, Chapter 5 concludes this study by summarizing and discussing the research findings, contribution to knowledge, and suggestions for future research.

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