



PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTORS WITHIN THE SCOPE OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

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Abstract

This research has been carried out in order to figure out perceptions of English instructors towards professional development programs. The data was obtained because of semi-structured interviews with 10 randomly selected instructors who are currently teaching English in a private university. The findings, which were obtained with the help of the qualitative study, were analyzed by means of content analysis. In conclusion, it was stated that professional development has become a very significant concept in language teaching. It is necessary for language teachers to find some opportunities to keep up with the latest developments in their fields. In addition, they should try to keep their language and teaching skills updated. Professional development programs such as, team teaching, journaling, action research, workshops, and reflective teaching provide these opportunities, and each of these opportunities supports the professional development of teachers in various ways. Exchanging knowledge and experience with teachers and encountering difficulties during teaching also support their professional development.

Keywords

Continuous Professional Development Program, Foreign Language Teaching, Improvement

I. Introduction

According to Day (1999), professional development is related to the continuation of a teacher's professional development beyond qualifications and initial training. This explanation refers to the professional development of teachers who have just begun their teaching journey. There are many regulations in the field of education all over the world in recent years including the professional development of teachers. In order to improve the quality of the education system, the qualifications of teachers should be increased. For this purpose, it may be useful to develop the general and specific field competencies that teachers should have through pre-service and in-service training, to raise their social status, to ensure their career development, and to determine and implement applicable teacher competency areas. There is no doubt that the importance of teachers' professional development in these regulations gains more importance.

Glatthorn (1995) indicates that professional development of teachers stems from educational initiatives. In this concept, professional development is defined as a basic mechanism, which deepens teachers' field knowledge and improves their teaching practices (Glatthorn, 1995). Moreover, professional development is stated as the cornerstone of teachers' creative efforts, which make their capacity increase to teach high standards. On the other hand, Day (1999) states that professional development includes learning experiences and planned activities, which affect the teacher directly or indirectly by contributing to the education. In addition, professional development includes teachers who work alone or work with others by reviewing, collaborating and improving themselves in relation to the change. Teachers critically acquire and develop the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence, which is essential for professional thinking, planning and implementation with children, young people and colleagues throughout all stages of their teaching lives. In particular, professional development is a kind of process in which teachers gain experience and research the formal and informal experiences stemming from their professional development (Glatthorn, 1995).

Alan (2003) states that teachers face various unpredictable challenges at different stages of their careers. Thus, it is required for teachers to be a part of professional development programs in order to deal with such challenges throughout their careers. Overcoming these challenges may be more difficult for teachers who are new to the profession than for experienced teachers. Therefore, teachers, who are new in their fields, may need special activities to adapt their teaching conditions. Important changes and developments have been observed in teaching English recently. The field of language teaching has experienced significant changes and innovations, especially in the twentieth century. Rodgers (2001) indicates that successive processes of change evolved language teaching in the twentieth century. The emergence of the Grammar-Translation Method between the 1840s and 1940s, when Latin was taught before the modern language was taught as another subject, and the fact that it was the most preferred method by teachers in language teaching in Europe, made the basis of professional development programs in language teaching. Richards and Rodgers (2001) state that until the 1940s, linguists began to be interested in how languages should be taught in order to teach languages more effectively, and after educators noticed that one method was not sufficient to teach a language, they recommended a different method to eliminate the deficiencies. As a result, various methods and requirements for different development programs have emerged. Different approaches have also made language teachers to explain themselves in a better way. For example; after the emergence of the Communicative Approach, the role of teachers was shaped in a different way, which makes the teacher pay more attention to communication. Moreover, teachers changed their daily classroom activities and some other responsibilities were assigned to teachers. They were also assigned tasks such as preparing equipment, preparing a lesson plan, evaluation, and using technology. In order to keep up with these changes, it becomes a requirement for them to develop professionally. In addition to these new teacher roles, there have been changes in the roles of learners along with teaching methods in terms of teaching English. The main aim for learners is to speak, communicate and use the language beneficially. While the importance of one-way conversation from teacher to learner has decreased, the importance of dialogues between learners has increased (Richard and Rodgers, 2001).

II. Method

In this section, information is given about the method of the research. The research group of the sample who were randomly selected involves 10 instructors working in the Department of the Foreign Languages at the Turkish Aeronautical Association University in the 2023-2024 Fall semester. The average age of the group is 25. Within the scope of this research, an 8-question semi-structured interview form, which was presented in Appendix 1, was used. The final step of the research includes statistical analysis of the collected data. By means of content analysis, the main and sub themes that emerged from the interview with 10 instructors were divided into categories such as teachers' improvement in their fields, students' learning, motivation, getting different perspectives, anxiety, obstacles in development programs, and gaining insights. These themes were created according to the interviews, which were carried out with 10 instructors regarding their beliefs about professional development programs.

III. Findings and Conclusions

In the light of the results of the research, the findings are presented below as a detailed analysis related to the perceptions of English instructors at the Turkish Aeronautical Association University towards professional development programs.

The results of this study can be listed as follows: As a result of the interviews conducted with 10 instructors who are currently working in the Department of Foreign Languages, in relation to individual factors, it can be said that they all believe that professional development programs encourage them in terms of their improvement in their fields. These programs have a huge impact on students' learning by enhancing instructors to gain insights regarding motivation.

According to Bartlett (1990), professional development of teachers is one of the factors affecting their success and motivation. Motivated teachers have a high awareness of how to motivate the students in their classes (Newby, 1991). Teachers' knowledge of student motivation makes foreign language teaching easier (Zahorik, 1996). This knowledge is defined as knowing the characteristics of specific motivation and understanding classroom activities that support specific motivation, such as encouraging personal development, increasing participation in the classroom, making English fun, and insistently emphasizing independent learning (Newby, 1991). In this context, teachers' knowledge about their field make them more motivated and this knowledge can be provided with the help of professional development programs (Newby, 1991).

Moreover, instructors who have participated in this research have also indicated that they obtain different perspectives through various professional development programs such as team teaching, action research and lesson study. For instance, 7 out of 10 interviewees state that they learned cooperation and unity with the help of team teaching. They can have an opportunity to notice different perspectives. They all said that the success of professional development programs emerges thanks to their cooperation with other teachers while planning their lessons. Thus, it can be said that the concept of professional development has become an indispensable part of

language teaching. The meaning of professional developments should be clearly found out by teachers in order to gain insights, to improve themselves better and to learn different strategies.

Furthermore, participants have also said that the more they participated in continuous professional development programs, the better they help students to learn a foreign language. They also believe that these professional programs may help them to be aware of what they need in terms of their field knowledge. 8 out of 10 interviewees have reported that they have difficulties in relation to teacher talking time, giving instructions and praising. They become better in these issues via professional development programs. In addition, 9 out of 10 interviewees have also stated that anxiety is a huge obstacle regarding professional development programs since a teacher cannot feel relaxed when there is another teacher who is observing the lesson in the class.

According to Sammephet and Wanphet (2013) the teacher's own personality, the teaching context, and the idea that they must necessarily participate in professional development programs are the main reasons for the anxiety, which was experienced by teachers. It was found that prospective English teachers were anxious about using English as a foreign language and that the anxiety levels of experienced foreign language instructors were lower than those of the prospective teachers.

Additionally, there is a highly significant relationship between instructors' years of experience and their anxiety levels. In this context, they have also added that anxiety can be prevented as teachers are getting more experienced in their fields. In addition, they have also stated that there are some obstacles, which prevent them from participating in professional development programs. These situations can be classified as heavy workload, anxiety, lack of motivation, health problems, and lack of sufficient knowledge about the relevant development program. Furthermore, all of these participants have an agreement in the positive outcomes of getting feedback from a mentor or a facilitator. They all emphasize that if instructors participate in a certain development program, they should get feedback about the things that they did or did not well. Otherwise, it is an inevitable fact that this situation will be a new obstacle for them. According to these research findings, in order to enhance the professional development of teachers, there is a need to eliminate the obstacles and to implement practices that will encourage teachers' professional development.

In conclusion, professional development programs may raise an awareness for teachers in terms of increasing their metacognition and producing changes in their teaching habits. If teachers must be deeply involved in the process, they can have an opportunity to improve themselves in their fields. In addition, teachers create their own personal beliefs and they share their personal styles with their colleagues. It may encourage them to know that educational training programs often consist practices related to their fields regarding their teaching responsibilities. These field applications are useful for novice teachers in order to figure out different teaching methods and strategies. Since they work with the team leader or facilitator, they can both share their ideas and discuss the situations encountered in these practices through analysis, synthesis, evaluation and reflection. Thus, teachers may visualize a photo that belongs to their classroom and practices, and this awareness enhances development in their own teaching to get better decisions by reflecting on their experiences. It is widely believed that professional development in teaching has a huge effect on teachers, their beliefs and techniques, which they use in a classroom environment. A professional development program is undoubtedly a valid tool for effective teaching practices.

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List of Appendices

Appendix1: Semi-Structured interview form

1. What are your ideas on professional development programs?
What do you think?

- a) Does professional development have any effect on teachers' foreign language teaching methods? If so, how would you explain this effect?
- b) Do professional development programs have any effect on students' learning? If so, how would you explain this effect?
- c) Is there a relationship between professional development and motivation and anxiety for both teachers and students? If so, what kind of relationship is it? Could you please explain?

2. What kind of professional development programs do you participate in (organized by the institution you work for, organized by other institutions, organized by publishing houses, workshops, seminars abroad, etc.)?

3. Do you think professional development programs contribute to you? If you think about it, what is its biggest contribution to you?

4. What are your professional development needs?

5. Do you think there are features of professional development programs that need to be improved? If so, what are these features?

6. What kind of situations may prevent you from participating in professional development programs?

7. Are you subject to an evaluation at the end of professional development programs? If your answer is yes, do you think such an evaluation is necessary?

8. Do you think the perspectives of the people who prepare professional development programs overlap with yours? Do these people ask you about your expectations? Could you please explain?