

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES FOR EFL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' quality plays a paramount role in the improvement of quality of education. A way to ensure high quality teachers is through effective continuous professional development for teachers. This present study is aimed to explore how the EFL teachers develop their professionalism particularly in terms of pedagogical and professional competencies. The result shows that there are three main themes of professional development pursuits of EFL teachers comprising of self- initiated or individual, institutional, and non-institutional professional development activities.

Keywords: *continuing professional development, EFL teachers, pedagogical competency, professional (subject matter) competency.*

АННОТАЦИЯ

Квалификация учителей играет первостепенную роль в повышении качества образования. Одним из способов обеспечения высокого уровня подготовки учителей является эффективное непрерывное профессиональное развитие учителей. Настоящее исследование направлено на изучение того, как преподаватели английского языка развивают свой профессионализм, особенно с точки зрения педагогических и профессиональных компетенций. Результат показывает, что существуют три основные темы профессионального развития учителей EFL, включающие самоинициативную или индивидуальную, институциональную и неинституциональную деятельность по профессиональному развитию.

Ключевые слова: *непрерывное профессиональное развитие, преподаватели английского языка, педагогическая компетентность, профессиональная (предметная) компетентность.*

INTRODUCTION

Professional development (PD) in an academic setting is believed to be a means to sustain and to enhance the quality of education effectively with continuing changes. There has been a great interest recently in the discussion of teachers and professional development by several researchers, educational practitioners, and teachers (Anugerahwati and Saukah, 2010; Mustofa, 2010, Qing, 2010; Khan, 2011; Hussein,

2012; Amin, 2013 and Simegn, 2014). This may indicate that teacher professional developments along with the needs for ongoing renewal of professional skills and knowledge is seen as the cornerstone of teachers' professionalism and quality (Lee, 2011). Thus, in this sense, Johnson and Golombek (2011) conclude that teacher professional development is a key to improve the quality of student learning and the ultimate goal of any educational enterprise.

In English Language Teaching (ELT) context, some scholars (Chan, 2011; Karimi, 2011; Kasi, 2011; Lee, 2011, Wati, 2011; Meng and Tajaroensuk, 2013) investigated various programs concerning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher professional development. They examined several effective approaches to teachers' involvement in professional development programs such as seminars, pre-service teachers programs, teachers training programs, workshops and other similar activities. Their findings suggest that it is necessary for the teachers, as professionals, to keep updated and at least to maintain their professionalism in responding to new educational paradigms and trends.

According to Zuheer (2013), developing EFL teachers' performance dealing with many related fields and needs such as the abilities and skills becomes very important. Therefore, professional development program held in fulfilling teachers' needs can be valuable for teachers to improve their quality. Many effective strategies and activities such as reflective inquiry, individual and collaborative teacher professional development programs can be implemented to upgrade teachers' performance and competencies. With regard to the activities, Raza (2010) states that self-directed development has its own significance in individual teacher development with his/her own specific teacher development agenda and needs. On the other hands, according to Richards and Farrells (2005), although teacher development activities can occur through a teacher's own personal initiative, collaborative PD activities both enhance individual and collective developments. Thus, it is apparent then that the interacting aspects of sustaining professional development activities both the individual teacher and the collaborative activities are significant to cater the various needs of teachers in their own ways.

Professional teachers in general must possess the required competencies to be qualified. Many teachers believe that good teachers are indicated with how much teaching experiences the teachers have. However, Rodríguez and McKay (2010) believe that experienced teachers are not always better than less experienced teachers yet experienced teachers frequently manage their classrooms more effectively than less experienced teachers. In this respect, both novice and experienced teachers are required to have standard competencies to be professional teachers.

Based on the elaboration of the problems, the research question is formulated into, how do EFL teachers develop their professionalism continuously. In addition, it is believed that qualified EFL teachers are expected to demonstrate their sturdy commitments for their professionalisms. This article is aimed to provide new insights to the existing theories of teachers and contribute to a wider perspective on professional development for EFL teachers

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative design involving seven EFL teachers teaching in junior and senior high schools. The presence of the researcher, as the key instrument, was very crucial. The data were collected through in-depth interviews, documentary sources and classroom observation checklist. The data also were collected from other sources such as subjects' colleagues, teachers' supervisors and the classroom observation. These various sources of data were necessary and useful in providing a measure of triangulation which is an essential component in all qualitative research studies as this adds to both the truthfulness and the reliability of the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that there are clear substantial patterns of PD activities conducted by EFL teachers in terms of pedagogical and subject matter competencies. The categories were divided into two main themes including institutional and non-institutional PD activities. Regarding PD collaborative activities conducted by all subjects, there are two main patterns that can be classified including institutional which are conducted inside school environments and non-institutional which are performed outside school environments. Collaborative PD activities conducted institutionally can be in forms of school IHT, communication in English with her students & English teachers, informal discussion/conversation, peer observation, peer coaching, and Classroom Action Research. From the data obtained, these collaborative activities have contributed to subjects' professionalism in improving their quality. Thus, they can be worthy recommendations for other teachers to apply some activities that have been empirically performed by all subjects.

In terms of non-institutional PD activities, the subjects shared some activities such as getting involved actively in English teacher forum (MGMP), attending seminars, workshops, teachers trainings, having language proficiency test, teaching experiences at English course, being a coach and an adjudicator of English debate, pursuing further study, having comparative study, and implementing lesson study. In this respect, these non-institutional PD activities conducted by subjects collaboratively showed positive impacts for teachers. These activities, therefore, can

be considerable for teachers' professional developments in terms of pedagogical and subject matter competencies.

With regard to non-institutional collaborative PD activities, the subjects exposed some similar PD activities. Academic and professional collaborative programs were the most common activities conducted by all subjects. All subjects had same experiences related to their involvement in English teachers forum and participation in seminars, workshops and trainings. They believed that those activities have provided spaces for teachers to keep informed about the latest issues of English teaching. In addition, teachers also could discuss and share problems and solutions with other teachers. As the consequence, teachers consider this activity could maintain and develop their quality.

The involvement and the participation of teachers in professional forum and academic programs could offer some benefits for their quality improvement. For instance, a short-term learning activity such a workshop provides an opportunity to acquire specific knowledge and skills (Richards and Farrells, 2005) addressing issues related to both institutional improvement and individual development. In addition, workshops are good way to stimulate everyday teaching with new classroom ideas and reflection on practice (Davison, et al. 2012). Therefore, because of their positive impacts on their professional competences, the majority of the subjects participated in some workshops get the better teaching skills.

The PD activity that most teachers took part was in-service training in form of seminars and workshops. These kinds of activities were frequently provided by the local authority as regular activities. With regard to workshops, Lay (2010) claims that workshops could also help both trained and untrained teachers to be able to advance their knowledge in their teaching careers and become familiar with techniques and approaches and properly use them fruitfully.

In terms of skills and knowledge extension programs, the majority showed similar activities such as having language proficiency test, teaching at English course, being a coach and an adjudicator of English debate and lesson study. The subject believed that teaching experiences at English course made them have richer of teaching techniques and having English proficiency test was intended to maintain teachers' language skill. In addition, coaching and an adjudicating in English debate has provided teachers an extra skills particularly in critical thinking and oral communication skills.

In addition, participating in lesson study could be meaningful part of the improvement of teaching skills. With regard to lesson study, Tasker (2011) points out that the goal of the exploration of student learning within the context of lesson study

has the potential to promote greater teacher professional development by focusing teachers' collective attention on shared student learning issues, and pursue jointly constructed solutions. Therefore, these activities could assist teachers not only to be more proficient in language skills but also to be more skillful in teaching in the classroom. As the result, teachers with the required language proficiency and a specialist ELT teaching qualification will have more chance of getting results in the classroom (Wichadee, 2011).

In connection with a doing course (a formal study or a short course/comparative study) as the last collaborative PD activity, it is frequently considered the most prohibitive activity due to time and expense (Johnny, 2009). Based on the findings, more than half of the subjects could pursue their further studies, while the other have not had the opportunity for continuing their study. The data obtained from analysis, taking a formal education or a short course have contributed to the improvement of their quality not only in terms of teaching skills such as classroom management, material developments but also language skills along with the cultures. Therefore, Johnny (2009) confirms that doing a course is a great way to develop teachers' competences since the most of the time teachers are focusing on thinking and learning. In conclusion, collaborative PD activities conducted outside school context are distinct from the institutional ones. Non-institutional collaborative PD activities tend to be more complex since sometimes the target of the activities are general or less relevant to teachers' needs while institutional collaborative PD activities appear more applicable and focused on problems encountered by teachers. Another difference lies on the possibility and situation in which the institutional PD activities provide more conducive atmosphere to perform with other teachers at school.

The starting point of teachers engaging in professional development in one place may not be relevant to other places. On the other hand, there is a similitude in the processes whereby teachers move from one stage to the next in different contexts that appears to be supported in the research reviewed, although with different manifestations. In connection with terms of individual PD activities, many literature called as self- initiated activities. Based on the research on self-initiated activities, Simegn (2014) reveals that the teachers seemed to have higher cognition about the importance of self- initiated professional development. They acknowledge that the self-driven activities and tasks of professionalism act the significant roles in bringing about real change on teachers' pedagogical effectiveness and efficiency.

Based on the findings, there are some individual PD activities that subjects shared. The activities can be in the forms of individual reading, joining online professional community, writing articles and some reflective activities such as self-

monitoring and reflective writing journal. Thus, each activity contributes differently for each individual teacher.

In addition to reading activities, staying online and joining online language and professional became the most frequent activity that subject did. The data show that all subjects shared the same activity regarding online activities. In addition, they emphasize that online communities provide opportunities for EFL teachers to be active contributors and participants, directing and constructing the learning events for the group and create regular opportunities for enhancing the learning teaching context, and connects teachers to other professionals within and beyond their schools characterized by sustainability over time (Riding, 2001; Saleh & Pretorius, 2006; Olofsson, 2010)

In the same vein, regarding other advantages of online community, according to Salazar, Muñoz, Fox and Lucas (2010), online and distance professional learning communities provide teachers with increased access and flexibility as well as the combination of work and education. They state that although online environments may present different experiences compared to traditional professional development, they can be used to build knowledge and community and teachers who participate in the program were exposed to new ideas and issues their realm.

To conclude, the current study conducted by Wu, Gao and Zhang (2014) suggest that heterogeneity of community members is crucial for the sustainable and healthy growth of an online professional development community in which participants can establish good relationships among members by sharing ideas, feelings and experiences with people with diverse voices but shared vision of professional pursuits. Another self-directed/individual PD activity that only minority of the subjects conducted was about writing articles and modules. The findings showed two subjects wrote some articles and teaching modules. Johnny (2009) points out that writing ranges from short articles right through to books and keeping a diary and reflecting on teaching is a good way to start good writing. By writing some articles and modules, teachers can develop their language skills particularly such as writing skills.

The last self-directed PD activities are related to reflective teaching activities conducted by teachers. Mann (2005) defines implicitly that the notions of reflective practice is the view that teachers develop by studying their own practice, collecting data and using reflective processes as the basis for evaluation and change. Literature show the advantages of reflective teaching activities (Qing, 2009; and Lundy, 2011) the need to implement reflective inquiry in classroom settings and ways to improve the teaching and learning of English through on-going reflection, it also points out that experience coupled with reflection can be a powerful impetus for teacher's

professional development. In addition, the reflective process could assist the teachers in understanding how to apply this knowledge in their individual teaching contexts.

In line with them, according Harun and Al-Amin (2013), reflective teaching and action research are really helpful for promoting teachers' professionalism and make classroom practice effective and enjoyable. In relation to this research, the findings show that although merely few subjects conducted reflective teaching activities, they opined that reflective teaching activities can be helpful means to maintain their professionalism. Reflective teaching activities can be in the aspect of self-monitoring through videotaping & students' feedback and reflective writing journal. Those reflective activities had provided teachers to evaluate what has been done and not to be improved. To draw the conclusion, reflective teaching practice has contributed significantly to the improvement of teachers' quality since they have opportunities to reflect on their knowledge and instruction with the goal of improving both either alone or working with others. Therefore, reflective teaching activities are highly recommended to do for the better and higher professionalism of teachers in education field.

CONCLUSION

Findings of this article can be considerably categorized into three key ideas of how EFL teachers develop their competencies. It shows that PD activities undertaken by EFL teachers comprise of self-directed/individual, institutional and non-institutional pursuits either in formal or informal situation. The first, self-directed or self-initiated pursuits, refers to individual endeavors that emerge from internal motivation, commitment and cognition of teachers. As a result, the importance of self-initiated professional development activities appeared noticeable in many existing literatures. In addition, self-initiated pursuits can be as comfort means to develop teachers' professionalism since the activities undertaken by teachers are based on their personal interests.

Here are some self-directed activities for teachers that show effective and helpful for maintaining and developing teachers' competencies. The activities are in the form of individual or independent reading, joining online professional communities, writing articles and some reflective activities such as self-monitoring and reflective writing journal. In short, self-directed learning involves personal construction of meaning, uses personal experience as the basis and stimulus for learning; and explores personal teaching practices to solve practice related concerns. In addition to self-directed activities, it can be concluded that collaborative institutional (inside school) PD activities have great potential impacts pertinent to better teachers' professionalism. The collegiality of PD built at schools can provide

positive atmospheres not only for the individual teacher but also other teachers. By doing group- directed PD activities, teachers have greater opportunities to discuss and to share with about the latest issues about and English teaching.

It can be concluded that collaborative PD activities turn out to be more effective and favorable than individual PD ones to improve teachers' quality. In this respect, the importance of collegiality and teachers support groups have contributed a lot to help teachers to improve their competencies. It reveals that EFL teachers undertake PD activities institutionally in the form of communication in English with her students & English teachers, school IHT, informal discussion/conversation, peer observation, peer coaching, and Classroom Action Research (CAR). In addition, these activities have shown positive to development of teachers' competency both pedagogical and professional competencies. However, the most important issue about collaborative institutional PD activities is pertinent to the conducive atmosphere of teachers support groups and informal collegial support existing at the schools.

The last category, collaborative non-institutional PD activities, is the most complex pursuits of teachers' developments. The complexity of the pursuits of development for teachers is attributable to the larger spaces and multifaceted dimension. However, it also can create broad perspectives and provide various insight that may be meaningful and applicable for teachers' needs. Sharing ideas and experiences with other teachers from different institution can be mutually beneficial.

Non-institutional collaborative PD activities include getting involved actively in English teacher forum, attending seminars, workshops and other teachers trainings, having language proficiency test, teaching at English course, being a coach and an adjudicator of an English debate, pursuing a further study, having comparative study, implementing lesson study. As has been mentioned previously, more complex activities can create more various benefits for teachers' developments. Therefore, these activities have made up to the development of teachers' professionalism.

There is no recipe for professional development that works for everyone. Frequently teachers find to be an effective tool for them may not offer similar results for other teachers. Techniques that teachers believe useful and meaningful today may not meet teachers' needs a year from now. But what is paramount is that teachers are required to discover many options teachers have for directing their own learning about teaching. Then, proper customization is necessary for the success of programs of teacher learning or professional development. This situation is attributable to the different needs and fast changes in English teaching realms. Therefore, professional development is truly lifelong learning in which teachers are expected to keep up their enthusiasm and motivation to learn the latest issues of the field sustainably.

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