THE IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE EFL TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the idea of professional development activities from some views to enhance EFL teachers' quality and to meet the changing needs of the students which can be best implemented by EFL teachers. Some considerations about professional development activities to be reminder are 1) a match to existing teacher needs, 2) a match to existing school needs, 3) teacher involvment in the activities, 4) active participation opportunities, 5) long-term engangement and 6) high-quality instructors.The contribution will give EFL teachers views about continuous professional development reflect which upon pertinent common goals effectively. In sum up, the professional development activities for EFL teacherwill maintain a vital and critical role in the development of quality of teachers.

Key words: Professional Activities, EFL Teacher, Professional Development

INTRODUCTION

A question of how to improve teacher quality has become one of the central questions in both policy and academic research. One of the most common answers to this question is that teachers need to keep learning through out their professional careers. An important way to assure teachers' continuous learning is to provide them with in-service professional development activities. It has been argued in the literature that providing effective professional development to teachers plays a key role in improving teacher quality, which eventually resultsing reater student achievement (Edge, Reynolds, &O'Toole,2015; Hilton, Dole,&Goos, 2015). According to Phillips (2008), "professional development is critical for maintaining continuous improvement in teacher quality."

There are two main types of professional development activities: traditional and non-traditional. The international literature has compared traditional professional development activities which are consisting of shortworkshops, conferences etc. Meanwhile non-traditional professional development activities consist of mentoring, coaching, peer observation, and soon. The duration of a professional development program is a key determinant for deciding whether the activity is regarded as traditional or non traditional (Ozer,2008). Researchers have criticized traditional professional development activities, because, while shorter in the time commitment they require of participants, they tend to be

less effective in reaching their desired goal (Birmanetal., 2000 ;Easton, 2008). Therefore, they offer little or no impact on the skills of teachers (Boyleetal., 2004). Collinson (2000) also noted that traditional professional development programs lack efficiency regarding specific teaching and learning issues.

On the other hand, non traditional professional development activities (mentoring, peer observation, and soon) tend to utilize greater time on task; and as a result, are more effective than their traditional PD counter parts (Birmanetal. 2000). Additionally, Hirsh(2001) criticized traditional professional development activities stating, "For years, educators have been confronted with poorly designed staff development. Scarce resources have been wasted because few understoodor took time to understand what helps adults acquire the knowledge and skills that help students achieve". Incontrast non-traditional is seen to be more active, practice-based and social-interactive. Hawley and Valli(1999) argued:

> The new paradigm staff development is a shared, public process; promotes sustained interaction; emphasise substantive, school-related issues; relies on internal expertise; expects teachers to be active participants; emphasise the why as well as the how of teaching; articulates a theoretical research base; and anticipates that lasting change will be a slow process.(p.134).

This newer image of PD is believed to bring about more powerful impacts for teacher learning and change as well as student learning and out comes. The result of this paradigm shift, in general, is that traditional forms of TPD learning activities (for example,

workshops or in-service days) are considered less effective than reform types of professional development such as action research or study groups. Furthermore, Birmanetal. (2000) argued that traditional professional development activities do not provide enough time to the teachers; therefore, they do not have much influence on changing teaching practice. Abadiano and Turney (2004) stated that while traditional professional development programs are organized for a short time; they tend to be in efficient and unproductive. Corcoran (1995) also criticized traditional professional development programs and stated, "there is a growing body of opinion among 'experts' that the conventional forms of professional development are virtually a waste of time". Similarly, Kelleher (2003) criticized traditional professional development activities, indicating that they fail to demonstrate an observable effect on education. Therefore, the imperatives of professional development Activities Teachers is a must.

Teachers' continuing professional development has become one of the most common central concerns in educational studies over the past several decades. As a result, on going research conducted in many countries has shown that professional development activities with in and beyond the school day affect teachers positively (Birman, Desimone, Porter, &Garet, 2000). Hirsh (2001) has consistently found that the professional development of teachers is the best way to affect their quality of teaching. Similarly, Birmanetal. (2000) have shown professional development activities play a key role in teacher preparation and improvement. Borko (2004) further supported this position by asserting, "teachers' professional

development is essential to efforts to improve our schools". In line, Kwakman (2001) also stressed the relevance of professional development activities for teacher development.

The purpose of this paper is to give insights about professional development activity for EFL teachers on professional dvelopment. Hence, this paper addresses the following problems;

1. What are the components of effective professional development activities?

2. How does professional development activities enhance EFL teachers' performance?

According to Star key et al.(2009), professional development programs are necessary not only for new teachers but also for veteran teachers. Similarly, Rogerset al. (2007) emphasized the importance of professional development programs to veteran teachers for self-renewal. Therefore, there is no doubt in the literature regarding the potential of professional development activities to help both novice and experienced teachers in developing the irexisting skills and in acquiring new ones.

The Components of Effective Professional Development Activities

As the conception of professional development has changed over the time, the effective activities have also changed over the years. Haris (2005) suggested that effective professional develoment activities treats teachers and learners with the opportunity on a real field, therefore there were some points to remember about effective professional development activities.

A Match to Existing Teacher Needs

The participants have emphasized that professional development activities should be offered according toexisting needs. For instance, one of the teachers

explained, "My needs are related to real classroom situations. That is why; when professional development activities are conducted based on real life situations, we can talk about effective professional development activities". Harrisetal. (2005), who found that when professional development programs directly meet individual needs of teachers, they are the most effective type of programs.

A Match to Existing School Needs

Some reported that professional development activities should be conducted according to the individual school-classroom needs, since needs may vary from school to school according to demands of the student populations. Therefore, in order to have any effective professional development activities, the Ministry of National Education and Directorate of National Education Department may conduct professional development activitie saccording to the reality of each school instead of offering the same professional development activities to all schools. As what Sand holtz and Scribner (2006) said that professional development activities should be related to real school-classroom situations by stating, since teachers need to see link sand benefits between what they are learning and their own classroom" (Sandholtz &Scribner,2006). Star key et al. (2009) also found that if professional development activities are related to the school setting, these programs become much more effective. In this regard, Meister (2010) and Opfer and Pedder (2011) claim ed that the assumptions of teachers in either higher or lower achieving schools might differ. Therefore, professional development activities could be organized differently in each school.

Teacher Involvement in the Design/ Planning of Professional Development Activities

Giving in put in the planning of professional development activities or involment in it impact teacher to connect with the subject matter and found the topics helpful and relevant. They believed that being given a role in the design would improve ownership and relevancy of the activities. Sandholtz and Scribner (2006) and Star key et al. (2009), said that it is importance of teacher involvement in the design/ planning of professional development activities and declared that teachers should be included in developing and approving of professional development activities.

Active Participation Opportunities

Another important component of any effective professional development activity is a design that allows the participants to engage in active participation during the activities; they want to learn by doing. Teachers mostly complained that they did not have any opportunity for active engagement with the materials because of time limitation. Some complained about being forced to sit and listen to instructors drone on and on only. Without active participation there is no possibility of learning effective teaching strategies. Sparks (2002) noted the importance of providing opportunities for active participation. Star key et al. (2009) also emphasized that providing opportunities for practice and appropriate time for educational practices may be come much more effective than any traditional professional development activities.

Long-term Engagement

Professional development activities are mostly short-term and they tend to lack the depth necessary to have a last impact on teaching skills. Hirsh (2001), and Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005), argued about the in efficiencies of short-terme ngagement in professional development activities and found that long-term engagement inprofessional development activities have a deep and lasting influence on teachers' learning. Thus, the Ministry of National Education should provide long-term professional development activities. In line, Guskey (1994) talked about the benefits of long-term professional development activities and pointed out professional development programs must be accepted as acontinuing process, not any incident in a short time. Torff and Sessions (2008) stated that prolonged (long-term) professional development activities are more effective than shorter ones.

High-quality Instructors

In some cases, for instance in a seminar or workshop, some participants overtly complained about the instructors, who taught the professional development activities, who was not well prepared (low-quality instructors); limiting the overall effectiveness. So that, the audience or the one follow was lose the enthusiasm to participate in any more professional development activities for next time unless the Ministry of National Education provides high-quality instructors for offered professional development activities. High-quality instructor is the heart of anye ffective professional development activities.

How Professional Development Activities Enhance EFL Teachers Performance

Richards (2011) explores ten core dimensions range from knowing the language of instruction to the

capacity to derive theory from practice. The first dimension is called the *language proficiency factor*. He explains how both native and non native speakers of the English language need to possess aseries of skills related to how they use language. One of those skills is providing input at a level that is appropriate for learners. The second dimension is the *role of content knowledge*, which is divided into two: *disciplinary content knowledge* and *pedagogical content knowledge*; the former is specific to language teaching and involves knowledge of the history of this field, including disciplines such as pragmatics, sociolinguistics, phonology, and syntax; the latter comprises the ability to plan curricula, reflect upon practice, and manage classroom environments.

Next, the third dimension entails *teaching skills*. Richards argues that these are the types of competences that teachers develop over time in professional development programs and because of reflective teaching. Richards (2011) states that "teaching from this perspective is a nact of performance, and for a teacher to be able to carry her self through the lesson, she has to have are pertoire of techniques and routines at her finger tips"(p.9). Richards argues that teaching skills are the result of teachers' decision-making and as such should be considered in teacher training. The fourth dimension is *contextual knowledge*, which refers to the knowledge that teachers have about the conditions and human and material resources of the contexts in which they teach; knowing the school curriculum and policies for disciplinary issues fall into this dimension. The fifth dimension the author explores is the *language teacher's identity*; this reflects the different roles that teachers are expected to display depending on school policies and event hecultures where they teach. Richards (2011) defines identity as "the differing social and cultural roles teacher- learners enact through their interactions with their students during the process of learning" (P14).

The sixth dimension in a teacher's profile is referred to as *learner-focused teaching*. Richards argues that teacher performance can be influenced by student learning and that exemplary teachers familiarize them selves with student behavior, devise teaching practices based on this knowledge, and keep students engaged during lessons. Making the classroom a community of learning and personalized teaching are two skills that fall under the category of learner-focused teaching. *Pedagogical reasoning skills* is the seventh dimension the author defines; it denotes teachers' ability to make informed choices before, during, and after class. These skills are shaped by the actions, beliefs, knowledge, and opinions teachers have of them selves, their learners and their contexts. Richards argues that teachers' philosophies should be addressed in professional development programs because they help teachers learn. Teaching philosophies are shaped by the ability to reflect upon experience and arrive at principles for second-language teaching and learning. This is the eighth dimension, called *the orizing from practice*.

The ninth dimension involves *belonging to a community of practice*. The author explains how teacher communities should work together toward common goals and engage more individualistic members to share with the community at large. Lastly, *professionalism* is the tenth dimension,

and it relates to the idea that language teachers are part of a scientific academic educational field and that, because of this, they should be familiar with what is current in the field. More importantly, Richards suggests that teachers must be critical and reflective upon them selves and their practices.

Those ten dimention integrated in professional development activities can range from "formal, structured topic-specific seminars given on in-service days, to everyday, informal 'hallway' discussions with other teachers about instruction techniques, embedded in teachers' everyday worklives" (Desimone, 2009, p. 182) Desimone's description of the myriad of learning activities for teacher learning makes obvious the in adequacy of designating learning activities in two opposing poles – formal, planned/ structured, mandated learning activities on one hand, and informal, incidental, self-initiated or voluntary on the other. What is needed is not a complete rejection of traditional workshops and a wholesale move towards reflective study groups, but a balance or an optimal mix

(Birmanetal., 2000; Hill, 2009; Hoban, 2002). Craft (2000), for example, listed a wide range of TPD learning activities which are linked to the contemporary views of TPD, suchas: 1) action research, 2) self-directed study, 3) using distance-learning materials, 4) on-the-job coaching, 5) mentoring or tutoring, 6) school-based and off-site courses, 7) job shadowing and rotation, 8) peer networks, 9) membership of a working party or task group, 10) learning partnerships, 11) school cluster projects, 12) personal reflection, 13) experiential 'assignments', 14) collaborative learning, and 15) information technology-mediated learning (e.g.e-maildiscussion groups, orself- study using multi-media resources). The activity ideally become a habit for EFL teachers and for each institution, they may Provided that these programs consider teachers' needs, knowledge, skills, and experiences,which are have a strong likelihood of positive results especially on students' achievement or outcome.

CONCLUSION

Professional development activities in school context refers to a process where teachers are consciously developing their individual capability for anabling the school and students to move forward within the complex and changing environtment, therefore the role and requirement are involve in system of it. professional development is a key component in improving teacher practice, even so, several key components are necessary for professional development to bebeneficial to thosethat participate. Moreover, research studies on professional development programs seem to agree upon the idea that these programs should be localized because they allow teacher store flect upon pertinent common goals.

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