

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES AMONG THE SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS IN KUALA TERENGGANU

Ruzana Omar
Academy of Language Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Terengganu
21080 Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia
Tel: 609-6216849/ 6012-6118478 E-mail: ruzana@tganu.uitm.edu.my

Faizah Mohamad
Academy of Language Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)
40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
Tel: 603-78311435/6013-9818809 E-mail: fareema@salam.uitm.edu.my

Nor Jawanees Ahmad Hanafiah
Academy of Language Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Terengganu
21080 Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia
Tel: 609-6216656/6013-9867252 E-mail: norja293@tganu.uitm.edu.my

Abstract

Annually, the English teachers attend various courses, workshops and programmes organized by District Education Department (PPD) and State Education Department (JPN). Though these teachers have attended the programmes for a number of years, very little research has been done to study the teachers' intentions to participate in professional development activities and the effectiveness of the programmes on the teachers. Thus, the present study was conducted to investigate the factors which influenced the in-service English teachers to involve in professional development activities and their perceptions on the programmes. A survey research was adopted and 40 sets of questionnaire were randomly distributed to 40 secondary school English teachers in Kuala Terengganu. The findings revealed that "Enhancing Knowledge in English" was the main factor which motivated the teachers to involve themselves in professional development activities and that personal gains did not play a significant role in determining the intention to involve in professional development activities. This study concludes that the teachers have positive responses towards the professional development activities they attended as the activities help to increase their knowledge and contribute new ideas for teaching the language.

Keywords: in-service teachers, professional development, secondary schools, intention, personal gains, teaching, positive responses

1. Introduction

Teaching profession was a respected profession and sought after by many job-seekers in the 60's and 70's. During those days, it was a well known fact that teacher's integrity was seldom questioned by parents and communities. But nowadays different scenarios have been painted to the profession. In Malaysia for instance, the job does not seem attractive as it is used to be. Due

to lower salary offered, less incentives and heavy work-load the career does not seem to attract the new generation. The findings of the study done on secondary teachers' job satisfaction and dissatisfaction in 1962 and 2007 by Klassen and Anderson (2009) revealed that teachers in 2007 rated their job satisfaction significantly lower than teachers in 1962 did.

To make the matter worse, today's English teachers' credibility is also questioned. The present generation of English teachers is said to have lack of proficiency in spoken and written English. Hence, English teachers need to upgrade themselves to keep abreast with new technology and knowledge to meet parents' high expectations. One way of developing themselves is by attending professional development activities. Hoyle (1980) stated that professional development is "a process in which teachers acquire the knowledge and skills essential to good professional practice at each stage of the teaching career is the improvement of teaching which involves the continuous improvement of knowledge and skills of the teachers" (p. 42).

Involving in professional development activities will affect teachers' perception in their teaching and their role as educators as well. Teachers who gain 'new' knowledge after being involved in professional development courses tend to have new insights and positive perceptions towards their profession as compared to those who cocoon themselves in schools without upgrading their skills and knowledge of teaching. Cohen and Hill (1998) stated that teachers' knowledge and practices are the primary factors influencing the relationship between professional development and improvements in students' learning, causing them to become the most immediate and significant outcomes of any professional development. Thus, it is vital for teachers to understand how professional development activities affect their students' improvements in learning.

The professional development among the English teachers is not the central attention of many related professional development studies. In fact, very little is known about professional development activities among the secondary school English teachers in Terengganu. Thus, this study hopes to explore and examine the involvement of those teachers in professional development activities and their views on the activities attended.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the factors that drive in-service teachers to involve themselves in professional development activities?
2. How do professional development activities affect the in-service teachers' preparedness in teaching English?

2. Review of Related Literature

Professional Development Activities among Teachers

In Malaysia, teachers involve themselves in professional development activities through formal sessions such as attending seminars, workshops, courses or conferences. However, many teachers might not be aware of the fact that they may also develop themselves professionally through informal ways. Hedge (1985) suggested that informal professional development sessions could be structured around any informal get-togethers such as during brown-bag luncheons or any social meetings. The suggestion was supported by Bell (1991) who added that teachers may also have it through chance encounter with colleagues such as while having discussion in the staff room during free periods or chatting at the school canteen. Hedge (1985) further added that teachers could also involve in professional development creatively by listening to in-service cassettes prepared by other school staff or by commercial enterprises.

Professional development is also regarded as an individual achievement or personal affair of one person. An English teacher for instance would seek for new knowledge professionally based on

his or her own needs. Nias (1989) as cited by Mohd Sofi (1992) stated that “ESL teachers in their quest for personal development, and indirectly organization development, acted more or less as isolated individuals. As they saw their own teaching a private affair, often they identified their own needs and skills; they prioritized them and discovered ways to meet their own development” (p. 47).

Teachers’ Perception of Effective Professional Development Activities

Effective professional development activities should be able to provide improved experiences, which enable the teachers to thoroughly examine their teaching and contribute to the teacher’s professional growth (Glatthorn, 1995). Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) stated that teacher development needs to focus on deepening teachers’ understanding of the processes of teaching and learning and of the students they teach because effective professional development involves teachers both as learners and as teachers. This suggests that ESL teachers should be made responsible for developing themselves professionally in the respective schools they are teaching.

A survey carried out by Komba and Nkumbi (2008) revealed that teachers believe that attending professional development activities help them to “achieve high standards of teaching and keep them updated in teaching; it increases their self-worth, enables them to move with time, and allows them to react appropriately to the challenges brought about by advancements in science and technology, and also to get promoted to higher ranks in the career” (p.75). Most of the teachers involved in their survey also felt that professional development activities were important in order to gain ‘confidence and competence’.

Besides, effective professional development activities must also include specific teaching practices as they could help the teachers to apply them in their classrooms (Desomine et al., 2002). Their study also revealed that professional development activities attended by the teachers can effectively change teacher’s classroom practices if they gain support and cooperation from other teachers who teach at the same school and grade.

Though not much research has been done regarding the professional development among the English teachers, a survey conducted by Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly and Driscoll (2005) has provided a lot of information about the needs of both elementary and secondary English teachers. Their study confirms that those teachers think that a professional development activity is most useful when they can learn about the second language learners’ development and improvement. The teachers also feel that certain topics (‘second language reading/writing, various kinds of teaching strategies, and English language development’ really help in improving their teaching practices.

3. Research Methodology

The present study employed a survey design. A questionnaire which consisted of 2 sections; namely Part 1 (The criteria that drive in-service teachers to involve themselves in professional development activities) and Part 2 (How professional development activities affect their competence in teaching English) was administered to 40 in-service teachers who were teaching English subject in secondary schools around Kuala Terengganu. The schools were randomly chosen based on their geographical locations in the district. The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). All data were presented in percentages and tables to enable the researchers to come up with the conclusions of the findings.

Table 1: Areas covered and distribution of items in the questionnaire

Section	No of Item	Area	Answer Scale
1	14	Criteria towards Professional Development	1 to 5 Likert scale
2	10	Preparedness in Teaching English due to Professional Development activities	1 to 5 Likert scale

4. Findings and Discussion

RQ1: What are the factors that drive in-service teachers to involve themselves in professional development activities?

The first aspect investigated in the study was the criteria that drove teachers to involve themselves in professional development. Findings exhibited in Table 2 indicate mean and standard deviation results.

Table 2: Overall mean and standard deviation results for criteria that drive the English teachers to involve themselves in professional development

No	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Enhance knowledge in English	4.5250	.55412
2	Improving teacher's proficiency in English	4.5000	.59914
3	Improving listening, speaking, reading and writings skills	4.4750	.55412
4	Learning various ways or techniques of teaching English	4.4500	.78283
5	Gaining more confidence in teaching English	4.4500	.59700
6	Improving teaching skills	4.4500	.55238
7	Making teaching English more appealing and interesting to students	4.3500	.80224
8	Playing a better role as an English teacher	4.3000	.51640
9	Self-satisfaction	4.2750	.64001
10	Better understanding of students problems	4.1250	.88252
11	Out of curiosity	3.8000	.85335
12	Promotion	3.6000	.87119
13	Gaining respects from other fellow teachers and superiors	3.4000	1.03280

Based on the results obtained from the data analysis, the main criteria that drove teachers to involve themselves in Professional Development was item number 5 ("Enhanced knowledge in English"), followed by item number 4 ("Improving teachers' proficiency in English") which recorded the mean of 4.5250 and standard deviation of .55412 and mean of 4.5000 and standard deviation of .59914 respectively. Improving listening, speaking, reading and writing skills

charted the third highest ($M=4.5250$, $SD=.55412$). The analysis also recorded that item number 9 (“Gaining respects from other fellow teachers and superiors”) with $M=3.400$, $SD=1.03280$ was the least important criterion influencing teachers to involve themselves in professional development. Promotion which recorded the mean of 3.600 and standard deviation of .87119 was found to be the second least important criterion in driving the teachers to join professional development activities. From the analysis, it was also found that “Personal gains” did not contribute much in driving them to involve in professional development activities.

RQ2: How do professional development activities affect the in-service teachers’ preparedness in teaching English?

The second aspect investigated in the study was whether the professional development activities affect the in-service teachers’ preparedness in teaching English. Findings exhibited in Table 3 indicate mean and standard deviation results.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of how professional development affects teachers’ preparedness in teaching English

No	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Varying students activities in the classroom	4.4000	.49614
2	Giving instructions in English more confidently	4.3500	.73554
3	Teaching Writing effectively	4.3000	.46410
4	Explaining Grammatical structure	4.2500	.49355
5	Teaching Reading effectively	4.2500	.63043
6	Teaching Speaking effectively	4.2500	.70711
7	Using different methods of teaching English	4.2500	.74248
8	Improving interaction with students (During Q & A session)	4.2250	.57679
9	Teaching Vocabulary effectively	4.2250	.73336
10	Teaching Listening effectively	4.1750	.71208
11	Using English teaching aids when teaching the subject	4.1500	.57957
12	Providing students with Mastery Learning	4.0000	.67937
13	Encouraging students’ independence in learning	3.7750	.89120

The analysis of Table 3 shows that the respondents were strongly in favour with the notion that by involving themselves in professional development activities, they could vary students’ activities in the classroom which recorded 4.4000 in mean and .49614 in standard deviation. It is probably because these teachers might gain lots of new ideas by being exposed to new techniques of teaching which would motivate them to vary their activities in teaching. Thus, item number 9 recorded the highest position. “Giving instructions in English more confidently” came second (Mean=4.3500, SD=.73554) suggesting that teachers would become more confident in giving instructions to students after they have attended courses or activities related to their

teaching. This is followed by “Teaching Writing effectively” (Mean=4.300, SD=.46410). It is interesting to note that, four items recorded similar placing in the organization of the analysis namely “Explaining Grammatical structure”, “Teaching Reading effectively”, “Teaching Speaking effectively” and “Using different methods of teaching English”. Thus, it shows that teachers value the importance of improving their grammatical structure and the four basic skills (Listening, Reading, Speaking, and Writing) as the foundation of language teaching. Somehow, “Teaching Listening effectively” only recorded 4.1750 in mean and .71208 in standard deviation which is one odd out of the four skills suggesting teachers do not seem to think that the skill is crucial or much needed in preparing them for teaching English. ”Teaching Vocabulary effectively” and “Improving interaction with students (during Q & A) similarly recorded eighth place. The analysis also recorded “Using English teaching aids when teaching the subject” as the third lowest among the 13 criteria. Students’ independence in learning English recorded the least favoured by teachers (Mean=3.7750, SD=.89120). Similarly, “Providing students with Mastery Learning” (Mean=4.000, SD=.67937) recorded the second lowest in mean and standard deviation. These two statements suggest that the professional development activities attended by these teachers do not really prepare the teachers to gear the students towards independent learning.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has proven that professional developments activities have brought about positive responses among English teachers in terms of increasing their knowledge and coming up with new ideas to teach English. Besides, professional development activities are very relevant and much needed to improve English teachers’ knowledge in the language and update their knowledge by applying new techniques of teaching, sharing opinions and knowledge with other English teachers of the same districts or state. It is also important to note that the teachers should be exposed to trainings that emphasize students’ independence and mastery learning in order to lessen students’ dependence on the teachers. Thus, Ministry of Education should seriously consider possible professional development activities which could bring about changes to the teaching of English in our country. It is highly recommended that more research is done in this area, focusing on the teachers’ needs to grow academically and more professionally especially in the era of technology nowadays.

References

- Bell, L. (1991). *Approaches to the Professional Development of Teachers* in Bell, L., & Day, C. eds. *Managing the Professional Development of Teachers*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 3-22.
- Cohen, D. K., & Hill, H. C. (1998). *State Policy and Classroom Performance: Mathematics Reform in California*. Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania.
- Darling-Hammond, L. & McLaughlin, M. W. (1995). Policies That Support Professional Development in an Era of Reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76.
- Day, C. (1999). *Developing Teachers: The Challenges of Lifelong Learning*. London: Falmer Press.
- Desomine, L. M., Porter, A. C., Garet, M. S., Kwang, S. Y., & Birman, B. F. (2002). Effects of Professional Development on Teachers’ Instruction: Results from a Three-year

- Longitudinal Study. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 24(2), 81-112. Retrieved 1 January 2013 from <http://epa.sagepub.com/content/24/2/81>
- Gandara, P., Maxwell-Jolly, J., & Driscoll, A. (2005). *Listening to Teachers of English Language Learners: A Survey of California Teachers' Challenges, Experiences, and Professional Development Needs*. Berkeley: Joint Publications. Retrieved 1 January 2013 from <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/6430628z>
- Glatthorn, A. (1995). *Teacher Development*. In Anderson, L. (2nd Ed.) *International Encyclopedia of Teaching and Teachers Education*. London: Pergamon Press.
- Hedge, D. (1985). *Planning Staff Development Programs for Rural Teachers*. Retrieved 7 September 2009 from <http://www.ericdigest.org/pre-922/staff.htm>
- Hoyle E. (1980). *Professionalism and Deprofessionalization in Education* in Hoyle, E., & Meggary, E. eds. *Professional Development of Teachers*. London: Kogan (pp. 42-54).
- Klassen, R. M., & Anderson, C. J. K. (2009). How Times Change: Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction in England in 1962 and 2007. *British Educational Research Journal*, 35, 745-759.
- Komba, W. L., & Nkumbi, E. (2008). Teacher Professional Development in Tanzania: Perceptions and Practices. *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*, 11(3), 67-83.
- Mohd Sofi Ali. (2002). Professional Development of ESL Teachers in Primary Schools. *Jurnal Pendidikan IPBA*. 2(5), 43-59.