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A REVIEW ON THE DELIVERY OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR EFL TEACHERS: FACE-TO-FACE, ONLINE AND BLENDED PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

Completing a bachelor degree and getting a teacher certificate do not simply mean that professional learning has ended. The improvements in educational philosophies and technological advancements entail a continuous professional development. Professional development programs are of crucial importance for teachers in terms of expanding current teacher knowledge, improving in-class behaviors and teaching skills. That is to say, the teachers act as both teaching agents and researchers who are in pursuit of acquiring field knowledge for meeting the profession's requirements. The 21st century can be recognized as an age which calls for life-long learning; that is, learning is a never-ending process for teachers. In order to promote professional learning and development, in-service teacher training activities including workshops, specialized courses, seminars, and panels could be organized. A specific content is defined in accordance with the professional needs of the teachers and conducted through adopting the delivery modes face-to-face, online and blended. The current study presents the definitions of these three modes, identifies pros and cons, and discusses their applicability and effectiveness considering the teachers in this current century by drawing mainly on the literature and research findings. Accordingly, some pedagogical implications regarding undergraduate (BA) and post-graduate programs (MA and Ph.D) designed for teachers of English are suggested.

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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

The professional development programs for teachers are incredibly important since they offer new professional concepts and skills that help teachers to gain credentials. More importantly, 21st century renders new roles for teachers: It could be easily said that a shift from the role of knowledge providers to the role of teaching mediators has been set. The teachers do not teach only; instead, they are expected to act as facilitators and guides for learners. Due to the changing roles and requirements, the teachers are supposed to search for new ways of improving themselves, which could be feasible through attending in professional development activities such as workshops, seminars, panels and other forms of teacher training. Thus, they could keep abreast of the changing concepts, beliefs, techniques related to the pedagogical implementations and technological improvements. It is of utmost importance for teachers to keep their knowledge up-to-date and transfer this knowledge to the learners through the contemporary pedagogical approaches.

The delivery of the professional development programs for teachers could be performed in face-to-face, online or blended forms. To start with face-to-face programs, as its name suggests, it is a typical delivery form that includes in-person interaction and enrollment with the physical presence of the trainers and the trainees. This type of delivery might be advantageous since it could keep the relationships strong through including verbal and non-verbal dimensions of interaction. Observing how the trainers use their body in terms of posture, tone of voice, and gestures might create a natural setting for learning. A genuine human communication with peers and mentors could have a notable effect on the learning process as the training settings allow for a convenience for interaction. On the other hand, face-to-face programs could have some disadvantages in terms of cost-effectiveness and applicability (Roche, 2018). The trainers and training venues need to be recruited and in-service teachers need to leave their institutions to participate in these programs. Or, they may need to spend some extra hours to get a training on any specified subject. This could be a burden for busy teachers with heavy-loaded course schedules; for this reason, some teachers could avoid attending any professional development activity. Therefore, online programs could be administered for teachers. They use online environments as a medium of instruction and teaching and learning activities are conducted through digital media. In other words, the professional development programs are mostly characterized by WEB tools and online platforms. Online professional development programs could be advantageous in terms of removing spatial limitations since the participants do not have to travel one place to another for attending a training event (Jung, 2001). However, some studies (Cengiz, Seferoğlu, & Kaçar, 2017; Songül, 2014) show that professional development programs which are developed for English language teachers who are not digitally competent might have some problems in online programs since they are supposed to have basic computer skills in order to reach the digital information presented online. For this reason, blended training programs which use the combination of both face-to-face and online delivery could be implemented. In this way, components of both forms could be utilized in order to get the best use of the program. In a word, some sessions of the teacher development programs might be held in in-

person settings while others could be organized by incorporating online methods such as web-conferences, webinars or online communities. Thus, blended programs could offer rich input through responding to English language teachers' professional needs and they could bridge the gap between face-to-face and online delivery. However, drawing mainly on the literature and current research findings, it could be claimed that providing a training on basic digital skills regarding using computers, social media and WEB tools efficiently might be a pre-requisite.

This present study describes the aforementioned three methods of delivery, highlight weak and strong points, and draws some pedagogical implications regarding undergraduate and post-graduate courses offered for English language teachers. Put simply, the literature review highlights that online pedagogy may have different characteristics than the pedagogy embedded in face-to-face programs; therefore, a course could be added into the curriculum of undergraduate and/or post-graduate English Language Teaching departments in Turkey in order to develop an awareness into the design and implementation of the online and/or blended programs that include digital components. In addition to that, a course about training an online trainer could be incorporated into the post-graduate English Language Teaching programs in Turkey, so the trainers could also be equipped with online pedagogical knowledge and skills. Finally, the number of the online and/or blended programs could be increased; therefore, English language teachers could develop a familiarity with these programs.

Keywords: Professional Development Programs, EFL Teachers, In-service Teacher Training, Online Pedagogy.

İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENLERİ İÇİN TASARLANAN MESLEKİ GELİŞİM PROGRAMLARININ YÖNTEMLERİ ÜZERİNE BİR DERLEME: YÜZ-YÜZE, ÇEVRİMİÇİ VE KARMA PROGRAMLAR

ÖZET

Lisans eğitimini tamamlamak ve lisans eğitimi sonrasında alınan öğretmenlik diploması mesleki anlamda öğrenimin sona erdiği anlamına gelmemektedir. Bilakis, eğitim felsefelerindeki değişim ve teknolojide meydana gelen gelişmeler, sürekli mesleki gelişimi gerekli hale getirmektedir. Mesleki gelişim programları, öğretmenlik bilgisi, sınıf içi öğretim davranışları ve öğretim becerilerini geliştirmesi bakımından öğretmenler için son derece önem taşımaktadır. Başka bir deyişle, öğretmenlerin, öğretmenlik mesleğinin gerekliliklerini daha iyi karşılayabilmeleri için alan bilgilerini sürekli geliştirme arzusunda olan bir araştırmacı ve öğretici olarak hareket etmeleri gerekmektedir. 21.yüzyıl, yaşam boyu öğrenmeyi zorunlu kılan bir çağ olarak tanımlanabilir; bu da demek oluyor ki, öğretmenler için öğrenim süreci asla sona eren bir süreç değildir. Öğretmenlerin mesleki öğrenimini ve mesleki anlamda gelişimini desteklemek amacıyla çeşitli çalıştaylar, kurslar, seminerler ve paneller gibi hizmet-içi eğitim faaliyetleri düzenlenebilmektedir. Öğretmenlerin mesleki eğitim ihtiyaçlarına yönelik olarak belirli bir eğitim programı içeriği belirlenmekte ve bu program yüz-yüze, çevrimiçi ve karma yöntem gibi çeşitli yöntemleri kullanarak

uygulanmaktadır. Bu çalışmada ise, bahsi geçen bu üç yöntemin tanımları yapılmış, artı ve eksi yönleri belirlenmiş; alan yazını ve alanla ilgili çalışmaların bulgularına dayanarak bahsi geçen bu yöntemlerin öğretmen eğitiminde kullanılabilirliği ve öğretmenlerin üzerinde etkililiği tartışılmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, İngilizce öğretmenliği lisans ve lisansüstü (yüksek lisans ve doktora) programlarıyla ilgili olarak bazı pedagojik çıkarımlarda bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mesleki Gelişim Programları, İngilizce Öğretmenleri, Hizmet-içi Eğitim, Çevrimiçi Eğitimbilim.

Introduction

It will be relevant to note that professional development programs (PDPs) have tremendously important outcomes for teacher development and student achievement. As the educational approaches, techniques and strategies to be implemented in the classroom for enhancing student learning have been continuously evolving day by day due to the technological and pedagogical improvements, the teachers are supposed to improve their knowledge, teaching skills, and instructional implementations to act in accordance with the requirements of the age. That is to say, the teachers are to be life-long learning agents who are in continuous pursuit of improvement in the teaching profession. In doing so, they could manage to keep pace with the competences in the field, and deliver a qualified instruction to the learners. This condition poses a chain effect actually; that is, provided that teaching is conveyed out in an effective way through the inclusion of up-to-date knowledge and appropriate techniques, learning is likely to occur. The bottom line is that student achievement is somehow dependent on teachers and that a link could be established between the proficient teacher and the academic achievement.

Undoubtedly, PDPs have a key role in increasing teacher learning and teaching effectiveness through improving field knowledge, in-class behaviors, and teaching-learning processes. The mode of delivery for PDPs could be either in the face-to-face (F2F) or online format. F2F programs are conveyed in specified places with trainees and trainers who are physically present in those settings. In other words, training activities could be held by allowing direct F2F human interaction. On the other hand, online PDPs offer virtual communication through a web-based platform where the participants get involved. Even though a physical contact could not be established via online training, some methods for instructional delivery, such as webinars, could be utilized in order to have a real-time communication among the participants. Actually, the Digital Age presents a direction from traditional classrooms to online learning environments since there is a diverse set of applications and platforms to be used for educational purposes. The global instructional trends have set the pave for the digital learning platforms because they are cost-effective, affordable, practical and accessible. Further, online training provides a platform where the participants in the far apart locations could attend at the same time, thereby allowing a fast travel of information around the world. Apart from that, there is no need to have physical items such as boards, projectors, chalks, and desks, etc. to conduct a course; instead, participants could get benefit from digital media. Everyone participating in the program could stay tuned in accordance with their own pace of study, which means that individualized learning could be built. A large volume of knowledge could be stored in organized digital files, creating a quick access for the users when needed. On the other hand, despite the listed advantages of online training programs, F2F training involves an in-person interaction which makes it precious. The participants take place in a live communication where all of the parties stand out as flesh and bones! They talk, they see, they feel and they smell the air, in a word! This could be motivating and inspiring for those who would like to have a F2F interaction. Therefore, blended learning (BL) appears at the stage. BL is a form of teaching and learning which combines F2F and online components. For this reason, comprehensive sessions could be held by including features of both forms.

This study aims at reviewing the three aforementioned modes of he delivery for professional development programs for in-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers. Throughout the current study, the aspects of the relevance, applicability and impact of the delivery modes are discussed.

The delivery modes of professional development programs

Face-to-face (F2F) delivery

The delivery mode of any professional activity or program refers to the way how the content is presented by applying some set of procedures. In this regard, F2F, online and blended types of delivery modes will be taken into consideration in the current study.

To start with F2F instruction, it actually refers to traditional in-class training activities and it is primarily held with the physical presence of trainees and trainers. As its name suggests, education takes place in-person, and all of the interactional practices are conducted via real human communication. Going forward, the learners who would like to be involved in the course are likely to travel to the setting where the training is conducted. The course participants might be required to attend the sessions on time since the class attendance is of crucial importance in order to track the course content.

Maintaining in-person interaction may be useful for teacher education since non-verbal aspects of communication including body language, gestures, posture and tone of voice are included. These elements might affect the quality of communication by building harmony and collaborative conversations. In addition, Partarrieu (2015) notes that learners could be supported by teachers more efficiently in terms of managing behavioral patterns of them such as bullying or other misbehaviors. She also maintains that computers could act as effective knowledge providers but they may be unable to guide learners in order to give affective support.

However, Roche (2018) claims that there are some limitations pertaining to the F2F instruction: 1) It may include training fee, 2) It has a spatial limitation since the participants are expected to attend in certain settings for the education, and 3) It is dependent on timing as the trainees and trainers are bound with a particular timeframe. Although F2F professional development programs may engage the participants easily via having a real human communication which enables interaction with verbal and non-verbal cues, it poses some contradictions related to the cost, travel to training setting, and adherence to a fixed schedule. In-service EFL teachers who have been employed to teach already might have some professional and personal obstacles that prevent them to attend a PDP held in F2F format. They could have heavily loaded schedules, so they cannot leave their courses to participate in any training. Or, they could have some other household responsibilities and financial problems hindering their attendance. Considering these parameters, it would be difficult and challenging for them to take part in any professional activity.

Online delivery

Grand-Clement (2017) asserts that technology changes the way of accessing and directing the information and that the use of pedagogy in different contexts is required; therefore, she suggests digital skills be given weight in life-long learning practices. The Digital Age constitutes the driving force for embracing the technology and pedagogy in professional development for teachers. The fact that 21st century learners appear to be glued to mobile phones, digital tablets, laptops, social media platforms, and applications might call for a substantial change in teacher development. For this reason, the instructors and teachers should be prepared to meet the instructional needs of the learners in order to maximize the learning opportunities and yield better outcomes. With this in mind, crafting teacher development programs in a way that addresses innovative practices such as digital media and web tools including webinars, blogs, e-portfolios and so forth. This would engender an online delivery of teacher development courses which enables online interactions between the trainees and trainers through digital

communities and online applications. Jung (2001) lists the benefits of online training for teachers as in the following:

1) teachers can access in-service training without leaving their classrooms,

2) teachers can improve their computer literacy,

3) teachers are better able to interact with their trainers and other teachers online,

4) once a database of online courses has been developed, teachers can access those courses that meet their individual needs ("Introduction", para. 3).

As could be seen obviously, online PDPs act as mediums where educational practices are implemented and interactions could be built, and as tools utilized for digital skills of teachers. Apart from those, online PDPs offer flexibility in that the teachers are not supposed to be at a specific setting particularly designed for education for a certain period of time. Online instructional delivery allows the participants to work on their own pace in their available time. Thus, the trainees do not need to leave their school or quit their courses to attend workshops. They could even join in sessions which are held by distinguished trainers of the field in a far away country without any obligation to travel. Virtual settings could provide cost-effective, time-efficient and practical instructional implementations.

According to the report prepared by Royal Society (2012), digital literacy is defined as 'the basic skill or ability to use a computer confidently, safely and effectively, including: the ability to use office software such as word processors, email and presentation software, the ability to create and edit images, audio and video, and the ability to use a web browser and internet search engines' (p.17). It is clear that a teacher who is digitally literate is able to use the basic software and hardware tools sufficiently and s/he has the technological skills in order to navigate, store, and share digital knowledge. All of the in-service teachers who have already started teaching do not necessarily have to be digitally literate; contrarily, some of them could be digital immigrants who were not born into digital environments but who adopted the digital skills later in their life (Prensky, 2001). According to Prensky, digital immigrant teachers may come up with a false assumption that the same methods applied when they were students themselves would work out with the learners of today. Considering the 21st century learners, particularly the younger generation, it could be concluded that they are digital natives, which means that they were raised in the digital world (Vodanovich, Sundaram, & Myers, 2010). Therefore, in order to mitigate the gaps between digital immigrant teachers and digital native learners, it would be helpful for teachers if training programs regarding basic technological skills and knowledge were held at first place. Otherwise, the teachers would avoid taking part in online PDPs due to the fear of failure.

Whitehouse, McCloskey, and Ketelhut (2010) suggest that unlike the pedagogical strategies which are utilized throughout the program, the design of online PDPs are creative and contemporary; therefore, a well-established combination of pedagogy and technology is needed in order to lead an effective learning. In other words, online PDPs may need to set aims, methods, techniques and other implementations which are particular to their own settings, thereby creating a need to develop a science of online pedagogy. To that end, a blend of technology, pedagogy and content knowledge (TPCK) which is the presentation of the subject-matter knowledge through applying the appropriate teaching techniques and strategies integrated with technological implementations (Koehler & Mishra, 2007) is needed. In a word, content knowledge (CK) referring to conceptual knowledge of the subject to be taught and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) which constitutes instructional procedures to be applied in order to facilitate CK learning (Shulman, 1986) do not appear to be sufficient for online learning. This accords with the findings of the study conducted by Songül (2014) that in-service Turkish EFL teachers were provided with Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) training in order to facilitate the integration of instructional technologies in their classrooms; however, the results show that the teachers who did not have a good command of computer skills experienced difficulties throughout the training

program. Therefore, she puts forwards that some preliminary tutorials about basic computer skills could be organized.

To summarize, online PDPs do seem to have their own advantages and disadvantages related to their design and implementation. Although it provides flexibility and easy-to-use applications, and removes the time and place constraints, a great endeavor should be invested in the design and administration of this type of delivery. Due to the fact that the educational procedures take place in an online setting, program developers and tutors who major in online pedagogy should be recruited. For this reason, the first step could be providing a specialized training particular to this domain since the online programs are operated in a different way in terms of the setting and delivery. Even if the content is the same by nature, the digital representation could differ.

Blended delivery

Banados (2006) claims that blended delivery provides a combination of technological and in-class instruction. That is to say, it refers to the curriculum consisting of a mixture of F2F and online instruction; therefore, it should be noted that implementations pertaining to each method of delivery could be found in a blended program. Blended PDPs could enable in-service teacher training, foster the learning of teaching methods, and improve information and communication technologies (ICT) skills (Geissler, 2014). Namely, blended learning provides a setting where the teachers could acquire some new teaching skills and practice them through a digital platform, as well.

Essentially, the integration of F2F and online delivery could enrich the input which is provided to the teachers: The teachers might be allowed to be involved in a genuine human interaction and, also, extend the instruction through being a part of online enrollment. Peachey (2013) suggests that the arrangement of the blending should be performed in a way that tasks ensure social interaction through real people. He also maintains that tutorials could be prepared for teachers to improve their digital learning skills and that a continuous evaluation regarding the materials and course design is needed; thus the content could stay up-to-date.

Eshtehardi (2014) conducted a study with EFL teachers and designed a blended teacher training program called 'Pro-ELT' which aims to improve the participants' English proficiency, teaching methods, and in-class techniques. In the aforementioned program, online and F2F delivery are combined: For speaking skills, interactive activities, delivery of micro-teaching practices, F2F training was held; however, online components were used in order to perform reflective practices and some production activities such as the submissions for individual assignments. Likewise, Truong (2015) carried out a study with teachers of English who were provided an online PDP and according to the results of the study, most of the teachers had a positive attitude towards the program but some of them indicated that they were demotivated since real human communication as in the F2F was missing. Apart from those studies, Cengiz, Seferoğlu, and Kaçar (2017) implemented an online CALL training for EFL teachers and they reported that some of the teachers had some difficulties due to the lack of basic computer skills; therefore, they proposed that some sessions of the training could have been designed in F2F format. In a word, it is indicated that a F2F tutorial could be held for digitally illiterate teachers.

To conclude, blended PD activities and programs enable teachers to benefit from both digital and classroom-based learning as long as the marriage between the two could be built in balance. Herein, the delivery of the course content is performed in a way that both forms become interwoven and, complement one another. Therefore, not only in-person communication but also online interactions could be established, thereby avoiding the feeling of isolation which might occur in online platforms. To add, since the training is conducted through digital settings and social applications, customization and self-study might be enabled.

Conclusion

On-site PDPs designed for EFL teachers are mainly classroom-based, and they include a direct F2F interaction without applying any intermediary tool. Therefore, F2F education enrollment enables emotional support through verbal and non-verbal components. Since language teaching procedures are mainly drawn on these components, a significant emphasis is focused on communicational aspects including spoken and non-verbal messages. Apart from the communicational dimension of this form of PDP, all of the participants are required to be physically present in the training setting; this could stimulate collaborative practices, thereby enabling the engagement in conversations easily. However, the technological advancements and shifting sands of instructional improvements may appear to have a profound effect upon the delivery mode of professional activities, which has brought online learning implementations into the agenda. The instructional procedures have ventured out from in-class learning to digital learning practices through the inclusion of social media platforms and myriad of web tools. The teachers are supposed to go online, work digitally and become equipped with the skills of navigating and reaching electronic knowledge. Online PDPs offer a training setting which is vastly different than F2F programs since the medium of instruction is virtual, thereby creating a need to be knowledgeable about how to use instructional digital learning platforms. However, some factors should be considered in order not to turn the advantageous nature of online learning into a mess. According to Jung (2001), there are some components to be included for the improvement of online teacher training: Accordingly, a systematic approach should be adopted for designing the programs at an initial phase. In other words, a haphazard course design would not be appropriate since the pedagogical framework in online training is different than in-class practices. Secondly, the interactional patterns between the trainers -trainees and the trainers-trainers should be enhanced, which may foster peer-support and, eventually, teacher learning. Thirdly, the online training programs are to be monitored and evaluated continuously; thus, the effectiveness of the program could be measured in terms of set dimensions and weak points could be diagnosed and treated accordingly. Fourthly, learner autonomy should be enabled through stimulating self-study, self-evaluation, and self-reflection. Fifthly, the trainers are to be provided a training about how to conduct online programs. As seen, some points need to be taken into consideration before designing and implementing online PDPs in order to prevent target blindness.

In addition, the number of online PDPs could be increased because the attitudes of participants could be dependent on their previous experiences related to the online programs, which is echoed in the study by Thomas (2009) indicating that the participants who had attended in online programs previously had more positive perceptions towards those programs.

Apart from F2F and online PDPs, an alternative delivery consisting of both modes could be used: Blended learning. The approach of one-size-fits-all needs to be eradicated when the diverse set of learning styles is considered: While individualized learning is found to be productive for some, the others would like to be physically present in learning environments by attending in F2F meetings. Some sessions of PDPs could be organized in a way that incorporates F2F implementations such as in-person talks, lectures, demonstrations, hands-on activities and some other practical works including micro-teaching practices. Web tools such as blogs, e-portfolios, webinar applications, online instruments to prepare digital lessons and create slideshows crammed into web pages might be adopted in order to form online communities and facilitate interactions. Self-regulated teacher learning could also be enabled through electronic self-assessment tools in order to foster an evaluation of their teaching behaviors.

To conclude, it is obvious that each mode of delivery might have some pros and cons, depending on the participants themselves, participants' previous training experiences, course design, course content, applied materials, and trainers. Considering the Digital World, the adoption of digital teaching and learning instruments and settings would be inevitable. However, the crucial point that could be drawn from this condition is that building a systematicity to be applied for designing, administering and evaluating the PDP program regardless of its being either online or blended mushrooms as a must.

Pedagogical Implications

Firstly, the number of online PDPs developed for EFL teachers could be increased in Turkey in order to create a familiarity with the operational aspect of the programs. Thus, an awareness might be developed together with the improvement of the digital literacy skills. The programs could be either blended or merely online depending on the professional needs of the teachers and the domain of feasibility.

Secondly, the pedagogy offered throughout online and blended PDPs seems to be different from the F2F programs since TPCK is required. For this reason, a course on online pedagogy could be added for undergraduate English language teaching programs in Turkey. Although there are some offered courses that incorporate training on how to integrate instructional technology in foreign language classrooms, those seem to be inadequate since a comprehensive systematic framework is needed for developing an insight into the science of online pedagogy.

Thirdly, post-graduate English language teaching programs could also include a course on training the online teacher trainers because there is a huge volume of information on the Web and crafting this enormous content for in-service teachers, and creating meaningful learning opportunities require specific competences.

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