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The Effects of Teacher Professional Development on Teaching Practice and Student Learning Outcome

ABSTRACT: Professional development is of great importance not only for teachers but also for administrators and leaders. It helps teachers improve or change their teaching behaviors and make their lessons more interesting and effective. To meet the academic needs of learners, it is clear that schools need to build seasoned and well-qualified teaching staff. It is commonly agreed that with the same modern facilities, only the upgrade of teaching quality sets themselves apart from any other schools. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of teacher professional development activities attributed to teaching and learning skills acquired as well as to determine teacher attitude toward their participation in these activities. About 114 teachers participated in the study. The data collected from the returned questionnaires were entered into the computer file using Microsoft Excel for the analysis. The study answered the following research questions: (1) What are the teachers' perceptions toward professional development activities they have participated in?; (2) To what extent do trained teachers implement what they have learned?; and (3) What do teachers suggest for professional development training activities? The findings show that teachers have positive perceptions toward professional development training and they hope to attend more trainings in the future. Regarding teachers' application of new learning in the classrooms, school leaders should invite facilitators who are experienced in teaching the same materials that respondents teach. The facilitators can take examples from the materials. In this way, respondents can find skills and techniques applicable. They also can change their teaching behaviors and classroom activities.

KEY WORDS: Professional development, teaching activities, teaching capacity, teachers' perception, teaching practice, training program, and student learning outcome.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers cannot enter the new era if they lack professional development activities (Roger, 2010). As the world develops rapidly, teachers also need to keep pace with the speed of the global development. In this context, B.P. Price (2008); D. Roger (2010); LF [Learning Forward] (2013); and P. Youngs (2013) indicated that lack of professional development activities can stop teachers increasing learners' academic achievements. Therefore, teachers always feel the need of professional development activities to help them with teaching performance.

In particular, professional development is the greatest concern in educational systems,

because teacher expectations are that learners can enhance their learning outcomes. H.H. Sandra pointed out that "*We cannot expect our students to change what they do if we are content for teachers to continue doing what they have always done*" (Sandra, 2003:2). Apart from ceaseless efforts from learners, teachers play an indispensable role in performing educational expectations. As such, teachers' engagement in professional development to improve their practice and performance is a must as teaching requires continual learning. Otherwise, the educational system, as well as societal intellect, could not develop as expected.

To meet the academic needs of learners, it is clear that schools need to build seasoned and

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well-qualified teaching staff. It is commonly agreed that with the same modern facilities, only the upgrade of teaching quality sets themselves apart from any other schools. G.B. Dinh (2007) showed that professional development plays a crucial role in enhancing teaching capacity. C.D. Brown proposed “*there is a need for high quality professional development to impact teaching strategies*” (Brown, 2007:30).

Research has also shown that teachers’ continuous professional development together with professional learning communities helps students acquire higher academic achievements (Schmoker, 2004; LF, 2013; and Youngs, 2013). Professional development is regarded as a self-regulated learning to characterize teachers’ collaborative engagement in instructional change cycles (Butler & Cartier, 2004).

H.H. Sandra added that “*professional development should be based on curricular and instructional strategies that have a high probability of affecting student learning – and, just as important, students’ ability to learn*” (Sandra, 2003:4). Furthermore, G.B. Dinh stated that “*teachers are considered to be an important element in promoting positive changes in the field of education through professional development*” (Dinh, 2007:1). However, J. Richards indicated that lots of teachers are resistant to make changes and therefore resistant to take part in professional development activities (Richards, 2002).

Therefore, teachers need to change their teaching performance provided that learning is regarded as a needed activity (Joyce & Showers, 2002). The LF (Learning Forward) in 2013 also highlighted that “*increasing time for teacher professional learning is advocated as a necessity in improving learning for every student, yet it is also cited as the most common problem plaguing schools and school systems across the nation*” (LF, 2013:15).

This study helps determine teachers’ perceptions toward professional development. By the way, it is a chance to figure out teachers’ needs so that school leaders can customize suitable trainings for their teaching staff; through trainings, teachers will apply new methods of teaching in the classrooms. Teachers will perform their teaching better and more comprehensibly. Learners will study more efficiently. This study can serve

as a foundation for school leaders to see the importance of professional development and contribute to their schools’ academic improvement.

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH LITERATURE

Living in a rapidly changing world, we need to catch up with changes in our work. That is why professional development is really necessary and has been defined by many scholars and researchers. According to C.D. Brown, professional development is “*the process of improving staff skills and competencies needed to produce outstanding educational results for students*” (Brown, 2007:17-18).

To L.L. Hayes & V.J. Robnolt (2007), professional development is considered to be the formative evaluation in the daily lives of teachers implementing new instructional practices. In addition, professional development is used “*to feature learning opportunities and topics suggested by teachers and a principal to improve teaching and learning*” (Lester, 2003:50).

In recent years, there has been lots of research related to professional development. After years of findings, B. Kubitskey & B.J. Fishman developed a model of teacher learning which helps build up teachers’ confidence in the relationship between teacher behavior and student response, when they take part in professional development activities (Kubitskey & Fishman, 2007). Furthermore, T.A. Nugent indicated that “*teachers value job-embedded training and the experience to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development activities in terms of anticipated student outcomes*” (Nugent, 2007:22).

D. Jenny also mentioned that “*professional-learning activity meshes with the work of teaching*” (Jenny, 2013:6). To have a broader view of this indication, models of professional development and ways to establish professional learning community need to be examined.

A professional development model is utilized to guide the program design since B.J. Spencer-Chapman (2008) demonstrated that the program design helps improve reliable measures of student outcome. Realizing the importance of a professional development

model, E. Drago-Severson (2002) suggested seven major models used for teachers such as: (1) in-service training, (2) observation/assessment, (3) development/improvement process, (4) study groups, (5) inquiry/action research, (6) individually guided activities, and (7) mentoring.

These kinds of models help teachers establish professional development communities within institutions as they “support teacher learning” (Stodolsky, Dorph & Nemser, 2006:94). To do this, teachers’ perceptions towards professional development need to be examined.

It appears that teachers’ perception towards professional development will decide their further academic success. M.R. Ferguson (2008) noted that many teachers like to attend workshops and peer-sessions when motivated. This has proved that these activities meet their own professional development needs and motivating factors also play a pivotal role; therefore, practices teachers apply after their participation in professional development will once again obviously explain their perception towards professional development (Ferguson, 2008).

Furthermore, M. Vanderburg & D. Stephens (2010) laid the emphasis on the caliber of mentors to help teachers with professional development. J. Ben (2014) supposed that teachers can create an environment conducive to student learning; nevertheless, they also need the collaboration and interaction from students. Moreover, teachers are able to change their teaching performance if they attend high quality professional development (Jenny, 2013; and Ben, 2014).

In the research, K.E. Keenan emphasized that “learning arises from the context of practice” (Keenan, 2005:54). K.E. Keenan also added that the learning process is facilitated via peer and expert modeling, peer collaboration, and proactive involvement in practice (Keenan, 2005). Students will benefit from the teachers’ level of willingness to apply techniques gained from learning. Therefore, teachers play an indispensable role in professional development.

T.J. Kane & D.O. Staiger (2012) highlighted the use of classroom observations to help teachers improve their teaching performance.

G.B. Dinh indicated that “teachers need to understand their duties in the field of upgrading and improving their professional skills and knowledge” (Dinh, 2007:12). Additionally, they also need to know their academic limitations and the impacts of professional development activities on their professional achievements.

According to S.K. Abell & M.H. Lee (2008), professional development activities provide teachers with chances to apply learning to the classroom. In addition, O. Amaral & L. Garrison (2007) proved that they help develop teaching and learning performance in the classrooms; besides, teachers can acquire new knowledge via professional development activities (Scott & Mouza, 2007; Jenny, 2013; and Youngs, 2013). More importantly, they do contribute to the development of professional learning communities within schools, enhance reflection on teaching practice and facilitating collaboration, and improve students’ academic achievements (Stanton, 2004; Park, Oliver & Johnson, 2007; and DoE, 2013).

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The subjects in this investigation were 150 teachers teaching different subjects in secondary and high schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. They were randomly selected via teacher database. The data collected from the returned questionnaires were entered into the computer file using Microsoft Excel for the analysis. The descriptive statistics were utilized for data analysis. The descriptive statistics were used to sum up and compare findings. According to M.L. Patten (2005), descriptive statistics helps summarize data.

The demographic data, related to the participants taking part in the questionnaires, were collected. The data collected from the questionnaires were coded numerically and entered. Descriptive statistics were also used in the second section to “provide baseline data in the scaled variables” (Brown, 2007:48). Tables using frequencies and percentages were used to report the responses to 1- 4 Likert-type scale questions and multiple-choice questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study targeted 150 teachers who were teaching different subjects in secondary and

Table 1:
Number and Percentage to Respondents' Application of New Learning
After Professional Development Training Activities

Focus Topics	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
My professional knowledge has increased after my participation in professional development training activities.	98	86	15	13.1	1	0.9	-	-
The knowledge acquired from teachers' professional development training is necessary and applicable.	7	6.1	54	47.4	13	11.4	40	35.1
My professional skill level had improved after my participation in professional development training activities.	10	8.8	57	50	23	20.2	24	21
The teaching skills and techniques gained from the training are beneficial in the classrooms.	9	7.9	51	44.7	17	15	37	32.4
I have changed classroom activities as a result of effective professional development training.	17	15	46	40.4	44	38.6	7	6
I have known how to increase my students' academic achievements via skills and techniques acquired from training.	6	5.3	65	57	31	27.2	12	10.5
My students have improved their academic outcomes since I started new teaching approaches.	11	9.6	53	46.4	33	29	17	15
I had time to share my teaching approaches with my colleagues.	7	6.1	19	16.7	66	57.9	22	19.3

N = 114

Table 2:
Respondents' Preference in Modalities of Training

Training Modalities	n	%
Training courses	17	14.9
Training workshops	55	48.2
Conferences	27	23.7
Seminars	76	66.7

N = 114

* Percentages are greater than 100, because several respondents preferred more than one kind of training topic.

high schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. They were randomly selected as they were being trained, so that they were able to enhance their teaching capacity. Of the 150 teachers, 114 teachers (49 males, 65 females) responded yielding an overall response rate of 76%. Though the researcher failed to collect all the questionnaires as planned, it was significant for analysis.

The biggest number of the respondents (41%, n = 47) ranged from 26 to 35 years in age. About 12 (11%) were below 26; 39 (34%) were from 36 to 45; and 16 (14%) was over 45. Among 114 teachers, the majority of them (89%, n = 101) obtained Bachelor degrees from teacher training colleges or universities; while only 13 (11%) graduated in Master degree. Most of the teachers (90.4%, n = 103) had

been teaching for more than 5 years.

Concerning teachers' attitudes toward professional development activities, 100% of the respondents agreed that professional development training provided with ideas that helped with class management. About 97 (85.1%) strongly agreed that professional development was necessary. About 45 (39.5%) respondents strongly agreed that teachers should be offered equal opportunities to receive professional development training.

They altogether agreed that professional development activities helped them become more confident in classroom management and it addressed their individual needs for in-depth training. All of the respondents agreed that professional development helped them self-assess their teaching performance and sharpen

their skills. They completely agreed that the goal of professional development was to help change their teaching behaviors.

Consequently, 114 out of 114 respondents agreed that professional development training activities helped them improve their teaching performance and also helped their students increase their learning outcomes. Of all the respondents surveyed, only 16 (14%) out of 114 disagreed that professional development activities were based on their prior knowledge. However, the majority of the respondents (85.1%, $n = 97$) uttered out that the professional development topics were not based on their needs.

About teachers' application of new learning in their classrooms, after their participation in professional development training activities, see in table 1.

Table 1 explicitly illustrates how teachers applied what they had learned in their classrooms. Nearly all the respondents strongly agreed that after their participation in training, they increased their professional knowledge and improved their skill levels, and their students increased their learning outcomes. About 53 (46.5%) disagreed that the knowledge acquired from teacher professional development training was necessary and applicable. About 67 (58.8%) agreed that their professional skill level improved after their participation in professional development training activities. In addition, 54 (47.4%) out of 114 respondents disagreed that the teaching skills and techniques gained from the training were beneficial in the classrooms.

The results show that 51 (44.7%) did not change their classroom activities. About 71 (62.3%) agreed that they had known how to increase their students' academic achievements via skills and techniques acquired from the training; whereas 50 (43.9%) disagreed that their students had improved their academic outcomes since they started new teaching approaches. About 88 (77.2%) out of 114 teachers disagreed that they had time to share learning experiences with their colleagues (see again table 1).

About teachers' suggestions for future professional development training, see in table 2.

The majority of the respondents (59.7%,

$n = 68$) rarely attended teacher professional development training activities; while only 27 (23.7%) answered that they often did. About 19 (16.6%) sometimes attended. Most of the respondents (66.7%, $n = 76$) preferred seminars; while only 17 (14.9%) preferred training courses. It is interesting to figure out that 55 (48.2%) preferred training workshops and only 27 (23.7%) preferred conferences (see again table 2).

CONCLUSION

The data show that teachers taking part in the questionnaires were young and experienced. All of them obtained at least a Bachelor's degree. Though respondents had positive perceptions toward trainings, they might not be willing to attend if they found topics boring and unsuitable to their individual needs.

It is recommended that surveys on training needs be conducted before training, so that school leaders would know what training modalities teachers need. Furthermore, leaders can talk to teachers in faculty meetings to seek out their training needs. Training facilitators should be more flexible and select appropriate teaching methodology in the future.

Regarding teachers' application of new learning in the classrooms, school leaders should invite facilitators who are experienced in teaching the same materials that respondents teach. The facilitators can take examples from the materials. In this way, respondents can find skills and techniques applicable. They also can change their teaching behaviors and classroom activities.

Concerning teachers' suggestions, respondents preferred seminars to conferences. Teachers themselves can work with other colleagues to study with one another. Additionally, training workshops and courses on specific topics will be conducted to help teachers with professional development. As expected, more than half of the respondents agreed that the most suitable time for training is from July to September. It is understandable because most of the teachers are on their summer holidays; then, and therefore, they will have more time to attend the trainings.

It is recommended that training be mainly

conducted at this time. However, other follow-up workshops should be conducted throughout the year to remind teachers of skills and techniques learned.¹

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Teachers at the Secondary and High Schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

(Source: www.google.com, 24/10/2014)

This study targeted 150 teachers who were teaching different subjects in secondary and high schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. They were randomly selected as they were being trained, so that they were able to enhance their teaching capacity. Of the 150 teachers, 114 teachers (49 males, 65 females) responded yielding an overall response rate of 76%. Though the researcher failed to collect all the questionnaires as planned, it was significant for analysis.