SATISFACTION LEVELS OF TEACHERS IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

Literature shows that professional development activities are beneficial for teachers’ self-improvement and students’ learning and achievement. In spite of global efforts to address them, some issues surrounding professional development activities persist. The researchers in this study examined the satisfaction level of teachers in professional development activities in Turkey and identified the factors affecting their satisfactions in these activities. For this aim, this study addressed the following research questions: 1) what are the satisfaction levels of teachers in professional development activities in Turkey? and 2) what factors affect the satisfaction levels of teachers in professional development activities? The results of this qualitative study demonstrate that the satisfaction of Turkish teachers with professional development activities is really low; as a result, teachers are choosing not to participate in any activities. The reasons for this dissatisfaction and unwillingness to participate include: 1) offering only traditional professional development activities, 2) not involving teachers in the design of professional development activities, 3) ignoring teachers’ needs during the process of planning of professional development activities, 4) offering activities unrelated to authentic classroom situations, and 5) having low quality of instructors in professional development activities. Finally, the researchers have some suggestions about how the Ministry of National Education might increase teacher satisfaction in professional development activities.

Key Words: satisfaction, teacher, professional development

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ÜLKEMİZDE DÜZENLENMEKTE OLAN HİZMET İÇİ EĞİTİM ETKİNLİKLERİNE YÖNELİK ÖĞRETMENLERİN MEMNUNİYET DÜZEYİ

ÖZET


Introduction

Teachers play a vital component in schools and have profound effects on students learning and achievement (Borko, 2004; Cheng, 1996; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007; Seferoglu, 2007). To this extent, the quality of teachers has been examined by many researchers over the last several decades (Abbate-Vaughn & Paugh, 2009; Ascher & Fruchter, 2001; Borman & Kimball, 2005; Boyle, While, & Boyle, 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2000; Hodge & Krumm, 2009; Guskey, 2002; Mahon, 2003; Meister, 2010; Okoye, Momoh, Aigbomian, & Okecha, 2008; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Palardy & Rumberger, 2008; Pedder, James, & MacBeath, 2005; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Rockoff, 2004; Seferoglu, 2001; Visser & Coenders, 2010; Vogt & Rogalla, 2009) and some have found that teachers are not well prepared upon

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graduation from university (Porter & Brophy, 1988). Therefore, numerous students fail to have quality teachers (Hirsh, 2001; Ozer, 2004; Palardy & Rumberger, 2008; Porter & Brophy, 1988; Seferoglu, 2001). According to the report of the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (1996), almost a quarter of secondary school teachers need additional training because they are not adequately prepared for the subject to which they have been assigned to teach. Thomas Guskey, a noted author and researcher in professional development, (1994) addressed this issue when he stressed the importance of having well prepared and high quality teachers in schools, “We cannot improve schools without improving the skills and abilities of the teachers within them” (p.9). Consequently, teachers’ continuing professional development has become one of the central concerns of educational research and has been widely debated over the last several decades by many educators, researchers, policy makers, and teacher unions not only in the United States but also most countries around the world (Boydak & Dikici, 2001; Carver & Katz, 2004; Easton, 2008; Jonson, 2002; McCaugthry, Martin, Kulinna, & Cothran, 2006; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Moir & Gless, 2001).

In exploring the importance of professional development activities, the literature has failed to reach a consensus about a number of issues, such as: what a clear definition of what professional development should entail, how to determine the effectiveness of professional development activities, what types of professional development activities should be highlighted, what factors affect teacher participation in professional development activities, and how teacher satisfaction levels with professional development activities impact their professional growth. While each of these issues is important, the researchers have focused this study on the factors affecting teacher satisfaction with professional development activities. Although the satisfaction of teachers in professional development activities has been examined in the United States over the last several decades, there is a dearth of information in the literature related to Turkish teachers’ satisfaction levels in professional development activities. This study addresses the need for further research into teacher satisfaction with professional development activities, and identifies some main factors influencing the satisfaction levels of teachers in Turkey.

**Literature Review**

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate related articles and books about professional development and corresponding factors that affect the satisfaction of teachers in professional development activities. This chapter includes strengths and limitations of existing professional development studies. To that end, the researchers begin by addressing the purpose and definition of professional development activities. Then, the researchers discuss types of professional development activities. Finally, the researchers mention the importance of professional development activities for teachers.

**Purpose and Definition of Professional Development**

Numerous researchers explain the purpose of professional development activities in the literature. Lowden (2005) has stated that, “Much of the literature and research states that the goal of professional development is to provide opportunities for teachers to learn and grow within the profession, thereby making an impact on student learning” (p.8). Similarly, Payne and Wolfson (2000) have asserted, “The purpose of professional development is to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to improve student achievement” (p. 14). As is evidenced by these statements, there is a common sense among researchers that teacher learning through professional development is meant to improve academic outcomes for students.

However, professional development takes many forms, and definitions of professional development are too broad to encompass any and all activities that achieve the above purpose.
Thomas Guskey (2000) defines professional development as, “Those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might in turn improve the training of students” (p.17). Torff and Sessions (2008) have offered the following definition, “...PD initiative refers to a program of activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge of groups of teachers. The terms professional development, staff development, and teacher training are often used to describe such activities” (p. 124). Additionally, Ducheny, Allezhauser, Crandell, and Schneider (1997) have described professional development as, “An ongoing process through which an individual derives a cohesive sense of professional identity by integrating the broad based knowledge, skills, and attitudes within psychology with one’s values and interests” (p. 89). The National Staff Development Council (2001) definition states that “Staff development is the means by which educators acquire or enhance the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs necessary to create high levels of learning for all students” (p. 2). The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (2009) has defined professional development as “activities that develop an individual’s skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher” (p. 49). Elman, Illfelder-Kaye and Robiner (2005) have identified that “... PD is the developmental process of acquiring, expanding, refining, and sustaining knowledge, proficiency, skill, and qualifications for competent professional functioning that result in professionalism” (p. 369). The definition this researcher will use for professional development, can be gleaned from the above definitions, is an ongoing process developed to improve teacher abilities - specifically their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes - in the hopes of improving student achievement.

Types of Professional Development Activities

Professional development programs for teachers can be divided into two main categories, including traditional and nontraditional. The duration of these programs is a key factor for deciding if the activity is regarded as traditional or nontraditional (Ozer, 2008). The international literature explains that traditional professional development activities comprise short workshops and conferences; while nontraditional professional development activities take the form of mentoring, coaching, or peer observation. Further it has indicated that traditional professional development activities have multiple limitations, including: minimal or lack of collaboration, lack of relevance to the daily work of teachers, lack of teacher engagement, limited knowledge, and lack of application to the classroom practice (Fullan, 1995; Lieberman; 1995; Miller, 1998). In this regard, some researchers have come to the conclusion that while traditional professional development activities may require less time than nontraditional professional development activities, traditional professional development activities have little or no impact on the teaching skills of teachers (Boyle et al., 2004; Collinson, 2000; Easton, 2008; Kelleher, 2003). Birman, Desimone, Porter, and Garet (2000) have contended that traditional professional development activities do not provide enough time to teachers, and therefore they fail to have much influence in changing teaching practices. In a similar vein, Abadiano and Turney (2004) have stated that because traditional professional development programs are organized for a short duration, they are inefficient and unproductive. Hirsh (2001) has claimed that, “For years, educators have been confronted with poorly designed staff development. Scarce resources have been wasted because few understood or took time to understand what helps adults acquire the knowledge and skills that help students achieve” (p. 255). Corcoran (1995) has 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” (p. 4).

As a result, the international consensus has agreed that professional development activities are important and beneficial for both teachers and the achievement of students, but only when they are conducted effectively (Boydak & Dikici, 2001; Carver, & Katz, 2004; Desimone, Porter, Garet,
Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Jonson, 2002; McCaughtry et al., 2006; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Moir & Gless, 2001).

The Importance of Professional Development Activities for Teachers

Once teachers begin their careers, they should seek to improve themselves by attending different professional development activities (Ozer & Beycioğlu, 2010). Kwakman (2001) has emphasized the importance of professional development for teachers in order to improve the overall quality of education. Professional development programs play a key role in preparing all teachers to do their jobs better (Birman et al., 2000). Also, Borko (2004) has said, “Teachers’ professional development is essential to efforts to improve our schools” (p. 3). Likewise, Ozer (2004) has said that “In-service training is especially important in the maintenance of continuous professional development” (p. 92) and Demirtas (2010) has noted that teachers are not well prepared in pre-service training programs; therefore in-service training programs are vital to complete their proficiencies on teaching. Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) have stated, “state legislators and administrators of local school districts saw staff development as a key aspect of school improvement efforts. Many school districts initiated extensive staff development projects to improve student learning” (p. 35). Additionally, Starkey et al. (2009) have spoken of the importance of professional development programs for teachers and said that “in-service teacher education is also often viewed as an extension of pre-service teacher education in ensuring teachers- whether new or experienced- have up to date snapshots of the knowledge needed to be effective” (p. 186). In this regard, Rogers et al. (2007) have stressed the importance of professional development programs to veteran teachers for self-renewal. Thus, professional development activities help both novice and veteran teachers to develop their existing skills and acquire new ones. Hirsh’s opinion (2001) is consistent with the above studies and agrees that professional development of teachers is the best way to affect the quality of teaching. Consequently, as stated by Rogers et al. (2007), professional development of teachers will continue to play a critical role in teacher quality for a long time.

The Purpose of Study

Even though some recent empirical studies show the importance of professional development activities for teachers in Turkey (Aytac, 2000; Boydak & Dikici, 2001; Saban, 2000; Seferoglu, 2007), there is not sufficient research evaluating the satisfaction of teachers in professional development activities and explaining which factors affect their satisfaction in professional development activities. This gap in knowledge illustrates a need for additional research to examine Turkish teachers’ satisfaction in professional development activities, and to identify the main factors influencing their satisfaction levels in professional development activities in Turkey. Consequently, this paper considers what has come to be known as “teachers’ satisfaction levels” in professional development activities and “factors” affecting their satisfaction in professional development activities in Turkey. To this end, the researchers have begun to fill the gap that exists in the field of professional development of teachers; by specifically exploring the factors that influence their satisfaction levels in professional development activities in Turkey.

The purpose of this study was twofold: first, to examine satisfaction levels of teachers in professional development programs in Turkey, and second, to identify factors influencing teachers’ satisfaction in these programs. The outcomes of this study are of utmost importance to policymakers and educators in Turkey, so that they may develop strategies for improving teacher satisfaction as it relates to professional development activities. Additionally, this paper is informative for the readers of the journal to learn more about one of the top issues in the Turkish educational system – factors affecting teachers’ satisfactions with professional development activities. In conducting this study, the researchers have hoped to find possible factors that affect...
professional development of Turkish teachers. This study, therefore, addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the satisfaction levels of teachers in professional development activities in Turkey?
2. What factors affect the satisfaction levels of teachers in professional development activities?

**Methodology**

**Sample**

The researchers have conducted this research in Osmaniye, which is one of the cities of Turkey. The researchers visited 15 elementary schools (out of 66 in the Centre District) and asked teachers how many professional development activities they have participated in the past 12 months. Then, the researchers selected 12 teachers (6 male and 6 female) from among the participant teachers in those 15 schools to interview.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The researchers used a qualitative research approach in this study, which Taylor and Bogdan (1998) pointed out “refer in the broadest sense to research that produces descriptive data on people’s own written or spoken words and observable behavior” (p.7). Mertens (2009) also explained, “qualitative methods are used in research that is designed to provide an in-depth description of a specific program, practice, or setting” (p. 225).

The researchers employed three different qualitative research techniques in order to triangulate the data for this study. First, the researchers conducted open-ended interviews with 12 selected teachers who participated in at least three professional development activities within last 12 months. The researchers asked the participants about their satisfaction levels in professional development activities and instructed them to identify factors that influenced their satisfaction during those experiences. Each teacher interview lasted around 50 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Second, the researchers asked the interviewees to generate a list of factors that affect their satisfaction in professional development activities. Finally, the researchers checked the result reports from professional development activities offered by the Directorate of Educational Department of Osmaniye and performed document analysis related to the purpose of this study.

The researchers used “peer review/examination”, “rich, thick descriptions” and “adequate engagement in data collection” strategies (Merriam, 2009) to promote the reliability and validity of the data analysis process.

**Findings**

Based on the analysis of the collected data, the researchers found that some Turkish teachers believe professional development activities help them improve their own teaching skills and increase the achievement of students. For instance, Ibrahim said that, “Professional development activities are [a] very big opportunity to improve my teaching skills during my career. As I participate in more professional development activities, I teach my students more effectively.” In a similar vein, Filiz said that, “I believe that as I participate in more professional development activities, I feel much better. Since, to me, it is one of the best ways to refresh/update my teaching skills and, as a result, increase the achievement of students.” This finding is consistent with the results of Pedder et al. (2005), who found that teachers already know about the importance of participation in professional development activities because they firmly believe that participation in
these types of programs directly improve their teaching skills and consequently increase the achievement of students.

Additionally, the researchers also found that most teachers in Turkey are unsatisfied with the offered professional development activities; as a result, they are not willing to participate in these activities. For instance, Ahmet stated, “I am not satisfied [with] participating in professional development activities even though I have participated in three professional development activities.” This finding is consistent with the outcomes of Ozer (2001), who found that while 31.3% of Turkish teachers are willing to attend in-service training programs, 68.7% of them are not willing to attend to such programs.

The researchers explored the reasons for teacher dissatisfaction and lack of willingness to participate in professional development activities and found the following major factors for teachers’ dissatisfaction on professional development activities:

1. **Offering Only Traditional Professional Development Activities:** The participants reported that the Ministry of National Education generally offers traditional professional development activities. Along those lines, previous researchers have criticized traditional professional development activities and have pointed out the multiple limitations inherent in a more traditional approach: minimal or lack of collaboration, lack of relevance to the daily work of teachers, limited knowledge, and lack of application to the classroom practice (Fullan, 1995; Lieberman, 1995; Miller, 1998). Most participants pointed to these limitations when explaining why they were not satisfied with the traditional professional development activities offered. For instance, Mehmet said that, “I just go to class and sit. We [all participants] are not active and have no activities. Therefore, I feel very bad when I participate in professional development activities.”

2. **Lack of Teacher Involvement in the Design of Professional Development Activities:** The researchers, furthermore, found that the lack of teacher involvement in the design of professional development activity is another important factor leading to teacher dissatisfaction with professional development activities. For example, Esra said that, “We, teachers, [are] not involved [with the] planning process of professional development activities. I wish we could get involve[d] in this process. Unfortunately, we -as teachers- have no [voice] in the process of planning. As a result, I am not satisfied participating in any professional development activities.” This is consistent with the results of Starkey et al. (2009), who emphasized the importance of teacher involvement (based on their needs) in planning professional development programs and declared that there exists a positive relationship between satisfaction and teacher involvement in setting professional development activities.

3. **Matching up with Teachers Needs:** Matching professional development activities with the needs of teachers is another important factor that affects the satisfaction of teachers in professional development activities. For example, Hasan said that, “When offered professional development activity matches up with my personal needs, I am very happy to participate in this activity. Otherwise, it is really boring, and I do not learn anything.” This is consistent with, Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001); who found the importance of matching professional development activities with the needs of teachers. Additionally, Harris, Day, Goodall, Lindsay, and Muijs (2005) claimed that if professional development programs met the needs of teachers, teachers would be more likely to participate in these activities. Likewise, Starkey et al. (2009) pointed out that when professional development activities meet teachers’ personal needs and when they help to improve their teaching skills, teachers place greater value on these activities (Starkey et al., 2009).
4. Relevance to Real Classroom Situations: The researchers also found that when professional development activities are related to authentic classroom situations, teachers are more willing to participate in these activities. For instance, Sedat said that, “When professional development activities are not relevant to my classroom situations, I really do not enjoy [them]. If they do not help me in my classroom, then participating in these kinds of these professional development activities is just waste of time.” To this end, Sandholtz and Scribner (2006) have stated that professional development activities should be related to real classroom situations. They (2006) have said that, “Teachers need to see links and benefits between what they are learning and their own classroom” (Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006, p. 112).

5. The Quality of Instructors: The low quality of instruction in professional development activities is another important reason for the dissatisfaction of teachers in professional development activities. For instance, Merve said that, “Most instructors are not good enough and they just read from slide shows. More interestingly, sometimes they ask us to read the slide shows.” Another participant (Guler) said, “I know more than most instructors in professional development activities. They just read whatever is in the slide shows.” These comments indicate that teachers perceive that instructors of professional development activities are not properly prepared, which deeply affects the satisfaction of teachers in professional development activities.

Due in large part to the factors above mentioned, teachers in Turkey are dissatisfied with participating in professional development activities. Consequently, as noted by Ucar and Ipek (2006), teachers report that professional development programs are not sufficient for their personal improvement. Similarly, Gonen and Kocakaya (2006) concluded in their research that professional development programs mostly have little or no effect on teachers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers have the following recommendations:

1. Nontraditional professional development activities should be offered in order to increase the satisfaction of teachers with professional development activities.

2. Teachers should be involved in the planning of professional development programs to increase the satisfaction of teachers with professional development activities.

3. The needs of teachers should be considered during the design process of professional development programs in order to increase the satisfaction of teachers with professional development activities.

4. Professional development programs should be related to authentic classroom situations in order to increase the satisfaction of teachers with professional development activities.

5. High quality instructors should be hired/trained to increase the satisfaction of teachers with professional development activities.

Conclusion

All teachers are expected to participate in professional development activities in Turkey (Gonen & Kocakaya, 2006; Kaya, Ceipi, & Kucuk, 2004). However, researchers have found that professional development activities have little or no effect on teacher effectiveness and professional growth in Turkey (Erisen, 1998; Gonen & Kocakaya, 2006; Ucar & Ipek, 2006). Quick, Holtzman, and Chaney (2009), noted that, “Teachers are influenced by their past and current experiences with professional development - what they liked and what they did not like” (p. 54). Researchers found that most teachers, who participated in professional development activities, report generally negative experiences (Bayindir, 2009; Desimone et al, 2002), and these negative experiences
impact the teachers’ thoughts and participation in future professional development activities (Bayindir, 2009; Scanlan, 1986). Teachers (participants) in this study reported a lack of satisfaction with the professional development activities being offered. Due to this dissatisfaction, teachers’ willingness to participate in professional development activities is rapidly declining. Teachers lacking the satisfaction to participate in professional development activities often view participation in these types of activities as just waste of time (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005).

The researchers have come to the conclusion that the Ministry of National Education should 1) offer mostly nontraditional professional development activities, 2) involve teachers in the planning of professional development activities, 3) consider the needs of teachers during the design/process of professional development activities, 4) offer professional development activities that related to authentic classroom situations, and 5) hire/assign high quality instructors in order to increase the satisfaction level of teachers with professional development activities. So, unless teachers’ dissatisfaction with professional development activities is addressed, policymakers and educators in the field of teacher professional development will continue to fall short of their goal to improve teacher abilities - specifically their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes - in the hopes of improving student achievement.

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Satisfaction Levels of Teachers in Professional Development Activities in Turkey


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