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Teachers' Perception of Online Professional Development: A Case of Chinese High School Teachers in Ningxia

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Abstract: The importance of utilizing the Internet to alleviate a range of training problems has been proved and accepted by teachers and educators. However, Chinese researchers found that less than 50% teachers eager to participate in online courses for their professional development. Therefore, research objective of this study was to identify Chinese high school teachers' perception toward usefulness and ease of use of online professional development (OPD). The participants consist of 120 teachers from 3 high schools in Ningxia. The instrument for data collection was 12-item questionnaire. The researchers adopted the Cronbach Alpha method to determine the reliability of the instrument. A reliability index of 0.84 was obtained. Two research questions were structured and data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that there was significant positive effect on the usefulness and ease of use of OPD among Chinese high school teachers. It was also recommended that to stimulate Chinese high school teachers' positive attitude toward OPD, the quality of OPD courses should be emphasized more by online educators.

Keywords: Online; Professional development; High school; Teacher; Attitude.

1. Introduction

The popularization of online learning provides high-quality professional development programs for every teacher who wants to distinguish himself/herself as the professional teacher (Ren *et al.*, 2014). Despite a number of studies have pointed to the importance of using the Internet to alleviate a range of training problems (Hartley and Bendixen, 2001; Vallieres, 2008), Chinese researchers still found that less than 50% teachers are eager to participate in online courses for their professional development, and some of the teachers who enroll online courses only for getting certificate as the evidence for their professional development record. In this sense, teachers' perception of online professional development needs to be investigated.

Some social psychologists (Hu, 2004; Wu, 1993) believe that attitude is a stable state of mind which represents the concept, object or person toward some issues. Every dimension of attitude, such as cognition, affection, and action, has its positive and negative aspect (Wu, 1993). Teachers, via online learning, can achieve the goal of in-service education or enrich their professional knowledge, so online learning should be considered as an effective way to promote their professional development (Hu, 2004). Besides, Howard (2006) emphasized that investigating in-service teachers' attitude towards OPD courses can facilitate course developers to devise and develop instruction so as to adequately cater for the educational needs of in-service teachers as well as other professional staff.

Under the background of Web-based technology becoming a kind of potential tool for supported collaborative learning, Liaw *et al.* (2008) investigate users' attitudes toward collaborative learning systems. The results show that system functions, system satisfaction, collaborative activities, learners' characteristics, and system acceptance are five attitude factors, which should be examined simultaneously when constructing a Web-based collaborative learning system. On the topic of Islamic education teachers' attitudes toward OPD in Saudi Arabia, the research findings by Albahiri (2010) reveal that teachers hold positive attitudes in general, but female teachers' attitudes are more positive than male teachers toward OPD.

By examining the findings from the evaluation of a large-scale professional development program for technology integration "Intel® Teach - Advanced Online" Research, findings by Todorova and Osburg (2009) reveal that German teachers have highly positive attitude on accepting and using the online platform for their professional development program. Majority of the teachers are satisfied with programs and willing to recommend it to their colleagues. Moreover, teachers who responded higher interest and more experiences in digital media as well as e-Learning are benefited more from OPD program compared with teachers with less experience. Teachers with

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positive attitude toward the e-Learning approach to professional development program and the online platform rate higher than those with negative attitude.

In response to the question of whether online self-regulated learning skills differentiate student attitudes towards the Internet and web-based education in web-based learning environments, Ertugrul (2011) survey 169 university students who participated in web-based education and found that students' attitudes toward web-based education is differentiated in terms of the factor of effectiveness of web-based instruction. Meanwhile, in the study of Liaw *et al.* (2008), 30 instructors and 168 college students were investigated to answer perceptions toward e-learning usage. Research findings show that teachers have very positive attitudes toward utilizing e-learning as their teaching aid tool. In addition, teachers' behavioral intention in using e-learning is affected by perceived usefulness and self-efficacy.

2. Research Objective

The research objective was to assess Chinese high school teachers' perception of OPD in Ningxia. Specifically, the study focuses on:

- (i) Identify the perceived usefulness of OPD among Chinese high school teachers in Ningxia.
- (ii) Identify the perceived ease of use of OPD among Chinese high school teachers in Ningxia.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- (i) What is the perceived usefulness of OPD among Chinese high school teachers in Ningxia?
- (ii) What is the perceived ease of use of OPD among Chinese high school teachers in Ningxia?

4. Methodology

The study employed quantitative research using survey approach. The researchers adopted this design since it is the most appropriate method of obtaining factual and behavioral information from selected samples (Olowoselu *et al.*, 2016a). The participants of the study comprises of 120 high school teachers that constituted the sample. The Attitudes toward Online Professional Development Survey (AOPD) used for this study was adapted from Kao *et al.* (2014). The questionnaire was validated by three experts in the School of Education and Modern Languages, Universiti Utara Malaysia. The researchers adopted the Cronbach Alpha method to determine the reliability of the instrument. A reliability index of 0.84 was obtained. The questionnaire was administered and all copies were completed and returned for analysis. A five points Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA=5), Agree (A=4), Undecided (U=3), Disagree (D=2) and Strongly Disagree (SD=1) was used for the items. Two research questions were answered using the descriptive statistic of mean and standard deviation. An item with a mean score of 2.51 and above was agreed, while item with a mean score of less than 2.50 was not agreed.

5. Results

Research Question 1: What is the perceived usefulness of OPD among Chinese high school teachers in Ningxia?

As shown in Table 1, all the 6 items were having their mean values ranging from 2.82 to 3.44 which were above the cut of point of 2.50. This indicated that the respondents accepted that all the items were perceived usefulness of OPD among Chinese high school teachers in Ningxia. The table further outlined standard deviation of the items which ranged from 0.28 to 0.34 which means that the respondents' opinions were very close based on their responses.

Table-1. Mean rating and standard deviation (SD) of perceived usefulness of OPD among Chinese high school teachers in Ningxia

S/N	Items	Mean	SD
1.	After attending OPD, my instruction becomes more interesting.	2.82	0.28
2.	After attending OPD, my creativity for instruction is increased.	3.23	0.32
3.	Attending OPD can effectively enhance my learning.	3.25	0.33
4.	Attending OPD can broaden my professional knowledge.	3.21	0.31
5.	Attending OPD can improve my teaching ability.	3.22	0.32
6.	OPD can encourage teachers to collaborate and share ideas.	3.44	0.34

Research Question 2: What is the perceived ease of use of OPD among Chinese high school teachers in Ningxia?

As presented in Table 2, all the 6 items with mean values ranging from 3.22 to 3.56 were above the cut of point of 2.50. This indicated that the respondents posited all items were perceived ease of use of OPD among Chinese high

school teachers in Ningxia. The table also shows close index of variability of all items which ranged from 0.32 to 0.36 standard deviation. This means that respondents were coherent in their opinions based on their responses.

Table-2. Mean rating and standard deviation of perceived ease of use of OPD among Chinese high school teachers in Ningxia.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD
1.	It is easier for me to attend OPD on the computer.	3.48	0.35
2.	It is easier for me to attend OPD on the Internet.	3.33	0.33
3.	It is convenient to receive training on the job by using OPD.	3.46	0.34
4.	The content of OPD is clear and understandable.	3.56	0.36
5.	The content of OPD is easy to access for learning.	3.45	0.34
6.	The learning of OPD is flexible.	3.22	0.32

6. Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that there is perceived usefulness of OPD among Chinese high school teachers while there is also perceived ease of use of OPD among Chinese high school teachers in Ningxia. The implication is that the respondents filled the questionnaire based on their experience which significantly influenced their opinions on the items since they were part of OPD training program attendants in Ningxia.

Certainly, the result was valid on the basis that it supported the finding of Liaw *et al.* (2007) who found several attitude factors as usefulness of OPD to teachers. This also means that Chinese school teachers tend to have good attitude toward OPD in Ningxia.

Finding also revealed that OPD can encourage teachers to collaborate and share ideas which were the usefulness of Chinese teachers attending OPD. This finding agrees with the finding of Todorova and Osburg (2009) who found over positive attitude of teachers toward OPD in school. This means that OPD is useful to teachers in schools. The finding of this study is also supported by the finding of Ertugrul (2011) who revealed positive attitude of teachers towards OPD in schools.

Consequently, finding has also shown that there is ease of use of OPD on the computer among Chinese high school teachers. This finding agrees with the finding of Olowoselu *et al.* (2016b) as they found computer skills have positive significant effect on professional development of teachers in schools.

Finding also revealed that attending OPD can broaden teachers' professional knowledge. This result has justified the finding of Albahiri (2010) and (Liaw *et al.* (2008)) who found significant positive attitude on the usefulness of OPD in schools.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

In accordance with the research findings, Chinese high school teachers positively accepted the perception of usefulness and ease of use of OPD. Specifically, encouraging teachers to collaborate and share ideas as well as effectively enhancing learning were the main reasons in usefulness of OPD proposed by school teachers after attending OPD. Additionally, clear and understandable OPD course content and ease of use on computer are the factors influencing teachers' attitude toward OPD. Therefore, it can be recommended that to stimulate Chinese high school teachers' positive attitude toward OPD, the quality of OPD courses should be emphasized more by online educators. Meanwhile, online professional learning community needs to be effectively utilized so as to facilitate teachers' cooperation and discussion in the course of OPD.

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