

## RESEARCH REPORT

### TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THEIR JOB AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN TURKEY: AN EFL PERSPECTIVE

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*Abstract – Various studies investigating the factors that affect professional development have found that both extrinsic factors such as pay and promotion and intrinsic rewards such as pride in work can supply motivation for professional development. This study aims to investigate the attitudes of Turkish EFL teachers toward their teaching career and professional development. In doing so, it also explores what cultural and/or political factors may affect Turkish EFL teachers' professional development. Data came from semi-structured interviews administered to 31 teachers working in 5 different English medium high schools in Istanbul. The findings indicate that these Turkish EFL teachers have positive feelings toward their careers and professional development to the extent that their personal values, abilities, and accomplishments match their expectations of the values, abilities, and accomplishments that should characterize a teacher. Moreover, the results also indicate that teachers' professional accomplishments, together with the recognition they receive from administrators and supervisors have a strong positive relationship to their attitudes toward professional development. Finally, similar to the findings of studies conducted in various cultural contexts, this research suggests that, extrinsic and intrinsic factors must receive complex interpretation in relation to work satisfaction of teachers and their attitudes toward professional development. Professional development has attracted increasing attention in recent years. It has been recognised that institutional conditions – such as the need for improving quality – and individual needs of teachers – such as job satisfaction and personal/professional growth – are the two inextricable dimensions of professional development.*

#### Introduction

**V**arious researchers who explored the possible effects of a range of personal circumstances on professional development concluded that planning professional development needs to take into consideration the individual teachers' needs. (Joyce and Showels, 1988; Craft, 1995; Hargreaves, 1994; Raymond et al, 1994).

Raymond et. al. (1992) argue that planning professional development requires an analysis of the following factors: a) The context of the teachers' current work b) The teachers' reflections on their past /present personal and professional lives c) The teachers' plan for their future professional lives.

This approach to professional development at the level of individual teacher is called biographical (Rudduck, 1988) or autobiographical (Craft, 1996) approach. In other words, this approach seeks to express the teacher's perspective and is based on the view that teachers need to reflect on their own experience to commit themselves to change (Rudduck, 1992). Hence this approach focuses on teachers' personal views on the nature of teaching and learning, personal growth, and professional development.

This paper presents the results of a pilot study conducted to investigate the factors that have a bearing on professional development in an EFL context. Before the study, ten Turkish EFL teachers were asked to briefly express their views on professional development and responses similar to the following were received:

- Professional development means re-evaluating one's own practice, one which had not been previously subjected to questioning.
- It means coming to understand our tacit theories and beliefs and it changes our value system.
- It means extra work and collaboration.
- Professional development involves self-discovery, and assuming responsibility for the outcomes of one's practice

These teachers also seemed to agree that the process of professional development is closely related to one's satisfaction with the job.

## **The study**

Three weeks after gathering the initial responses of ten teachers, thirty-one Turkish EFL teachers from five English medium high schools in Istanbul were interviewed. The purpose of this semi-structured interview was to find out what Turkish EFL teachers teaching in various Turkish high schools felt about their jobs and professional development.

### *Participants*

Twenty-two of the teachers who participated in this research were female, nine were male. Three of them had two years of experience. The rest had an average of ten years of experience. These teachers had been working in these schools for a minimum of two years. Eighteen of these teachers were from English medium

state high schools and thirteen of them were from English medium private high schools.

Seven of the teachers who participated in the study were involved in a collaborative project with the aim of exploring their students' writing problems in EFL and investigating whether the implementation of process writing approach could alleviate these problems.

### *The semi-structured interview*

The interview consisted of eighteen questions divided into three parts. Questions included in the first part investigated the teachers' work experience. The questions in the second and the third parts were aimed to tap what teachers felt about their jobs and their attitudes toward professional development (See Appendix I). Question five in part two was aimed at investigating teachers' job satisfaction based on the scales of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) developed by Weiss et al. (1967), and used by Pennington and Riley (1991) for a survey of job satisfaction in ESL. In other words, in line with the MSQ scales, job facets such as work load, payment, advancement, creativity, ability utilisation, autonomy, politics and proceedings and authority were integrated into question five. Question six was aimed at investigating the issue of teacher burnout. The third part of the questionnaire, was aimed at investigating the teachers' attitudes toward professional development.

### *Findings and discussion*

The results in relation to the questions tapping job satisfaction indicated low level of satisfaction with the payment and promotion and workload facets of the teaching profession. Specifically, there was a considerable dissatisfaction with recognition of achievement in the form of pay, benefits and promotions. Moreover, the teachers in general complained about the lack of opportunities for self expression, independence and professional responsibility. On the other hand, the teachers involved in the project mentioned previously seemed to be more satisfied with these internal motivators. In other words, the project seemed to enhance their self-esteem and motivation to continue to develop their professional competencies.

The discussions in relation to the question investigating whether the teachers felt disillusioned with their profession revealed that most of the teachers were moderately satisfied with their status in the community mainly because they were pleased with the performance of their students. However, in general, they thought that their self-esteem needs could be more satisfied if salaries were better.

Especially low salaries in comparison with those of foreign EFL teachers seemed to negatively affect their self-esteem. Moreover, findings of the survey indicated that the teachers wanted to be more involved in policy matters. They also believed that faculty meetings, and committee work could be improved in effectiveness. These findings seem to support the results of two studies conducted in the USA (Chase, 1985; Pennington, 1992).

According to the findings in relation to questions tapping teachers' attitudes toward professional development, the teachers in general believed that professional development involves consciousness raising which encourages assuming responsibility for one's own teaching and gradual empowerment. However, teachers working in the state schools in particular pointed out that in general there is a lack of initiative for professional development because they were not encouraged to express themselves due to set curricula and materials. They generally felt that changes, rather than dictated to teachers, could be brought about by teachers themselves; this would promote feelings of self actualisation and esteem. This finding once more highlights the need for interpreting 'the ownership of change' at the level of the individual teacher. In other words, the findings of this study reflect the principles of 'bottom-up' approaches to professional development. On the other hand, although these teachers complained about the curriculum and materials and thought that using materials dictated to them did not allow them much independence, the majority of them did not seem to be prepared to do much about it. For example, twelve teachers pointed out that they did not want to work for the materials development and testing offices of the school mainly because they thought such a job would require extra reading. These teachers in general believed that the role of a teacher is to teach, and that that was demanding enough as it was. Moreover, similar to the findings of studies conducted in various cultural contexts, these findings suggest that extrinsic and intrinsic factors must receive complex interpretation in relation to work satisfaction of teachers and their attitudes towards professional development.

In relation to the questions tapping the teachers' interest in reading in the field or attending seminars or workshops and keeping diaries, only six out of thirty-one teachers reported that they subscribed to ELT journals and four tried keeping diaries. On the other hand, eight teachers from private high schools reported that they could find some ELT journals in the resource room in their school.

Those who had not subscribed to ELT journals and those who reported that they never tried keeping diaries in general said that they were so overworked that they could not find time for reading journals and writing diaries. Seven teachers reported that they joined the Teachers' Center at the British Council. Moreover, twelve teachers pointed out that they tried to participate in local teacher workshops held at their institution or elsewhere. The rest attended workshops only when

they were organised in their own institutions. However, according to the teachers, these were one off workshops and were not organised projects which have professional development as their explicit aim. In other words, these workshops could not possibly prepare grounds for joint tasks and collaboration.

Further investigations about those seven teachers (three were working in state schools and four in private high schools) who reported that they joined the Teachers' Center at the British Council indicated that they were recognised by their colleagues and school authorities as essentially very active individuals engaging very enthusiastically with their environment. Discussions with these seven teachers revealed that they were interested in learning from their colleagues as well as in systematic self-study and testing of ideas by classroom research procedures. Four of these teachers believed that keeping diaries is one way of exploring their own practice over time. These seven teachers' professional enthusiasm about development and personal growth seem to support Joyce and Showers' (1988) beliefs that teachers' attitude toward professional development is affected by individual differences, i.e. the nature of their engagement with their environment and the state of their conceptual development.

In relation to the item investigating what the teachers thought of the concept of teacher as researcher, it was found that twenty one teachers felt that exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences could help them with reflection on their practice. However further discussions with these teachers revealed that most of them were not accustomed to systematically analysing their teaching behaviour or that of others. The remaining ten teachers (seven were involved in the collaborative project and three were from state schools) felt that the 'teacher-as-researcher' ideal implies systematic self-study and learning from the work of other teachers. They believed that in this way they would achieve professional and self-fulfilment. According to findings the teachers in general agreed that observing other teachers might be a useful way of collaboration and developing oneself. On the other hand, with the exception of the seven teachers involved in the collaborative project as mentioned earlier, and the three teachers from the two state schools, most teachers thought that being observed by other teachers could be rather disturbing. They felt that if they had to be observed, they preferred the evaluation of an expert eye. So they generally considered observations merely as a means of top-down evaluation conducted by outsiders rather than a way of peer-supported learning. This may be due to the fact that they are mostly observed once or twice a year by an inspector sent to schools by the state authorities.

On the other hand, the teachers involved in the collaborative project felt that teachers providing feedback to each other was more beneficial than being observed by an outsider. These findings seem to support the arguments of Zeichner et al. (1987:29) that colleagues have a greater effect than administrators,

even though their influence is conveyed most informally. Those teachers who reacted positively to both being observed and observing other teachers made comments similar to the following:

Observations encourage collaboration, and you can learn a lot.

Observations enable me to talk freely about my practices.

Observations can help both parties to reevaluate values and beliefs.

In relation to the question tapping the teachers' attitudes toward participation in the high school-university partnership for practice teaching programmes of the faculties of education, teachers believed that participation in such programmes would be beneficial for them in the sense that sharing experiences with student teachers could be one way of reflecting on their own practices.

However, they also commented that such activities were time consuming. In addition, they suggested that there should be some kind of a recognition for those teachers who are willing to participate in such a partnership with the universities. Hence these teachers' views of professional learning were affected by their experience and the types of school they teach in. Day (1991) for example argues that teachers judge professional learning opportunities in line with their attitudes which he thinks are mostly formed by their experiences.

## **Conclusion**

Most of the teachers who participated in this study, felt that professional development is a constant process which involves personal growth and self-empowerment. Yet, due to a heavy teaching load as well as have additional employment after school hours, they thought that there was not much time for such professional development activities.

The problem of low salary is a widespread phenomenon, especially in Turkish State schools. Low salaries force the majority of the teachers to look for a second job. Hence they almost have no time for designing their own materials and setting their own goals, let alone participating in other activities for professional development.

Furthermore, since research is not yet integrated into the role of a teacher in most schools in Turkey, teachers do not receive much help in order to develop observation and research skills which enable them to explore their own teaching or that of others and to analyse the outcomes of their practices in their classes. Hence, as Somekh (1993) has argued, teacher development programs need to instil the idea that research, like teaching, is a practical activity, and that it has a direct

bearing on what happens in the classroom. This approach to teacher development once more highlights the 'teacher as researcher' and 'action research' traditions, emphasising professional development based on self-study, action research and peer assisted learning.

In Turkey, especially in the majority of the state English medium high schools, there are not very many opportunities for teacher autonomy and decision-making. Teachers need to have some control over the situation, and that can happen if they understand, at the level of principle, what they are trying to achieve and why they are trying to achieve it. As Pennington (1992) points out, one cannot expect a person to be willing and committed to any work in which s/he has no power to change the state of the things. The fact that the findings of the study indicate that those teachers who were involved in a collaborative project in their school had more positive attitudes toward professional development supports this view. These teachers seemed to be committed to the planned changes in the pedagogy and curriculum in use because the research they were involved in gave them opportunities for reflecting on their practice freely, and 'deconstructing' (Fairclough, 1985) and transforming the existing beliefs where necessary. In this sense they were involved in professional development which engenders self-empowerment as 'a constant process of becoming' (Hopson et al., 1981).

Moreover, as the findings of this study indicate, there is no well-established system of recognition of quality in service in Turkish State schools. It is a well established fact that if teachers who perform remarkably well receive incentives and recognition, this could encourage others to improve their performance. As Joyce and Showers (1980) pointed out, teachers who are actively engaged in professional development may encourage their colleagues to make a similar commitment. However, one should also point out that individual differences may have a considerable effect on teachers' attitudes toward professional development.

Finally, the findings of the this study also suggest that the context of a teacher's current work plays a crucial role in creating a positive climate which engenders opportunities for teachers to realise their potential on their way to self-empowerment.

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## **APPENDIX I:**

### *Semi-structured interview administered to 31 EFL teachers*

#### **Part I**

- 1 sex: M \_\_\_\_\_ F \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 age: \_\_\_\_\_ school: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 How long have you been teaching English?
- 4 How many years have you been teaching in this school?

#### **Part II**

- 5 What do you think of the general working conditions in your school?
  - a) workload
  - b) payment
  - c) advancement
  - d) The chance to do different things from time to time
  - e) The chance to do something that makes use of your abilities
  - f) The freedom to use your own judgement in the choice of teaching materials
  - g) The competence of the head/principle in handling the teaching staff
  - h) The chance to be somebody in your school
- 6 Have you ever felt 'fed up' with your profession? If so, why?

#### **Part III**

How would you define the following?

- 7 teacher development
- 8 teacher autonomy
- 9 teacher as researcher

What do you think of the following?

- 10 joining professional organizations
- 11 participating in ELT conferences or seminars

- 12 subscribing to ELT magazines
- 13 participating in local teacher workshops held at your school or at other institutions
- 14 holding regular meetings with colleagues in your school to discuss common problems
- 15 keeping diaries
- 16 observing other teachers or other teachers observing you
- 17 working for the materials and/or testing office in your school
- 18 participating in high school-university partnership for school experience and practice teaching programs.