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Satisfaction with professional development: 
Relationship to teacher and professional development program characteristics

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between background characteristics, motivation patterns and program characteristics, and satisfaction from professional development programs (PD) among education personnel. Data were collected using a questionnaire from participants in 38 PD programs having different objectives and designed for different audiences. Differences in satisfaction were found among participants who demonstrated different patterns of motivation and possessed different perceptions of the PD program contribution. Hence, these factors should be addressed to garner support for additional PD training among education personnel.

Keywords: Professional development; satisfaction; motivation; educational personnel.

1. Introduction

Professional development (PD) is described as "any activity that intended primarily or partly to prepare paid staff members for improved performance in present or future roles in the school districts" (Little, 1987, p. 491). Actually, education personnel can be involved in an array of PD activities that include continuing education courses, reflecting on actual lessons (Schifter & Fosnot, 1993), group discussion concerning selected authentic artifacts (student work or instructional tasks) (Ball & Cohen, 1999), individual activities such as engaging in educative online venues (Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005), and self study and action research. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between background variables, motivation patterns and PD program characteristics and satisfaction from PD programs among education personnel in northern Israel.

1.1 Satisfaction with PD activities

Participant's satisfaction with PD processes is important for designing and improving future PD programs. Research has shown that participant's satisfaction can be used to assess the degree to which PD programs are effective in promoting professional development. The term 'satisfaction' is borrowed from marketing (Spreng,
Mackenzie, & Olshavsky, 1996). Clients usually have a set of standards or expectations in relation to the product or the service they purchase. If the experience meets their standards, clients experience feelings of satisfaction.

Alliger, Tannenbaum, Bennett, Winston, & Shotland (1997) suggest referring to satisfaction as a two-dimensional construct which comprised of affective and application (benefits) dimensions. In contrast, Fourneir and Mick (1999) proposed viewing satisfaction as a holistic concept which is context dependent and dynamic. They showed that motivation, attitudes, feelings and meanings which are developed on cultural-social grounds and shaped through the dialogue between the product and the client during use, are all incorporated in feelings of satisfaction.

Morgan and Casper (2000) tested the multi-dimensional structure of satisfaction and found that participants refer to six different dimensions that include attitudes towards the content of the PD program, program management, assessment and evaluation processes, benefits from PD program, the learning environment, learning materials and instructional aids, and the structure of the PD program.

According to the Israeli Ministry of Education, three dimensions measure participants' satisfaction from PD programs: teaching quality, program quality, and program relevance for the participants.

1.2 Correlates of teachers' satisfaction from PD activities

Three sets of factors can affect participant’s satisfaction with PD programs and processes: participant’s background, their motivation, and program characteristics. Background characteristics, such as education, experience, and school responsibilities are usually included in the criteria for participation in the PD program. Insights regarding the relationship between participants' characteristics and satisfaction are useful for matching programs to participants' needs (Early, 2005; Shui-Che, Kam-Wing, Kuen-Fung, Heung-Sang, & Seeshing, 2005; Steffy, 2000).

Given that individuals are responsible for the decision to participate in PD activities, it is likely that the level and source of their motivation affect that decision. Common approaches view motivation as mental and physical energy that drives individuals to perform tasks and provides a general and abstract explanation to their actions (Helms, 2006). In the literature there is a distinction between external and internal motivation (Rayn & Deci, 2000). The actions of individuals, who are externally motivated, are driven by incentives such as salary raise, an academic degree, and improvement in the conditions of their employment, or avoiding sanctions such as losing status or conditions. The actions of individuals, who are internally motivated, are driven by curiosity and interest, a belief that this is the right way to act, and enjoyment derived from being involved in the activity. Understanding the correlation between sources of motivation to participate in PD and satisfaction can guide policy-makers in seeking effective ways for encouraging education personnel to participate in PD activities.

The third set of variables that relate to satisfaction from PD programs refers to program characteristics. Components of the program should meet participants' expectation and needs in order for them to feel satisfied. Relevant components include objectives (i.e., focusing on subject matter vs. teaching strategies), the cultural target group to which it aims (in the Israeli context this refers to Arabic speaking vs. Hebrew speaking communities), and the education level to which it aims (preschool, elementary or secondary).

In all cultures people report that they interested in positive feelings rather than negative (Scollon, Diener, Oishi, & Biswas, 2004). Also in all cultures, feelings are classified as pleasant or unpleasant, favorable or unfavorable, and most feelings are classified the same across cultures. However, some feelings are classified differently in different cultures. The way feelings are classified depends on whether they are beneficial or harmful to individual well-being and needs and to cultural norms. It is likely that education personnel from the Arab and the Jewish communities have different needs and have different expectations from PD activities. Consequently, participants from the two communities are likely to judge the merits of PD programs in reference to these different needs and expectations and as a result they will be satisfied to different degrees.

The present study examined the relationships among these clusters of variables as depicted in Figure 1.
2. Method

2.1 Participants

Data were collected from 499 education staff in 38 PD programs that took place in a center for education personnel development. Six of these programs were intended for preschool staff, 19 for elementary school staff, eight for high school staff, and the remaining five were general. Thirty one of the programs were designed for Hebrew speaking participants, while seven were for Arabic speaking personnel. As to the subject of the PD programs, 20 were devoted to subject matter, nine were for personnel who carry out non-teaching responsibilities, and nine focused on curriculum and personal enrichment.

2.2 Instrument

This study made secondary use of evaluation data that were collected by means of a questionnaire that addressed participant's background characteristics (experience, education, and school role), source of motivation (internal, external, and mixed) to join the PD program, and program characteristics (objective, cultural group, and educational level), and satisfaction with the program.

3. Findings

Findings indicated no significant difference in satisfaction between participants who differ in experience, education, and school role.

Participants manifested three patterns of motivation: external, internal and mixed. Results of ANOVA comparing the mean satisfaction of participants by their source of motivation revealed significant differences (F=12.00, p<.001, η² = .05). Participants with internal and mixed sources of motivation were significantly more satisfied. Source of motivation accounted for 5% of the variance in satisfaction from the PD program.

ANOVA analysis indicated that participants who perceived the PD program as contributing to their professional status or to both their professional and organizational status were significantly (F = 48.33, p<.001, η² = .18) more satisfied than participants who perceived the program as not contributing, neither to their professional nor to their organizational status. The pattern of perceived contribution accounted for 18% of the variance in participant’s satisfaction with the program.

The differences in level of satisfaction of participants by program objectives and school level were not statistically significant. Participants in PD programs intended for Hebrew-speaking education personnel were
significantly (Mann-Whitney (Z) = -2.19, p<.05, d=.13) more satisfied than participants in PD programs intended for Arabic speaking education personnel. Cultural group membership accounted for 13% of the variance in satisfaction.

Three regression models predicting satisfaction from the PD program by participant and program characteristics were tested: with the total sample and all predictors, for Hebrew speaking personnel, and for Arabic speaking personnel. Inspection of the results indicated that the regression coefficients of many of the predictor variables were not statistically significant, therefore the regression analyses were rerun with those having significant coefficients only and results are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Total Sample (N=499)</th>
<th>Hebrew Speaking (N=276)</th>
<th>Arabic Speaking (N=424)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural group</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Position</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and home class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General and home class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source of motivation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived contribution</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional status</td>
<td>0.39***</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional/organizational status</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No contribution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>-0.26***</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>11.84***</td>
<td>19.12***</td>
<td>4.47**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was found that 13% of the variance in satisfaction with the PD programs for the total sample was accounted for by perceived contribution of these programs, school level, cultural group, and sources of motivation. The level of satisfaction was higher when the program was perceived as contributing to the participant's professional status or to both the organizational and professional status, when the program was intended for a specific level of education (i.e., not general), and when the program was intended for Hebrew speaking participants.

For the Hebrew speaking group, results indicated that 12% of the variance in participants' satisfaction from the PD programs was accounted for by perceived contribution and the level of education to which the program was aimed. The level of satisfaction was higher when the program was perceived as contributing to the participant's professional status or to both the organizational and professional status and when the program was not intended for specific level of education (i.e., not general).

Only role at school was found to be significantly related to satisfaction of Arabic speaking participants and accounted for 12% of the variance in the latter variable. Participants who were not specific subject matter teachers were more satisfied than the others.
4. Summary and Conclusions

The expectation to find differences in satisfaction among participants with different personal and professional backgrounds was not confirmed. High and similar levels of satisfaction with PD activities were found among participants with differing personal and professional characteristics. Indeed, the contribution of these characteristics to predicting satisfaction was found to be quite small. Identifying other characteristics that affect satisfaction should be the topic of future research. Concurrently, and considering that PD training is a product of interest to education personnel, further efforts should be made to identify relevant attributes of potential participants, to discover what causes them to continue to take part in PD training, and to examine which sectors are not attracted to professional development activities and why.

Differences in satisfaction were found among participants with different patterns and sources of motivation and different perceptions of PD program contribution. Due to the significance of these variables in predicting satisfaction, the system must pay attention to them when attempting to motivate participants to participate. These factors must also be used to garner support for additional PD training. In this way, education personnel will be able to develop a clear perception of how PD training can contribute to their professional career.

References


