

Difficulties in the Empowerment of Iraqi Teachers of English through professional Development Activities.

Key word : Development Activities

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Abstract

Completing a Teaching (TesL, TefL) program is the beginning of a life time of professional growth. Teaching is in itself, a continuous growth experience, since one really (learns) something only when asked to explain or teach it to others. Students are often our best teachers and you will learn from new students each term.

Professional development is an ongoing process, one that evolves as you assess and reexamine your teaching beliefs and practices .It is self-empowerment and deciding to take the first step is your responsibility and that step is well worth taking .

Therefore, this research has been tackled to shed the light on the main difficulties existing in the empowerment of Iraqi teachers of English through professional development activities It also aims at identifying and classifying these difficulties.

To fulfill this aim, a sample of 100 teachers of English at the preparatory and intermediate schools in Diyla Governorate are considered to be the subjects of this research.

A scaled questionnaire as an instrument of measurement is used in this research to be an investigatory tool.

The results of this research proves that the hypothesis of this study which reads that Iraqi teachers of English face difficulties in their empowerment through professional development activities is verified and accepted.

Chapter one :Introduction

1.1 Statement of the problem and its significance.

One of the main reasons to pursue professional development is to be empowered to have the opportunity and the confidence to act upon your ideas as well as to influence the way you perform in your profession .Empowerment is the process through which teachers become capable of engaging in ,sharing control of ,and influencing events and institutions that affect their lives. (Murray,2010:3)

Many English language teaching experts believe that ongoing professional development is essential, especially in today's world of constantly changing technology. Teachers of English who have been trained to use new techniques and resources are more inclined to try them with their students . (chisman&Grandall,2007:201)

Relating to the same point, Murray (2010:3) states that feeling empowered manifest leader _ship skills and teacher development leads to improvement in student's performance and attitude.

Ur (1996:50)asserts that although English teachers have seen a lot of progress, they have not yet reached a satisfactory level of professionalism . She also asks if English teachers can be rightly called professionals. Richards& Renandya (2002:391)add that there are still too many amateurs who think that it is enough to know English in order to teach it, resulting in the lowering of teaching standards

Murry (2010:3) also points out that teachers all around the world face similar challenges due to the very nature of school environment .They teach their classes independently from their colleagues, which make them feel isolated. She adds that some teachers can become overwhelmed by the demands of school bureaucracy and if they don't receive regular supervision or feedback, they can become frustrated.

Therefore, this study has been tackled to shed light on the main obstacles that Iraqi teachers may face in their empowerment through professional development activities.

1.2 Aim of the study

The present study aims at identifying and classifying the difficulties Iraqi teachers may face in their empowerment through professional development activities.

1.3 Limits of the study

This study is limited to:

- Teachers of English in Diyla General Directorate of Education.

1.4 The Hypothesis.

It is hypothesized that Iraqi teachers of English face difficulties in their empowerment through professional development activities.

1.5 Procedures.

To achieve the aim of the present study, the following procedures will be adopted by the researcher to collect data:

- Choosing a number of teachers from Diyla Directorate of Education (at random) to represent the study sample.
- Preparing an elicitation tool (rating scale questionnaire) under the supervision of a number of specialists who examine its validity and make any comments, suggestion and modifications if necessary.
- Interpreting the results in the light of the hypothesis by using the proper statistical means that suits the nature of the study.

1.6 Value of the study.

- The present study is expected to be of value for Iraqi teachers who may benefit from its results about this essential aspect that may cause difficulties to find the possible solutions in the light of the recommendation.
- It is going to provide feedback about this essential part of the teacher development.

1.7 Definition of Basic Terms.

Difficulty. a thing hard to be done or overcome, something that causes labor or perplexity in mastering, solving or achieving a hard enterprise (Webster,2002:630)

Empowerment .It is the process through which teachers become capable of engaging in ,sharing control of ,and influencing events and institutions that affect their lives. (Murray,2010:3)

Professional Development :it is systematic practice of improving one's skill and knowledge within a professional domain in this case, teaching.

(Beckman & Klinghammer, 2006: 143)

Chapter two Theoretical Background

2.1 Professional Development.

Professional development refers to skills and knowledge attained for both personal development and career advancement. It encompasses all types of facilitated learning opportunities, ranging from college degrees to formal course work, conferences and informal learning opportunities situated in practice. It has been described as intensive and collaborative ideally incorporating an evaluative stage. (Bolarfinwa,2003:10). There are variety of approaches to professional development among these is the following:

- **Consultation:** to assist an individual or group of individual to clarify and address immediate concern by following a systematic problem solving process.
- **Coaching and mentoring:** to enhance a person's competencies in a specific skill area by providing a process of observation, reflection and common goal.

Galbraith & Anstrom(1995:10) point out that peer coaching is somewhat different from peer mentoring in that the participating teachers, see themselves as equal. Together they select an area of teaching or a classroom related problem they would like to focus on.

They (ibid) add that coaching has proven to be an effective means of increasing collegiality as well as refining teaching skills.

It should be noted that in setting up a peer coaching situation, it is important to choose a colleague whom you respect and trust. Think of the "coach" as the partner who can offer construction criticism in an judgment way.

Murray (2010:6) states that peer mentoring is one of the techniques that is useful for teachers who have not spent much time in the English language classroom. It is also useful for experienced teachers as it motivate them to reflect on and refine their own teaching strategies and practices. Mentoring, then, is meant to be used to or evaluate,

instead, it provides opportunities to focus on individual teachers, provide support, share knowledge and experience and ask question.

Murcia(2001:533) adds that ongoing coaching and mentoring is also likely to highlight areas of one's own teaching that one may want research or lead one to search for instructional materials or references works on topics that one may not have considered previously.

- **Lessons study:** it means solving practical dilemmas related to intervention or instruction through participation with other professionalists in systematically examining practice.
- **Reflection Practice:**

It means supporting, developing and ultimately evaluating the performance of employees through a process of inquiry that encourages their understanding and articulation of the rational for their own practice. (Jasper,2006:20)

Reflection can also be defined as a way of thinking about educational matters that involves the ability to make rational choices. It requires that the teacher be introspective, open- minded, and willing to accept responsibilities for decisions and actions. Reflection facilitates learning and continued profession growth and it is an important factor in the ability of teachers to be effective throughout their careers (steffy etal,2000:55)

Reflection, then, is a signification component of self- study and action research as it is a powerful way to know about the self in research and practice as well as to unpack the very self in teaching practice. Reflection practice in teacher education allows teacher educators to explore how teachers learnby including "I" in an epistemology of reflective practice.

Bechman & Klinghamer (2006:144) add that reflective means thinking about what happens in the classroom, both in terms of teaching itself and in terms of the learner response and then, try to improve it.

Farrell (1998:5) on the other hand, states that reflective teaching helps free teachers from impulsive behavior or, on the other extreme, from monotony in their teaching. It also allows teachers to develop their own educational perspectives.

He (ibid) adds that teachers can benefit from sharing their reflective teaching experiences with their colleagues and one way to take control of one's own learning is through cooperation with other teachers. Collegial cooperation can help teachers become more assertive and decisive about their personal learning. It can also boost their confidence and empower them to find solution to challenges they face in their teaching.

- **Self- study method.**

Teachers research plays an increasing signification role in contemporary society as a basis for self- exploration and inquiry. for the last decades there have been active scholarly efforts to formalize self- study research as an accepted form of inquiry and further the framework as a promising research paradigm in educational research. The self- study grounds action research as one form of teacher- research, which has been emerged as a methodology in educational research to help teachers engage in inquiry, structures and social arrangement that dominate segments of the "population" some of which teachers themselves might reinforce. Accordingly self- study research is :

- Personal situated inquiry.
- Critical collaborative inquiry.
- A transparent and systematic research process
- Knowledge generation and presentation.

(Cohen &Manion,2011:15)

Self- study of teaching practices begins to build the muscles for professional development as a lifelong process. It reminds us that some of the hardest and most important work is to working on oneself. Self- study can build teachers efficacy be encouraging teachers to be a gents of their own learning and reform initiatives while collaborating with professional collogues to their daily and long- term work with students. Cooperation can help teachers become more assertive and decisive about their personal learning. It can also boost their confidence and empower them to find solutions to challenges they face in their teaching.(ibid)

- **Technical Assessment.**

It means assisting individuals and their organizations to improve by offering resources and information, supporting networking and change effort

- **Working collaboratively with professionals in other fields.**

The more one teach, the more likely he/she begins asking questions about his/her own classroom, learners or teaching practice. These questions can serve as the basis of a series of ongoing research projects of his own. (Murcia2001:549)

Murray(2010:9) mentions three main collaboration techniques that can be considered as means of pursuing professional development .

These are:

- Forming or joining local and national teacher's associations.
- Urging your association to connect with other association .
- Becoming active in an international professional association .

She (ibid) highlights the importance of joining professional associations by saying that these are good ways to connect colleagues and pursue personal goal for professional development. The benefit of becoming a member of an international organization includes receiving regular newsletter, being a part of interest groups that focus on teaching topics and issues that concern you, and having the opportunities to share and learn from other like- minded individuals.

- **Participation in workshops and conferences.**

Richards & Farrel (2005:20) point out that the purpose of workshop is to provide teachers with the opportunities to learn more about a specific area or skill related to teaching and learning (in this case, English language). They are designed to give participants a chance to try out practical application about the topics being presented and to contemplate how they might utilize or adopt elements of the activity for us in their own classrooms. They also assert that participation in conferences is an excellent way for teachers to gain confidence and demonstrate their expertise.

- Subscribing to journals and regularly reading periodicals about language teaching and learning and related field.

- Another way to keep current is to read and respond to journals in the field and to submit comments, book reviews and articles to them.
- Working on curriculum or text book developments teams in ESL program.
- Serving on text books selection committees in ESL. Program.
- Participating in summer institutes or special graduate program to augment and update knowledge and skills.
- Offering to review texts, for publishers or journals.
- Participating in electronic (e- mail) discussion groups and using internet to access language teaching and learning websites and electronic journals.

The internet has created global access for professional development through e- mail electronic lists (e- mail discussing group) and the world wide web, where accessing one website may lead to scores of other interesting sits linked to it. The online format also support the discrimination of more time – bound information such as notices of conferences, employment opportunities and political issues and promote interaction through email or discussion groups (Murcia, 2001:543-546)

Chapter Three

Methodology & Procedures

3.1.An Introductory Note.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology and procedures used to conduct the present study which is designed to shed light on the main obstacles that Iraqi teachers face through professional development activities.

This chapter provide detailed description of the population and sample design, data collection, procedures instrumentation, validate, reliability and scoring scheme.

3.2.Population and sample selection.

The population of this study comprises the teachers of English at the primary and secondary stages in General Directorate of Education in Diyla Governorate.

Berg (2004:34) states that the logic of using a sample of subjects is to make inferences about larger population from a smaller one (a sample).

So the sample of the research consists of primary and secondary schools distributed between the center of Baquba and sub directorate of AL- Khalis province(50 teachers for each).Twenty teachers have been randomly chosen for the participation in the pilot study. The participants in the pilot study were excluded from the sample of the final administration of the questionnaire, so the sample of the teachers consists of 100 teachers of English.

3.3 Instrument of the study.

To achieve the aim and to verify the hypothesis, questionnaire has been constructed by the researcher, as shown in table (1).

So, the researcher has constructed a closed questionnaire and considered it as the main instrument of the present study. It consists of (15)items. The items are supposed to conclude teachers' difficulties by three rating scales. I agree, I partially agree, I disagree. The items represent the most important difficulties in joining professional development activities from teachers point of view of.The type of questionnaire that is used in this study is rating scales questionnaire. In this scale, people can show how strongly they agree or disagree with the items of the questionnaire.

Table -1- Questionnaire Items

No	Items	I agree	I partially agree	I refuse
1-	Enhancing professional learning and fulfillment through collaboration with other colleagues is rather a difficult task as teachers used to teach their classes independently from their colleagues.			
2-	Improving teachers demands offering resources and information supporting networking and change effort. i.e., it demands technical assistance.			
3-	Problem solving activities and inquiry is difficult within the constrains of classroom life.			

4-	Most Iraqi teachers do not know how to conduct action research because they rely heavily on the academic research.			
5-	Most teachers lack the research base to support effective instruction.			
6-	Most teachers are not aware of professional opportunities, including local and national organizations.			
7-	They do not undertake a wide range of activities for improving their competence or enhancing their profession.			
8-	Teachers rarely committ to reflection practice, which is an essential part of continuing professional development, as it requires an environment of support.			
9-	Most Iraqi teachers try to develop only their knowledge of subject matter and not their knowledge of pedagogy.			
10	They rarely participate in effective workshops which help them to upgrade their knowledge language learning.			
11-	Most teachers have never attended at conferences which motivate them to try new techniques or find solutions to recurring problems in the classroom.			
12-	Promoting teachers' awareness and refinement of their own professional development need providing and recommending structural opportunities for reflection and observation.			
13-	Most teachers don't have enough awareness of the value of professional development which becomes a top priority.			
14	Most Iraqi teachers are not receptive to alternative perspective on routinized practice to update and modify their knowledge.			
15	Professional development components include monthly meetings of support groups in which teachers learn new strategies discuss concerns and share ideas which may cause load on the part of most Iraqi teachers of English.			

3.4 Face Validity.

To ensure face validity, the questionnaire was exposed to a jury of experts* in the field of English language. They are especially required to determine the suitability of the questionnaire items to the sample of the study and to propose and make any necessary suggestions for modifications, deletions, or addition that enrich and sharpen the test. The jury have agreed that the test and procedures are suitable except for some modification which have been taken in to consideration.

* The jury of expert consists of the following members whose names are arranged alphabetically:

1- Arwa, Abd Al- Rasuel (Ph.D) College of Education for Human Sciences. University of Diyla.

2-Kalil .I. Hadidi (Ph.D) College of Education for Human Sciences. University of Diyla.

3-Fatima, Al- Saddy (Ph.D) College of Basic Education. University of Meyssan.

4-Nakham, kdwri (Ph.D) College of Education. University of Tikrit.

5-Salam, Al Temimy (Ph.D) College of Education (Ibn Rushed). University of Baghdad.

6-Shaymaa', Al-Bekri (Ph.D) College of Education (Ibn Rushed). University of Baghdad.

3.5 The pilot Administration of the Questionnaire.

After constructing the questionnaire, a pilot study has required to find out exactly whether the questionnaire is well constructed or not. Thirty teachers of English has been chosen for the pilot administration of the questionnaire.

Results of the pilot administration can be considered a good indication for making any necessary modification in the final version of the questionnaire and to determine the effectiveness of the items in the light of the subjects responses.

3.6 Reliability of the Questionnaire.

Test- retest reliability method has been applied to compute the reliability of the questionnaire. test- retest reliability indicates that the same respondent respond to the questionnaire twice, the researcher would get the same answer each time, this notion is the basis of the test-

retest reliability by asking the same respondent to complete the survey items of the questionnaire at different time. If the correction between the first set of answer and the second is greater than (0.70), ones can assume that the test retest reliability is good (Cooper, 2006:15)

Thus, test-retest reliability coefficient of the first and second administration of the questionnaire indicates (0.84) which is considered high.

3.7 Final Administration of the Questionnaire

The final version of the questionnaire was distributed to the subjects at the beginning of April, 2013. The teachers were asked to give their views regarding items according to scale of three dimension. The teacher responses have been utilized by the researcher.

3.8 Overall Performance.

In order to investigate the hypothesis of the study which reads(Iraqi teachers of English face difficulties in their empowerment through professional development activities), the responses of the subjects were investigated by using the mean and the theoretical mean formula. The mean score of the subjects was (40.62) as it is compared to the theoretical mean (30).

This result indicates that the mean is higher than the theoretical mean. This proves that Iraqi teachers of English face difficulties in their empowerment through professional development activities. Accordingly, the hypothesis mentioned above is verified and accepted.

4-Conclutions, Recommendations and Suggestions for further Studies

4.1. Conclusions:

After presenting the main difficulties faced by Iraqi teachers in their empowerment through professional development activities, the researcher considered the weighted mean of the items that ranges from (70-85%) as difficult topics. Consequently, eight items were considered difficult as it is shown clearly

Table (2)
Weighted mean of the questionnaire items

Item No	I agree	I partially agree	I refuse	The weighted mean
1	70	13	17	70%
2	60	27	13	60%
3	72	17	11	72%
4	40	20	40	40%
5	45	15	40	45%
6	55	23	22	55%
7	30	25	45	30%
8	75	20	5	75%
9	73	17	10	73%
10	71	16	13	71%
11	80	10	10	80%
12	78	10	12	78%
13	65	22	13	65%
14	63	20	18	63%
15	85	10	5	85%

الملخص

صعوبات تقوية مدرسي اللغة الانكليزية العراقيين خلال أنشطة التطور المهني الكلمة المفتاح : التطور المهني

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أن إكمال برنامج لتدريس اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة ثانية أو أجنبيه هو حياة كاملة من التطور المهني . وأن التدريس بحد ذاته هو خبرة متنامية لان المدرس يتعلم ايضا من خلال توضيح وتدريس المادة للطلبة في كل فصل دراسي جديد .

أن التطور المهني هو عمليه مستمرة لتقييم الخبرات التدريسية وهو تقويه ذاتية للمدرس نفسه لذلك أعدت هذه الدراسة لتسليط الضوء على أهم الصعوبات التي يواجهها مدرسو اللغة الإنكليزية العراقيون في تقويتهم من خلال أنشطة التطور المهني وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد وتصنيف تلك الصعوبات ولتحقيق هذا الهدف ، تم استخدام مقياسا مدرجا كوسيلة بحثيه وإحصائية لعينه مكونه من (١٠٠) مدرس في مديرية تربية محافظة ديالى .

أثبتت النتائج بان ألفرضيه القائلة أن مدرسي اللغة الإنكليزية يواجهون صعوبات في تقويتهم خلال أنشطة التطور المهني قد تم قبولها.

Conclusions remarks can be clearly pointed out as

1-Item number (15) which reads "professional development components includes monthly meetings of support groups in which teachers learn new strategies discuss concerns and share ideas, which may cause load on the part of most Iraqi teachers" constituted the most difficulty for teachers. It got a weighted mean of (85%).

2-Item number (11) which reads "most teachers have never attended at conferences which motivate them to try new techniques or find solutions to recurring problems in the classroom" constituted the second difficulty for teacher's .It got a weighted mean of (80%)

3-Item number (12)which reads "promoting teachers awareness and refinement of their own professional development need providing and recommending structural opportunities for reflection and observation" constituted the third difficult for teachers It got weighted mean of (78%)

4. Item number (8) which reads, "Teachers rarely commit to reflection practice,which is an essential part of continuing professional development, as it requires an environment of support" constituted the fourth difficulty for teachers .It got weighted means of (75%)

5-Item number (9) which reads "most Iraqi teacher try to develop only their knowledge of subject matter and not their knowledge of pedagogy" constituted the fifth difficulty for teachers .It got a weighted mean of (73%).

6- Item number (3) which reads "problem solving activities and inquiry is difficult within the constraints of classroom life "constituted the sixth difficulty for teacher's .It got a weighted mean of (72).

7-Item number (10) which reads "they rarely participate in effective workshops which help them to upgrade their knowledge of language learning "constituted the seventh difficulty .It got a weighted mean of (71).

8-Item number (1)which reads "enhancing professional learning and fulfillment through collaboration with other colleagues is rather difficult

task as they used to teach their classes independently from their colleagues" constituted the eighth difficulty for teachers .It got a weighted mean of 70.

4.2 Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations.

In the light of the findings achieved and conclusions derived, the following pedagogical implications and recommendation are drawn as follows:

1-The ministry of Higher Education could utilize the result of the present study by cooperating with the ministry of Education to set up a course or workshops pertaining the concept of professional development of the teacher training Institutes. under and post graduates need to receive proper knowledge of the concept of professional development and the significance of its positive impact on the teaching / learning process.

2- Teachers informed by a sense of independent professionalism will be receptive to alternative perspectives on routinized practice, and they will seek to update and modify their knowledge and work in ways that are consistent with their developing views.

3- Teaching is a lifelong learning. It's that learning "the best part of teaching" which motivate many English language professionals to keep teaching when the benefits from other jobs would otherwise draw them away .

4-Effective professional development is self-empowerment and deciding to take the first step is your responsibility, and that step is well worth taking

5- Conferences participation enables teachers to develop long-lasting professional and personal contacts in the English teaching community .It can empower teachers to be leaders.

6-Development of teaching competence is our professional responsibility and we can undertake a wide range of activities in the fulfillment of this obligation ,so,there are courses to take, journals to read,collegues to talk with and observe ,classroom research to conduct ,textbook for review and workshops to attend .This range of professional development opportunities allow us to develop a comprehensive, yet personal professional development plan.

7- Learning to pose questions, search for your own answers, and be agent of your own learning in collaboration with critical friends will provide you with systematic collegial support for accountability in your practice.

4.3-Suggestions for further studies.

1- A similar study is needed to investigate the difficulties faced by Iraqi instructors in their empowerment through professional development activities.

2- A study is needed to investigate the effectiveness of joining professional development activities on the development of Iraqi English teaching competence.

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