

Investigating Teachers' Perceptions of the Influence of Professional Development on Teachers' Performance and Career Progression

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Abstract

Understanding a process is the key to maximizing the outcomes of such a process; teachers' professional development (PD) can be further facilitated through fully apprehending the process by which they grow professionally and the factors that contribute to such growth. In this study, the author intends to explore the relationship between a school environment and teachers' readiness for PD as well as how they perceive of the impact of PD on their professional and personal qualities, students' performance, teachers' career progression, and commitment to the job and workplace. The author administered semi-structured interviews with three English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers who are in their mid-career stage and work for private, American curriculum-based schools in Dubai. The results show that all three interviewees admit the positive influence of PD on their professional performance, personal qualities, students' outcomes, career progression and commitment to the profession. How a progressive school culture would impact teachers' inclination towards PD has also been brought to attention by the interviewees as a critical aspect. As potential areas of research on PD, it is recommended that students' academic performance is to be looked into closely through examining their assessment results in order to muster tangible evidence on the significance of teachers' PD. Also, a conversation analysis of classroom discourse following a number of classroom observations of teachers in different career stages would be another informative research method to investigate the impact of PD on teachers' performance and on classroom dynamics.

Keywords: professional development, differentiated professional development, school culture, teacher's commitment, career progression

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Introduction

A holistic view of professionalism based on the external and internal processes a teacher undertakes was offered by Evans and Waring (2014). They considered professionalism as a combination between interactive and people-centered methods where professional standards are maintained, knowledge is enhanced, and expertise is achieved. They went on to say that professionalism could be interpreted differently depending on the individual's occupation, status, expertise, and purpose. Teacher professionalism is said to be deeply intertwined with their professional identity and beliefs about the requirements of being a good teacher. They also suggested a dichotomy between professionalism and professionality. For them, professionalism is a functional aspect that is related to a teacher's status, while professionality has more to do with a teacher's skills, knowledge, and conduct. Describing a professional as a trained, qualified expert who demonstrates practical competence was induced by Leung (2009).

Teaching is a professional job; teachers are supposed to develop and improve their skills continually. By tenacious learning, teachers' professional degree and performance can be enhanced; professional qualifications are socially and politically viewed as powerful indicators of teacher professionalism (Leung, 2009). Teachers' PD refers to the re-establishment, development, and expansion of teachers' knowledge and skills. Innovation in teachers' professional development involves teachers' practical experience and the formation of instructional strategies that allow students to gain autonomous, reflective, and critical thinking skills. PD is said to be a cognitive and personal attempt that requires engagement with new ideas, trying new approaches, improving pedagogy as well as emotional involvement (Girvan, Conneely & Tangney, 2016).

Thus, exploring teachers' insights into the impact of PD on their teaching abilities, knowledge, and career advancement is pivotal to gaining a comprehensive understanding of the existent as well as the potential obstacles teachers might face. As the head of the English department, the author feels compelled to find out how the teaching faculty feel towards PD sessions organized by the school and the speculated impact on them and their students; thus, the present study is meant to seek answers for the following question:

1. How does school culture influence teachers' inclination to PD?
2. What is the impact, if any, of PD on teachers' performance and students' outcomes?
3. Is there any relationship between PD and teachers' commitment and career progression?

Through answering the research questions, the study in hand will add some empirical knowledge on PD to the existent body of literature; examining how PD systems work at some private schools and whether they accomplish their purposes as intended or not from a more practical viewpoint is still needed in order to illuminate the issues at stake.

Literature Review

Mizell (2010) defined professional development as any educational experience related to a practitioner's work. Individuals in a wide range of professions take part in professional development to learn and apply new skills and knowledge that would enhance their professional performance. In the educational field, research has shown that school leadership and teaching quality are the main contributing factors in boosting student achievement. School leaders continually strive to bring about and implement the best educational practices and professional

development is the main strategy through which school systems bolster teachers' performance levels. McIntyre, Hobson, and Mitchell (2009) claimed that successful PD tends to take place in schools with a culture focused on the learning of staff as well as students.

Formal, Informal, and Differentiated PD

In literature, PD refers to both formal and informal learning activities specifically designed to enhance teachers' professional knowledge, capabilities, competence, motivation, self-efficacy, and beliefs (Coldwell, 2017). Richter, Kunter, Klusmann, Lüdtke, and Baumert (2011) defined formal PD as structured learning environments where experts impart knowledge to teachers to help them sharpen their skills, e.g., training courses, workshops, and conferences. They referred to informal PD as those activities that comprise no specific curriculum, nor they mandate a particular environment. Informal PD includes individual activities on the part of the teachers, e.g., reading narratives of colleagues, observing classes, contributing to joint activities such as teachers' networks, blogs, and study groups. More to the point, empirical studies showed that novice teachers tend to use observations and informal discussions with peers to improve their practices, while more experienced teachers tend to participate in more formal meetings for their professional learning. Avalos' study (2011) pointed out that teachers in their early "survival and discovery" (p. 118) years usually report problems with class management and effective teaching approaches; such issues can be resolved through mentoring and peer observation as well as other informal means of exchanging practical knowledge. In contrast, teachers pursue more formal learning opportunities as they grow towards their mid-career phase. Mid-career teachers tend to gain more professional knowledge in the areas of subject content, pedagogy, teaching methods, and performance standards through formal activities such as conferences, workshops, and training courses. Generally, teachers seem to have different preferences for their learning opportunities across their career cycle.

Taylor, Yates, Meyer, and Kinsella (2011) mentioned that teachers' PD does not necessarily acknowledge the fact that teachers are not a homogeneous population and that they rather represent diverse perspectives, experience, expertise, receptiveness to new ideas, as well as the potential for leadership roles. PD cannot be considered a generic or a one-size-fits-all model; teachers' needs, experience, career stage, beliefs, students, and school context should be taken into consideration. Professional learning should begin with instigating reflection on teachers' needs and demands instead of imposing unified PD opportunities (Tait-McCutcheon & Drake, 2016). Taylor et al. (2011) advocated differentiated PD for teachers based on their level of experience and expertise; it was noticed that granting teachers the chance to choose the type of PD they need enhances their self-efficacy and pedagogical knowledge. It was also mentioned in the related body of literature that providing that type of differentiated and responsive support to meet teachers' learning needs could lend a helping hand to enhancing teachers' professional commitment (Day & Gu, 2007).

Professional Development and School Culture

Avalos (2011) contended that professional development is not only about how teachers learn, but also how they transform their knowledge into practice for the maximum benefit of their students. Teachers' PD is a complex process that entails cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers, and the capacity and readiness to examine one's convictions and beliefs and to explore

the available alternatives for improvement; this necessitates particular educational environments or school cultures that are permissive and conducive to learning. Different studies referred to school culture as an indicator of the school's philosophy and attitude. This notion implies how the administrative and organizational structures operate and interact to enhance or restrict teachers' workplace learning. School traditions, mission, vision, and administrative arrangements influence how teachers appreciate their work and how they interact professionally among themselves. Various subject departments that are seen as forms of the school organization can have positive effects on teacher professional growth and active pedagogic leadership (Avalos, 2011). The impact of a supportive and development-focused organizational culture on teachers' dedication to PD was further stressed in Chang, Yeh, Chen, and Hsiao's study (2011). The study suggested that teachers who actively participate in PD "would benefit from pleasant and harmonious workplaces" (p. 169), varied learning opportunities, and motivation to learn from peer experiences which all contribute to workplace learning. Workplace learning is defined as all formal, informal, individual, and collaborative PD that takes place in schools. A supportive organizational learning environment can enhance teachers' intelligence, self-confidence, and self-efficacy (Avalos, 2011). Desimone (2009) also pinpointed school leadership as a contextual factor and supportive school culture as particularly central to organizational learning.

The Impact of PD on Teachers' Performance and Students' Outcomes

Teacher professional development often involves reciprocal sharing of ideas, experiences, and active participation in problem-solving activities. Many study results demonstrated the positive impact of PD on teachers' knowledge and practices. Professional development was said to have improved teachers' curricular knowledge and understanding in academic areas like reading comprehension, and in some social areas such as fostering students' learning. Improvement in teachers' knowledge contributed to their increased self-satisfaction and self-efficacy (Avalos, 2011). Coldwell (2017) argued that international research linked teacher PD with higher teacher efficacy. He added that teachers' increased knowledge as a result of PD enabled them to feel more confident and motivated as effective educators. Coldwell's participants contended that PD had also helped them demonstrate their distinctive skills and attributes. Knowledge, confidence, and motivation were seen to be closely related to self-efficacy. Furthermore, some of the teachers who participated in Coldwell's study asserted that taking part in PD increased their confidence which in turn led to the validation of their content knowledge. Other teachers claimed to have become so confident that they started applying for promotions. Many of Coldwell's subjects discussed other 'mediating outcomes' such as improved classroom practices and increased job satisfaction. Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, and Birman (2002) averred that PD and ongoing learning opportunities were found to have enhanced teachers' instruction and classroom practices. They confirmed that PD is a cornerstone in deepening teachers' subject knowledge and increasing their "capacity to teach to high standards" (p. 81).

Moreover, a number of studies asserted that quality PD increased teachers' content knowledge and improved their enacted instructional practices which had a positive impact on their students' attainment (Polly et al., 2015; Pehmer, Groschner, & Seidel, 2015). In Avalos's (2011) review of publications on teacher professional development, he highlighted the effects of PD on student outcomes as teachers tend to adapt their teaching methods to individual student needs. Chang et al. (2011) claimed that it is the teachers' practical experience and instructional approaches that

promote students' reflective, critical thinking, and autonomous skills. Pehmer, Groschner, and Seidel (2015) discussed the potential relationship between classroom dialogue-focused PD and students' higher-order learning abilities. They argued that PD is meant to enhance teachers' knowledge of different classroom aspects, which would foster deeper understanding on the part of the students. In their study, Polly et al. (2015) propounded that teachers' content, practical, and personal knowledge had statistically significant effects on student learning outcomes. Generally, it is believed that teachers' enhanced knowledge is significant to fostering and scaffolding students' profound understanding through students' engagement in a productive classroom discourse that develops their higher-order thinking skills. According to Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development, social interaction with adults and more knowledgeable partners was seen to strongly influence the learning progress on the part of the learners; thus, teachers were found to contribute much to such interactions (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). With a special focus on more knowledgeable individuals who offer apprenticeships to students while learning, "the teacher has a vital role in employing a variety of tools and scaffolds to support the development of literacy knowledge" (Mariage, Englert, & Garmon, 2000, p. 302).

Professional Development, Career Progression, and Teachers' Commitment

Career progression is defined by Li, Tong and Wong (2012) as the "systems of training, development programs, promotion, incentives and salary of an organization" (p. 55). Career progression can be also described as the changes in job roles that often lead to greater status, responsibilities, and sometimes pay (Coldwell, 2017). According to Taylor et al. (2011, p. 85), the profession of teaching "offers a relatively flat career trajectory" that lacks satisfactory leadership roles for experienced teachers who demonstrate expertise in the field. Therefore, the extent to which teaching career paths offer continued progression and opportunities to contribute to the quality of education is essential for recruiting and retaining highly qualified and motivated teachers. Besides, teachers usually seek enhanced career paths to promote new learning and maintain motivation about their teaching; without such opportunities, teachers who pursue professional advancement are forced to move into educational management roles. The relationship between PD and career progression was further supported by Coldwell's study findings (2017) where the respondents associated PD with promotion. Within the literature discussing the impacts of PD, evidence of career outcomes is mostly related to those characteristics that are seen as precursors to career progression but may not automatically lead to promotion -namely teacher expertise, confidence, and self-efficacy (Coldwell, 2017). Based on the Kirkpatrick model, Coldwell (2017) suggested that PD could shift from reaction to the administered training to learning from the training. Then it might possibly cause changes in participants' behavior to achieve desired results. This framework indicated that PD interventions could influence the ultimate outcomes of career progression, particularly professional and content knowledge, increased job satisfaction, and refined classroom practice.

Teachers who were highly engaged in PD were found to have observed positive impact on their career progression, promotion chances, retention, and commitment. As per Coldwell's study (2017), PD can have constructive effects on teachers' commitment to the job and their intentions to stay in the field. He argued that teaching is an "emotional work" (p. 190) that entails support and access to learning opportunities in order to sustain commitment on the part of the teachers. The quality of PD and professional stagnation were also reported by Taylor et al. (2011) as

relevant to teachers' commitment to their jobs. Li, Tong and Wong (2012) confirmed that among the predisposing factors of professional commitment is the opportunity for knowledge and skill development. They concluded that the perception of career progression opportunities is a significant indicator of professional commitment. In the same vein, Day and Gu (2007) stated that teachers' professional development is a self-regulated, emotional, and cognitive process that is meant to enrich teachers' knowledge and practices as well as enhance their self-efficacy and commitment. Another study by Day and Gu (2009) defined veteran teachers "as those with substantial (24+ years) experience" (p. 454); Day and Gu's study linked veteran teachers' commitment, resilience, and effectiveness in the profession to adequate school support and quality retention.

Methodology

Research Paradigm

The paradigmatic nature of the current study is an interpretative one. The study is concerned with the human understanding and interpretations of a specific phenomenon like teachers' perception of PD and its impact on their performance, students' performance, and career progression (Ernest, 1994).

As a result, the ontological and epistemological stances of this study have to do with subjectivity or subjective reality. The research design, or the overall structural design that helps to construct the current study efficiently and to attempt the research questions (Perry, 2011) is qualitative interpretive. Qualitative research lays emphasis on observing the social world from the "actor's" viewpoint. Actors are the informants or respondents; what these informants say or do is an important element of qualitative research. Qualitative research also stresses bringing understanding to the public eye through interviews (Grix, 2004). Generally, interpretive research on teaching scrutinizes contextual meanings established by students and teachers in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the problem(s). Moreover, it is believed that the earlier research methodology is considered, the more feasible the process of research which would probably reflect on the kind of mustered evidence and the type of reality to be represented.

Participants and Sampling

The participants in the current study are three English Language teachers who work for private schools in Dubai, UAE. Nadia is a female teacher who has been teaching in the same school for nine years; she started as an elementary school teacher until she has become a middle school one. Nadia is currently pursuing a post-graduate degree in Education. Amjad is a high school, male teacher who has been working as a coordinator in the Department of English Language for five years. Amjad is a veteran teacher who has been in the field of education for fifteen years. Mourad is an elementary school, male teacher who has spent ten years in the teaching profession. Generalisation "which is an act of reasoning that involves drawing broad inferences from particular observations," is debatable in qualitative research. The aim of many qualitative studies "is not to generalize but rather to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of some aspects of human experience through the intensive study of particular cases." Hence, the results of this study are not meant to be generalized, but to present practical knowledge to the existent body of literature. (Polit & Beck, 2010, p. 1451).

Data Collection Method

Instrumentation or the research regulating factor is the process of selecting and designing the research instruments as well as considering the underlying conditions of administering those instruments. The tools a researcher utilizes in observing, measuring and making sense of the surrounding world determine their productivity (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the only data collection methods for the study in hand. Kvale (2008) defines a semi-structured interview as a purposeful everyday conversation that involves a certain technique; in general, interviews provide high quality data and adaptability is one of their major strengths (Drever, 2003).

Procedures

Informal, individual, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with all three interviewees. The interviews took place in an informal setting for its adjustability to the individual context and situation to help the interviewees give their true feelings without having to bear any consequences (Christensen, 1980). Informality is prioritized when personal, complex, or sensitive issues such as disagreement with organizational policy are tackled (Hannabuss, 1996). The interviews were individually administered to allow the researcher to lead the discussion easily in the desired direction and create an atmosphere of discretion that helped the respondents to discuss their personal views openly. Face-to-face interviews were considered more convenient in terms of observing the teachers' non-verbal responses, e.g., body language, tone, hesitation, and facial expressions (Bell, 2005).

Data Analysis and Discussion

All interviews were transcribed, color-coded, and manually analyzed. Transcribing qualitative data granted the author the initial reduction opportunity to settle on information relevant to the study. A thematic color-coding, manual analysis then took place based on discussed themes. Interviewees were given pseudonyms to reach confidentiality of identities.

Preferred PD Types (Formal vs. Informal)

All three interviewed teachers highly value PD as an effective tool that contributes to raising the level of teachers' performance and confidence, content knowledge, awareness of trendy classroom strategies and teaching methodologies, classroom management skills, and students' outcomes.

As for the teachers' preferred PD types, Nadia claims that at the beginning of her teaching career, she used to be more inclined to informal means of PD such as "*observing colleagues' classes and having discussions with them during parallel meetings in order to get practical experience of in-class effective teaching strategies.*" She adds that as she becomes more experienced in the field, she tends to "*search for formal workshops and courses*" that would equip her with updated knowledge of teaching and learning. As veteran educators, Mourad and Amjad also show preference for formal PD activities; Amjad states that he "*can target a specific area of growth to enhance through choosing a suitable PD session,*" which "*saves time and is more interesting.*" Teachers' work engagement and additional responsibilities are investigated in relation to PD by Richter et al. (2011); results demonstrate that teachers with management

responsibilities pursue more formal PD, a finding that correlates with Amjad's situation as a coordinator of the English department at his school.

Interviewees' arguments can also be attributed to the assumption made by Tamir (1991) that a novice teacher "brings in a relatively high load of life experience and very little, if any, professional experience." Teachers thus tend to prioritize practical classroom-related knowledge, usually provided via informal PD, over theoretical, professional knowledge offered in teacher education courses that seem to student teachers "irrelevant and hard to internalize" (p.265). Moreover, Nadia cites narratives as representations of practice that she used to rely on as a novice teacher. According to Pulvermacher and Lefstein (2016), utilizing narratives is not unusual in pre-service teacher preparation; teacher educators consider narratives as an auspicious method of adding more practical repertoire to student teachers' knowledge.

Differentiated Professional Development

Though unplanned, differentiated PD is a theme that emerged during the interviews which indicates its fundamentality to all three participants. The notion that teachers' professional development should be differentiated is adopted by all three teacher interviewees. Nadia believes that "*an experienced teacher's needs are completely different from what a fresh graduate might need.*" She adds,

"I still remember when I was a fresh graduate; I attended advanced PD workshops that made me think teaching is hard. PD workshops must be offered in stages that suit both novice and expert teachers and meet their different needs. Teachers' knowledge varies depending on their years of experience and background."

Amjad holds a similar opinion to Nadia's; he says that,

"For professional development to be effective and interesting, teachers' actual needs should be addressed. A certain teacher who needs to improve his teaching methodologies is better directed to pedagogy-related PD rather than to a class management one. Differentiated PD makes it more convenient for both teachers and teacher trainers."

Mourad agrees with the other teachers' thoughts about differentiated PD; he confirms that "*offering PD based on teachers' needs would improve their performance.*" He thinks that "*PD can easily be turned from performance-improving sessions to time-wasting ones.*" Differentiation should extend beyond how learners learn to who the learners are, which should, in turn, dictate the course of learning. To put it differently, teachers must build on the learners' prior knowledge taking their level of readiness into consideration. Students come to learning settings with a number of personalized characteristics, likes and dislikes, and life experiences. As a result, deep learning takes place when teachers become cognizant of each student's values and needs. Bowgen and Sever (2009) argued that responsive teaching happens when we consider whom, what, where, and how we teach; this thought contradicts the pervasive notion that one-size-fits-all PD is a successful practice. Readiness, motivation, learning style, interest, needs, content, and situation are among the factors to be attended to by PD experts when offering learning for teachers. Student teachers, in turn, deserve to gain knowledge of particular areas as per their specific teaching situations. To sum up, PD experts should not regard teachers as a homogeneous group but rather a diverse one in terms of experience, background, knowledge, and potential for leadership roles.

The Impact of School Culture and Career Stage on Teachers' Inclination to PD

Two of the three interviewees admit that their school culture is supportive and conducive to various forms and types of PD; they even have a feeling of belonging to their schools and never think about finding another job. Mourad describes his workplace as a “*good place*” for veteran teachers, like himself, who can gain new skills and knowledge that would help them improve professionally. However, he refers to the same workplace as being “*not the most suitable place for fresh graduates*” who are in need of professional guidance in order to be identified with the experienced teaching community. Amjad adds another aspect where he mentions stress as a by-product that comes along with different job responsibilities. On the other hand, Nadia holds a different opinion; she contends that the school she works for is unsupportive to teachers who tend to improve their abilities. She goes on to say that the school administrative people are unappreciative to her attempt at obtaining a post-graduate degree.

The schools where Amjad and Mourad work administer regular PD sessions; some are done by internal parties, e.g., heads of departments, administrative personnel, or even other teachers. Other PD sessions are done by external experts in the field. Additionally, both schools tend to send some of their teachers to attend workshops sponsored by other organizations, e.g., MENA Teacher Summit, which is seen by both teachers as an added value and credit to their workplaces. However, Nadia believes that it is the school's reluctant attitude towards PD that limits teachers' chances of participating in beneficial PD sessions as the school tends to hold teachers responsible for administering such workshops, “*while many of them lack the adequate experience to.*” Nadia's viewpoint was discussed in Pulvermacher and Lefstein's study (2016) on how novice teachers need to observe proficient practitioners and even “perform new tasks under their supervision;” since the teaching profession is one that largely situates its training in practice, it is essential to socialize “novice teachers into expert ways of seeing and understanding classroom practice” and to represent such practice in an adequate depth (p.256).

Teacher respondents ascribe their inclination to PD to their conscious and deliberate awareness of the pivotal role PD plays in sharpening their capabilities and updating their knowledge. This eagerness to PD on the part of the three participants asserts the point raised by Coldwell (2017) that to some teachers, the desire to develop their careers and to see positive outcomes are the motivation to engage in PD. This is also referred to by Avalos (2011) as teachers' self-directedness and as teacher's autonomy in Chang et al. (2011).

Based on the Huberman Model, all three participants are considered to be in the middle stage of their career; in this career stage, teachers are believed to be very experienced, but they remain largely interested in enhancing their professional knowledge and skills. This prediction made by Huberman (1989) is in line with the interviewed teachers' response when asked whether their current career stage has affected their inclination to PD as they all denied being less committed to PD than they were in the earlier stages (Richter et al., 2011).

The Impact of PD on Teachers' Performance and Students' Outcomes

All three interviewees mention the positive effects of PD on their professional and personal qualities, and consequently on students' academic performance. Nadia affirms that PD has augmented her self-confidence and motivation “*to always search for effective and enjoyable*

teaching approaches” which results in improved students’ outcome as *“they started enjoying learning English even if the topic was hard.”* Moreover, she acknowledges the strong relation between PD and her perception of second language learners’ needs, her ability to predict their errors, and her competence in adapting the curriculum accordingly.

Amjad mentions self-efficacy and classroom management skills as the two areas of improvement mostly influenced by PD:

“I owe my success as a teacher to professional development...my classroom management skills have greatly evolved due to the shared experiences I gained through professional development.”

Mourad highly appreciates the impact of PD on his content knowledge and teaching methodologies:

“PD sessions have widened my perception of the effectiveness of various teaching methodologies. They helped me identify the different strategies of teaching...my subject knowledge also increased and so did my students’.”

Relationship Between PD, Career Progression, and Teachers’ Commitment

All three interviewees admit that they look forward to being in leadership positions; they believe they have gained the required experience and knowledge which would enable them to perform in such a leading place competently. Amjad declares that it is quite normal for any professional to look for opportunities to improve their abilities. Amjad, as the teacher coordinator in the English department, believes that PD has made him eligible for the position he is currently occupying. Additionally, he asserts that *“professional development is the only way that can lead”* him to the position he is still aspiring to.

Mourad states that he is *“looking for a good time and opportunity to apply for a leadership role”* to implement what he believes *“is more useful, practical, and effective with students.”* He holds the belief that PD would help him *“get the knowledge and build the solid background”* required for leadership roles. According to Mourad, a teacher’s job description needs to be revised in order to *“take him back to his main role in the classroom and help him stay focused on this role and to play it effectively.”*

Nadia, a master’s degree student, thinks that PD would augment her *“opportunities of getting a leadership position,”* but not in her current school. As per Taylor et al. (2011), advanced certification generally prepares teachers for leadership roles as teachers at this stage are expected to demonstrate expertise. Nadia also plans to find a job in a different workplace that appreciates her initiative to sharpen her teaching skills. Commitment to the job has been argued by Pfitzner-Eden (2016) to be affected by a number of factors, among which are the beliefs about the expectations about the future job which justifies Nadia’s noncommittal attitude towards her workplace.

Conclusion

The aim of the study has been achieved and the research questions have been thoroughly answered through the administered interviews that probed into the interviewees’ speculations and perceptions of PD. All three respondents realize the value of professional development and how a positive and supportive school culture can promote teachers’ inclination to PD; their proclivity

for attending PD sessions can be attributed to their deliberate cognizance of the significance of PD in teachers' professional life. However, they invalidate any relation to their current career stage; all participants confirm that their career stage has no negative effect on their commitment to PD. The interviewees have also shown preference for more formal PD types, e.g., conferences, workshops, and courses, compared to informal or tentative ones such as peer observations and narratives by colleagues. The three participants cite a number of professional and personal qualities they have gained as a result of PD among which are a sense of self-efficacy, motivation, classroom management skills, developed content knowledge, confidence, and enhanced teaching methodologies. Students' outcomes, as per teachers' words, are positively influenced by teachers' inclination and commitment to PD. According to the interviews, teachers in the current study assume that PD increases their chances of obtaining leadership roles and thus enhances their committal attitudes towards PD and the workplace. Additionally, the three teachers are advocates of differentiated PD based on teachers' needs and experience.

For future studies on PD, employing a quantitative tool such as a survey to explore the multifaceted topic of PD from teachers' perspectives would add value to the existing body of research. Developing a longitudinal study and mustering data about students' academic performance through following up on their academic progress over time would provide literature with firmly established evidence on the significance of teachers' PD. Additionally, classroom observation of teachers in different career stages followed by conversation analysis of classroom discourse would be another informative research method to investigate the impact of PD on teachers' performance.

Limitations of the Study

All private schools in Dubai follow the standards set by The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) which is the educational regulatory and quality assurance authority of Dubai Government. The KHDA pays regular inspection visits to Dubai schools to ensure their commitment to KHDA standards. Among the KHDA requirements from schools is a specific number of PD sessions to be administered for teachers. Since all Dubai schools seek KHDA recognition, they need to achieve the target number of PD conferences by any means which might explain the interviewees' viewpoints. In a different context where schools have the deliberate choice of PD related decisions, such a study would yield different results.

Generalization is referred to by Allen (2017) as "the extent to which findings of an empirical investigation hold for a variation of populations and settings" (p. 618). The number of participants is another limitation of the study; the sample of participants are not seen to be representative of the target population. Interviewing more teachers of a range of different subjects, not only English language teachers, would have brought more themes to the spotlight. Hence, the study results cannot be generalized to other populations that do not share the same features of the current research context.

In addition, data triangulation or the strategy used by researchers to improve the validity and reliability of research findings is another shortcoming; reliability or consistency of data results is achievable when the data collection method produces the same results about the observed phenomenon regardless of who makes the observations (Golafshani, 2003). In

the light of the adopted paradigm in this study, the reliability and trustworthiness of the research findings could have been increased upon employing an additional data collection method.

About the Author

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