

## **Teachers' Professional Development Tools: Importance and Usage**

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**Abstract:** Current technological developments have led to an easier access to information leading to sociological changes worldwide. This brought about changes in all professions, especially in teaching as one of the roles of the teachers is to prepare their students to the world of future. This fact highlights the importance of foreign language teaching and personal and professional development of teachers.

In order to enable professional development, professional development tools are crucial. Richards and Farrell (2009) suggest 11 professional development activities & tools for language teachers. These are: **workshops, self-monitoring, teacher support groups, teacher journal, peer observation, teaching portfolios, analyzing critical incidents, case analysis, peer coaching, team teaching, and action research.** In the present study, the level of importance attached to the above mentioned tools and the frequency of their usage by the lecturers teaching at the Foreign Languages High-school at Selçuk University is determined.

**Key Words:** Professional Development, Teacher Training, Teacher Development.

### **Introduction**

Foreign language teaching has been always an important matter in a globalizing community. Language teachers, hence, are to be open to new opportunities in teaching, learning, searching, exploration, and development. Besides, they also should be energetic to find solutions to encountered problems in classrooms. Furthermore, language teaching has become more learner centered and this necessitates an emphasis on guiding and helping students. Teachers need to improve themselves mentally, emotionally and professionally both in order to overcome challenges and in order to stay continue their interest in their jobs. In order to meet current demands, teachers' professional development enables them to keep up dated and learn new skills and techniques in his/her area.

Fullan (1991, p. 326) defines professional development for teachers as "the sum total of formal and informal learning experiences throughout one's career from preservice teacher education to retirement". Teacher development may also be defined as "any attempt of the teachers to improve themselves and their teaching practices" (Şimşek, 2009, p. 11). It is also systematic analysis of a teacher's own practice. (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p. 19). The chief aim of teacher development is enhancing teachers' ability to teach more efficiently, increase their interest in lifelong learning and improving their skills.

Effective professional development involves teachers both as learners and teachers (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1996). Successful teacher development helps to increase awareness via allowing teachers to observe their own development both professionally and personally. Pursuing new knowledge, taking advantage of technologies, and awareness of development are crucial to reach self-satisfaction, a condition required to make a teacher satisfactory. As Billings (1997) argues, professional development of teachers can be thought as: "a deliberate and continuous process involving the identification and discussion of present and anticipated needs of individual staff for furthering their job satisfaction and career prospects and of the institution for supporting its academic work and plans, and the implementation of programs of staff activities designed for the harmonious satisfaction of needs." (p. 4)

There is a relationship between personal and professional development of teachers. (Calderhead and Shorrock 1997, p. 15). According to Earley and Bubb (2007): "Managers and leaders of continuing professional development need to ensure that personal development is not marginalized as it is crucial to teacher effectiveness and school success. Research makes a compelling case for personal development a key component of teacher development." (p. 43). Hence, teacher development can be thought as a part or form of personal development.

Teacher training and teacher development are not same. Teacher training is usually determined by experts and is often available in standard training formats; on the other hand, teacher development is about examining different dimensions of a teacher's practice (Richards & Farrell, 2009, p. 4). As a result, teacher training is standardized but teacher development has different dimensions and can be self-initiated. Teacher training is compulsory, competency based, short term, temporary, and done with experts; teacher development is "voluntary, holistic, long term, ongoing, continental, and done with peers." (Woodward, 1991, p. 147 in Şimşek, 2009, p.43)

## **Professional Development Tools of Language Teachers**

Richards and Farrell (2009) state eleven procedures/tools that can be used to facilitate professional development of teachers. These are: workshops, self-monitoring, and teacher support groups, keeping a journal, peer observation, teaching portfolios, analyzing critical incidents, case analysis, peer coaching, team teaching, and action research. If we are to provide short information for each:

### **Workshops**

A workshop is "an assisted form of learning in which the leader provides a structure for enquiry and which enables workshop members to learn through doing." (Price, 2010, p. 35)

Some benefits of workshops: (Richards and Farrell, 2009, p. 23)

- Providing input from experts
- Offering teachers practical classroom applications
- Raising teacher motivation
- Developing collegiality
- Supporting innovations

### **Self-Monitoring**

Self-monitoring is a self-management procedure and a systematical observation of an individual on his or her own behaviors, actions, reactions. (Ganz, 2008). Self-monitoring enables a teacher to observe his/her own success and behavior.

### **Teacher Support Groups**

Teacher support groups should not only be thought as gathering together and discussing problems. (Richards and Farrell, 2009) define a teacher support group as: "two or more teachers collaborating to achieve either their individual or shared goals or both on the assumption that working with a group is usually more effective than working on one's own."

### **Keeping a Teaching Journal**

By keeping a teaching journal, one can easily record a lot of information that can be easily retained for future reference. It provides personal growth and helps teachers to keep a record of classroom events.

### **Peer-observation**

"Peer – observation is an effective way of sharing skills and spreading examples of good practice across the teaching profession." (Leaman, 2006, p. 146).

### **Teaching Portfolios**

A portfolio is a collection of teachers' works and ideas providing clues about the performance and improvement of a teacher throughout a professional development endeavor. "A professional portfolio is

an evolving collection of carefully selected or composed professional thoughts, goals, and experiences that are threaded with reflection and self-assessment. It represents who you are, what you do, why you do it, where you have been, where you are, where you want to go, and how you plan on getting there.” (Evans, 1995, p. 11). In a study made by Koçoğlu (1985) with 5 senior students, the results showed that the process of preparing a portfolio provided a useful approach to enhancing professional development.

### **Analyzing Critical Incidents**

Richards and Farrell (2009) believe that *critical* incidents can reveal some of the underlying principles, beliefs, and assumptions that shape classroom practices.

### **Case Analysis**

Case analysis is an analytical thinking technique. Cases can be used as a material in teaching-learning environment and for outgoing teachers case analysis might be very useful. “We study cases not so much to find the right answer, but to train ourselves in systematic analysis so we will be effective decision makers in the business world. Successful case preparation depends on multiple readings of the case and multiple points of view.” (Robinson, 2008)

### **Peer Coaching**

Rhodes et al. define coaching as “a peer-networking interaction (working together) which draws upon collaboration and mutual trust. It is usually a short-term relationship which can be used to help embed change, raise performance, raise impact and assist in skill development.”(2004, p. 25). Peer coaching may help to share ideas with other teachers, solve classroom-related problems in schools.

### **Team Teaching**

“Team teaching is a process in which two or more teachers share the responsibility for teaching a class. The teachers share responsibility for planning the class or course, for teaching it, and for any follow-up work associated with the class such as evaluation and assessment.” (Richards and Farrell, 2009, p. 159)

### **Action Research**

According to Craig action research is “a common methodology employed for improving conditions and practice in classrooms and in other practitioner-based environments such as administrative, leadership, social, and community settings.” (2009, p.2). Zuberr-Skerritt, (1992) informs that “action research is based on fundamental concepts of active learning, adult learning and holistic, dialectical thinking, and on the principles of experiential and to advance knowledge.” (2004, p. 88).

### **Methodology**

This research was carried out to find out the importance and usage of professional development activities and tools suggested by Richards and Farrell (2009). This study aims to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Does the level of importance given by teachers to professional development tools vary according to gender, age, and work experience?
2. Is there a difference between the levels of importance attached by teachers to the above mentioned professional development tools and the frequency of their usage?

The participants of this study are 60 Turkish EFL lecturers (30 female and 26 male) working at Foreign Languages Teaching High School at Selçuk University. Out of the 60 participants, four didn't mention their gender.

## Data Analysis

The data have been gathered through a questionnaire about professional development tools. The professional development tools mentioned were: workshops, self-monitoring, and teacher support groups, keeping a teaching journal, peer observation, teaching portfolios, analyzing critical incidents, case analysis, peer coaching, team teaching, and action research. In order to indicate the importance attached by the lecturers to these professional development tools, they were asked to select out of the following: 1- absolutely not important, 2- Unimportant, 3- undetermined, 4- important, and 5- very important. The second part asked to choose one of the options related to the usage of these tools by the lecturers. They chose one out of the following: 1- never, 2- occasionally, 3-sometimes, 4- usually, 5- always, in order to determine how frequency of their employment by these lecturers.

Data gathered from the professional development tools questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.0 with reference to the research questions. The mean values and the standard deviations were calculated to see the differences between English teacher's thoughts and usage of professional development tools suggested by Richards and Farrell (2009).

## Findings and Discussions

1. Does the level of importance given by teachers to professional development tools vary according to gender, age, and work experience?

Table 1- Importance level of professional development tools according to gender

Gender	N	X	S	t	P
Male	26	42,96	6,37	-,67	,51
Female	30	41,23	12,32		

As it can be seen in table 1, the importance level of professional development tools doesn't vary according to gender. In other words, both male and female teachers find teachers' professional development tools important.

Table 2- Professional development tools usage scores of teachers according to gender

Gender	N	X	S	t	P
Male	26	37,96	8,47	,29	,77
Female	30	38,23	5,60		

The table above indicates that there is no significant difference between female and male teachers' usage scores of professional development tools.

Table 3- Teachers' views about importance of professional development tools and teachers' usage scores of professional development tools

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
important	Between Groups	383,188	5	76,638	,799	,555
	Within Groups	5178,996	54	95,907		
	Total	5562,183	59			
usage	Between Groups	104,009	5	20,802	,417	,835
	Within Groups	2693,391	54	49,878		
	Total	2797,400	59			

According to Anova test results, there is no statistically difference ( $> 0,05$ ) between average of age groups of the lecturers (20-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41 and above) in terms of importance level and usage frequency of teachers' professional development tools. Teachers at different age groups give close importance to teachers' professional tools.

Table 4- Importance level and usage scores according to work experience

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
important	Between Groups	1086,918	4	271,730	3,339	,016
	Within Groups	4475,265	55	81,368		
	Total	5562,183	59			
usage	Between Groups	48,017	4	12,004	,240	,914
	Within Groups	2749,383	55	49,989		
	Total	2797,400	59			

Anova test results indicate that the usage score of tools doesn't vary according to seniority in profession. But, multiple comparison analysis showed that teachers who have been working between 1 and 5 years find professional development tools more important than the teachers who have been working more than 20 years.

**2. Is there a difference between the level of importance given by teachers to professional development tools and frequency of conducting these tools?**

PD Tools	Very Important	Important	Undetermined	Unimportant	Absolutely Not Important
Workshops	27%	50%	18%	0%	2%
Self-Monitoring	40%	48%	10%	0%	0%
Teacher Support Groups	27%	55%	18%	0%	0%
Keeping Teacher	18%	37%	40%	0%	3%

Journal					
Peer Observation	%%23	%%50	%%23	%%0	%%3
Teaching Portfolios	%%20	%%58	%%20	%%0	%%0
Analyzing Critical Incidents	%%30	%%52	%%18	%%0	%%0
Case Analysis	%%40	%%37	%%18	%%0	%%0
Peer Coaching	%%22	%%40	%%33	%%0	%%0
Team Teaching	%%32	%%48	%%18	%%0	%%2
Action Research	%%30	%%47	%%22	%%0	%%2

Table 5- The importance level and usage frequency of professional development tools.

Table 5 above indicates that teachers find professional development tools very important for a successful teacher development, but they do not employ them accordingly. Workshops, for instance, are important according to %77 of teachers, but about 50 percent almost never conduct them. According to %88 teachers self monitoring is important but %20 never did self monitoring. For the majority of teachers, teacher support groups are important, but only %7 of them conduct it. %73 of teachers think keeping a teacher journal is important, but only %7 of them are keeping teacher journals. Although %73 of teachers find peer observation important, %49 almost never experienced it. For %78 of teachers, teacher portfolios are important, but just %10 of teachers keep a teacher

portfolio regularly. %82 of teachers find analyzing critical incidents important, but just %5 of them analyzes critical incidents. According to %77 of teachers case analysis is important, but just %5 of them conduct it. %62 of teachers find peer coaching important, but only %10 of them act accordingly. %80 of teachers think team teaching is important, but only %17 of teachers conducted it more than a few times. %77 of teachers think action research is beneficial for a successful professional development but about %13 them never did an action research and about %80 of them almost didn't do it.

The outcomes of the present study might indicate an unawareness of what these tools are and how they are going to be employed.

Many of the lecturers at the Foreign Languages High School in Konya register in graduate studies if they seek professional development or attend conferences. However, self initiated teacher development sessions and activities do not rank high in their agenda.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Both as a person and as a teacher lecturers have aims. While trying to reach those aims they come across some challenges. In order to cope with existing and new challenges teachers need to develop professionally. As professional development is not compulsory, teachers should develop some positive attitudes towards professional development. In a research conducted by Ateşkan (2008), science teachers' perceptions about online teacher professional development program were investigated. The results showed that teachers were not satisfied with previous professional development programs because of the problems about content, process and organization as conducted by the Turkish Ministry of Education.

For successful teacher development there are some tools suggested by Richards and Farrell (2009). These are: workshops, self monitoring, teacher support groups, keeping a teaching journal, peer observation, teacher portfolios, analyzing critical incidents, case analysis, peer coaching, team teaching, and action research. This research showed us that lecturers at Foreign Language High School at Selçuk University find every tool important. According to them the most important tools is self-monitoring. But they do not employ these tools enough for their professional development.

PD Tools	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Occasionally	Never
Workshops	%%88	%%0	%%37	%%42	%%8
Self-Monitoring	%%7	%%0	%%23	%%50	%%20
Teacher Support Groups	%%7	%%0	%%37	%%48	%%7
Keeping Teacher Journal	%%27	%%0	%%22	%%40	%%10
Peer Observation	%%18	%%0	%%33	%%37	%%12
Teaching Portfolios	%%10	%%0	%%22	%%62	%%7
Analyzing Critical Incidents	%%5	%%0	%%22	%%50	%%23
Case Analysis	%%5	%%0	%%30	%%35	%%27
Peer Coaching	%%10	%%0	%%37	%%42	%%10
Team Teaching	%%17	%%0	%%20	%%42	%%18
Action Research	%%7	%%0	%%30	%%48	%%13

The professional development tools mentioned in this study might be easier used via the internet. For example, keeping an online teaching journal or online teacher support groups can be more functional as internet allows mass access. Moreover, due to time concerns, gathering together and holding a workshop, for instance, is not very easy. Hence teachers may participate in online workshops or analyze critical instances together within a forum. A teacher can keep online teaching journal and teaching portfolios. In short, internet can be used in a variety of ways in order to conduct professional development activities easily.

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