Teachers' Perceptions about the Professional Growth Activities and Practices Provided by the School

*1Dr. Chakerian Taline

*1Department of Human and Social Sciences, University of Saint Joseph, Beirut, Lebanon.

Abstract
This article is a study that aims at examining the perceptions of language arts and math teachers working at the Armenian High schools in Great Beirut area in Lebanon about the professional growth activities and practices provided by the school. It also aims at studying the applicability of the knowledge gained from these activities and practices; in addition to the obstacles that prevent teachers from applying the new knowledge gained. Finally, it aims at determining teachers' suggestions about how to improve these activities and programs in order to help their professional growth. This study was qualitative and exploratory thus used interviewing to collect data and teachers' point of view and the way they make meaning of the opportunities provided to them. Thus, the sample of the study included 10 teachers, from seven different Armenian schools who participated in an interview addressing their professional growth to analyze their perceptions regarding the growth activities provided by the school.
Results of the study revealed that although the majority of the teachers were appreciative about the one-time workshops and trainings offered to them during the year, yet what they really needed for their professional learning were more discussions with their peers about the trials and errors, in addition to an external mentor who would guide them personally in every step of the learning process. The researchers recommend that planning should not happen only before the trainings but also after the teachers have received the training in order to meet, reflect and plan the implementation process; teachers need intensive follow up until the process of learning has been completed.

1. Introduction

Professional growth has been widely approached by many researchers. Danielson (2009) [9] stated that professional growth is not only for novice teachers but also for the experienced ones, for teaching and learning are so complex; meaning that teachers always need to update themselves.
Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) [5] represented professional growth as a continuing process of learning. They clarified that professional development is usually a one-time workshop which aims to help teachers master some skills, while professional growth happens as a result of professional activities which help them learn. They concluded that they are interrelated since the efforts invested in professional development are aligned with perspectives of growth or learning. Dagen and Bean (2014) [7] added, professional growth is the experiences that teachers gain in a culture that encourage collaboration and shared leadership. Based on that, teachers acquire the knowledge needed in both content and pedagogy to improve student learning. Thus, teachers develop their skills as a result of various, planned, professional activities in a collaborative culture.
The interconnected model of professional growth made by Clarke and Peter (1993) [6]; as cited in Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) [5], outlines the professional growth as a complex process involving four domains: the first domain is the personal, it includes the teacher's knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes; the second domain is the external domain that includes the external source of information or stimulus. In other words, any knowledge gained by teachers from outside

sources, practices or activities might in turn reflect into the teachers' missions and practices in a professional setting. The third domain is the domain of practice. It involves teachers' personal experimentations. This is the part where teachers put their knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes into practice by experimenting them in a professional setting. Finally, the fourth domain is the domain of consequence, where teachers weigh the outcome of what they experimented in the professional setting based on their knowledge, beliefs and attitudes. The salient outcome might be negative or positive according to the teachers' ethics and practices.
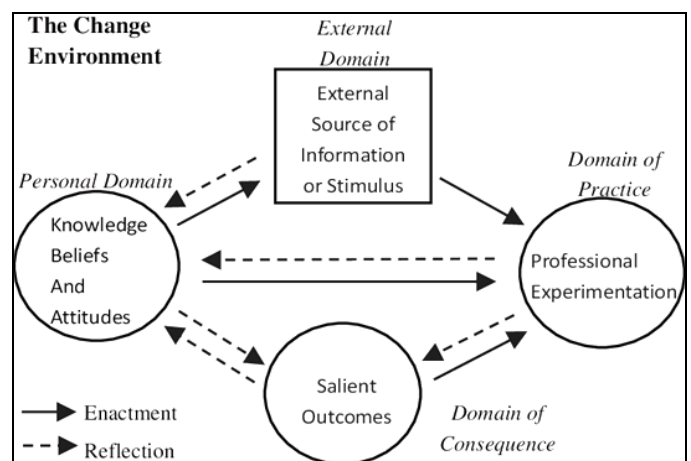
Fig 1: The Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002, p. 951) [5].

*Corresponding Author: Dr. Chakerian Taline

< 55 >

In addition to the four domains mentioned above, the interconnected model suggests that a teacher's growth or change occurs through two processes: one called "reflection" and the other "enactment". These two processes are substituted in the conceptual framework with arrows to explain that when change occurs in one of the domains it is definitely going to influence the others. Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) [5] further explained that in this model, the term "inaction" is the translation of a certain theory, knowledge, belief, or experience into action in the domain of practice. This domain recognizes how complex professional growth of teachers is by clarifying that growth will not be a result of one domain leading to another, but instead the multiple growth pathways existing in between these domains. The four domains that affect teachers' growth are interconnected, and each teacher might go through different processes to reach the targeted professional development. Some teachers develop their skills as a result of being exposed to external sources of information such as, in-service sessions, conversations with colleagues or an evaluator, in addition to reading books or professional publications, etc. Others develop certain skills after weighing the learning outcomes of their practice (the domain of consequence). While others who enter the profession with fixed beliefs and attitudes, might change their beliefs and gain new knowledge after experimenting and practicing in the classroom (professional experimentation).

Many researchers analysed professional growth activities and found that some of the common features that made these activities successfully leading to teachers' growth were as follows:

School Culture: One of the important factors in improving teacher professional growth was found to be the school's culture (Louws, Meirink, Van Veen, and Van Driel, 2017) [25] where they argued that shared school vision, goals, and standards had a great impact on teachers' professional learning. Thus, any professional growth activity should be related to the school's vision and mission (Murray, 2013) [28] and while considering professional growth, it is important to clearly set feasible goals (Guskey, 2000) [15].

Teacher Identity: As explained earlier by Clarke and Peter (1993) [6] in the theoretical framework, the personal domain of the teachers is one of the important factors affecting teacher professional growth. As another confirmation to this research finding, Anderson (2015) [1] found that teachers' identity is directly related to their learning. The findings suggest that teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes influence their readiness to learn and improve their practice.

Teachers' Unique Needs: As a first step of planning professional growth activities, teachers' needs should be identified and acknowledged. Many researchers have stressed the importance of adjusting professional learning goals to individual teachers' unique needs. This is because, as Reeves (2012) [32] explained, each teacher has particular challenges and opportunities. Therefore, careful planning to take all those unique needs into consideration was found to be a must (Danielson, 2015) [10]. Some of the professional development activities that might help in identifying teachers' needs are teacher self-evaluation, reflection, and other teacher evaluation processes like observations and feedback. They help teachers in pinpointing the strengths and weaknesses and to set goals for improvement.

Duration of the PD Activities: The duration of the professional development provided to teachers is also argued by researchers to have an impact on its effectiveness. Researchers explain that professional development activities with extended duration are more effective than one-time workshops. That is since teachers need time to process what they have learned, put their learning into practice, reflect on the implementation process, discuss their trials and errors, and receive feedback about how to improve their practices (Bayer, 2014; Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Kalinowski, Gronostaj, & Vock, 2019; Palardy & Rumberger, 2008) [2, 3, 21. 30]. Henrichs and Leseman (2014) [18] on the other hand, argued that teacher professional development should be provided through recurring sessions and should be supported continuously. They also found that even a single workshop can have some positive impact on improving teachers' performance, explaining that one-time workshops were better than no workshops at all. Still another analysis done by Educational Testing Services (ETS) found that the duration of the professional development activities were unrelated to student achievement, explaining that while enough time should be spent on teacher professional development, what really matters is how well these practices are organized (as cited in Wenglinsky, 2002) [35].

Content Specific Knowledge: Murray (2013) [28] stressed the importance of trainers' content specific knowledge, explaining that the designed activities should provide content specific knowledge which sheds light on the daily challenges of teaching and learning of those particular subjects. Yarema (2015) [38], in her research about "The Impact of a Professional Development Program on Teachers' Practice", mentioned that only 4% of elementary teachers had the content knowledge required to teach Science to these classes. Eventually, it was necessary to primarily provide them with professional development activities that enhanced their content knowledge, skills, and practices.

Modelling: Teachers need to be provided with models of lesson plans, student achievements, and portfolios, as well as opportunities to observe peer teachers or videos of good and effective teaching practices. The importance of modelling was stressed by Zepeda (2012) [39], who argued that professional growth activities should not focus only on theories, but also provide concrete and applicable ways to put these theories into practice. Murray (2013) [28] asserted that new concepts learned by teachers are ineffective when there are few processes that help teachers, especially the ones that are struggling to improve, adapt, and practice these new methods. Teachers need demonstrations of the theories communicated. In addition, they need time to experiment these theories, put them into practice, and accordingly develop their lessons.

Experiment and Practice: Teachers should be encouraged to experiment these practices and activities in their classrooms without fear of failure (Loucks-Horsley, 1987) [24]. Hence, telling teachers what they need to do to grow professionally and providing them with development activities is not enough. Teachers need to practice new methodologies in their classrooms. That is where learning happens, and that is where they master new concepts (Murray, 2013) [28].

External Support Person: Takahashi and McDougal (2016) [34] found that connecting with an expert who is not from the school, who is knowledgeable and is a resource person, can

< 56 >

provide lectures, appropriate approaches, and private support to teachers through trainings and discussions together. They pointed out that this factor was important and effective.

Weak Versus Strong Observations: While observations are important to highlight the standards teachers need to work on to grow, not all observations help achieve that purpose. Philpott and Oates (2017) [31] pinpointed that weak observations fail to highlight some of the poor practices performed by teachers, which in turn lead these underperforming teachers to believe that these are accepted and helpful practices.

Reflection: While some researchers have confirmed that reflection is one of the main strategies for improving teacher professional development (Owen, 2015; Philpott & Oates, 2017) [29, 31], others have clarified that different elements should be considered while performing this practice. Such would include clarifying to teachers which content to reflect on, and helping teachers to consider setting goals for implications following the reflection process (Steeg, 2016) [33]. Researchers have also found that reflection and self-assessment are also important components of professional growth (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2009) [11]. Glickman et al (2009) explained that self-assessment is a way of reflection. Moreover, it is very powerful and effective when used by teachers with high expertise and commitment. Moller and Pankake (2006) clarified this point by explaining that this is because low performing teachers do not realize that their performance is not satisfactory. However, indications for their poor performance might help them either understand or blame others.

Feedback about Their Practice: While providing teachers with planned opportunities for reflection and self-assessment are helpful, providing feedback on their progress, the self-assessments they have conducted, and the reflections they have had on their own work is also crucial. Feedback, especially when received from an expert, helps redirect or confirm how teachers perceive their own practices, and provides ways to improve their performance. The importance of feedback was stressed by Joyce and Shower (2002) [20] who explained that any training intended to help teachers' growth should fulfil these expectations, by providing teachers with the theoretical memo, demonstrating how the theoretical part can be practically applied, giving teachers enough time to practice what they have seen and heard, providing teachers with necessary feedback about their practice, and providing teachers with follow-up training or coaching (in case of need). The crucial role feedback plays on teachers' performance was also stressed by Lipowsky and Rzejek, (2015) [23]. They explained that after each teacher training, while practicing new knowledge in the classroom, providing detailed feedback can make improvements possible.

Teacher Collaboration: Many research studies have confirmed that interactions between teachers to collaborate on planning and to have pedagogical discussions about students and teaching are an important factor. On the other hand, other research studies have indicated that collaborations rarely make major changes in practice (Yarbo & Ermeling, 2016) [37]. Another research done by Meijs, Prinsen and de Loat (2016) [26] found that 66.4% of the Dutch teachers reported being somehow positive about learning through collaboration.

This means that collaboration might not be the most preferable style for all teachers. Still another research study found that administrators are struggling to create environments where teacher collaboration leads to teacher development and learning (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2015) [4]. Creating time for teachers to meet and discuss issues is not enough. Thus, several factors affect teacher improvement processes through teacher collaboration and discussion. Such include working on building trust between the team members (Hallam, Smith, Hite, Hite & Wilcox, 2015) [17], creating a culture where teachers feel free to express their ideas and disagreements (Anderson, 2015) [1], carefully planning collaboration time as well as leading and supporting teachers to use this collaboration time effectively (King, 2016) [22].

Student Learning: Guskey (2000) [15] explained that professional growth activities should be focused on student learning and school improvement. Doecke (2015) [15] found that shifting teachers' views about professional growth activities from being performed only for their own sake to realizing the impact of these activities on student learning raised teachers' awareness about the importance of these activities. It also helped them see the outcome of these trainings and activities more clearly.

Teacher Active Participation: Teachers' commitment and involvement are important in the growth process. Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) [5] argued that there was a need for reconsidering the way activities were presented. Thus, it transformed from being something done for teachers into a process that involved teachers as active learners. He explained that this could happen through reflecting on professional development programs and practicing what was learned. Owen (2015) [29] also found that teachers' active participation, from planning process to the evaluation process of professional growth activities, was important. Danielson (2007) [8] explained that teachers' commitment and involvement are maximized, when they are involved in all aspects of the growth process. This includes setting goals and making decisions about the program, while implementing and evaluating the process. They must not only be set by teachers, but also by administrators, since they help them create policies and plan professional learning. This in turn increases teachers' knowledge to improve practices and encourages continuous reflection. All this fosters the teachers' active participation and learning during the process of development and growth (Murray, 2013) [28].

School Leadership: The vital role principals play in teachers' professional growth was mentioned by many researchers. Takahashi and McDougal (2016) [34] found that when principals share their enthusiasm about professional growth activities with others in the school, their positivity contributes in improving teachers' passion for growth.
Wise (2017) [36] carried out a research study about the perceptions of principals in leading professional development. The perceived principals greatly influence the decisions taken concerning professional development, and showed that teachers are sometimes involved in making decisions about their own development. The principals also reported that, while implementing the professional development activities, the focus was on "generating positive effects for teachers by increasing student achievement, intentionally planning professional development, and meeting desired outcomes" (p. 146). To make sure that these activities met the desired

< 57 >

outcomes, evaluation of professional development was applied mainly through a teacher survey. Lastly, teams of teachers and administrators, who proctored and evaluated the activities, assessed whether or not change had occurred in the classrooms and in instructional practices.

While encouraging teachers' active involvement, the vital role principals play in planning teacher professional growth activities and processes should not be ignored. Thus, it is an interrelated process that requires the active involvement of both principals and teachers.

Bayer (2014) [2] classified professional development activities into two main groups: traditional and non-traditional. Traditional activities mainly included workshops, lectures, and conferences. While, non-traditional activities included mentoring, coaching, peer-observations, etc.

Hunzicker (2011) [19] also divided these activities into two groups, but named traditional workshops as "sit and get" forms of trainings, while non-traditional practices as "active and interactive" trainings. He explained that professional development practices are called active when they engage teachers in activities such as problem solving, discussions, role-play, etc; while it becomes interactive when teachers are provided with opportunities to share their points of view, ideas, problems, and such. This suggests that collaboration is most usually more enjoyable then working in isolation.

Regarding the effectiveness of different professional development features, Guskey (2003) [16] argued that most of the features listed in the literature as effective characteristics of teacher professional development and described as "research-based" strategies, rarely consider the impact of these strategies on student learning outcomes, since most of the research done on this topic studies teachers' perceptions instead of the degree to which student learning outcomes are improving due to the use of these teacher professional development strategies. Kalinowski, *et al*. (2019) [21] reviewed 38 studies about professional development programs that aim to improve student academic language proficiency when teaching different subject areas. They explained that while none of the professional development interventions were judged as ineffective, more studies were needed to clarify which interventions were considered as more effective than others in improving student leaning outcomes.

Consequently, this study investigates the pattern that teachers in the Armenian high schools go through in order to grow professionally. It also inspects the external sources of information they are exposed to and whether they are able to practice them in the classroom or not. Finally, it informs them about the external sources needed according to their educational experience to assure their professional growth.

2. Research Questions
Based on the theoretical framework and the reviewed literature, the research questions of this study were as follows:
1. What are the opportunities and activities provided by the school to help teachers' professional growth?
2. Do the activities and opportunities provided by the school, help teachers to acquire the knowledge needed to grow professionally and improve the learning process?
3. How much of the new knowledge gained from activities and practices, do teachers practice in the classroom? What are some of the obstacles that prevent them from practicing this new knowledge?
4. How can these activities and practices provided by your school be improved according to the perceptions of teachers?

3. Materials and Methods
3.1. Design of the Research
This study is qualitative and exploratory in nature. Qualitative research helps in controlling, analyzing, and interpreting different views to collect insight about a specific occurrence (Gay, L., Airasian, P., & Mills, G. 2011) [13]. Thus, 14 teachers from seven Armenian High schools in Lebaon willingly participated in the interviews through zoom application. Zoom meetings were used instead of face-to-face interviews due to the covid-19 ongoing pandemic situation. Therefore, the researcher was given the phone number of the teachers to contact them and schedule a zoom meeting. Hence, the qualitative research method was used to better understand the teachers' perceptions on the professional growth activities provided by the school and their effectiveness.

3.2. Research Instruments
One main instrument was chosen by the researchers to collect data, and it was one-on-one interviews with each teacher through zoom meetings. An interview is a purposeful interaction, where the researcher obtains complementary data. It provides data not only about how things are going, but also about how things are the way they seem to be. The interview questions were derived from the theoretical framework as well as the reviewed literature discussing the following topics: activities and opportunities provided to teachers by the school to help their professional growth, the degree to which these activities and opportunities help teacher in achieving professional growth, whether teachers are able to practice the knowledge gained from these activities, some of the obstacles that prevent them from practicing the new knowledge gained, and finally suggested ways to improve these activities in order to maximize teacher's growth. The Interview questions were as follows:
1. What opportunities and activities are being provided to you by the school to help your professional growth? (External).
2. Do these activities and opportunities provided to you by the school help you to acquire the knowledge needed to grow professionally and improve the learning process? (Personal).
3. How much of the new knowledge gained from activities and practices, do you find yourself practicing in your classroom? What are some of the obstacles that prevent you from practicing this new knowledge? (Professional experimentation).
4. How can these activities and practices provided by your school be improved? (Outcome)

4. Data Collection Procedure and Analysis
To collect data, permission was gained from school administrators; contact numbers of the teachers who were willing to participate in the interviews were granted. The researchers contacted each participant privately to schedule the zoom meetings. All meetings were recorded with the permission of the participants.

All the interviews were recorded, documents were created for each guiding question and categorized into quotes and classified into appropriate themes to analyze the findings.

< 58 >

5. Results

The Opportunities and Activities Provided by the School to Help Teacher Professional Growth, and the Follow-Up Procedures

Upon analysis of this question, 20% of the teachers were part-time teachers. Thus, they had no idea about the activities and opportunities provided to the teachers. The other 80% of the teachers listed several opportunities and activities that were being provided by the school to help their professional growth. One of the things that most of the teachers reflected on was the one-time workshops that were organized by various universities. Teachers were informed about them and given the freedom to choose whether they wanted to attend or not. In case they decided to attend, they had the freedom to choose the topic(s) they wanted. These workshops were not obligatory, as one of the respondents said: "Our professional growth activities are mainly through attending workshops at universities. These workshops are optional".

The post follow-up of these workshops differed from one school to another. Some schools had no follow-up for these workshops, while others expected the teachers to fill a survey or write about what they learned and how they were going to implement it. The teachers' feedback regarding the workshop was submitted through email. Otherwise, teachers were required to present the workshop to their colleagues. Yet, the majority did not conduct any follow-up for these kinds of workshops.

Other activities mentioned were obligatory workshops presented by the school. During these, teachers were asked about their professional growth needs, and accordingly a second workshop was planned by the administrator. One of the teachers explained:

After each obligatory workshop we attend, we are asked about the aspects we need to professionally develop, and we are regularly asked this same question throughout the year. Accordingly, the administration decides to organize future workshops. However, after the workshops are over, we do not get intensive follow-up.

Other teachers also discussed seminars which they attended and represented, general meetings to discuss problems and share ideas, gatherings prepared by the government for Brevet and Terminal teachers, a series of training workshops with follow-up from an outside evaluator, meetings with subject teachers to discuss teaching methods, department meetings, and discussions with a coordinator. However, these activities mentioned were fewer in number, compared to the general workshops.

Only two out of seven schools mentioned having department meetings twice a year, and one out of seven schools had an external support person visiting the school to train the teachers and evaluate them. The general workshops mentioned, as explained by teachers were not content specific, did not consider teachers' unique needs, were not level specific, and did not differentiate novice from experienced teachers. No modelling or demonstrations were mentioned either. Observations were not satisfactory, since the feedback received was on general behaviour instead of content-specific teaching practices. Follow-up was rarely done to motivate and guide teacher practice of the new knowledge learned. Reflections were also left for teacher to personally choose, with no further discussions. Regarding part-time teachers, they did not have any idea about the activities and opportunities provided. This meant that they neither participated in trainings, nor were they followed up for their development. Thus, mainly, professional growth activities

were focused on the general on-campus workshops. Those were workshops offered by universities which teachers attended by choice. This was in addition to general meetings held mainly at the beginning of the school year, where problems were discussed and ideas were shared. These activities were considered the traditional professional development activities as explained by some researchers (Bayer, 2014; Hunzicker, 2011) [2, 19].

The Applicability and Effectiveness of the Activities and Opportunities Provided by the School to Help Teachers Acquire the Knowledge Needed to Grow Professionally and Improve Learning.

On the one hand, upon asking teachers about their perceptions regarding the new knowledge gained from activities and practices, almost all teachers reported either not having gained a lot, or not being able to apply the knowledge they had gained. To be more specific, 40% of the teachers did not find the workshops, and other activities provided by the school, to be helpful in any way by saying that they were neither beneficial nor applicable. One of the teachers said:

Sometimes the seminars are not beneficial because they are not practical, maybe the person presenting the seminar has a great professional background about the subject, but does not have the experience to teach people from different levels. So, the lecturers ended up giving the seminars, transmitting the ideas or theories, and passing information that they had read from books. Consequently, when it comes to application they had no idea how it could be implemented in the classroom.

One of the Elementary Language Arts teachers suggested that attending workshops was not sufficient for professional growth if it was not followed up by a presentation of these workshops. This teacher explained:

When teachers attend a beneficial seminar and represent what they learned in front of their co-workers, I think it is the best way for teachers to grow and learn more. In addition, experienced teachers must prepare workshops to discuss and share the techniques they use. Teachers should also read a lot of materials to prepare a workshop. So, in this way, they improve professionally. Commonly, evaluators believe that if we share what we have learned from the workshop, this means we are going to implement them. This might be true to some extent, but developing a workshop helps the teacher learn a lot more than by just sharing ideas. Teachers also need to read books not to become stagnant.

Another concern was tackled by teachers saying that the same topics were being repeated over and over throughout the years, so the experienced teachers were getting bored. An Elementary Math teacher said: "… After certain years of experience, the workshops become repetitive and a waste of time. I can say only 30% are beneficial, especially if you are a person who stays up-to-date about topics such as interactive classrooms."

The other 40% of the teachers who were more positive about the idea, viewed these workshops to be beneficial as a reminder for important concepts; however, they explained that these workshops were not applicable. They were a good reminder that paved the way for teachers to remember the core educational concepts to self-inspect and evaluate themselves from time to time. Despite the fact that most teachers perceived them as repetitive, they were satisfied about the general outcome. One of the Participants explained:

In every workshop, I find something that can be directly applied in the classroom, yet most of the workshops are repetitions and some of them are not applicable in our

< 59 >

classrooms. Nevertheless, I think every teacher needs to attend workshops at least once a year, to find out whether there are new ideas and methods, or even to evaluate themselves, to see whether they are on the right track or not. However, I repeat, they are not completely helpful.

Teachers were more positive about the subject content related workshops or even the workshops that were tackling a topic they were going to implement or that was needed in class. As one of the participants said:

At the beginning of the school year, I suggested that we need a person who can follow-up with our Math department and discuss different methods to teach Math, and it was accepted. As a result, a professional Math instructor provides workshops every few months correlated to ways of teaching math with examples and documents. Last year, when we started referring more and using more technology in the classroom, some teachers needed support, so we were all given a workshop on it. You can't imagine how helpful these workshops are.

From this angle, teachers were more engaged and committed to topics that were based on practical matters highly needed in their classrooms. Such topics included technology, supporting students with different abilities, and handling behavioural issues they were facing.

Teachers also felt that guidance, provided to them personally, helped their professional growth far more than the workshops or seminars. This was regardless whether the guidance was provided by a coordinator, evaluator, an educational psychologist, or even colleagues during department meetings. It served as an added value for teachers, since it reflected their communicated needs in meetings held at the department. They believed that this sort of guidance was directly related to their professional growth more than attending trainings and workshops. One teacher explained how helpful the meetings with the coordinator or evaluator could be for their professional growth by saying:

My discussions with the coordinator are the most beneficial part since it is directly related to my work. I reflect on what is expected from me and the things I need to change. Sometimes the evaluator notices things I have not. I work on them and grow professionally. I feel these are opportunities provided and tailored to me.

Another teacher said, while comparing workshops with the meetings done with the coordinator, that:

We have workshops, which are given to all teachers at the same time. Specific teacher's needs are not taken into consideration. As a matter of fact, subject teachers usually meet together with the subject coordinator on a regular basis to provide comments on tests we have prepared, these meetings have been so beneficial too because they recommend high interaction and self-engagement.

Finally, 20% of the teachers, who believed these workshops to be extremely helpful, explained:

Since all the workshops are subject-specific, I am able to practice them in my classroom…I find myself able to apply them in my class, since we hold monthly meetings where we discuss trials and errors that are practical and not just theoretical. These meetings help make new techniques easy to implement.

Another teacher also suggested: "I believe that when workshops are exclusively oriented to the subject we teach, they provide examples of how to teach a certain topic and give me recourses to use in class, they are considered beneficial."

Yet, another teacher explained:

We have a specialist who is trying to change the methods we are using to teach, the workshops are offering beneficial methodologies that are directly related to the ways we practice in class. The school is constantly helping us to apply what they want us to integrate, through both workshops and specialists who are responsible to help and guide us especially when it comes to technology.

Teachers were also asked about the obstacles for application. There were many common obstacles mentioned, such as attending training for better use of technology but not having the means and facilities to use them. They had very limited space, too many students in the same class, a lack of preparedness of students for critical thinking, insufficient parental involvement, an overloaded curriculum, restricted time per session (only 45 min) to include activities, etc. As such not all methods presented by the seminars turn out to be helpful. It is really disappointing for teachers to attend a workshop without having the means to implement what they learn, or being provided with the needed guidance to know how to apply them with the means to make the trainings more applicable and effective.

Suggestions for Improvement

When asked about their suggestions for improvement, one of the teachers was convinced that the only way for teachers to grow was for teachers to evaluate and reflect on their own work. In addition, they thought that teacher professional growth was more the job of the teacher than the responsibly of the school.

Other teachers suggested that providing a mentor who is an expert in the subject taught or even has a degree in appraisal methodologies (suggested by two teachers), as well as having subject coordinators who know the curriculum and can monitor assessments would be ideal for teacher development. Finally, providing more meetings and discussions with teachers instructing the same subject was also suggested by two teachers. This respondent explained:

…teachers should sit and discuss the problems that they encounter… teachers at the school can discuss and diagnose students' weaknesses, acknowledge the progress, put clear objectives that are attainable, and not theoretical and impractical… working together, pinpointing weaknesses, and discussing them can be more beneficial… I think this is way more beneficial than increasing the number of workshops.

Some teachers also mentioned that appraisal and feedback positively affect teachers and increase their performance, job satisfaction, and job security.

I believe that appraisal and feedback are constructive and have positive impact on teacher's performance, for it helps decrease the teachers' feelings of insecurities and helps increasing their job satisfaction.

Further suggestions for improvement included not having the same workshops for both new and experienced teachers. In other words, they must provide tailored, grade-level workshops to meet teachers' needs and expectations across the curriculum.

6. Discussion of Results

We can infer from these outcomes that what teachers really wanted was not general presentation of topics and theories. Teachers highly communicated the need for non-traditional activities and practices to help their development and growth. Most teachers did not find these one-time workshops practical, explaining that even if they served as a reminder or

< 60 >

self-assessment, they were far from being practical. This was because mostly theories were presented with no clear explanation of how to apply them in the classroom. As Henrichs and Leseman (2014) [18] explained, one-time workshops were better than no workshops at all. However, professional development activities, when carefully planned, could do much more than simply being a reminder. Therefore, why settle for the least, when much more could be done. Thus, teachers regarded these professional development activities as ineffective, and mentioned some activities that they perceive would help them.

Teachers needed topics that were more practical and specific to the subject they taught, as well as trainings that provided resources and ways to implement the theories presented in the trainings. As Murray (2013) [28] explained, trainings should provide content specific knowledge which sheds light on the daily challenges of teaching and learning.

In addition to training, teachers needed guidance provided to them personally. That is through a mentor, a coach, or an expert who could follow up with them and help them implement what was presented in the workshops. It was crucial to guide teachers after presenting the theories and concepts. This could be done through modelling, coaching, mentoring, giving time to practice what was learned in class, and providing an external support person who conducts strong observations that sheds light on the weaknesses. This person who also guides teachers towards improvement was mentioned by many researchers (Murray, 2013; Philpott & Oates, 2017; Takahashi & McDougal, 2016) [28, 31, 34].

The need for communication was also mentioned, either to receive feedback from the mentor or expert supporter, or to collaborate with peers to learn from the experiences of each other. This point was also stressed by many researchers, who found that providing feedback about teacher practices in class, their reflections, and self-assessment, as well as increasing the interactions between teachers, were all features of effective professional development activities (Lipowsky & Rzejek, 2015; Yarbo & Ermeling, 2016) [23, 37].

Another point teachers made was that experienced teachers lost interest, since the same topics were repeated. Thus, considering the unique needs of teachers, differentiating between the novice and experienced teachers, and providing trainings accordingly would help address such disappointment. So, teachers would not feel that these trainings were a waste of time. Reeves (2012) [32] explained that each teacher had particular challenges and opportunities, thus, considering their unique needs while planning development activities was a must.

Finally, an important point to consider from this research study is that the only two teachers who were more positive about professional development activities came from the same school. It was the only school which had a set plan and direction that were clearly communicated with the teachers. Teachers in this school knew the purpose of the workshops they were provided, and the direction they were heading towards. In addition, a group of experts from a university were involved and were responsible for providing content-specific workshops to teachers. These experts were also responsible for observing the classrooms and providing personal guidance to teachers through meeting sessions scheduled directly after each observation. Teachers were more positive about the professional development activities and practices provided by their schools and considered these activities to be very helpful in improving their instruction.

Assumptions and Beliefs about Teachers' Knowledge
The policy of professional development in Armenian schools is derived from the philosophy that teachers are professionals. Therefore, they know what to do and how to do things related to teaching students. Hence, providing them with various opportunities to attend workshops would be considered enough to help them reflect on their own practice and implement the latest theories heard from these workshops. Most of the workshops offered to the teachers are general workshops, where teachers can attend them regardless of the subject they teach. While teachers expressed positivity regarding the offered workshops, they did not find these workshops effective in terms of their applicability and their impact on teacher professional growth.

Teachers expressed different expectations regarding their development and growth. Practices such as self-evaluation, planned reflection sessions, discussions with their peers and evaluators, being offered content specific workshops and receiving content specific feedback. In addition to follow up observations and discussions for the trials and errors that ease the implementation process, preferable by an outside evaluator who is an expert in the subject area being taught, where some of the practices valued by teachers, while receiving plenty of opportunities that were limited to one time workshops either on-campus general workshops or workshops offered by universities. Thus, there are differences between the assumptions and beliefs that administrators have concerning teachers' knowledge and expectations regarding practices that help them advance their knowledge and performance in the teaching field.

Assumptions and beliefs about teachers' knowledge affect greatly the way professional growth activities are planned, introduced and followed up with teachers.

On one hand, findings inferred from this research study suggest that one of the assumptions is that one-time workshops are enough for teachers' professional growth. On the other hand, teachers perceive that attending workshops are not sufficient for their professional growth if it is not supported by examples or demonstrations about how to apply and implement the concepts in the classroom. Another problem perceived by the teachers regarding this assumption is that when the same workshop is given to all teachers, specific teachers' needs are not taken into consideration.

Teachers are professionals, therefore they must be given the freedom to choose whether they need professional activities or not. In addition, follow up for workshops are not necessary since teachers know which part of the workshops should and could be implemented in the classroom. This is another assumption about what constitutes teachers' knowledge. However, teachers perceive that being offered various types of content specific seminars with follow up discussions is a must for their development.

Another assumption is that having teachers fill a survey and reflect on the things they have learned during the workshops are enough to make sure that theories presented would be implemented in the classrooms, whereas teachers are convinced that having discussions to evaluate and reflect on their own work is much helpful for their growth.

Furthermore, having general meetings to discuss problems and share ideas, or having departmental meetings to discuss teaching method is beneficial. This assumption is perceived by teachers to be true as well, where teachers find the meetings with their coordinators or evaluators to be very helpful for their professional growth.

< 61 >

Teachers have mastered the content they are teaching. As a result, content specific workshops are not necessary. Having workshops concentrated on general behaviors and topics are enough. This is another assumption about teachers' knowledge held by administrators. Teachers perceive that the same topics are being repeated over and over throughout the years, and that they are only beneficial as a reminder for important concepts. In addition, teachers believe that the subject content related workshops are more practical and work on their specific needs more adequately.

Finally, the assumption that is having a series of training workshops with follow up from a preferably outside evaluator as well as external support person visiting the school to train the teachers and evaluate them, is perceived by teachers as the most beneficial step towards improving teachers' growth. Since the feedback is more personal and the follow up with the teachers to ease the implementation process was done considering the specific needs of the teachers. Moreover, teachers perceive that guidance provided to them personally helps their professional growth far more than the workshops or seminars; believing that these sort of guidance is directly related to their professional growth.

7. Conclusion

In light of the theoretical framework and teachers' personal domain-including their knowledge, beliefs and attitudes-teachers were knowledgeable about the importance of professional development. They looked forward to benefiting from innovative methodologies and to utilize their qualifications as an opportunity to upgrade their capabilities and challenge themselves as they progressed. Teachers were most likely interested in the workshops and seminars that provided activities, but they were not satisfied from the practical side since these workshops did not pragmatically translate into their classroom environments and personal needs.

With regards to the external domain (external sources of information), the majority of the schools included on-campus obligatory one-time workshops for all teachers, workshops offered by universities, as well as general meetings at the beginning of the year discussing important issues regarding general teacher practices. Two out of seven schools included departmental meetings, which encouraged collaboration. One school included experts from a university to present trainings and offer personal guidance to teachers. Teachers from this latter school were very positive about the professional development activities provided to them. The majority of the teachers expressed the need for the workshops and trainings to be practical, directly related to the subject they teach, and rich with resources to be used in class. They requested workshops that took teachers' unique needs into consideration, differentiated between novice and experienced teachers, and were directly related to the subject and level they teach.

The domain of practice (professional experimentation) revealed that teachers were mostly provided with workshops and were left with the choice of practice. Teachers perceived the importance of the follow-up by an expert (preferably the person presenting the workshop), who would guide them while practicing what they had learned through workshops. They were aware of the value of collaborative work through departmental meetings, where they would get the chance to discuss their trials and errors, and share ideas with one another. Teachers also mentioned the importance of practicing reflection and self-assessment.

Regarding the Domain of Consequence (Salient Outcomes), teachers need to reflect on their performance and evaluate student achievement to see the connection between improvements in their practice and that of students' performance. It is important to take the time at the end of the year to evaluate the changes performed and their effect on student performance. That is because the end point of any professional development activity is and should be tied to student learning and increasing their achievement scores and overall performance, which eventually leads to overall school improvement.

It is obvious that one domain leads to the other, and the interrelation of these domains is unique for every teacher. That is due to teachers have different backgrounds, attitudes, and needs. Yet, this article concludes that professional development needs careful planning before, during, and after exposing teachers to any kind of activities and practices. Having a shared vision or a goal would motivate teachers and help them focus on the endpoint, providing them with reasons why the workshops and trainings are important. While the duration of the workshop is important-since teachers need time to learn and internalize new concepts-it is the follow-up that makes a difference. Whether it is a one-time workshop, or a workshop offered throughout the year, teachers need follow-up from an expert who is knowledgeable about the subject being taught. This skilled person should observe them in the classroom to see how the new knowledge is being practiced and accordingly guide teachers to improve their performance. Teachers learn a lot from one another, therefore, collaboration is highly recommended. Planned discussions about teachers' trials and errors would inspire teachers and help them benefit from each other's experiences. All these follow-up activities are as important as planning the subject of the training and deciding on the specialist who will present it. An important aspect to keep in mind is that growth does not take place overnight. It happens gradually, step by step. As King (2016) [22] clarified, teachers' professional development is complex, needs time, requires different processes, and includes active involvement never done in isolation. Finally, when evaluating professional development, it is better to consider the improvement in teachers' daily practices, rather than expecting major changes (Robinson, 2018).

Recommendations for Ministry of education and school administrators

- Having teacher professional development centres that employ professionals who are experienced in teaching, for different subjects and different levels, who could visit schools to assess teachers needs, provide trainings, observe them in the classroom and provide the needed guidance throughout the year, until the learning process has been completed.
- Making agreements with universities or professional development centres, to send to schools experts who are knowledgeable in a subject area, and could provide content specific trainings and afterwards guide teachers in the implementation process.
- Differentiating between the workshops presented to novice and experienced teachers
- Planning for workshops that are specific to the subject taught and related to the teachers' area of expertise that provides teachers with resources and focuses on practical ways to implement theories in the classroom.
- Meeting privately (post-workshop) with the teachers to reflect on what was acquired and plan for implementation

< 62 >

in the classroom (This might be done by a coordinator, a mentor, or a trainer himself/herself).

- Observing and providing regular feedback about the implementation of the new methods
- Planning meetings for teachers teaching the same subject to discuss trails and errors
- Inviting peers who teach the same subject more regularly to discuss trials and errors

References

1. Andresen BB. Development of analytical competencies and professional identities through school-based learning in Denmark. *International Review of Education*. 2015; 61(6):761-778. doi:10.1007/s11159-015-9525-6
2. Bayer A. The Components of Effective Professional Development Activities in Terms of Teachers' Perspective. *Online Submission*. 2014; 6(2):319-327.
3. Birman BF, Desimone L, Porter AC, Garet MS. Designing professional development that works. *Educational leadership*. 2000; 57(8):28-33.
4. Bridwell-Mitchell EN. Theorizing teacher agency and reform: How institutionalized instructional practices change and persist. *Sociology of education*. 2015; 88(2):140-159. doi:10.1177/0038040715575559
5. Clarke D, Hollingsworth H. Elaborating a model of teacher professional growth. *Teaching and teacher education*. 2002; 18(8):947-967.
6. Clarke D, Peter A. Modelling teacher change. In *Contexts in Mathematics Education. Proceedings of the 16th Annual Conference of the Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia,* 1993.
7. Dagen AS, Bean RM. High-quality research-based professional development: An essential for enhancing high-quality teaching. *Handbook of professional development in education: Successful models and practices, PreK-12*, 2014, 42-64.
8. Danielson C. *Enhancing professional practice: A framework for teaching*. ASCD, 2007.
9. Danielson C, Axtell D. *Implementing the framework for teaching in enhancing professional practice*. ASCD, 2009.
10. Danielson C. *Talk about teaching!: Leading professional conversations*. Corwin Press, 2015.
11. Danielson C, McGreal TL. *Teacher evaluation to enhance professional practice*. Ascd, 2000.
12. Doecke B. Storytelling and Professional Learning. *Changing English*. 2015; 22(2):142-156. doi:10.1080/1358684X.2015.1026184
13. Gay LR, Mills GE, Airasian PW. *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications*. Pearson Higher Ed, 2011.
14. Glickman CD, Gordon SP, Ross-Gordon JM. *The basic guide to supervision and instructional leadership*. Pearson Higher Ed, 2012.
15. Guskey TR. *Evaluating professional development*. Corwin press, 2000.
16. Guskey TR. What makes professional development effective?. *Phi delta kappan*. 2003; 84(10):748-750.
17. Hallam PR, Smith HR, Hite JM, Hite SJ, Wilcox BR. Trust and collaboration in PLC teams: Teacher relationships, principal support, and collaborative benefits. *NASSP bulletin*. 2015; 99(3):193-216. doi:10.1177/0192636515602330
18. Henrichs LF, Leseman PP. Early science instruction and academic language development can go hand in hand.
The promising effects of a low-intensity teacher-focused intervention. *International Journal of Science Education*. 2014; 36(17):2978-2995. doi:10.1080/09500693.2014.948944
19. Hunzicker J. Effective professional development for teachers: A checklist. *Professional development in education*. 2011; 37(2):177-179.
20. Joyce BR, Showers B. Student achievement through staff development, 2002.
21. Kalinowski E, Gronostaj A, Vock M. Effective professional development for teachers to foster students' academic language proficiency across the curriculum: A systematic review. *AERA Open,* 2019, 5(1).
22. King F. Teacher professional development to support teacher professional learning: Systemic factors from Irish case studies. *Teacher development*. 2016; 20(4):574-594. doi:10.1080/13664530.2016.1161661
23. Lipowsky F, Rzejak D. Key features of effective professional development programmes for teachers. *Ricercazione*. 2015; 7(2):27-51.
24. Loucks-Horsley S. Continuing to Learn: A Guidebook for Teacher Development, 1987.
25. Louws ML, Meirink JA, Van Veen K, Van Driel JH. Exploring the relation between teachers' perceptions of workplace conditions and their professional learning goals. *Professional Development in Education*. 2017; 43(5):770-788. doi:10.1080/19415257.2016.1251486
26. Meijs C, Prinsen FR, De Laat MF. Social learning as approach for teacher professional development; how well does it suit them?. *Educational media international*. 2016; 53(2):85-102. doi:10.1080/09523987.2016.1211333
27. Moller G, Pankake A. *Lead with me: A principal's guide to teacher leadership*. Routledge, 2013.
28. Murray J. *Designing and implementing effective professional learning*. Corwin Press, 2013.
29. Owen S. Teacher professional learning communities: going beyond contrived collegiality toward challenging debate and collegial learning and professional growth. *Australian journal of adult learning*. 2015; 54(2):54-77. doi:10.1080/19415257.2013.869504
30. Palardy GJ, Rumberger RW. Teacher effectiveness in first grade: The importance of background qualifications, attitudes, and instructional practices for student learning. *Educational evaluation and policy analysis*. 2008; 30(2):111-140. doi:10.3102/0162373708317680
31. Philpott C, Oates C. Teacher agency and professional learning communities; what can Learning Rounds in Scotland teach us?. *Professional development in education*. 2017; 43(3):318-333. doi:10.1080/19415257.2016.1180316
32. Reeves M, Haanaes K, Love C, Levin S. Sustainability as adaptability. *Journal of Applied Corporate Finance*. 2012; 24(2):14-22.
33. Steeg SM. A Case Study of Teacher Reflection: Examining Teacher Participation in a Video-Based Professional Learning Community. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*. 2016; 12(1):122-141.
34. Takahashi A, McDougal T. Collaborative lesson research: Maximizing the impact of lesson study. *Zdm*. 2016; 48(4):513-526. doi:10.1007/s11858-015-0752-x
35. Wenglinsky H. The link between teacher classroom practices and student academic performance. *Education policy analysis archives*. 2002; 10:12.

< 63 >

36. Wise JT. *Leading Professional Development: Perceptions of Ohio Principals* (Doctoral dissertation, Ohio University), 2017.
37. Yarbo J, Ermeling B. Expanding instructional horizons: A case study of teacher team-outside expert partnerships. *Teachers College Record*. 2016; 118(2):1-48.
38. Yarema SL. *The impact of a professional development program on teachers' practice and how context variables influenced such practice: a case study*. Wayne State University, 2015.
39. Zepeda SJ. Professional development: What works. Eye on education. *Journal of Educational Administration*. 2012; 51(5):728-730.

< 64 >