



Exploring the Effectiveness of Professional Development and the Implementation of Theories Introduced to University Professors

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Abstract. This study explores the effectiveness of professional development workshop series training programs on the university professors' teaching applications in terms of skills and methodologies introduced after one year from the date of the program and explores the professors' implementation of the theories. The findings showed that most participants pointed that their teaching concepts shifted from a traditional method of teaching to a nontraditional one due to the professional growth program.

Keywords: *professional growth, faculty, higher education, student centered approach, traditional classroom methodology, nontraditional classroom methodology, teaching methodologies.*

Introduction

Background of the study

With the expanding number of universities in Lebanon and the demand for quality enhancement, universities started demanding more from their faculties. Education improvement has slightly ameliorated student performance since little attention is given to what has been happening inside the classrooms. Whatever the subject matter the university professors teach, it is expected from them to be up-to-date with the new teaching methodologies being introduced. It is expected from them to shift from the traditional

teaching we all might have experienced in a way or another in our educational journey. The professor is now expected to integrate more technology into his/her instructional method and so on and this is the challenge. Teacher professional development programs are very important in changing teachers' classroom behaviors in ways that lead to several positive effects in the classrooms with the students. The professional development of teachers is studied and presented by several researchers, but the importance behind such studies is to understand that professional development is about "teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students' growth" (Avalos, 2011, p. 12). This is where the idea of conducting workshop series over several semesters started in one of the universities in Lebanon in order to help the professors enhance their teaching skills and introduce them to several teaching methodologies, which would allow them to shift from the teacher-center approach to the student-center approach. Simultaneously, we cannot expect from the students to change their behavior and attitude towards learning if we, as educators, do not change the way we think about education and teaching.

This paper is an extension to a previous study that has been conducted during 2015 where the researcher conducted a professional development program to 70 university professors. The program was made up of workshop series consisted of 5 main topics each of which aimed to enhance a specific teaching skill and introduce the professors to the student-center approach in order to shift from the traditional teaching to the nontraditional. Each workshop consisted of 5 four-hour sessions over a week (5 days). The workshop was divided into two main parts. The first part of each topic dealt with theories of learning and development, learner-centered teaching, integrated course design, importance of adapting blooms' taxonomy in the curriculum, various teaching methods, and the effect of integrating ICT into the classroom instruction. The other part was based on practical work where professors applied what they had learned and tried to adapt the new methods acquired into their context. The professors were asked to think constructively and share ideas in order for all the participants to benefit and build on their own knowledge. Project-based learning strategy was adapted by the presenter in order to promote higher order thinking and build on the professors' needs (Al Chibani, 2016). Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the effect of a workshop series training program on the university professors' teaching effectiveness in terms of skills and methodologies introduced after one year from the date of the program.

Brief literature review of the study

It has been researched that one-day workshops for teachers are ineffective since the teachers are trained on topics detached from their actual classrooms, which lead the teachers to express that their professional development experience as 'meaningless and wasteful' (Aminudin, 2012). This is why a considerable investment has been put on this topic in order to prove that professional development programs benefit on the long run

where teachers implement what they get trained on. As mentioned before, this study is part of a longitudinal study that is being conducted by the researcher. The findings of the previous study indicated that the teaching concepts they were introduced to have shifted their teaching approaches from a traditional method of teaching to a nontraditional one due to the professional growth program. They all indicated that they got introduced to several new learning approaches and that now they value more the importance of active learning. They added that working with a student-centered classroom would facilitate the job of the teaching because they become facilitators rather than lecturing in the class (Al Chibani, 2016). According to Aminudin (2012), it is important that all the resources put on teaching training all around the world achieve its goal and improve the quality of teaching. Cardno (2005) discusses the importance of teacher training programs in order to confirm the development of teaching profession. This goes in line with Al Chibani where his study indicates that workshop series made the professors feel more confident in terms of learning new strategies to serve different students' needs and achieve the objectives behind the lesson taught (Al Chibani, 2016). Many research show that the importance of enhancing teaching in higher education has started to be the focus of many universities (Patton, 1997). McInnis (2003) states that "The importance of teaching and learning in universities has shifted from routine and somewhat token acknowledgment in government policy to central place in the higher education policy agenda" (p. 2). McInnis (2003) also discusses that the government started paying more attention to the strategies of improving the faculties in higher education and enhancing their teaching skills. McInnis (2003) adds that the government started giving more attention to introduce new information of technology into the classroom with the market demand. Boyer (1990) explains that over the last decades, there has been an unbalance between how well the teachers are being rewarded and the research on this issue in particular. Leslie (2002) indicates that in the United States, there has been a strong movement in where the importance of teaching quality was promoted. This goes along with several researchers. Goodson and Dean (as cited in Aminudin, 2012) agree that professional development programs for teachers cannot be separated from theory. They discuss that separating the theoretical knowledge from practice will gradually affect the idea of teaching as a career. Research shows that the teaching experience doesn't affect the teaching quality neither improves the teaching skills (Pratt, 1997). Richardson (2005) also suggests that the implication and the importance of the opportunities for teachers are to enhance their teaching skills. This all come from faculty development programs and pedagogical training sessions that could be done in universities in order to improve the teaching of the professors (Eggin & MacDonald, 2003). Teachers need to be given the sufficient time of professional training sessions in order to be able to benefit from the theory learned and be sure of it in order to be motivated and apply it in their classrooms (Aminudin, 2012).

Recent research shows that faculty development programs enhance the teaching skills and encourage teachers to integrate more often what they learn into their classrooms.

It promotes learning aspects in higher education and allows teachers to shift their teaching from traditional to more active centered learning (Gunersel & Etienne, 2014). According to Gabriel et al. (as cited in Aminudin, 2012), teachers in general believe that such professional development programs have significant impact on the teachers' development as teachers. They stimulate learning and development of teachers' professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Moreover, involvement in professional development is supposed to have positive impact on the ability of teachers in order to gain and progress the "knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice" (p. 19). In addition to that, Desimone (2009) declares that professional development programs influence on the ability of the teachers in terms of decision making and implementation of change in teaching and leadership performance in order to educate the learners more effectively. Buczynski and Hansen; Powell et al., Harris et al. (as cited in Aminudin, 2012) believe that teachers revealed possessiveness to such programs and such experiences have helped them improve their teaching skills and have helped them gain more confidence in teaching.

Objectives of the study

Synthesized from the purpose of the study, the objectives of the study are as follow:

1. To explore the effectiveness of conducting workshop series on the university professors' teaching effectiveness; 2. To understand how the conducted workshop series help the university professors get introducing new teaching skills and teaching methodologies which affect their teaching performance; and, 3. To describe how the workshop series help the university professors gain an understanding of student-centered approaches.

Research questions of the study

In order to be able to fulfill the objective of this study, several research questions should be answered. The research questions are answered qualitatively throughout the data collection method and will be elaborated later on under the appropriate section of this study. The research questions are as follows:

To what extent do conducted professional development workshop series encourage the university professors apply new knowledge about new teaching skills and teaching methodologies they learned in their classrooms?

In what ways do conducted professional development workshop series leave impact on the teachers' performance in their classrooms daily teaching?

How do professional development workshop series help the university professors attain an understanding of the student-centered approaches and help the teachers to apply them in their classrooms?

Method of the study

In order to gain understanding of the research question of this study, qualitative research methods are used. According to Patton (1980), the researcher seeks to know and recognize deeply what people have to say in qualitative methodology. In qualitative approach, the researcher has the coincidental to study the person's understandings in details. Patton (1980) states that one of the main purposes of the qualitative measures is to allow the researcher to recognize more and capture other people's point of view. In order to answer the research questions of this study, an email was sent to all the 70 university professors who attended the professional development program. In the email, the researcher reminded the participants about the program and explained to them the importance and purpose of the email. The researcher raised up the three research questions and gave the participants the freedom to answer in the spaces he provided them with on the Google Form he prepared and with whom he shared the link. The purpose of using the Google Form was to keep the participants anonymous for the purpose of confidentiality and reliability of the study. The researcher wanted to gain the participants trust and get into their minds. Patton (1980) explained that the purpose of interviewing was to enter one's mind and perspective. 58 out of 70 Forms were filled out by the participants and the Forms were printed out for analysis. A comparative method was adapted in order to analyze the data collected. First, the answers for each question were joined and analyzed separately. Then a comparison analysis was done in order to compare the answers. The researcher coded the answers in order to search for common answers.

Findings and Discussions of the study

Almost all of the 58 participants pointed that their teaching concepts have shifted from a traditional method of teaching to a nontraditional one due to the professional growth program. They all indicated that they started adapting new learning approaches and that now their teaching skills became more active. This goes in line with Al Chibani (2016), Cardno (2005) and McInnis (2003) who discuss the importance of teacher training programs and learning in universities which shifted from routine and somewhat token acknowledgment in government policy to central place in the higher education policy. The participants added that working with a student-centered classroom facilitated their teaching job because they became more as facilitators rather than lecturers in the class. Almost all the professors indicated that the program helped them self-assess their teaching skills and that they started reflecting on it in order to improve it for the sake of the teaching quality and students' comprehension. They confirmed that moving away from the classical teaching made them aware of the students' needs and this goes back to what they have learned from the workshop series they have attended. Several professors indicated that students now rush to register classes with them because of the new approaches they started adapting and integrating in their teaching approaches. All of this they have learned from the professional development program they have attended. This goes in line

with Boyer (1990) and Leslie (2002) who explain that over the last decades, there has been an unbalance between how well the teachers are being rewarded and discuss how there has been a strong movement in where the importance of teaching quality was promoted. In addition to this, the findings of this study go in line with Al Chibani (2016), Gunersel and Etienne (2012) and Gabiel et al (2011), (as cited in Aminudin, 2014), who discuss the fact that professional growth development training program enhance the teaching skills and encourage teachers to integrate what they have learned into their classrooms more often. It promotes learning aspects in higher education and allows teachers to shift their teaching from traditional to more active centered learning. Teachers in general believe that such professional development programs have significant impact on the teachers' development as teachers. They stimulate learning and development of teachers' professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Moreover, involvement in professional development is supposed to have positive impact on the ability of teachers in order to gain and progress knowledge, skills, and emotional intelligence that are essential to good professional thinking, planning, and practice.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study is the first of its kind in Lebanon. It explores the effect of a workshop series training program on the university professors' teaching effectiveness in terms of skills and methodologies introduced after one year from the date of the program.

The findings of the study show high significance that participating in a professional growth program enhanced the teaching awareness of different teaching methodologies and that improving the professors' teaching skills was promising to the university professors in one of the private universities in Lebanon even after attending the workshop series. The program showed positive significance on the conceptions of the participants in terms of enhancing teaching skills and knowledge. The professors showed positive responds from the program and asked for future workshops that will be extension to the conducted ones. Moreover, the findings of the study identified that teachers considered attending continuous work on improving their teaching would facilitate their students learning more effectively and that allowed them to enhance their actual teaching skills during the year that passed after attending the workshop. This shows that it is essential for the universities to introduce more such programs, which motivate the professors and improve the teaching quality.

Even though, the objectives of this study were accomplished and the research questions were all answered throughout the qualitative methodology conducted. There are several recommendations that can be implemented in future studies. It is recommended for universities to introduce more professional development programs since studies show that it is more likely that teachers start to implement what they learn in such workshops.

Such professional development programs enhance the teaching quality and allow teachers to integrate new teaching methodologies into the university classrooms. This research study along with the first study conducted in 2015 (Al Chibani, 2016) can be replicated to include more universities to increase the validity and reliability of the findings.

This study is the second part of a longitudinal study taking place on yearly basis as it was recommended in the first part of the longitudinal study conducted year 2015 (Al Chibani, 2016). The study was conducted on the same group of professors who had participated in the professional development program so that their perception of its impact on their teaching practice can be better understood.

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Profesinio tobulinimo programų efektyvumo ir universiteto dėstytojų išmoktos teorijos įgyvendinimo tyrimas

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Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje plėtojamas tyrimas, atliktas autoriui 2015 m. įgyvendinant profesinio tobulinimo programą, kai buvo vedami užsiėmimai 70 vieno iš Beiruto universitetų (Libanas) dėstytojų. Straipsnyje tiriamas šių užsiėmimų poveikis gebėjimų ir metodologijų aspektu, atspindintis dėstytojų anketose, pateiktose praėjus metams nuo kursų baigimo. Analizuojama, kiek dėstytojai suvokė jiems užsiėmimų metu pristatytas mokymo teorijas ir kokia apimtimi pradėjo jas taikyti studentų auditorijoje.

Tyrimas paremtas kokybine duomenų analize. Siekiant atsakyti į tyrimo klausimus, visiems užsiėmimuose dalyvavusiems dėstytojams buvo išsiųstas elektroninis laiškas su prašymu anoniškai atsakyti į tris *Google Forms* aplinkoje pateiktus klausimus. Siekiant išanalizuoti surinktus duomenis buvo taikomas lyginamasis metodas. Apklausos rezultatai atskleidė, kad beveik visi iš 58 *Google Forms* anketas užpildžiusių respondentų pastebėjo, jog dėl profesinio tobulinimo programos jų mokymo koncepcija pasikeitė. Dėstytojai adaptavo naują požiūrį į mokymąsi, o jų mokymo metodai pasidarė aktyvesni. Jie pripažino, kad klasikinio mokymo atsisakymas jiems padėjo geriau suprasti studentų poreikius. Šis pirminis tyrimas reikšmingas siekiant paskatinti dėstytojų profesinio tobulinimo programas aukštajame moksle, nes jos daro teigiamą poveikį ir jų studentams.

Esminiai žodžiai: profesinis tobulinimas, fakultetas, aukštasis mokslas, į studentus orientuotas požiūris, tradicinė mokymo metodologija, netradicinė mokymo metodologija, mokymo metodologijos.

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