

The Impact of Professional Development Activities on Teachers Perceived Competency in Teaching English

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ABSTRACT

The current study was conducted to investigate the impact of Professional development activities on teachers' perceived competency in teaching English. A survey research was adopted and 40 sets of questionnaire were randomly distributed to 40 secondary school teachers in Kuala Terengganu. This study adopted a research study of survey design and it was done to investigate on how do professional development activities affect their competence in teaching. The quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) for statistical analysis. Frequency analysis was applied to describe numerical data for responses of the questionnaire. The findings revealed that "Study of English content" has affected English teachers the most in their competency of teaching after being involved in professional development activities and that "Realism-Usage of real objects" was not contributing much to the teachers' competency in teaching as it recorded the lowest mean. This study concludes that the teachers have positive responses towards the professional development activities, increase their knowledge and contribute new ideas of teaching the language. They perceived that professional development activities had increased their level of competency in teaching English.

KEYWORDS: In-Service Teachers, Professional Development, Secondary Schools, English Content, Realism, Positive Responses.

INTRODUCTION

An English language teacher needs to be competent in the language to gain confidence in teaching. Competent teachers tend to be well respected not only by the school community, but also by the general public and their students as the end-receiver. To become competent in a language, it has always been assumed that the person need to be linguistically competent whether this be phonological, grammatical or lexical in relation to the language they are conversing [13], in this case of their target group. Somehow, there are many other skills that teachers need to have in order to be competent other than linguistically competent.

Due to that reason, teachers who involved themselves in professional development activities tend to acquire new level of confidence in the language resulted to acquiring competency in the teaching. But, the proficiency in language is not all about it to be competent in teaching per se. There are other aspects that are needed to be explored in order to be considered as a competent English Language teacher. The teacher is expected to have a certain amount of knowledge and skills which is known as teacher's competence. In other words, teacher competence includes the correct way of transmitting units of knowledge, application and skills to students [1] as cited by [10, 12, 14].

This study intends to examine how professional development activities affect teachers' competency in teaching English. The new knowledge and skills that they had gained from involving themselves in the activities might affect them differently based on their individual perceptions in terms of how the activities had benefitted them in their teaching in schools.

Problem Statement of the Study

Issues related to promoting teacher's professionalism in the Malaysian classroom have been raised almost every day in the local newspapers over the past few years, especially where teacher's proficiency and commitment were questioned. Declining in students' English language performance in public examination results has also become an issue. As pointed out by [9] who stated that Malaysia has recently seen a sharp decline in English despite its history. This has provoked the implementation of certain measures calculated to check this and prevent its recurrence.

Many researches on professional development were mainly done at higher institutions but not at school level. This study hopes to explore and examine the views of English teachers in secondary schools on professional

development activities and the involvement of English teachers in secondary school. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do professional development activities affect in-service teachers' competence in teaching English?
2. Do teachers who are attending professional development activities improve their teaching in English?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional Development Activities and Teachers' Competency

Competent teachers are those who can come out with new ideas, practices and thinking skills who have high confidence level when it comes to teaching. Research shows that effective professional development for teachers support teachers' motivation and commitment to the learning process. It merges the needs of individuals with schools or the goal of districts [4-6, 8, 11] as cited by [7].

More often than not, in-serviced teachers who involved themselves in professional development activities tend to become more competent in teaching due to the pedagogical skills and content knowledge that they had gained during the courses that they had attended. A number of studies show that professional development courses enhance teachers' content knowledge and strengthen their pedagogical skills [15, 17] as cited by [2]. Another set of studies has identified that these courses increase teachers' confidence in teaching their subject matters and cultivate a positive attitude towards teaching and student learning [3, 16].

A survey carried out by [8] revealed that professional development activities attended by teachers had developed their competency, increased their standards of teaching as well as keep their teaching updated. It has also been reported that their self-worth is increased, their technologically knowledge is improved and a significance number of them had been promoted to higher ranks. Hence, most of the teachers involved in the survey felt that professional development activities were important in order to gain confidence and competency.

Due to that reason, policy makers in Ministry of Education (MOE) and State Education Department (JPN) need to play their role in organizing professional development activities that can give a big impact to teachers in terms of producing competent English teachers to teach secondary school students. As without competent teachers, the quality of English learning activities in the classroom will be questioned by the public and parents. That was concurred by [11] as quoted, "Policy makers, school and district leaders and researches are all increasingly concerned with improving the quality of evidence about the effectiveness of teacher professional development especially in terms of teacher its impact on deserved reform outcomes".

On the same note, it has been shown by research that competent educators and leadership in school are the most important factors in raising students' accomplishment in education and that would produce quality in teaching. English teachers should develop their knowledge and skills continuously to materialize the best educational practices and to be as competent as possible. Competent teachers are those who managed to help students to learn independently and confidently in utilizing the correct techniques of learning in schools. That is the best practice in schools which should be highly considered. It is noted that the only strategy school systems have to strengthen educators' performance levels is Professional Development (PD). It is also the only way educators can learn so that they are able to improve their performance and increase student's performance in school.

The bottom line is with all the facilities provided, there is simply no excuse for teachers not to develop themselves and put efforts to upgrade their teaching and also their career as well.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) for statistical analysis. Frequency analysis was applied to describe demographic data and numerical data were presented for responses in every section in the questionnaires. All data were presented in percentages and tables to enable the researcher to come up with the conclusions of the findings.

Table 1: Areas covered and distribution of items in the questionnaire

Section	No. of Item	Area	Answer Scale
4	10	Competency in teaching English	1 to 5 Likert scale
5	3	Opinion on teachers' improvement in teaching	Open-ended

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ1: How Professional Development Activities Affect Teachers' Competence in Teaching English?

The study explored on “How professional development activities affect teacher’ competence in teaching English”. The result of the descriptive analysis is shown in Table 2. It shows the mean scores and standard deviation of the analysis. The mean score of above 4 for each item shows positive effect on overall teachers’ competence in English.

Table 2: How Professional Development activities affect teachers’ competence in teaching English

No.	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Instructional methods in English	4.1250	0.64798
2	Work with state and/or English	4.0000	0.59914
3	Study of English content	4.1750	0.44650
4	Reviewing student work/assessment	4.1500	0.57957
5	ICT and Power-point presentation in teaching English	3.9000	0.84124
6	Usage of newspaper in education	4.0500	0.71432
7	Realism-Usage of real objects in teaching	3.8500	0.76962
8	Preparing critical questions in tests/examinations	3.9500	0.67748
9	Usage of English/grammar games in lessons	4.1500	0.66216

Table 2 shows that “Study of English content” has affected English teachers the most in their competency of teaching after being involved in professional development activities. Its mean score was 4.1750 which indicate the highest score amongst the list of items in the group, followed by “Reviewing students’ work and achievement” and “Usage of English/grammar games” similarly recorded 4.1500 “Instructional methods in English”, “Usage of NIE”, “Work with state and/or English” and “Preparing critical questions in tests/examinations” were placed fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh respectively. “Realism-Usage of real objects” was not contributing much to the teachers’ competency in teaching as it recorded the lowest mean of 3.85. “ICT and power-point presentation in teaching English” was also not contributing much to the teachers’ competency in teaching as the mean score showed the second lowest, 3.9000.

RQ2: Do Teachers Who Are Attending Professional Development Activities Improve Their Teaching in English?

The findings of the study indicated that the implementation of professional activities was viewed extremely positive by secondary schools’ English Language teachers in Kuala Terengganu. Thirty seven out of forty respondents admitted that they have become more prepared to enter the classroom after attending professional development activities organized by District or State Education Department. Many responded that they have gained more self-confidence in teaching after attending such activities due to exposure to new knowledge. The positive responses were more so received from non-options teachers who seemed to be very optimistic to improve themselves in the language.

CONCLUSION

The findings in this study indicated that a majority of English teachers in selected schools in Kuala Terengganu think positively towards professional development. Many of them agreed that the activities have affected them in preparation and competency in teaching English positively. They have become more prepared to enter the classroom and become more enthusiastic to attend professional development courses after knowing that it will make them a better teacher. The findings had also shown that by implementing professional development activities will upgrade teachers’ confidence level in teaching English in the classroom.

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