

Professional development needs of English teachers in Myanmar university

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ABSTRACT

A small-scale survey was conducted in Myanmar to investigate the professional development needs of EFL teachers. The study was to shed light on the current situation and the challenges related to English language education. The participants of the study were asked to select three professional development needs that interested them from a list of ten need areas. Some qualitative data is used to supplement and interpret the results of this study. The results show that the teachers need to take part of the responsibility for their professional development. According to them, ongoing professional development is essential in today's world. Teachers' belief in themselves and in what they are doing make them confident. According to the interview data, Myanmar teachers' preferred PD areas are teaching skills and methods, understanding students, and attending conferences, seminars and workshops.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nearly all teachers would agree with Pennington (1990:132) that a distinguishing characteristic of the notion of teaching as a profession is the centrality of career growth as an ongoing goal. The terms 'Teacher Development' (TD), or 'Professional Development' (PD) for teachers, are broad terms that include a variety of aspects connected not only to a teacher's professional development, but also to his/her personal development (Igawa, 2002). PD is therefore seen as an ongoing process and an integral characteristic of a fully professional teacher (McDonough, 1997). Due to the pervasive dissemination of English as the Global Language and the massive exportation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), professional development for EFL teachers is currently showing an increase in perceived validity, particularly for non-native speaking (NNS) teachers.

Professional development has been defined in different ways by different scholars. According to Humammed (2011), Professional Development is about teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students' growth. Mizell (2010) says that effective professional development is on-going training, practice and feedback and provides adequate time and follow-up support. Teacher professional development is a life-long and continuous process in which teachers are expected to upgrade their knowledge, master new skills and change their practices since advancement in their teaching career is finally for their students and education reform (Alzankaw, 2021).

According to Vadelvel et.al. (2021), professional development can be described as the enhancement of a teacher's skills, knowledge and ability in improvising their teaching methodologies to serve the students better. It is a long term learning process which is crucial in keeping abreast with the modern changes and developments in the teaching world. Nugraha & Maulida (2021) said that teachers' professional development is one of the solutions to make the teachers always improve their skills and adapt to current issues.

The purpose of this study is to address this crucial issue in language teaching and to come up with a temporary list of the professional development needs of EFL teachers, which we hope will be developed into a more extensive taxonomy. It is also hoped that this study will benefit professional development designers for EFL teachers in selecting the target areas for their programs. By investigating the professional development needs of Myanmar EFL teachers, this study was intended to shed light on the current situation as well as the

challenges being faced by Myanmar's English language education. Thus far, these topics have been scarcely addressed in international TESOL literature.

However, by studying current issues related to English language education in Myanmar, several vantage points to better view English education can be gained. This is due to the universal nature of second language learning and the professionalism of language teachers in general. It could be argued that this universal nature is also due to the globalization phenomenon of the interconnectedness of our politics, economy, and culture, as well as the fact that English plays a pivotal part of the global infrastructure for information and communication today (Cochrane & Pain, 2000).

2. METHOD

A small-scale survey was carried out in Myanmar, in January 2020, to investigate the professional development (PD) needs of Myanmar teachers of English. The participants of the study were asked to indicate three (3) PD needs that interested them from a list of ten need areas. The ten need areas are the professional development needs identified by Igawa (2008). Some qualitative data is used to supplement and interpret the results of this study.

2.1 Participants

The participants in the study are 93 Myanmar teachers of English who were working under the Ministry of Education in Myanmar. The overwhelming majority of the participating teachers were female; of the total number of participants, 25 were male, 58 were female. As to where they were teaching, there were (14) Associate Professors, (35) lecturers, (30) Assistant Lecturers, and 14 tutors. Regarding the teaching experience of the participants, a few of the Myanmar teachers were young novice teachers; 14 of them said that they had been in service for 0-5 years, 30 said 6-10 years, and 49 said 11-20 years. The qualitative data they provided includes transcripts of semi-structured interviews conducted in Myanmar universities, corresponding to the time of the survey questionnaire and one month after that. Although the teachers will remain anonymous, they kindly granted us permission to use their responses in this study. To this study, they are identified by the following numbers:

This feature of many participants teaching at higher education institutions may be due to the fact that the participants have experience of an international TESOL conference. In addition, this fact may also partially explain the unusually low percentage of male teachers among the participants; the ratio of male English teachers is lower at institutions of higher education in Myanmar than other countries. Sunderland (1994), for example, discusses the gendering of the English language teaching profession (Ehrlich, 1997).

2.2 Research design

This study was a qualitative study using a small survey and in-depth interview as the methods of data collection. The searchers focused on the respondents' points of view regarding their professional development program. All data collected in this study were elaborated in the form of narrative account in order to get a better understanding about the results. For data collection, a questionnaire was used as one of the research instruments. The questionnaire consists of 14 items from 10 need areas. This questionnaire is with a 5-point rating scales starting by strongly disagree, disagree, not sure, agree and strongly agree.

The semi-structured interview guide included rather general questions such as: What are the difficulties you find teaching English in Myanmar?, How do you cope with the difficulties?, What are your professional development needs? The questions presented during the e-mail communication were more focused and specifically asked for an explanation on some of the issues. In the open-ended section of the questionnaire of this study, the Myanmar teachers were asked to specify their professional development need if they chose the last item.

3. RESULT

In conducting the questionnaire as well as interview survey, the 10 professional development areas are utilized as identified by Igawa (2008). It may be worthwhile to introduce her study to supplement and interpret the results of this study when necessary. The participants have experience of teaching at least three universities. The responses of the questionnaire and interview on the ten professional development need areas by Igawa (2008) are shown in the following.

3.1 Qualitative data

To supplement the questionnaire results, the participants' interview transcripts and e-mails have been utilized. The Myanmar teachers' most preferred professional development area is (a) Teaching Skills & Methods (TSM). This finding seems quite reasonable because teaching skills and methods are at the center of teacher professionalism. The interview responses by the 31 Myanmar teachers were collected and then categorized by professional development need area. The following table shows the responses of the participants on the questionnaire of 10 professional development need areas by Igawa (2008).

Table 1 Teachers' responses towards a variety of aspects connected to a teacher's professional development

SN	PD areas	Discussion
1	Teaching Skills and Methods (TSM)	Interviewee 1 When I first started my M.A. English course, I started to know about the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT) when I studied at postgraduate level.
		Interviewee 2 Teacher professional development is a type of continuing education effort for educators. As far as I understand, its one-way teachers can improve their skills and, in turn, boost student outcomes. Learning can take place in formal or informal settings. Formal settings include conferences, courses, seminars, retreats, and workshops.
2	Language Improvement (LI)	Interviewee 3 Most of the Myanmar teachers (of English) do have a high level of English and they think it's not important to get their English improved.
		Interviewee 4 Through my experience in attending the conferences in Thailand and Vietnam, I should say that we are better at English than our neighbors. The reason behind this is that English in Myanmar is more important than in the neighboring countries, as it is almost the only choice to improve your opportunities both at work and your self-improvement.
3	Communication Skills (CS)	Interviewee 5 Professional development training can help teachers to become better at planning their time and staying organized. This ultimately makes teachers more efficient and gives them extra time to focus on students rather than the paperwork.
		Interviewee 6 The teacher and administrator who inspires, guides, and helps students can have a lasting influence on students throughout their lives. Students and staff members should interact with each other in a warm, open, and positive fashion.
4	Understanding Students (US)	Interviewee 7 I think the most difficult thing for me to learn was how to manage the classroom and how to deal with, from my perspective, very passive students who weren't as active as what I had anticipated them to be, so doing more active group work and getting them to stand in front of a classroom and things like that. They were so shy. And I felt like I was embarrassing them all the time.
		Interviewee 8 The other possible explanation for this is that there is a discrepancy among Myanmar; Myanmar's growing economy has led to an income gap in the population. The teachers may feel detached from the younger generation who come from wealthy families. Therefore, the teachers think that they need professional development to better understand their students. She was surprised by how affluent the parents were: - in the kindergarten, yes, because it was, a lot of the students that were going there were quite wealthy. So, it was amazing the number of resources that were there.
5	Motivation (MO)	Interviewee 9 Professional development in the 21st century gives educators the tools and skills to stay modern with the needs of students and allows them to plan for changing trends in education. To realize areas of strength and areas that need attention for growth, reflective practice is necessary.
		Interviewee 10 In short, professional development is important. Approaching our development goals with that sentiment in mind can help us tap into motivation that may be stifled when the benefits of development opportunities seem to be one sided.

6	Attending Conferences, Seminars & Workshops	Interviewee 11 Attending a seminar has numerous benefits, including improving communication skills, gaining expert knowledge, networking with others and renewing motivation and confidence.
		Interviewee 12 The focused nature of learning at a conference allows us to dig deeper with the understanding of our topic of interest.
7	Lifelong Education (LE)	Interviewee 13 The foremost over whelming issue as marked by majority of the teachers was absence of any sort of reward or acknowledgement after attending the training course, the second major issue was that participating faculty were over-burdened with other duties during the program; third major issue was acceptance of change by the departmental heads as there was less supportive environment for accommodating innovative ideas.
		Interviewee 14 Professional development needs of teachers include content knowledge and quality teaching, research-basis, collaboration, diverse learning needs, student learning environments, family involvement, evaluation, data-driven design, and teacher learning.
8	Cultural Understanding (CU)	Interviewee 15 Teachers seem to experience personal and professional dilemmas with cultural diversity. Teachers' professional development is needed on the issue. Since the lack of such contextualized understandings of professional development for cultural diversity have been noted generally. Since even teachers who received professional development on cultural diversity seem to report training inadequacy and thus, feeling of unpreparedness.
		Interviewee 16 It remains important to untangle how schools actually support teacher learning in context, and how these professional development arrangements contribute to justice-oriented understandings and pedagogical actions. We were interested in the role context-based professional development hold in supporting teachers to re-center the cultural diversity to justice and equity and to implement equitable, culturally relevant practices that avoid reproducing inequalities in pedagogical enactments.
9	Subject Matter Knowledge (SMK)	Interviewee 19 In education, the term professional development may be used in reference to a wide variety of specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness.
		Interviewee 20 Teaching profession requires long years of initial professional education and continuing professional development after long arduous initial professional development for the aspiring teachers to acquire an adequate knowledge and skills that they can apply in their teaching profession.
10	Others (OT)	Interviewee 23 Professional development plays a vital role for quality and success in teaching and learning in universities. Professional development provides academics with job satisfaction and in the process helping to build better universities with competent lecturers.
		Interviewee 24 Consequently, teachers indeed need support in transforming pedagogical practice as well as knowledges about self, students and society in better conceptualizing cultural diversity and support student learning. Thus, teacher learning within this paradigm is understood as an interruption of taken-for-granted notions that usually result in reproducing injustices in education. Professional development in the critical multicultural paradigm is intertwined with culturally relevant and critical pedagogies and emphasizes pedagogical facilitations of empowerment and voice, as well as teachers'

	critical reflexivity between practice, self, and societal discourses.
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As it shown in Table 1, Myanmar teachers firstly identified ‘Teaching Skills and Methods’ as the area where they required professional development. The second most preferred area was ‘Understanding Students’. The third area was ‘Attending Conferences’ followed by ‘Seminars & Workshops’, selected by most teachers. In this study, it was noted that many Myanmar teachers of English lack proper teacher training before teaching, which resulted in many teachers indicating TSM as a professional development need area. In other words, higher education teachers are more informed in terms of the current TSM and are more confident in their teaching practices.

According to the interview responses, the professional development areas were very much preferred by the Myanmar participants. Most Myanmar teachers discussed the professional development needs that seem to suggest that they have difficulties in understanding all the professional development areas. Because most of Myanmar students are a little bit shy. According to our culture, we do not really show off a lot. And to study English, they need people to socialize, be talkative, and show their opinions. It’s very hard to get the students to communicate in English. These Myanmar teachers say that their students are timid. This shyness may explain why the teachers feel as though they do not understand their students and why the teachers think that they need professional development in this area.

3.2 Quantitative Data

The main instruments used for the purpose of data collection are a questionnaire as well as a semi-structure interview. The questionnaire consists of 14 items from 10 professional development need areas identified by Igawa (2008). This questionnaire is with Linkert scale of 5-pint rating starting by strongly disagree, disagree, not sure, agree and strongly agree. The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics and shown with mean and standard deviation to better understand the respondents’ answers (Table 2).

Table 2 Participants’ responses towards professional development needs (n=93)

SN	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	Teachers need to take part of the responsibility for their professional development.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	7.70%	92.30%	4.92	0.27	Top priority
2.	Ongoing professional development is essential in today’s world.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	15.40%	84.60%	4.85	0.36	Top priority
3.	Teachers belief in themselves and in what they are doing make them confident.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	23.10%	76.90%	4.77	0.42	Top priority
4.	Teachers’ attitudes towards their professional development have to be positive.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	38.50%	61.50%	4.62	0.49	Top priority
5.	Teachers need to be given a chance and time to develop.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	53.80%	46.20%	4.46	0.50	Top priority
6.	Teachers have to be open for self-reflection and critique from others.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	69.20%	30.80%	4.31	0.46	Top priority
7.	Sharing	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	76.90%	23.10%	4.23	0.42	Top priority

	experience and ideas with colleagues gives a teacher a sense of belonging.								
8.	Reading periodicals in ELT keeps a teacher up-to-date.	0.00%	0.00%	7.7%	76.90%	15.40%	4.08	0.47	Top priority
9.	Practicing reflective teaching is a fundamental part of continuity of development.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	61.50%	38.50%	4.39	0.49	Top priority
10.	Using new ideas and techniques is motivating and encouraging.	0.00%	0.00%	7.7%	61.50%	30.80%	4.23	0.58	Top priority
11.	Teachers have to learn continuously and be life-long learners.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	30.80%	69.20%	4.69	0.46	Top priority
12.	Equipping schools with the products of new technology is of great help in teacher development.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	53.80%	46.20%	4.46	0.50	Top priority
13.	Teachers need a comparative salary and excellent career promotion.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	38.50%	61.50%	4.62	0.49	Top priority
14.	Attending workshops and conferences is a key factor in teacher professional development.	0.00%	0.00%	7.7%	38.50%	53.80%	4.46	0.63	Top priority
Average		0%	0%	2%	46%	52%	4.51	0.53	Top priority

NOTE:

1.00-1.66=Considered of low priority

1.67-2.33= Considered medium priority

2.34-3.00= Considered of top priority

The areas of professional development needs of Myanmar teachers are listed below in order of preference (Table 2). Three points of significance (TSM, LI, and US) are discussed based on the Myanmar teachers' responses. The PD areas that Myanmar teachers were interested in were TSM, LI, CS, and MO. However, TSM was the most favored area of professional development followed by the area of CS also being highly preferred by Myanmar teacher group. However, in the areas such as LI and MO, Myanmar teachers showed very little.

This table shows that the first research question item (1) received the highest mean score (M=4.92) and it is followed by item no (2) and (3) with the second and third highest mean scores. The rest are also relevant to the needs. It is found that the agreement has been made by the participants that teachers need to take part of the

responsibility for their professional development. They should attend professional development training so that they can enhance their skills, knowledge and ability in teaching. It is also found that ongoing professional development is essential in today's world as professional development itself is a life-long and continuous process so that the teachers can get up to date skills needed with the advancement of modern world. The question item (3) with received the third highest mean scores proved that self-belief and self-confidence are also the keys that should be instilled in a teacher.

4. DISCUSSION

The following figure shows the mean score of the participants' responses towards professional development needs. The results are shown in graphic to have a clear presentation and understanding of data. It helps to better understand the respondents' answers on the questionnaire of 10 professional development need areas identified by Igawa (2008). The mean scores revealed that the participants have fairly similar responses and attitudes towards the professional development needs.

The first question (1) states with the mean 4.92 and SD 0.27 and strongly agrees of appreciation. It is shown that teachers really need to take part of the responsibilities for their professional development. The second question item with the mean 4.85 and SD 0.36 reveal that teachers should take part in development with the ongoing process. They should not stop learning once they got the required qualification for certain teaching programme. The question item (3) with the mean 4.77 and SD 0.42 show the top priority appreciation and show that teachers should have confidence in their teaching and subject matter. The response of the fourth question item with the mean 4.62 and SD 0.49 reveal that teachers are supposed to have positive attitudes towards professional development. The question item (5) with the mean 4.46 and SD 0.50 give a strong appreciation that teachers should be given time and chance to develop their teaching skills and the skills on their subject. Question item (6) with the mean 4.31 and SD 0.46 appreciate the statement "Teachers have to be open for self-reflection and critique from others." Teachers should feel comfortable for being judged and criticized on their skills on subject matter and teaching so that they can fill what they lack of. Response to question no (7) shows that sharing experience and ideas with colleagues gives a teacher a sense of belonging. The next question item with the mean 4.08 and SD 0.47 shows that reading periodicals in ELT keeps a teacher up-to-date.

Teachers need to be upgraded and the skills he has needs to be updated with the current flow of the world. The rest responses also reveal that professional development increases teachers learning, students' achievement and improves teaching quality. It is also shown that professional development programme improves and maintains teacher's subject proficiency, gains knowledge and skills for language teaching quality. The responses revealed the importance of using technology in teaching English, too. As a result, teaching on using technology is given importance. All the responses eventually revealed that ELT teachers should be included in developing and approving of professional development program and activities.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of professional development needs of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers based on the notion that teachers are professionals who need PD comprised of diverse processes that provide ongoing intellectual, experiential, and attitudinal growth (Lange, 1990). In spite of this growing recognition of the professional development needs of EFL teachers, the content of professional development has not been duly addressed in research and professional development need areas are not clearly identified or delineated (e.g., Cheng & Wang, 2004; Yeh, 2005). In recent years, Myanmar has been transforming itself towards a market economy, with a rapidly growing GDP and a widening income gap. Globalization is heavily impacting Myanmar and, as a result, English has become the foreign language of choice. Because now we are coming into the globalizations and most of the investors that come to Myanmar, say like companies or other organizations, require those who can speak English. That's why they try to study English, either part-time or full-time. So once they graduate, they can get a job easily. That's why they study English. It is our hope that the overall condition of Myanmar will improve to the point where English language education will bring to its teachers and students the happiness they deserve. Much of this hope stems from the fact that there are groups of young Myanmar teachers of English who are confident in their pedagogical knowledge and communicative competence.

6. RECOMMENDATION

The following can be gleaned from this study on Myanmar teachers and their professional development preferences:

1. The Myanmar teachers' preferred areas of professional development are Teaching Skills & Methods (TSM), Understanding Students (US), Attending Conferences, Seminars & Workshops (ACSW), and Communication Skills (CS).

2. The Myanmar teachers' most preferred PD area is Teaching Skills & Methods (TSM).

3. As for the Language Improvement (LI) area, only a small portion of the Myanmar teacher group showed interest. This could be due to the fact that the majority of the participants of this study are teachers from higher education institutions who feel as though that they do not need to improve their language abilities any further.

4. Understanding Students (US) was highly favored by the Myanmar participants. This preference seems to suggest that Myanmar teachers have a hard time understanding their students, mainly because Myanmar students are culturally influenced to be shy and/or because there is a growing income gap among the people of this country. This income gap may be causing communication problems between teachers and their students.

7. LIMITATION

It must be taken into consideration that the institutional affiliation of the individual teachers is a significant variable. In other words, the PD preferences of the teachers could be closely linked to the institutions where they teach. This was a variable that could not be controlled due to the design of this study. It should therefore be acknowledged that the results of this study cannot be generalized across various teaching institutions and levels of education.

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