



THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF WORKPLACE CONDITIONS AND LEADERSHIP IN PRIVATE COLLEGES IN MUSCAT ON TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceived impact of workplace conditions and leadership in the private colleges in Muscat, Oman on teachers' professional development. Questionnaires and interviews were the two research techniques used to collect the needed data. Random sample including three directors of Language Centers and 64 teachers from five private colleges participated in the study. The findings of this study revealed that workplace conditions have a positive impact on staff professional development. However, participants presented a number of insufficient conditions in their work environment which, as they believed, if modified, will promote teachers' professional growth. In regard to the leadership, the majority of teachers argued that their directors are supportive and cooperative. Yet, some participants suggested some significant actions that leaders should undertake to enhance the teachers' professional development.

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INTRODUCTION

It is very important for the leaders of educational institutions to understand the significance of their staffs' professional development which can be defined as "activities aimed at enhancing the knowledge and skills of teachers by means of orientation, training and support" (Coetzer, 2001, cited in Lessing and Witt, 2007). Professional development is also defined as "a continuous process determined by the interplay between the individual and the organization, leading to a combination of craftsmanship and mastery" (Clement and Vandenberghe, 2000, p. 87). However, leaders "cannot expect teachers to take care of their professional development individually. Each school is expected to create favorable conditions for teachers' professional development" (Clement and Vandenberghe, 2000, p. 81). According to NPEAT (1999) cited in Owen (2005), educational institutions where teachers work are found to be the best place for their learning and professional development. Besides the workplace, leaders also have a huge impact on teachers' professional growth.

These two factors have the ability to promote or diminish teachers' professional development (Day and Gu, 2007, 427).

Purpose and Research Questions of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate the workplace conditions that influence teachers' professional development in these private colleges in Muscat, Oman. This research was also designed to explore the role that directors of the Language Centers are playing in order to facilitate their faculty's enhancement by examining the opinions of the teachers and their HODs working in these selected colleges. The data collected from their opinions will help to answer the following research questions:

- What are the work place conditions that have an impact on staff professional development in the selected private colleges in Muscat, Oman?

- How can heads of departments in the selected private colleges in Muscat, Oman, most effectively support their teachers to enhance their professional growth?

Significance of the Study

By examining the workplace conditions that might affect teachers' growth from their own experiences, could shed the light on the importance of having supportive environment in order to make the private colleges better places for faculty's development in the future. In addition, discussing the role that directors and heads of departments should play in their workplace in order to enhance their faculty's growth might attract the stakeholders' and policy makers' attention to educate them about the importance of supporting and motivating their staff. Having favorable conditions in the workplace and supportive leaders will definitely "enrich teachers' knowledge base, improve their teaching practices, and enhance their self-efficacy and commitment to quality of service" (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996, cited in Day and Gu, 2007, p. 426).

Literature Review

There is a considerable amount of literature discussing the issue of teachers' professional development and the factors that influence it. Most of the research and studies mention work environment and leadership as two main elements that have a significant influence on the professional development of teachers in any educational institution.

Workplace Conditions

A large number of studies have been conducted to investigate the impact of workplace conditions on staff professional development and all identify it is one of the most influential factors on teachers' growth. According to Cole (1991), Day (1999), cited in Flores (2007, p. 299), "workplace conditions play a key role in enhancing teacher learning and development in schools". The literature suggests a number of conditions in the work environment that have the main impact on the growth of the teachers. The following sections discuss the most significant of these.

Collegiality Vs autonomy

Collegiality and autonomy are the two workplace conditions that are discussed the most in the literature, suggesting their major impact on staff professional development. However, the results of most studies indicated that collegiality has a greater influence on teachers' growth than autonomy. According to Owen (2005) and Clement and Vandenberghe (2000), collegiality enhances teachers' knowledge and provides them with new ideas, enables them to link their previous knowledge with the new ones. In addition to these positive effects, Shah (2012) found in her study that collegiality increases teachers' enthusiasm and motivation toward their work and helps them to be more committed and satisfied. Moreover, it makes them more flexible in coping with the continuous changes in knowledge and methodology. Another significant influence of collegiality is that it changes the challenges in the workplace into learning opportunities because collegiality encourages teachers to share their problems and difficulties with their colleagues and to participate in problem solving activities in their workplace (Clement and Vandenberghe, 2000). These advantages of collegiality for teachers' professional

development were supported by the "Situativity Theory" which argues that teachers learn better when they are involved in particular activity with a group of teachers in a particular environment (Barab and Duffy, 2000 as cited in Owen, 2005). Much of the literatures' view of autonomy tends to be negative because it "is related to uncertainty and fear and it results from a defensive attitude (Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989; Ashfort and Lee, 1990 as cited in Clement and Vandenberghe 2000, P. 85). It is not considered a good starting point for teachers' professional development, because it is considered to lead to confidence in outmoded educational views that are inspired by teachers own experiences as a pupil. Usually teachers' autonomy is presented as a heresy (Hargeraves, 1993)". In addition, Shah (2012) argues that autonomy "threats or barriers to teachers' professional growth and development" (P. 1243). She claims also that even if teachers are superstars, they will not be very productive when they are working autonomously. According to the participants in Flores study (2007), working individually reduces the chances of cooperation, support, and guidance between teachers and it creates a "culture of separation" inside the institution. On the other hand, there is some literature that takes a different view of autonomy. Hargeraves *et al* (2012) argue that "autonomy is not about acting alone but, in this case, about the teacher drawing on his or her own will in the process of CDP" (P. 23) and it is not "acting freely in isolation, but rather feeling recognized as a valuable part of the world" (P. 30). This shows that autonomy can be effective when teachers are given the freedom to work independently and to share their opinions without having the fear of being judged.

Workload

Teachers' workload and the stress that might cause for teachers is another essential factor that has an impact on teachers' growth. When teachers' workload is very high, then teachers will find it difficult to be involved or to attend professional development programs. According to Hemer's study (2014), teachers with high workload focus less on their professional development. He found from his interviews with teachers that when they have a high workload, they sacrifice their research time to focus on their teaching which affects their enhancement. However, the study mentioned another group of teachers who claimed that because they are not ready to sacrifice their research time, they force themselves to work for extra hours or at the weekends in order to be able "to cope with the pressures of high workload" (p. 489). Hargeaves (1994), as cited in Easthope and Easthope (2000), believed that focusing on teaching is not the only reason for lack of time with teachers, but the administrative duties that are given to those teachers. As a consequence, teachers do not find enough time to update their skills which has a negative impact on teachers' professional growth. Day and Gu (2007) also discussed the issue of the high workload pressure and its effect. They argued that this does not only influence teachers' development, but their lives as well because teaching is one of the most exhausting careers if teachers are doing their duties appropriately.

Working relationships

It is well known that good relationships between teachers in the work environment enhance their professional development. However, not many studies discussed the importance of relationships in the educational institutions. Kennedy (2011) is

one of the few researchers who wrote about this issue. She argued that such relationships are essential for the effective learning in the institution.

Rewards and incentives

Literature discussing the impact of rewards and incentives on teachers' professional development is limited. However, there are some writers who discuss their influence on motivation, commitment and teaching quality. These elements are very crucial in staff growth because if teachers are not motivated or committed, they are unlikely to have the desire to take advantage of the learning opportunities in their workplace. Shah *et al.* (2012, p.272) are researchers who discuss the importance of rewards and how common they are as a factor in motivating and satisfying teachers. They stated, "Unless and until the institution does not recognize the efforts and contributions of their employees and reward them accordingly, it would not be able to conquer the highest level of motivation and job satisfaction of the recruits. Reward and recognition is advantageous to the employee in a way that it injects self-confidence. Offering different schemes of rewards etc. is a way of acknowledging the efforts of employees which helps the employee to ponder on the point that he/she as well as his/her works is being valued by the institution. It also works as stress reliever. When an institution is offering different sorts of incentives and rewards to the employee, it will relieve many of his/her fears"

As it is clear from the statement, the authors related both rewards and recognition together. However, they argue that recognition without rewards does not have that obvious influence on staff. Therefore, if the organization wants to support and enhance its teachers' accomplishments, which will not happen if they are not developing themselves, they should award them whether. However, Murnane's *et al.* study 1991 (cited in Day *et al.* 2007) did not totally agree with these findings. Their study shows that rewards are not a priority those who decide to be teachers in the future.

Leadership

"Each school is expected to create favorable conditions for teachers' professional development – especially in countries with a deregulating, decentralizing and privatizing educational policy" (Clement and Vandenberghe, 2000, p. 81). Therefore, leaders in private institutions should be aware that it is their responsibility to work hard to provide the best conditions for their staff development.

Supporting collegiality

Leaders should be aware that collegiality in any institution is not created by itself (Shah, 2012). Therefore, they have to encourage collegiality among teachers in their organizations in order to enhance their professional development. The most important step in supporting teachers' collegiality is through creating an environment where teachers and leaders trust each other (Clement and Vandenberghe, 2000). In addition, leaders themselves should be good models for their staff in collaboration, hence they have to respect teachers' opinions and involve them in making decisions (Owen, 2005). Leaders should make teachers "recognize the value of working together and to focus on what they have in common. However, although it is important that leaders are aware of the

importance of collaboration among teachers, they must be aware of the significance of understanding the needs of each teacher in the department. " 'One size fits all' standardized provision is unlikely to be effective because it does not take account of teachers' existing knowledge, experience and needs" (Hargreaves *et al.*, 2012, p. 22).

Providing opportunities

"Teachers are likely to reject new ideas that conflict with their current ideas unless, as part of the professional learning, their existing understandings are engaged. Without such engagement, teachers are likely to dismiss new strategies as unrealistic and inappropriate for their particular practice contexts" (Timperley, 2008, p. 17). As it is obvious from the statement above, Timperley believe strongly in the power of the learning opportunity provided for teachers in their workplace in improving their teaching skills and in changing their practices and beliefs. The writer claims that it is very important for leaders to provide teachers with activities which they are engaged in. However, she thinks that the type of these activities is not as important as choosing the appropriate kind of activities that meet the needs of the staff and which are well organized and managed. That means leaders are not supposed to create a number of activities just to do something, but they should plan worthwhile activities related to the needs that have been identified when providing such opportunities. Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002, p. 948) agree with Timperley regarding the importance of activities that leaders should provide for the staff. They state that "teachers change inevitably through professional activity; teachers are themselves learners who work in a learning community". However, opportunities provided for teachers are not only in a form of activities as Flores (2007) believes. She explained that opportunities should require an authentic participation from teachers in decision-making about improvements and meaningful interaction with other colleagues about objectives and how to achieve them. In addition, it is giving teachers chances to develop a shared vision of the mission and goals of the institution they are working in. It is what the writer called "collaborative culture". James and McCormick (2009) discuss also the importance of allowing teachers to be involved in making decisions in their educational institution. They claim that teachers should "decide and act together". In addition to this, the two authors believed that it is the leader's duty to provide formal and informal training as part of the in-service training for teachers.

Encouragement and motivation

Motivation and encouragement are two vital aspects that stimulate staff to work on themselves in order to develop and change. Kennedy, (2011) argues that leader should understand that if their staffs are not interested and motivated, then any learning opportunity will not be effective. Therefore, the author suggests one of the ways that leaders can use to motivate their teachers which is through building feelings of self-competence among staff by recognizing their' achievements and by supporting them to decrease fear of creating, innovating, or coming up with new practices and ideas.

Trust

Timperley (2008) states that it is not easy for teachers to change their ideas and practices, so creating an environment

based on trust is an essential factor for success and improvement. Harwood and Clarke (2006) add that in order to have an environment where everybody is motivated to be involved in professional development programs and activities and committed to them, leaders should build up trust with the employees. Flores (2007) claims that leaders should prove their trust of their teachers through sharing and distributing the responsibility throughout the institution. In summary, teachers' professional development can be influenced by external and internal factors. However, because this research is focusing on the internal ones, only literature discussing the impact of workplace conditions and leadership were reviewed. The researchers discuss a number of elements on the work environment that has a significant influence on staff. The condition that almost all literature agrees as having the biggest impact on staff progress is collegiality. These studies gave an insight about the most significant workplace conditions and the role of leaders in facilitating them which helped me to narrow down my research focus. However, none of this research discusses the issue in Sultanate of Oman, so this research applied these conditions in the selected Omani private colleges in order to investigate if they have an impact on staff professional development and if the leaders in these colleges are helping to create the favorable conditions that enhance their teachers' professional development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Paradigm

According to Coleman and Lumby (2006), there are two dominant paradigms in educational and social research, interpretive and positivist. In this research, an interpretive paradigm was used because of its appropriateness to the nature and purpose of the study which is trying to find out facts based on peoples' experiences. Robson (2011, p. 24) argues that "this approach emphasizes the world of experience as it is lived, felt and undergone by people acting in social situations". He adds that the best data collection tools for this paradigm are the ones that acquire multiple views because it provides deeper understanding of the situation or problem.

Research Approach

"The purpose of the research determines the methodology and design of the research" (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011, p.79). Therefore, a mixed methods approach, or multi strategy designs as some researchers prefer to call it, was used. Robson (2011) defined mixed methods approach as an approach "where qualitative and quantitative approaches are combined in the same project" (p. 29). He identified six different types of this approach based on the research purpose and the data required. One of these types is the sequential exploratory design where the priority is given to the qualitative data followed by the quantitative data. This type was the one used in my research because of its appropriateness for the nature of the research and the data needed to get the answers for my research questions. The significance of using a mixed methods approach was because there was a need to investigate the opinions and experiences of the participants in order to get deeper understanding of the situation in the colleges researched. According to Malina, Nørreklit, and Selto (2010), "combined quantitative and qualitative methods enable exploring more complex aspects and relations of the human and social world" (p.6).

Data Collection Instruments

"The methods of data collection selected will depend on the nature of the inquiry and the type of information required" (Bill, 2010, p. 6). Therefore, questionnaire and interviews were the two main instruments used to collect the data for this research. These two tools are used very widely in the social research because they provide a large amount of data in a short time with low costs (Robson, 2011).

Questionnaire

Questionnaires were one of the tools used in this research paper because of its appropriateness for this kind of research. According to Robson (2011, p. 236) questionnaire is very suitable when the researcher is "seeking to find out something about what is going on". The questionnaire was divided into two main parts. The first part was ordinal scale question and in was divided into two parts. The questions in the first part were related to the workplace conditions whilst the second concerned about the directors of the Language Centres. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions. The questionnaire helped to gain data about the elements in the work environment that have an impact on teachers' professional development from teachers' point of view. In addition, it was valuable because it gave an idea about the best practices that leaders can undertake to make educational organizations better places for learning from teachers' point of view. One person from each college was nominated to help in distributing the questionnaire. A clear explanation about all important details and the time given to teachers to complete the task was provided to the nominated teachers.

Interview

Seeking for a better understanding of the private college policies and leaders' role towards teacher's continuous professional development, semi-structured interviews were conducted with directors of English language centres in three selected private colleges in Muscat as a second technique of data collection. This type of interview was chosen because it gives the researcher the freedom to ask questions based on the interviewee's answer (May, 2011). He adds that semi structured interviews "allow people to answer more on their own terms than the standardized interview permits, but still provide a greater structure for comparability over that of the focused or unstructured interview" (p. 135). A consent letter was sent for the three directors via e-mail to participate in the research; they responded to the e-mail and agreed to participate. All the interviews took place in the interviewees' offices during their working hours and they took about an hour.

Procedure for Data analysis

Because this research used a mixed methods approach in the questionnaire, statistical analysis of the data besides the qualitative analysis was needed. The ordinal scale questions in the questionnaire were first analysed qualitatively in order to get a clear idea about the impact of workplace conditions and leaders on teachers' professional development based on teachers' experience. From the qualitative findings, a numerical analysis was developed. The numerical analysis gave the researcher better understanding of the level of impact of each one of the conditions in the workplace and of the

actions that directors as leaders are taking in their departments. This analysis also gave an accurate picture of how many participants were really affected by these conditions. According to Malina, Nørreklit, and Selto (2010) analysing data qualitatively and quantitatively makes the outcome of the research stronger than using only one approach for analysis. However, for the open – ended questions in both questionnaire and interview, a qualitative analysis was adopted. All the responses of the participants were typed into the computer. This generated a huge amount of information, so it was a necessity to revise them, remove irrelevant and unimportant data and keep only the relevant and valuable ones.

Sampling

In order to investigate the impact of working conditions and leadership on teachers working in the private colleges, a questionnaire and an interview were chosen as tools for data collection. A hundred participants working in the Language Centres in these five colleges were chosen randomly. That means every teacher working in the Language Centre of any one of these selected educational institutions have an equal opportunity to participate in this study (Robson, 2011, May, 2011, Goode, and Hatt, 1981). From each college, twenty teachers were included in the study. Out of 100 questionnaires distributed, 95 were completed and returned. As mentioned earlier, only English language teachers participated in this study because English is taught as a foreign language in Oman, so some teachers from other departments might not be fluent enough in English to express their ideas or to understand the questions. For the other research tool, the interview, three directors of the Language Centres from three of the selected colleges were chosen to participate. Also, it provided me with a chance to check the objectivity and reliability of this response because getting the same response from different people means that the collected data is reliable (Bell, 2010).

Validity and Trustworthiness

Because increasing the level of validity and reliability will increase the trustworthiness of the research, the research chose the use of mixed methods approach. Robson (2011, p. 77) argues that validity is "concerned with whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about". The researchers try as much as possible to make the findings valid through the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods which will not only depend on opinions and experience, but statistical numbers as well. In addition, that helps to overcome some of the limitations that each approach has, for instance, using quantitative approach adds the objectivity feature to the findings of this research (Robson, 2011, p.19), so the findings will not only be subjective and that increased their validity and reliability. Increasing the level of validity helps to increase the level of the trustworthiness of the work.

FINDINGS ANALYSIS

The findings from the questionnaires and interviews provided insights into two key areas relating to this:

- The general atmosphere that already existed in the work environment of these colleges and the workplace conditions that have, or might have had if they were provided, the biggest impact on teachers' professional

growth from the point of view of both teachers and their directors (the first research questions).

- The perceived impact of the directors of English Language Centres in these colleges on teachers' progress and the actions they can undertake to enhance their staff professional development (the second research question).

This chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section will outline the demographic characteristics of participants in this research. The impact of workplace conditions in the selected private colleges on teachers' professional development will be considered in the second section. The third section will deal with the impact of leaders of these educational institutions on teachers' professional development. The second and third sections will be divided into two parts; the first part will present and discuss the main findings from the questionnaire, while the second part will be a presentation and discussion of the interview data. The discussion of the presented data will be based on existing literature.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 64 of the 100 questionnaires sent to the teachers in the five selected colleges in Muscat were returned, which represented a responses rate of 64%. As illustrated in table 1 below, the majority of participants were females and only 37.5% were males. Only 14% participants were under 27 years old and most of them, 36%, were between 36-34years old. This might be because of the requirements of these colleges which prefer older teachers because of their greater experiences. This can be seen from the "experience" data which showed that 61% of the participants have more than 10 years of experience, while only 16% of them have less than five years of experience. The data also demonstrated that the majority of the participants, 64%, were Master's degree holders, while 8% have PhDs. Additional information on the demographic characteristics is as presented in Table 1. The analysis of the background data for the participants demonstrates the variety of teachers who participated in this research.

Table 1. Demographic Data

Background information	Level of variable	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	24	37.5%
	Female	40	62.5%
Age	-26	9	14%
	27-35	17	26.5%
	36-46	23	36%
	+46	15	23.5%
Qualifications	Bachelor	18	28%
	Masters	41	64%
	PhD	5	8%
Experience	-5	10	16%
	6-10	15	23%
	+10	39	61%

Besides the 64 teachers who took a part in this study, there were also 3 directors of the English Language Centres working in three of these colleges who volunteered to be interviewed. One of them is a female who has Masters in applied linguistic and 5 years of experience in educational leadership and she will be given (DLC1) title. The other two directors are males. One of them, who will be given (DLC2) title, got his PhD recently and has 6 years of experience in leadership and the

other one is a Master's degree holder in Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language who has 2 years of experience and who will be given (DLC3) title.

The Impact of Workplace Conditions in the Private Colleges in Muscat on Teachers' Professional Development

Questionnaire data

To explore the working conditions in the researched colleges, teachers were asked in the questionnaire to answer 14 questions in a form of ordinal scale question which could be categorized into three main areas; collegiality and autonomy, workload, and recognition, besides an open ended question. Although the overall findings indicated positive views of the conditions in the workplace of these colleges, it seems that there is an absence or insufficiency of some essential elements which help to enhance teachers professional development.

The following review the data gained.

Professional Development Programs: Although 55% of the lecturers in the ordinal scale question stated that they have got enough learning opportunities to improve their teaching practices, in comparison to 30% who declared that the opportunities, they have got so far are insufficient for their professional development, almost all participants in the open-ended question agreed that there is a need to increase the number of professional development programs provided for them. Teachers believed that the need to increase these activities and programs in their workplaces was because of their potential significant impact on their professional growth. However, a significant number of the participants believed that professional development activities should not be restricted to department or college level. They emphasized the importance of supporting them to attend and participate in external conferences and workshops. In addition, they believed that interaction with teachers from different educational institutions might be a form of professional development.

DISCUSSION

As it is obvious from the findings above, even when teachers feel that they receive enough professional development, they believed that having more programs and training sessions would help to raise the level of their professionalism. Many studies discussed the importance of the professional development programs for teachers during their teaching career. One of these studies is Kiziltepe study (2008) which showed that these programs are ones of the powerful factors that enhances lecturers' learning and motivation in Turkey's universities. Besides professional activities and workshops, teachers would like to listen and learn from the experiences and practices of other teachers in different educational organizations. Kelchtermans (2006) argued that "Any interaction that breaks the isolation of teachers will contribute in some fashion to the knowledge, skill, judgment, or commitment that individuals bring to their work, and will enhance the collective capacity of groups or institutions" (p. 223). This interaction with other colleagues might be described as Professional Learning Communities (PLC). James and McCormick (2009) showed in their study that these communities have a huge impact on teachers' professional development. Although all participants in this research were focusing on face- to- face teachers learning communities, the

two researchers, argued that this is only one form of these communities. PLC can be found in another form where teachers interact and share ideas with other teachers from different educational institutions through the internet. However, they believed that in order to be able to participate effectively in these online leaning networks, teachers should be qualified in using technology. Suggesting the importance of training sessions focusing not only on teaching methodologies, but in other fields like using technology as one of the participant was asking for.

Reasonable Workload

Although 75% of the participants believed that their workload in their respective colleges is manageable, 77% of them claimed that reducing their workload will create bigger chances for them to develop professionally. However, when teachers were asked if there is a relationship between increasing their workload, experiences in the educational field and widening their knowledge, 34% of the teachers thought that increasing their workload has a positive impact on their experience and knowledge whilst 47% of the respondents argue that there is no correlation between increasing their workload and widening their professional knowledge. Nevertheless, there are 19% of teacher who claimed that they don't know if their workload has an impact on their experience and knowledge. Surprisingly, more than half of the participants, 65%, believed that doing some admin work beside the teaching duties enhances their professional development. On the other hand, 28% believed that admin work reduces their professional progress opportunities.

Discussion: As the findings showed that, the issue of teaching workload and admin duties is a controversial one. Although some teachers believed that reducing their teaching workload and admin responsibilities will provide time for them to read and research more about their profession, others argued that these responsibilities are one of the factors that provide them with knowledge and experience. Kiziltepe (2008) discussed the issue of admin duties as an extra workload for teachers. She found that lecturers in Turkey are attracted to the private universities because they are assigning them to do some admin duties, with less teaching workload and extra paid. However, it is important here to shed the light on the Equity Theory which is applied. Equity Theory, as Ololube (2006) defined it, is the fair balance between the outputs (what teachers do for the institution, e.g., hard work) and the inputs (what teachers get from the institution e.g., incentives). In the case of Kiziltepe's research, it seems that this theory is applied as the college is reducing the teaching workload and paying more when lecturers are undertaking admin work. However, the situation in the private colleges included in my research is different because, as it is clear from findings, Equity Theory is not achieved. Teachers are getting admin duties besides the full teaching load without being paid. This can make teachers lose their motivation to work hard in their respective institutions (Ololube, 2006).

Appreciation and Recognition: When teachers were asked if their innovative accomplishments in their colleges are recognized and awarded more than half of them, 58% indicated that they are not, while 42% showed their satisfaction towards the recognition and awards in their institutions. A number of participants agreed that it is a kind of

support for their professional development to feel that their efforts are appreciated by their institutions

Discussion: Although not many teachers mentioned recognition and appreciation when they were asked about the working conditions that influence their professional development, the literature shows the positive impact of recognition on staff progress. According to Shah *et al.*, (2012), "rewards and recognition are the most common practices which make an employee satisfied with her/his job as well as keep him/her highly motivated" (p.272). When teachers are satisfied and motivated they usually tend to achieve more, acquire new knowledge and involve in advantageous practices. In addition, Shah (2012) figured out in her study that recognition is not enough by itself. It is more effective with paying something.

More Flexibility and Less Restrictions: Although a significant number of teachers, 87%, thought that they were given a fair amount of freedom to work independently, some teachers commented that more flexibility and less restrictions in their workplace is needed in order to increase their productivity and professional development opportunities.

Discussion: It is important for the head of the department to be flexible with the staff to some extent and give them a greater degree of control on their duties and workload. Rodgers (2006) suggested that "flexible work arrangements have a positive effect on a number of indicators such as turnover, productivity, and absenteeism". In addition, flexibility in the workplace is a key factor in enhancing staff skills and in developing them professionally (Reilly, 2010). Furthermore, giving teachers a space of freedom to apply new things makes them more creative and productive (Hargreaves *et al.*, 2012).

Interview data

In responses to the semi structured interviews, the directors of the English Language Centers in the selected colleges referred to several workplace conditions that are essential for teachers' professional development as well as different techniques to enhance their staff progress. These included:

Staff Professional Development Programs: All of the interviewed directors agreed on the significance of the provision of professional development programs in the workplace for staff enhancement.

Discussion: Returning to the questionnaire data, we find that the condition which needs to be promoted and increased in the workplace, as teachers' claimed, is the professional development programs. Likewise, the findings from the interview revealed that the directors of three of the researched colleges, have the same ideas as their staff which showed that both groups, teachers and leaders, are aware of the importance of the continuous professional development in the workplace which is a positive indicator. "Working in nurturing environment that stimulates professional growth and development, may impact one's feeling of commitment to the organization and the profession. The more teachers perceive that they have opportunities for professional growth, the more they will strive to act for the good of the organization and the profession" (Bogler, and Somech, 2004).

Supportive Leadership: A second condition that the three directors agreed on the importance of enhancing professional development was supportive leadership.

Discussion: a significant amount of literature discussed the importance of supportive leadership and its positive impact on staff. According to Banai, and Reisel (2007), supportive leadership influence staff performance positively. However, although it is important that leaders support their staff by providing and creating learning opportunities, it is more important that staff have the desire to develop themselves because if there is no passion, teachers will not get use of the learning opportunities even if they were existed (Clement and Vandenberghe, 2000). Yet, besides thinking of providing learning chances for teachers, supportive and successful leaders should also think about ways to sustain teachers' motivation to develop. Rewards, as (DLC3), suggested can be an effective method to keep teachers motivated. According to Shah *et al.*, (2012, p.272). "Offering different schemes of rewards etc. is a way of acknowledging the efforts of employees".

Evaluation of Performance

Both (DLC1) and (DLC2) agreed on the impact of performance evaluation on staff progress. When (DLC1) was asked how that can impact staff professional development, she explained, that this annual evaluation is giving every teacher a clear, complete and honest insight about their progress. This helps them to know their weaknesses to change and develop them.

Discussion: performance appraisal is a very important factor in enhancing teachers' professional development because as Lee, H. (2005) argued it helps directors to understand each teachers needs and weaknesses. That assists the leaders, to provide the appropriate types of development programs that are best enhance teachers' growth.

Suitable Workload

(DLC1) and (DLC2) agreed that manageable workload is an important factor that helps staff to develop. The importance of this element is as (DLC1) argued is to enable teachers to find free time, which is also another important factor, to be engaged in the continuous professional development process. When both directors were asked about the suitable workload for teachers from their point of view, both of them said it is 18 hours which is the current workload in their colleges. Another question was asked about the admin duties that teachers are supposed to do and if that helps them to develop professionally or if it is just an extra load. (DLC1) replied that most of the admin duties teachers are doing so far are related to the department and the students' in the foundation program, so teachers should be cooperative with each other in order to achieve such tasks. She added, there are some tasks, like students registration, which teachers are responsible for now, but there is a plan that such responsibilities are taken from them. However, (DLC2) answer was that admin duties in his college are optional and only qualified teachers' are chosen to do them. If a teacher agreed on doing such duties, their teaching workload will be reduced.

Discussion: The findings showed that both (DLC1) and (DLC2) are against heavy workload for teachers. In Fact heavy

load proved throughout the studies its negative influence on staff performance (Hemer, 2014; Day and Gu, 2007). They believed that providing time for them means increasing their learning chances. However, it seems that each one of these two directors have different point of view regarding admin duties. While (DLC1) believed it is supposed to be shared among all teachers, (DLC2) claimed it should be done by qualified teachers only.

The impact of leaders in the private colleges in Muscat on teachers' professional development:

Questionnaire Data

The findings showed that most of teachers' opinions towards their directors were very positive which indicated that the Language Centres of these private colleges have supportive and cooperative directors. However, there are some suggestions based on the data collected from teachers' responses. These suggestions are listed below.

Provide learning opportunities

Almost all teachers who participated in this research agreed that the biggest support that teachers in private colleges can get from their leaders is the provision of learning opportunities. The data collected showed that the majority of teachers, around 72%, are satisfied with the learning opportunities that their directors are trying to provide. However 28% believed that their directors should create more chances for their staff. A number of techniques which leaders can undertake to increase the learning opportunities in their workplace were suggested by the participants. However, some teachers argued that providing learning chances is not only through facilitating the attendance of professional development programs and activities, but also through giving them the chance to conduct workshops in their colleges. Another way of increasing learning opportunities for teachers, as the participants suggested, is through supporting them to conduct research. This was proved its effectiveness on teachers' growth. According to Kiziltepe (2008), research is a very essential aspect of staff professional development. The third technique that participants recommended is supporting staff to continue their higher education.

Discussion: The responses above indicated that there is a number of ways which leaders can carry out in order to create learning opportunities for teachers to enhance their professional development. All these methods are very influential as they are part of teachers' in-service trainings which helps to update their knowledge and skills. According to Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002), teachers' professional development in any educational organization should be inevitable and continuous.

Involving teachers in decision-making

More than 70% of the participants believed that involving them in decision making is a very effective way for leaders to enhance their professional growth. According to the data analyzed from the ordinal scale questions, it seems that the directors of the Language Centers in the selected colleges are involving the teachers effectively in decision making. The analysis indicates that more than half of the respondents 64% declared their involvement in decision making while half of

this percentage disagree with this. However, even though 36% of the participants claimed that they are not involved in decision making, the majority of the teachers, 81%, felt that their HODs respect their opinions when they come up with new ideas and practices.

However, involving teachers in making decisions is not only in teaching related issues. Teachers claimed that their directors should involve them in choosing training sessions and programs they feel that they need. However the findings from ordinal scale showed a positive attitude from teachers towards involvement in choosing the professional development programs as almost 56% of the teachers declared that they and their colleagues participate in choosing the professional development activities according to their needs and interest.

Discussion: Literature proved that teachers can be more committed to their teaching duties and to their educational institutions when they are participating in decision making (Ololube, 2006). Not involving staff in decision making and not listening to their suggestions regarding the educational problems in their respective organizations, does not only affect teachers' professional development, but the institution's outcomes and performance. The findings of Robinson *et al.*, study (2008) about the impact of different types of leaderships, indicated that the high performing schools are those where leaders are discussing educational issues with their staff and involve them in decision making. According to James and McCormick (2009) leaders and teachers should decide and act together. They stated "involving staff in decision making and using their professional know-how in the formulation and critical evaluation of school policy" (p. 977) is an important factor for teachers' professional development and it gives them a clear sight about the institution goals and vision.

Interaction with staff: A number of participants mentioned how important it is for them to interact with their directors. However, it seems that generally the relationship between directors and teachers in the selected colleges are positive as around 82% of the participants declared that they have a good relationship with their HODs while only 18% showed their dissatisfaction with this relationship. Teachers mentioned different types of interaction that they feel is supportive for their professional development. A group of teachers added that their leaders can monitor their progress at work and based on that, they give them feedback from time to time to help in their professional development.

Discussion: Many studies discussed that importance of interaction between teachers and their leaders and its positive impact on staff professional development. According to Clement, and Vandenberghe (2000) interaction with staff can be a very effective informal way of supporting staff professional progress. In addition, Robinson *et al.* (2008) believed that principals should communicate and interact with their staff because they as leaders are more likely to be the source of advice for their staff.

Encouraging collegiality

The analysis of the data regarding collegiality in the work environment showed that 75% of the participants believed that their HODs encourage teachers to collaborate with each other and support them to work as a team. The findings also indicated that teachers working in the Language Centres in the studied colleges are supportive and cooperative since around

three quarters of them, 75%, agreed on that. This helps lecturers to collaborate with each other and to discuss their issues together. This is very noticeable from the findings below:

- 73% of teachers agreed that they feel more creative when they work with other teachers, while only 15% of the participants thought that doing a task individually make them feel more creative.
- About 78% believed that working in a group with other teachers would save their time, and only few of them, around 22%, considered working with a group of teachers is a waste of time.
- 77%, claimed that they do not have the fear of criticism from their colleagues when sharing new ideas
- 84% believed that discussing their professional problems and challenges with other colleagues helps them in solving these problems.

Nevertheless, although the majority of teachers stated that working as a team would save their time, help them achieve tasks creatively, and help them deal with their problems professionally, almost half of them admitted that they usually work alone as it is more comfortable for them than working in a group. Therefore, it is important that leaders change this habit with their staff and encourage them to work together.

Discussion: Although this data demonstrated how lecturers in the selected private colleges are supportive, the level of collegiality in their workplace is still low. Even when teachers are aware of the advantages of collegiality, they tend to use the easy and comfortable path for them which is working individually. As mentioned earlier in this research, the importance of collegiality is discussed extensively in the literature. According to Hargreaves (1994), cited in Kelchtermans (2006), collegiality has the power to enhance teachers' learning. Moreover, Shah (2012) claimed that working collaboratively with other teachers play a key role in saving teachers time. Harwood and Clarke (2006) suggested that one of the best ways for leaders to support their staff professional development is through encouraging them to work together and share their ideas and professional problems. This can achieve "by creating an environment whereby these experiences can be exchanged" (p. 30).

Being fair with staff: Many staff believed that being unfair with them has a negative impact on their motivation toward self-professional development.

Discussion: This argument agreed with the findings of a study that was conducted by VSO (2002) in a number of educational institutions in the developing countries. In this study, female teachers who are working in different educational institutions in Papua New Guinea and Zamia admitted that they feel that they are demotivated at work. They claimed that this was because of their directors who are unfair with them as he is with male teachers. This can be a very negative indicator as it has a huge impact on teachers' motivation towards self-professional development.

Understanding teachers' needs and weaknesses: One of the significant issues that teachers raised is the importance of understanding each teacher's needs. Approximately 73% of the participants claimed that their HODs understand their needs as teachers, comparing to 27% who disagree with this claim. Some of the participants stated that their HODs should have

the ability to understand their different needs. Besides the ability to understand teachers' needs, participants argued that leaders should also be capable to identify faculty weaknesses in order to be able to plan for effective and appropriate learning opportunities.

Discussion: Lee, H. (2005) is one of the researchers who discussed the issue of understanding teachers need and its relation to their professional development. Lee argued that "activities are more effective in improving teachers' learning if they form a coherent part of a wider set of opportunities for teacher learning and development. In order to establish coherence among professional development activities, a PDP must be developed based on what participants need and what they already know". Hargreaves *et al.* (2012) agreed with what Lee suggested. They claimed that in order to provide the best professional development activities for teachers, leaders should be aware of every teachers' needs because 'one size fits all' is not working effectively. However, although it is important for leaders to understand their teachers' needs, it might be difficult sometimes to achieve that because of the number of staff in the department. Therefore, it is important for teachers themselves as well to be aware of their needs and weaknesses and work hard to develop themselves.

Interview data

As was clear from the questionnaire data presented above, the majority of teachers believed that their directors are supportive and their impact on teachers' professional development is positive. When the directors were asked about the ways of enhancing their staff professional development two main techniques were identified:

Providing professional learning opportunities: All directors agreed that by providing learning opportunities for their staff, they are supporting their professional enhancement. However, they mentioned various ways of providing learning opportunities like "conducting internal workshops on issues and topics related to EFL, inviting external experts to conduct workshops and training sessions for the staff, encourage staff to attend local and international conferences and encouraging staff to upgrade their academic qualifications".

Discussion: a Significant amount of the literature discussed the importance of providing learning opportunities for teachers professional development (Clarke and Hollingsworth, 2002; Flores, 2007; James and McCormick, 2009, Timperley, 2008). In addition to these studies, the findings from the questionnaire above and interviews showed that the factor that has the greatest impact on staff professional development is the learning opportunities provided for teachers. However, according to some participants in this research and Flores (2007), providing learning opportunities are not only by conducting workshops which teachers attend, but also by involving teachers to and engaging them in these workshops.

Financial support: The three directors agreed that another important way to promote teacher's development is through supporting them financially. They explained that providing adequate funds for the development process would definitely help in promoting teachers.

Discussion: As the findings above showed, financial support is one of the factors that helps enhance staff professional

development. Kiziltepe (2008) argued that financial support is one of the factors that attract academics in Turkey to move from their colleges to other ones. Therefore, colleges should allocate part of their profits to support professional development.

Challenges: The three directors discussed a number of challenges in their institutions that hinder them from promoting their staff professional development. Actually, four main challenges were identified.

Time, Strategic plans, financial issues, Staff motivation:

Discussion: first, the findings from both questionnaire and interview showed that heavy workload is one of the factors that have a negative impact on teachers' professional development. The data also showed that decreasing teachers' workload will provide the needed time for both teachers and leaders to conduct and attend workshops and training sessions. That means manageable workload increases teachers' learning opportunities and enhances their professional growth. *Second*, we can establish that setting strategic plans should be the first step in the development process in any organization. Starting with this step is very significant because when having well-designed strategic plans, the development process will be more organized and the programs provided will be adequate and based on teachers' needs. According to Guskey (2010), professional development programs are considered successful and effective when they meet teachers' expectations and needs".

Third, senior managements in the private educational institutions should be aware of the significance of having qualified teachers in their institutions. Increasing the budget that is specified for staff development will increase the quality of teachers' performance and as a result, they will have competitive outcomes which affect their reputation positively. *Fourth*, as mentioned earlier, if a teacher loses her/his motivation to be involved in professional development process, no program can be effective. According to Guskey (1986), cited in Guskey (2010), "the majority of programs fail because they do not take into account what motivates teachers to engage in professional development" (pp. 382). Therefore, before planning for development programs, the institutions should identify what motivates teachers to be involved in these programs.

Conclusion

The present research; by analysing the experience of teachers who are working in the Language Centers of five private colleges in Muscat, aimed to investigate the conditions in the workplace that are influencing the teachers' professional development. It also aimed to explore the role that leaders play to promote teachers' progress. In addition, the research endeavored to suggest some reliable and effective strategies that may be helpful to improve the conditions that affect teachers' development positively. A number of factors were discussed under workplace conditions and leaderships. These elements were chosen because many studies, which were reviewed in this research, proved their impact on staff professional development and because of their existence in the work environment of the selected private colleges. Regarding the workplace conditions, the findings of this research displayed that continuous professional development programs, reasonable workload, appreciation and recognition, and

freedom and flexibility are the factors that have the greatest influence on teachers' professional growth. In addition to these factors, the interview data added two essential conditions in the workplace; supportive leadership and performance evaluation. The research participants of the private colleges have complained about the lack of professional development programs in their workplace and they asked for more learning opportunities to be facilitated. Reasonable workload is another condition that has a direct impact on faculty professional development. Teachers and leaders as well claimed that heavy workload reduces teachers' opportunities to progress because of time limitations. Besides these conditions, appreciation and recognition were identified to have a significant impact on staff progress as these two elements are encouraging teachers to learn more and enable them to give more. As the data also revealed, the teachers are looking for a space of freedom and flexibility in their workplace. They believed that these two aspects can be helpful to enhance their creativity and innovation. The interviewed directors added 'supportive leadership' as a workplace condition that promotes staff professional development positively. Moreover, the interview findings suggested the performance appraisal as another factor that supports in enhancing teachers' professional growth as it provides a clear insight of the teacher's needs, weaknesses and areas to be developed.

In regard to the leadership, the research data revealed that the leaders in the private colleges are generally supportive. However, there were some suggestions that leaders should undertake in order to enhance teachers' professional growth. Providing learning opportunities is the first and the most important practice from leaders and teachers point of view. In addition, involving teachers in decision-making has positive effects on teachers' progress since it gives them a clear sight about goals and vision of their college. Moreover, leaders' interaction with their staff is an effective way of communication which enriches teachers' knowledge and helps them; especially the new ones, to learn from the leaders' experiences. Another practice that the leaders should consider in their work environment is encouraging collegiality. This factor was discussed widely in the literature and it proved its significance on enhancing staff professional development. Also, some teachers argued that being fair with all teachers in the department is a very influential element because it has a direct and strong correlation with motivation. The last point which was discussed by both teachers and leaders understands teachers' needs. As they claimed, this action is helpful in promoting teachers' progress. The study has revealed that the workplace conditions which exist in the private colleges in Muscat, Oman are in general helpful in promoting teachers' professional development although there are some insufficient conditions that need to be amended. Regarding the impact of leadership, it was concluded that, in general, the leaders in these colleges are supportive and cooperative to some extent. However, they have to undertake some actions in their work places, so they can be more effective and supportive.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the suggestions of the research participants, the following strategies and recommendations may be proposed to enhance teachers' professional development in the private colleges in Muscat, Oman.

- Decreasing the number of admin duties that are assigned to teachers. If there are any non-teaching related responsibilities, they should be optional. In addition, it is highly important for the educational institutions to balance between teaching workload and other duties.
- Setting strategic plans for the staff continuous professional development. These plans will be very helpful in providing and creating well-organized and high-quality training sessions based on teachers' needs and interest and meet the institutions goals. When plans are made, achieving desired goals will be easier.
- Allocating more funds for faculty continuous professional development. This will have a huge perceived impact on the quality of teachers' performance.
- Motivating teachers is a key factor for the success of any professional development programs. Therefore, the colleges should find out ways to sustain staff motivation
- Ultimately, the duty of teachers is a highly supreme task which they should proudly and successfully deliver to students. Therefore, the teachers must receive an intensive portion or interest of professional development.

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