

Chapter 13

Teacher Satisfaction, Research Engagement, and the Conceptualization of Research From In-Service English Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports a mixed-methods study that aimed to explore in-service English teachers' job satisfaction and research engagement in Turkey and reveal whether these two constructs are related. The study also attempted to understand reasons behind the frequency of teacher research engagement. The data were collected from 2,476 teachers through an online questionnaire. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics, and Pearson's correlations; the qualitative data were analysed through content analysis. Most of the participants were satisfied with being teachers but were not satisfied with their teaching practices. Positive correlation was found between reading research, doing research, and job satisfaction. The frequencies of doing research and reading research were not in agreement, in that participants reported to do research more frequently than they read research. Participants equated doing research with studying English. This shows that most in-service English teachers are not aware of the construct teacher as a researcher.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Teachers need to adapt educational innovations to their teaching throughout their career and cope with several instructional challenges to provide effective teaching. These issues make it critical to ensure teachers' professional development (PD) as it is the central means to improving education (Guskey, 2002). There is ample empirical evidence in the literature showing that PD has several benefits: it alters

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teachers' beliefs (Griffin, 1983), changes their teaching methods (Borko & Putnam, 1995), improves their practice (Cohen, McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993), and increases their knowledge about innovations in their fields (Wilches, 2007).

The consensus on the significance of PD led to increased attention to PD programs and many studies were carried out to propose models and guidelines for designing effective PD programs as a part of in-service teacher education. In general, it is agreed that PD programs should be context- and subject-specific (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995) and on-going (Kırkgöz, 2008); conform teachers' needs (Hayes, 2000; John & Gravani, 2005), and have a practical focus (Vukelich & Wrenn, 1999). Despite the agreement on the characteristics of effective PD programs, many studies showed that these programmes are ineffective in many contexts (Elyas & Al Gridgi, 2012; Emery, 2012; Hamid, 2010; Nguyen, 2012), including Turkey (e.g. Atay, 2008; Hoş & Topal, 2013; Uysal, 2012; Uztosun, 2017). The common conclusion of these studies was that, due to different reasons, teachers did not benefit from these programmes and improve their practice.

One of the reasons why several PD programs failed to achieve their objectives is probably because most of these programmes are delivered in the form of workshops, seminars, conferences or courses (Boyle, 2004; Ono & Ferreira, 2010). These mainly follow conventional approaches to PD and provide transmissive practice which do not allow for active teacher engagement but rely on expert knowledge transmitted to teachers (Taniş & Dikilitaş, 2018). The dependence on expert knowledge seems to disregard teacher knowledge and their classroom experiences and makes it difficult to promote teacher engagement in the development process (Borg, 2015). For these reasons, attending these programmes may not promote teachers' professional development and improve their practices (Choi & Andon, 2014; Kubanyiova, 2012).

Webster-Wright (2009) refers to the problems of PD programs in defining professional knowledge. She underlines the distinction between professional development and professional learning with the assumption that professional knowledge is not acquired, and therefore, is not a transferable object. Conversely, professional development requires an authentic way of learning with a special emphasis on the teaching context (Webster-Wright, 2009). These arguments make it necessary to reconceptualise PD through shifting its focus from knowledge transmitted from experts in PD programs to lifelong or continuing learning (Fraser, Kennedy, Reid, & McKinney, 2007). This is because professional development is a continuous process of reflection and self-development (Middlewood, Parker, & Beere, 2005) and teachers should be active participants of their personal growth (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). These ideas are in line with the transitional models of PD which are informed by constructivist approach that highlights the involvement of teachers in creating knowledge (Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Kennedy, 2005). From this perspective, as maintained by Borg (2015), teachers are not knowledge consumers but knowledge generators, and hence, play active roles in their professional development experiences.

The arguments that are summarised above consider teachers as responsible agents of their own professional development. The main assumption is that teachers know their training needs and they are the most knowledgeable individuals of their teaching contexts. For that reason, compared to formal development programs, informal learning through individual activities could contribute more to teacher development as they are based on teachers' self-examination or observation of their classrooms (Desimone, 2011). These ideas are relevant to the concept of teacher autonomy because self-development requires teachers to be responsible for their practices and the results (Skaalvik, 2014); and take purposeful independent actions that will result in the improvement of their professional development.

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